

# Action research with parkrun UK volunteer organizers to develop inclusive strategies

Simone Fullagar, Sandra Petris, Julia Sargent, Stephanie Allen,  
Muhsina Akhtar, Gozde Ozakinci

Date of deposit	03 12 2019
Document version	Author's accepted manuscript
Access rights	Copyright © 2019 the Author(s). Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. This work has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies or with permission. Permission for further reuse of this content should be sought from the publisher or the rights holder. This is the author created accepted manuscript following peer review and may differ slightly from the final published version.
Citation for published version	Fullagar S, Petris S, Sargent J, Allen S, Akhtar M, Ozakinci G. Action research with parkrun UK volunteer organizers to develop inclusive strategies. <i>Health Promotion International</i> . 2019 Nov 28; Advance article.
Link to published version	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz113">https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz113</a>

Full metadata for this item is available in St Andrews Research Repository at: <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

## **Action research with parkrun UK volunteer organisers to develop inclusive strategies**

### **Abstract**

This article addresses the challenge of promoting physical activity through a focus on equity and engaging physically inactive citizens through the development of inclusive strategies within parkrun UK- a free, volunteer-led, weekly mass community participation running event. We discuss how a UK-based action research design enabled collaboration with volunteer event organisers to understand participant experiences, constraints and develop localised inclusive practices. In contrast with ‘expert’ driven health behaviour interventions, our research pursued a ‘ground up’ approach by asking what can be learnt from the successes and challenges of organising community events, such as parkrun UK, to promote inclusion? A modified participatory action research approach was used with four parkrun sites across England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, that involved quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey data (N = 655) that informed the process. Our analysis explored parkrunners’ and volunteer organisers’ perceptions relating to i) the demographics of parkrun participation and ii) actions for change in relation to the challenges of engaging marginalised groups (women, ethnic minorities, low income, older people, those with disabilities or illness). We discuss the challenges and opportunities for addressing (in)equity and inclusion through volunteer-based organisations and the implications for translating knowledge into organisational strategies.

**Key Words:** parkrun; inclusion; community; running; action research; physical activity

## Introduction

Like other advanced economies, the United Kingdom (UK) has developed physical activity and sport promotion strategies to engage inactive citizens and target socially marginalised populations (Sport England, 2016). The interconnected issues of widening social disparities, inequitable access to sport and persistent health inequalities (affecting quality of life and expectancy) have been consistently associated with lower participation. These involve populations such as those on low incomes, women, people with disabilities and chronic illness, older persons and those from ethnicity minorities (Cleland *et al.*, 2018; Such *et al.*, 2017). In addition to ‘top down’ policy approaches, calls have been made to develop ‘ground up’ and practice-led knowledge of physical activity promotion through analysis of community-based events (i.e. not designed by public health experts) (Reece *et al.*, 2018; Wiltshire and Stevinson, 2018).

Developing inclusive physical activity programmes that address constraints to sport and physical activity is important for reducing the likelihood that universal promotion could actually *increase* health-related inequality (Carey *et al.*, 2017; Hanson *et al.*, 2016). People with greater socio-economic resources are likely to be more active and derive greater health and social benefits than those who are poorer (xx 2018; Wiltshire and Stevinson, 2018). This article focuses on parkrun<sup>1</sup> as one of the fastest growing global community-based running events, to examine the potential for developing equitable local strategies for physical activity promotion. We seek to contribute a methodological perspective on the processes and findings of an action

---

<sup>1</sup> parkrun is written with a lowercase ‘p’ throughout this article which reflects their branding.

1  
2  
3 research project that engaged volunteer-led physical activity organisers in the  
4 development of inclusive strategies. parkrun provides a unique health-oriented  
5 organisational context for understanding the challenges and opportunities of  
6 developing inclusive volunteer-led events.  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

13  
14 Community-based sport events that promote social interaction have been identified as  
15 successful across a number of sites and localised programs (e.g., running and walking  
16 groups, public exercise classes) (Heath *et al.*, 2012). Other studies have focused  
17 specifically on the potential of leveraging mass participation sport events to sustain  
18 regular participation in physical activity, particularly for traditionally ‘harder to reach’  
19 groups, such as women (Lane *et al.*, 2015; Murphy *et al.*, 2015). Focusing on an Irish  
20 running event, Lane *et al.* (2015) identified the issue of ‘relapse’ after ‘one off’ event  
21 participation. An intervention was designed to promote local physical activity  
22 opportunities with some success amongst women. Yet, mass sport events have also  
23 come under scrutiny for their narrow focus on elite ‘sport identities’ that fail to  
24 connect with diverse groups. This scrutiny also focuses on their top down  
25 (commercial or non-profit) management and the lack of a demonstrable effect on  
26 community participation after the extensive promotion of mega-sport events (e.g.  
27 Olympic and Paralympic Games) (e.g., Weed *et al.*, 2015). Subsequently, working  
28 with local communities needs to be at the heart of tackling inactivity and engaging  
29 under-represented groups in more diverse forms of sport and recreation provision  
30 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015; Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011).  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55

56 Our parkrun research project emerged out of a ‘sandpit event’ held by the UK-based  
57 charity Cancer Research UK that brought together a range of academics, health  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 professionals, and charity organisations to fund innovative approaches to prevention  
4 research with ‘hard to reach groups’. The research team was composed of  
5  
6 professionals (Cancer Prevention Ireland and the Islington Bangladeshi Association)  
7  
8 and academics from different disciplines (sociology, psychology, physiotherapy). The  
9  
10 collaboration was formed through a shared desire to understand how parkrun worked  
11  
12 as an informal health promotion setting, to address inequalities affecting participation  
13  
14 and the prevention of chronic illness. Physical activity interventions that *engage*  
15  
16 citizens who experience inequality and poorer health outcomes have been identified  
17  
18 as important approaches in the broader ‘social ecology’ of preventing non-  
19  
20 communicable diseases (World Health Organisation, 2010). A recent Public Health  
21  
22 England report echoes this approach to valuing community-centred approaches when  
23  
24 it states: ‘participatory approaches directly address the marginalisation and  
25  
26 powerlessness caused by entrenched health inequalities’ (Public Health England,  
27  
28 2015, p. 5).  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

### 38 **parkrun Research Literature**

39  
40 The emerging body of research on parkrun from the UK and Australia has identified  
41  
42 the capacity of the event to engage people who are less active and experience  
43  
44 constraints to participation: those with lower levels of education (Sharman *et al.*,  
45  
46 2018), women, older people, those with various health/ mental health conditions or  
47  
48 disabilities (Cleland *et al.*, 2018; Grunseit *et al.*, 2018; Morris and Scott, 2018;  
49  
50 Stevinson and Hickson, 2014; Wiltshire and Stevinson, 2018). One of the first studies  
51  
52 conducted with over 7000 parkrunners in the UK identified the majority as not having  
53  
54 been regular runners prior to their parkrun registration and reported benefits related to  
55  
56 psychological well-being and sense of community (Stevinson *et al.*, 2015). [More](#)  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4 recently, in a prospective 12-month study of newly registered parkrun participants (n  
5 = 354) showed that the participants benefited from improved fitness. In addition, to an  
6 increase in weight loss, participants also reported an increase of 39 minutes of  
7 increased physical activity per week (Stevinson and Hickson, 2018).  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

13  
14 parkrun has been consistently identified as a site of social interaction that connects  
15 people in local places (Hindley, 2018) and across places with the rise of ‘parkrun  
16 tourism’ (Sharman *et al.*, 2018). However, parkrun also risks entrenching inequitable  
17 patterns of access to social and cultural capital if inclusion is not addressed (Wiltshire  
18 and Stevenson, 2018). Stevenson and Hickson (2014) identified lower engagement  
19 with participants with low incomes and culturally diverse backgrounds. There has  
20 also been little research that has explored the more nuanced, intersectional relations of  
21 inequality (connecting income, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality etc) that  
22 shape participation. Importantly, the organisational identity of parkrun has evolved as  
23 it has grown over time and moved from a ‘sport’ orientation to a focus on community  
24 inclusion, collaboration and engagement for a ‘healthier and happier planet’ (Reece *et*  
25 *al.*, 2018, p. 327). Our research sought to move beyond an assumption that parkrun  
26 ‘is’ inclusive because it is free, local and non-traditional, to explore *how* parkrun  
27 volunteers can be engaged to develop knowledge and inform strategies that are  
28 responsive to the localised context of participation.  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

## 51 **Background**

52 Since it began in 2004 parkrun has continued to expand across the UK and in April  
53 2019 there were 616 sites. parkrun has maintained its ‘free’ participation policy  
54 through a volunteer-based model of delivery. Core funding for the small paid staff  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 team and operational costs is obtained from corporate sponsors (e.g., sport clothing,  
4 insurance) which align with its mission. As a citizen-led community organization,  
5  
6 parkrun has sought to replicate its model across the globe and there are currently 1809  
7  
8 sites across the world (<https://www.parkrun.com/> last accessed 13 April 2019). In  
9  
10 April 2019, there were 1,996,908 parkrunners registered in the UK (who have  
11  
12 averaged 13.8 parkruns each). The average completion ‘times’ have steadily  
13  
14 lengthened, indicating a growth in walkers and slower runners (Reece *et al.*, 2018). In  
15  
16 recognition of the potential of parkrun to engage less active groups, strategic  
17  
18 relationships were developed with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games  
19  
20 and Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games legacy plans to support new events in  
21  
22 these cities. In December 2018, Sport England announced specific funding to  
23  
24 establish 200 new parkruns in areas of social deprivation and to encourage people  
25  
26 who experience marginalisation (women, low income, culturally diverse, older,  
27  
28 disabled etc) to become more physically active ([https://www.sportengland.org/news-  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60](https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-features/news/2018/december/12/sport-england-partner-with-parkrun-for-three-years-with-3-million-investment/)), last accessed 20 May 2019).

parkrun promotes running (and invites walking) as physical activity where the event is ‘a run not a race’. The parkrun website articulates a participatory sport or physical culture:

“parkrun is all about inclusiveness and wellbeing. We want as many people as possible to feel part of a real local community brought together by our events, as well as our global parkrun family... parkruns are never more than 5km – it’s a distance that anyone can complete (even if some of us are walking by the end...).

1  
2  
3 And it's why we've kept the format of parkrun so simple: register once, then turn  
4  
5 up and take part wherever you want, whenever you want....parkrun's simple  
6  
7 concept should – and really can – exist in every town in the world. So no-one  
8  
9 should ever have to pay to go running in their community regularly, safely and  
10  
11 for fun". <http://www.parkrun.com/about/>  
12  
13  
14

15 The uniqueness of parkrun lies in its global governance structure, non-for-profit status  
16  
17 and industry partnerships that shape the growth of active local and global  
18  
19 communities. This occurs through a grassroots volunteer culture and innovative use of  
20  
21 digital media (e.g., Facebook, Flickr, Twitter). Such an event subsequently offers a  
22  
23 unique opportunity to understand the “how, what and why” of parkrun's success as  
24  
25 well as the challenges. By collaborating with volunteer organisers to identify localised  
26  
27 strategies that could be embedded in delivery we can begin to unpick such areas.  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

### 33 **Research Design and Methodology**

34  
35  
36 **Design:** The project used a modified participatory action research (PAR) design  
37  
38 across four parkrun sites in the UK (Northern Ireland (NI), South West England  
39  
40 (SWE), Inner London (L) and Scotland (S)). A PAR design seeks to involve research  
41  
42 participants in each step of the research process. This is to enable shared  
43  
44 understandings to be produced through an ‘action-reflection’ cycle to effect social  
45  
46 change (Frisby *et al.*, 2005). Steps generally include framing questions about social  
47  
48 change, selecting methods, collecting data, analysing and reflecting upon the findings  
49  
50 to identify actions for change. The specific context of the research funding shaped our  
51  
52 decision to adopt a ‘modified’ PAR approach. The collaborative sandpit process  
53  
54 required each team to develop research questions and methods that were reviewed as  
55  
56 part of the funding process during the sandpit. Therefore, there was no involvement of  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 the parkrun co-researchers at the formative stage. In addition, the timeframe for data  
4 collection and analysis was limited by funding to one year 2014-15 (with a one year  
5 follow up in 2016 to identify the implementation of actions for change). The  
6  
7 following research questions shaped the direction of the study and the parkrun co-  
8  
9 researchers contributed to refining the study questions within the methods used:  
10  
11  
12  
13

- 14 1. How inclusive is parkrun of non-traditional participants/ marginalised groups  
15 who are less active (low income, cultural diversity, disability, age, gender, and  
16 health conditions)?  
17  
18  
19  
20
- 21 2. What do parkrunners identify as important aspects of the ‘participatory culture’  
22 that sustains their engagement?  
23  
24  
25
- 26 3. What actions do parkrunners identify as potentially improving the engagement  
27 of non-traditional participants to create a more inclusive parkrun culture and  
28 engage marginalised groups?  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 We drew upon a concurrent and mixed methods approach that was oriented by a  
36 *qualitative* emphasis on interpreting equity issues that affect participation (Leech and  
37 Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Hence, we adopt a constructionist approach that also  
38 acknowledges the situated context of our research (human experiences and non-  
39 human elements such as weather, parks, survey instruments, websites, audio  
40 recorders, meeting notes, cake) and the partiality of all knowledge (participants’ and  
41 our own). In this way we acknowledge Mantoura and Potvin’s (2013) critique of  
42 normative notions of participation and consider the dimensions of knowledge  
43 production that involve human and non-human actors. We were also guided by the  
44 work of Baum *et al.* (2006, p. 854) who describe the epistemological approach of  
45 PAR in terms of the process of researchers and participants co-producing shared,  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 change-oriented contextual knowledge: ‘at its heart is collective, self-reflective  
4 inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and  
5 improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they  
6 find themselves’.  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

13  
14 Below we outline the key phases of the collaborative action-reflection learning cycle  
15 that guided the research process and ongoing interpretation of data collected through a  
16 mixed methods approach. We followed the same process in each of the four research  
17 sites.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

## 24 25 26 **Undertaking a Participatory Action Research Process**

27  
28  
29 *Phase 1: Collaborating with volunteer organisers to understand the localised context*  
30 *of parkrun participation*  
31  
32

33  
34 The four sites were selected due to their proximity to the primary research team  
35 locations across the UK to develop an ongoing relationship with a local parkrun site  
36 (SF and JS: South West England; GO: Scotland; MA, SF and SP: London; SA:  
37 Northern Ireland). The volunteer run directors at all four parkrun sites that were  
38 approached, enthusiastically agreed to be involved in researching strategies to support  
39 inclusive participation. The four sites have been anonymized for publication and  
40 included quite diverse characteristics with respect to socioeconomic, cultural, and  
41 geographic differences. The Northern Ireland parkrun was located in a local parkland  
42 in walking distance from the centre of a regional town with a number of low income  
43 areas. The Scottish parkrun was located in a popular park on the outskirts of a semi-  
44 rural setting of a university town. The London parkrun was located in a multiuse park  
45 on the border of an affluent and deprived area with a large British South Asian  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 population. The South West of England site was located in a popular parkland area on  
4  
5 the fringes of a regional town with limited public transport and areas of middle and  
6  
7 low income nearby.  
8  
9

10  
11 This phase involved forming a parkrun co-research team in each site (average of 6  
12  
13 volunteer members involved in organising their local parkrun). Each team met  
14  
15 formally three times on average over the project and informally with their research  
16  
17 team member(s) on numerous occasions (e.g., during parkruns, via email). Minutes  
18  
19 were taken of meetings by the researchers and formed part of the dataset. The first  
20  
21 meeting involved a discussion of the project, ethical issues and an invitation to  
22  
23 contribute to refining the methods that had been selected within the timeframe. At  
24  
25 least one researcher facilitated a discussion of key questions to identify the  
26  
27 assumptions and perceptions of parkrun volunteers. Topics discussed included the  
28  
29 inclusiveness of parkrun, who does and does not participate from their local  
30  
31 community, reasons for participating and constraints to participation.  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36

### 37 *Phase 2: Researching parkrun participation and localised issues*

38  
39 The online and paper-based surveys were developed by the academic team with  
40  
41 piloting and input from co-researchers in the context of the broader literature. The  
42  
43 survey [monkey link](#) was distributed [by the run directors via their local social media](#)  
44  
45 [accounts two weeks before the site visit. On the day of the main site visit \(by the](#)  
46  
47 [whole academic team\), paper surveys were distributed and participants were invited](#)  
48  
49 [to fill in the questionnaire at the end of their run/volunteer shift. Announcements were](#)  
50  
51 [made to ensure that no one was filling it twice, although this could not be guaranteed.](#)  
52  
53 [Each researcher who was assigned to their local parkrun site conducted numerous](#)  
54  
55 [visits over 12 months to observe, facilitate meetings with the co-research team and](#)  
56  
57 [also participate in parkrun.](#) Overall, 655 on-line (393) and paper based (262) surveys  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 were completed by respondents aged 16 years and older. We do not have data on  
4 response rates or reasons for non-completion. Questions covered motivations for  
5 participation, benefits, participation frequency, demographic details, perceptions of  
6 inclusiveness and suggestions for change to increase inclusion of parkrunners from  
7 diverse backgrounds. For example, ‘how has your involvement in parkrun impacted  
8 on your health and wellbeing? ‘Has attending parkrun had an impact on your  
9 friendships and social interactions?’ And, ‘what strategies could be used to support  
10 parkrun to be more inclusive of people who don’t often participate?’  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

24 We developed the above items rather than using existing validated measures and this  
25 is acknowledged as a study limitation. During the site visits to administer the surveys  
26 the academic team engaged in participant observation by either completing the run or  
27 observing volunteers/runners. At each site in-depth interviews were also completed  
28 (19 in total) after each event to explore the meanings of participation and perceptions  
29 of inclusiveness (several involved a photo elicitation component and will be reported  
30 elsewhere). Three in depth interviews were also conducted with core paid parkrun  
31 staff to explore their perceptions of challenges relating to inclusion and organizational  
32 learning. The interviews will be reported separately.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

47 *Phase 3: What do we know about parkrun participation? Creating shared*  
48 *understandings of the survey data*  
49  
50

51  
52 The second co-research meeting was held at each parkrun site to discuss a draft  
53 summary report that the academic team produced on the preliminary survey findings.  
54 These reports provided data (graphs and text) on participant demographics, perceived  
55 benefits and motivations, event management and communication. This phase of the  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 project provided an important opportunity for discussing the volunteers' assumptions  
4 and perceptions of parkrun's inclusiveness, against the data collected about the local  
5 context. In terms of the issues raised by the data (a common observation was the low  
6 numbers of people from culturally diverse backgrounds), the process of discussing the  
7 reports enabled a shared understanding to develop about how inequalities shape  
8 (non)participation. Surfacing assumptions and biases was important given that many  
9 volunteers passionately believed that parkrun was naturally inclusive of everyone. We  
10 also acknowledge that bias shapes the sample and hence we do not make any claim to  
11 representativeness. Summary reports were revised slightly following the contributions  
12 of co-researcher interpretations about the localised context (via multiple forms of  
13 personal and professional expertise). The reports provided an important reference  
14 point in the ongoing process of reflecting on who was not participating and how they  
15 could be better engaged.  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

#### 33 *Phase 4: Identifying actions for change*

34  
35  
36 A final group meeting was held with each parkrun co-research team to discuss a  
37 finalised summary report that included further analysis of survey data on the  
38 perceptions of inclusiveness and suggestions for change. This stepped process of  
39 sharing research data during different phases enabled the co-researchers time to  
40 reflect on issues and consider the strategies for change offered by parkrunners in their  
41 event. Through reflective discussion of the reports, a set of draft actions for change  
42 were produced by each site that responded to local issues. Summary reports were then  
43 updated to include these local actions for change and circulated within the co-research  
44 teams. Research team also created a one-page summary outlining key issues and  
45 actions for change that was shared publicly in each of the four parkrun sites via social  
46 media. Parkrunners were encouraged to provide any further feedback to their parkrun  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 volunteer teams or directly to the academic team. After further discussions amongst  
4  
5 the teams about informal feedback, minor changes were made to the site reports as a  
6  
7 result. For example, one site wanted the description of the health inequalities  
8  
9 reframed to avoid perpetuating negative perceptions (from ‘deprived’ community to  
10  
11 issues of inequality relating to access to recreation). This action-oriented process was  
12  
13 designed to engage the parkrun community at each site in the conversation about  
14  
15 inclusiveness and raise awareness.  
16  
17  
18  
19

#### 20 *Phase 5: Sharing knowledge about actions for change*

21  
22

23 The one-page summary reports were also shared with organizations named in actions,  
24  
25 such as, local public health professionals or community groups. To encourage  
26  
27 knowledge exchange across the parkrun organisation, each summary report was  
28  
29 shared across the four parkrun co-research teams and presented at an annual parkrun  
30  
31 conference for regional ambassadors and event directors. While there was not scope  
32  
33 within the project to undertake an extensive follow-up twelve months afterwards, we  
34  
35 were aware of certain changes that had occurred. For example, one local authority  
36  
37 included parkrun in their active living strategy to address the need for better ‘joined  
38  
39 up’ communication in the area (see Table 1).  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

#### 45 *Phase 6: Reflecting upon changes and challenges*

46  
47

48 We conducted a brief one-year follow-up via email and phone with each of the four  
49  
50 parkrun co-research team leaders to identify what actions had been implemented and  
51  
52 what key challenges arose in the process. Later we discuss the strategies and  
53  
54 implementation challenges that arose in the process of conducting this kind of PAR  
55  
56 research within a short time frame. The modified PAR approach enabled the  
57  
58 involvement of the four parkrun co-researcher teams over a concentrated period of  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 time at key points in the process. The interpretation of different data produced  
4  
5 through qualitative and quantitative methods was crucial to designing actions for  
6  
7 change. The academic team assumed primary responsibility for data collection,  
8  
9 preliminary analysis, and report writing (which importantly lessened the demands on  
10  
11 co-researcher time given they were already active volunteers and many also had paid  
12  
13 work and unpaid care roles).  
14  
15

### 16 17 **Analysis and Discussion**

18  
19  
20 In this article we report on both the qualitative and quantitative data from the survey  
21  
22 that was interpreted within the action research approach. The analysis of the whole  
23  
24 dataset (across the four sites) was undertaken at the end of the project and in this  
25  
26 article we focus on the overall findings from the survey with reference to distinctive  
27  
28 site specific issues as they emerged in the research findings. Hence, we emphasize the  
29  
30 constructionist approach to knowledge that underpins our collaborative analysis of the  
31  
32 demographics of participants, the multiple meanings produced about the parkrun  
33  
34 culture, and the actions for change (Ponic and Frisby, 2010). Within the action  
35  
36 research cycle, the research team completed the initial analysis of the datasets and  
37  
38 each site visit involved academic team meetings to synthesize results. The closed  
39  
40 survey questions were analysed using SPSS to produce descriptive statistics by three  
41  
42 members of the academic team. The open-ended survey questions were thematically  
43  
44 analysed using a coding framework developed by two researchers with cross checking  
45  
46 and reflection occurring across the broader team (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A manual  
47  
48 coding framework was developed for the limited number of survey questions.  
49  
50 Examples of qualitative codes developed for the survey analysis included: reasons for  
51  
52 and benefits of participating (health, social interaction, helping others, sense of  
53  
54 achievement, event organization) and strategies for change (communication and  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 outreach, images of diversity and expanding inclusive ethos, accessibility and location  
4  
5 and event format).  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11

## 12 Findings

### 13 1. Who participates in parkrun?

14  
15 While we do not claim that the survey results are by any means representative of  
16  
17 parkrun participation, they do align with broader patterns for runners in the UK  
18  
19 (white, middle class, younger age groups) (Department for Culture, Media and Sport,  
20  
21 2015). However, the demographic profile for our parkrun sample does reflect greater  
22  
23 participation by women than is evident in national sport and recreation data. We also  
24  
25 acknowledge the bias that is always present in survey recruitment and the challenges  
26  
27 of engaging people who may have low levels of literacy. Across the four sites there  
28  
29 were six hundred and fifty-five survey respondents (South West: N = 267; London: N  
30  
31 = 120; Northern Ireland: N = 98 and Scotland: N = 140; Missing: N = 30) who  
32  
33 completed the online survey or paper surveys that were distributed on the day of field  
34  
35 visit. 309 participants identified as men, 332 as women and 3 preferred not to say.  
36  
37  
38  
39

40  
41 This fairly even gender distribution is also similar to the gender breakdown of parkrun  
42  
43 registrations where women make up approximately 50% (although women  
44  
45 parkrunners actually participate at lower rates than men; *personal communication*  
46  
47 *with parkrun*).  
48  
49  
50

51  
52 The mean age of respondents was 41.9 years (SD = 11.18; Range: 16-79; 22 missing)  
53  
54 with the highest participation age groups being 35-54 years (58.3%), 16-34 years  
55  
56 (28.9%) and ≥55 years (12.8%). The ethnic background of the sample was  
57  
58 predominantly white (93.1%; 17 missing), while 4.9% of the respondents reported a  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 disability (19 missing), of these 1.7% reported physical impairment and 1.5%  
4 reported visual impairment. The majority of parkrunners were in current employment  
5 (86%; 18 missing) and 56.8% had a university or college degree or higher (19  
6 missing). 4.3% reported less than £430 as monthly income before tax, 19.1% as £431-  
7 1500, 25.8% as £1501-2600 and 17.2% reported at least £4301 monthly income  
8 before tax (7.9% preferred not to say; 26 missing). 35.9% of the respondents had been  
9 attending parkrun for less than a year (3.1% for 5 years or more: 27 missing). In  
10 terms of frequency, most respondents reported participating monthly (47%) or weekly  
11 (37.3%).

12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25 The pattern of participation revealed largely middle-aged, white, more rather than less  
26 affluent and mostly abled bodied parkrunners as the norm and is in line with  
27 previously reported findings from a larger study by Stevinson & Hickson (2014).

28  
29  
30  
31  
32 These patterns provoked discussion about local demographics, constraints and ideas  
33 for change. Each parkrun site team also emphasised 'exceptions' to the norm relating  
34 to certain individuals, families or groups who were identifiably part of the 'parkrun  
35 family' (such as, a prominent volunteer organiser with British-Caribbean heritage,  
36 older runners who had survived cancer and heart attacks). Discussions often moved  
37 between reflections on the participation gaps in the data and the 'exceptional' stories  
38 that were shaping perceptions of inclusiveness in relation to the broader parkrun  
39 narrative. Next, we turn to the survey data that reveal the perceptions of parkrunners  
40 across the four sites about inclusiveness as an ethos and practice.

## 51 52 53 **2. Inclusive parkrun ethos and practice**

54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
There was a common perception that the parkrun ethos (the 'parkrun family' is a  
common descriptor) was inclusive of diversity, as this London respondent states: 'it  
brings in people of all different ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds'. The majority

1  
2  
3 of survey respondents (70.1%) reported that they felt parkrun images and promotion  
4 reflected the diversity of people in the community. This inclusive ethos was  
5 articulated in relation to parkrun being accessible to all because it was local, free and  
6 welcoming. The research methodology importantly opened up the perception of  
7 inclusiveness through the shared process of reflecting on the different datasets,  
8 assumptions and discussions within co-research teams. In London parkrun, for  
9 example, it was evident through the research that the ethnic and religious backgrounds  
10 of parkrunners was not reflective of the majority of local residents in this culturally  
11 diverse neighbourhood. There were number of comments about the need to address  
12 the *lack of diversity* among participants (in terms of socio-economic status and  
13 ethnicity), as these London respondents stated: ‘more work with local councils and  
14 schools. parkrun is very middle class, there could be more interaction with people  
15 from working class families’. Furthermore, a respondent suggested that,

16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

‘It would be good if the general atmosphere was warmer and more inclusive. The runners at London parkrun do not seem to represent the 30% Bangladeshi population in the area - I don't know why this is or how it can be improved, but perhaps it suggests that many local residents feel it is 'not for them', which is at odds with parkrun's ethos as a community venture’.

The survey responses to open-ended questions about the strategies local parkruns could use to be more inclusive were a major source of discussion amongst co-researchers to identify local actions for change. In these discussions we oriented conversations around the possibility of change, rather than solely focus on

1  
2  
3 ‘constraints’. This acted as a means of increasing awareness about what existing  
4  
5 practices were working and how change could be enacted.  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 When survey respondents were asked about how parkrun could develop strategies to  
11  
12 engage people from diverse backgrounds, the majority of comments related to the  
13  
14 need for more *promotional strategies* about the nature of the event (friendly ethos, run  
15  
16 at your own pace or walk) to reach the broader community. Typical comments  
17  
18 included: ‘people may worry they are too slow or unfit to take part (as I first did),  
19  
20 perhaps more could be done to focus on how parkrun is not a race or about a time’  
21  
22 (London respondent) and ‘people think you have to "run" but you can walk it’ (NI  
23  
24 respondent). In terms of the friendly parkrun culture, some respondents felt that there  
25  
26 was an insider/outsider dynamic created by established social networks in running  
27  
28 groups. Such groups were often mentioned in relation to their more visible ‘sport’  
29  
30 identity (club clothing, competitiveness) which was thought to exclude non-sporty  
31  
32 runners as a NI respondent said, ‘be less exclusive i.e. if you're not in X [name of a  
33  
34 running group] runners you're an outsider’. In contrast, other respondents commented  
35  
36 on particular inclusive practices that had become part of parkrun and could be  
37  
38 expanded upon. The NI site had begun to support a parkrunner-walker with a visual  
39  
40 impairment and this was commented on by many respondents: ‘guide dogs offered  
41  
42 and course to help people learn how to guide a person with a visual impairment  
43  
44 running/walking’. Respondents in the Scottish parkrun site also commented on the  
45  
46 role that café plays and how opening the café over winter would encourage post-run  
47  
48 socialising.  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 *Access to local parks* was also identified as a constraint to participation for sites that  
4  
5 were not easily reached by foot or public transport (the London site was the exception  
6  
7 in terms of a highly accessible location). 43.7% of respondents indicated that they  
8  
9 strongly agreed that parkrun was hard to get to without using a car. While parkrun is  
10  
11 a free event, the transport costs and car use is an equity issue for those on low  
12  
13 incomes or with mobility needs. In the next section we discuss what each of the  
14  
15 parkrun sites identified as the strategies for change and whether they managed to  
16  
17 implement these over a twelve-month period.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

### 24 **3. Inclusive strategies for change**

25  
26 Table 1.1 identifies key themes that encompass the types of inclusive strategies that  
27  
28 are being, or could be mobilised by volunteers to effect change at each parkrun site.  
29  
30 The central research team analysed the strategies developed across the sites to identify  
31  
32 meso or organisational level themes that can inform parkrun's local and global  
33  
34 capacity building strategies; i) promoting the parkrun 'ethos' in ways that attract  
35  
36 diverse participants, ii) developing joined-up relationships with local organisations  
37  
38 (e.g., cultural groups) to enable pathways to parkrun and access to parks, and iii)  
39  
40 fostering an inclusive culture that supports less confident runners from diverse  
41  
42 backgrounds. The challenge of change lies with both the *formulation and*  
43  
44 *implementation* of inclusive strategies that rely on volunteer labour and centralised  
45  
46 support from parkrun and partner organisations.  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

54 [*insert* Table 1.1 Inclusive strategies and actions for change here]  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 The twelve-month follow-up identified a number of constraining factors that impacted  
4 on the parkrun teams' ability to follow through on some of their identified actions.

5  
6  
7 These issues reflect local differences between the contexts of parkrun sites and culture  
8 of volunteer teams, as well as broader socio-political issues and challenges of  
9  
10 volunteer-based community organisations. Run directors and volunteer teams  
11  
12 identified immediate issues with managing the growing numbers of parkrunners (and  
13  
14 hence needing more volunteers). There was some reluctance to actively promote  
15  
16 parkrun to attract *more* participants, despite the desire to address inequalities. The  
17  
18 demands on volunteer organisers were felt to be increasing with the growth of various  
19  
20 bureaucratic requirements (e.g., safety, child protection requirements, managing  
21  
22 others) (see also, Nichols, 2017).  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30  
31 For some parkrun sites, such as London, the question about how to engage with  
32  
33 culturally diverse communities raised a more complex set of issues about cross-  
34  
35 cultural understanding, engagement with groups and appropriate forms of promotion.  
36  
37 Culturally sensitive strategies arose (NI) when there was a local parkrun champion to  
38  
39 support initiatives (e.g., supporting the translation of parkrun promotional material  
40  
41 into different languages) given that there was no budget to support additional costs  
42  
43 (on the process of developing culturally inclusive promotion see, Telenta *et al.*, 2019).  
44  
45

46  
47 For those parkrun sites that were not centrally located, within walking distance or  
48  
49 well serviced by public transport, the issue of transport proved to be difficult to  
50  
51 address in the context of cuts to local government budgets. A number of sites wanted  
52  
53 to have parkrun signage put in their local parks but without funding or park  
54  
55 management support this did not happen, except in NI where they had both. Signage  
56  
57 of free events within and beyond parks has been identified in relation to promoting  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 participation to regular events in low income neighbourhoods. On the other hand,  
4  
5 successful initiatives such as ‘first-timers welcome’ that Scottish parkrun initiated  
6  
7 were continuing (through news in local media/Facebook/word of mouth where more  
8  
9 time would be given to first timers in the beginning of parkrun every 2 months).  
10  
11  
12  
13

14 The effects of austerity in the UK are exacerbated by some local councils that had  
15  
16 introduced charges for parking and were considering outsourcing the management of  
17  
18 parks. This raises the threat of parkrun being impacted on by other events (charity fun  
19  
20 runs that paid for park use). In the follow up, SWE parkrun identified a drop in  
21  
22 parkrun participation after parking charges were introduced. Broader initiatives that  
23  
24 were beyond the immediate remit of parkrun organisers provide more difficult to  
25  
26 implement (e.g. car sharing schemes or improved public transport access) and  
27  
28 highlight the need for joined-up planning for active living. In the context of austerity,  
29  
30 parkrun faces certain constraints in developing inclusive events. Especially when  
31  
32 local park authorities desire to charge for use, despite central health promotion  
33  
34 policies that emphasise the importance of physical activity (xx, author).  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42

## 43 **Conclusion**

44 The growth of parkrun arguably reflects changing participation trends with the rise of  
45  
46 informal community sport and physical activity events. The lessons learned from this  
47  
48 volunteer-led movement can contribute insights to inform the development of  
49  
50 inclusive, joined up strategies for physical activity promotion across sport, health  
51  
52 promotion, community organisations and local government sectors. This article has  
53  
54 sought to contribute knowledge about how participatory research processes can  
55  
56 mobilise the expertise of volunteers and participants to inform future strategies within  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 physical activity programmes. Participatory research methodologies can also inform  
4  
5 knowledge translation practices by drawing upon the practical knowledge of  
6  
7 participants to consider how equity can be approached in sport and health promotion  
8  
9 contexts (Edwards and Rowe, 2019; Ponc and Frisby, 2010; Schaillée *et al.*, 2019).  
10  
11 One of the major limitations of our research was the constrained timeframe and  
12  
13 funding. This reduced our capacity as researchers to develop ongoing collaborations  
14  
15 with the parkrun sites and to consider the issues arising in the implementation of their  
16  
17 strategies. We also acknowledge that the sample is not representative of parkrun  
18  
19 participants and we do not have data on response rates and nor for reasons for non-  
20  
21 completion and further research into understanding diverse perspectives is needed.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

For many community-based sport organisations with a centralised governance structure (such as federated organisations), translating research into practical actions to effect ‘bottom up’ change is an ongoing challenge with respect to inclusion. parkrun continues to evolve as an agile, hybrid organisation with the capacity to engage committed parkrunners, volunteer organisers, sponsors and research partners in a change agenda. Our findings contribute knowledge about understanding the perceptions of volunteers and identifying local actions that enact parkrun’s strategic focus on creating a ‘healthier and happier planet’ and an inclusive ‘parkrun family’ (Reece *et al.*, 2018). There are further implications concerning the translation of research findings into multi-level organisational strategies that build capacity for inclusive practice across key areas (Batra *et al.*, 2016). Closing ‘the gap’ between an inclusive parkrun ethos and who actually participates, requires strategies to increase awareness of equity and inclusion across the organisation. This transcends through and from governance boards, developing volunteer training resources, online

1  
2  
3 knowledge sharing platforms, diversity sensitive marketing, supporting champions of  
4 change, as well as partnering with multiple stakeholders and research organisations to  
5 develop effective implementation and monitoring practices. As our research has  
6 demonstrated, there is a great deal of expertise within community based-  
7 organisations, such as parkrun, that can be harnessed through participatory processes  
8 to create organisational change.  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18

### 19 Funding

20 This work was supported by Cancer Research UK [anonymised grant number  
21 XXXXXX]  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

### 31 References

32  
33 Batras, D., Duff, C. and Smith, B. (2016) Organizational change theory: Implications  
34 for health promotion practice. *Health Promotion International*, **31**, 231–241.  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39

40 Baum, F., MacDougall, C. and Smith, D. (2006) Participatory action research.  
41 *Journal Epidemiol Community Health*, **60**, 854-857.  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

47 Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative*  
48 *Research in Psychology*, **3**, 77–101.  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

54 Carey, G., Malbon, E., Crammond, B., Pescud, M. and Baker, P. (2017) Can the  
55 sociology of social problems help us to understand and manage ‘lifestyle drift’?  
56 *Health Promotion International*, **32**, 755–761.  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3  
4  
5 Cleland, V., Nash, M., Sharman, M.J. and Clafin, S. (2018) Exploring the health-  
6 promoting potential of the ‘parkrun’ phenomenon: What factors are associated with  
7 higher levels of participation? *American Journal of Health Promotion*, **33**, 13-23.  
8  
9

10  
11  
12  
13  
14 Department for Culture Media and Sport. (2015) *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for*  
15  
16  
17 *an Active Nation*

18  
19 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486622](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622)  
20  
21 [/Sporting\\_Future\\_ACCESSIBLE.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf) (last accessed 22 April 2017).  
22  
23

24  
25  
26 Edwards M.B. and Rowe, K. (2019) Managing sport for health: An introduction to the  
27  
28 special issue. *Sport Management Review*, **22**:1–4.  
29

30  
31  
32 Frisby, W., Reid, C. J., Millar, S. and Hoerber, L. (2005) Putting “participatory” into  
33  
34 participatory forms of action research. *Journal of Sport Management*, **19**, 367-386.  
35  
36

37  
38  
39 Gilchrist, P. and Wheaton, B. (2011) Lifestyle sport, public policy and youth  
40  
41 engagement: Examining the emergence of parkour. *International Journal of Sport*  
42  
43 *Policy and Politics*, **3**, 109–131.  
44  
45

46  
47  
48 Grunseit, A., Richards, J. and Merom, D. (2018) Running on a high: parkrun and  
49  
50 personal well-being. *BMC Public Health*, **18**, 59.  
51  
52

53  
54  
55 Hanson, S., Cross, J. and Jones, A. (2016) Promoting physical activity interventions  
56  
57 in communities with poor health and socio-economic profiles: A process evaluation of  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 the implementation of a new walking group scheme. *Social Science & Medicine*, **169**,  
4  
5 77-85.  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 Heath, G.W., Parra, D.C., Sarimiento, O.L., Andersen, L.N., Owen, N., Goenka, S. et  
11  
12 al. (2012) Evidence-based intervention in physical activity: lessons from around the  
13  
14 world. *The Lancet*, **380**, 272-281.  
15  
16  
17  
18

19 Hindley, D. (2018) "More than just a run in the park": An exploration of parkrun as a  
20  
21 shared leisure space. *Leisure Sciences*, January 10, 2018:  
22  
23 10.1080/01490400.2017.1410741.  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 Lane, A., Murphy, N. and Bauman, A. (2015) An effort to 'leverage' the effect of  
29  
30 participation in a mass event on physical activity. *Health Promotion International*, **30**,  
31  
32 542-551.  
33  
34  
35  
36

37 Leech, N. L. and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009) A typology of mixed methods research  
38  
39 designs. *Quality & Quantity*, **43**, 265-275.  
40  
41  
42  
43

44 Morris, P. and Scott, H. (2018) Not just a run in the park: a qualitative exploration of  
45  
46 parkrun and mental health. *Advances in Mental Health*, August 13, 2018:  
47  
48 10.1080/18387357.2018.1509011.  
49  
50  
51  
52

53 Murphy, N., Lane, A. and Bauman, A. (2015) Leveraging mass participation events  
54  
55 for sustainable health legacy. *Leisure Studies* **34**, 758-766.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Nichols, G. (2017) Volunteering in Community Sports Associations: A Literature  
4  
5 Review. *Voluntaristics Review*, **2**, 1–75.  
6  
7

8  
9  
10 Ponc P. and Frisby, W. (2010) Unpacking Assumptions About Inclusion in  
11  
12 Community-Based Health Promotion: Perspectives of Women Living in Poverty.  
13  
14 *Qualitative Health Research*, **20**, 1519–1531.  
15  
16

17  
18  
19 Public Health England. (2015) A guide to community-centred approaches for health  
20  
21 and wellbeing [http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-services/publichealthengland/171382A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_briefi_.pdf)  
22  
23 [services/publichealthengland/171382A\\_guide\\_to\\_community-](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-services/publichealthengland/171382A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_briefi_.pdf)  
24  
25 [centred\\_approaches\\_for\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing\\_briefi\\_.pdf](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-services/publichealthengland/171382A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_briefi_.pdf) (last accessed 22 April  
26  
27 2017).  
28  
29

30  
31  
32  
33 Reece, L.J., Quirk, H., Wellington, C., Haake, S.J. and Wilson, F. (2018) Bright  
34  
35 Spots, physical activity investments that work: Parkrun; a global initiative striving for  
36  
37 healthier and happier communities. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, **53**, 326-327.  
38  
39

40  
41  
42 Schailleé, H., Spaaij, R., Jeanes, R. and Theeboom, M. (2019) Knowledge translation  
43  
44 practices, enablers, and constraints: Bridging the research – practice divide in sport  
45  
46 management. *Sport Management Review*, March 5, 2019: 10.1123/jsm.2018-0175.  
47  
48

49  
50  
51 Sharman, M. J., Nash, M. and Cleland, V. (2018) Health and broader community  
52  
53 benefit of parkrun - An exploratory qualitative study. *Health Promotion Journal of*  
54  
55 *Australia*, **30**, 163-171.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Sport England. (2016) *Towards an active nation: Strategy 2016–21*. London: Sport  
4  
5 England.

6  
7  
8  
9  
10 Stevinson, C. and Hickson, M. (2014) Exploring the public health potential of a mass  
11  
12 community participation event. *Journal of Public Health*, **36**, 268-274.

13  
14  
15  
16  
17 Stevinson, C. and Hickson, M. (2018) Changes in physical activity, weight and  
18  
19 wellbeing outcomes among attendees of a weekly mass participation event: A  
20  
21 prospective 12-month study, *Journal of Public Health*, doi:10.1093/pubmed/fdy178.

22  
23  
24  
25  
26 Stevinson, C., Wiltshire, G. and Hickson, M. (2015) Facilitating participation in  
27  
28 health-enhancing physical activity: A qualitative study of parkrun. *International*  
29  
30 *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, **22**, 170-177.

31  
32  
33  
34  
35 Such, E., Salway, S., Copeland, R., Haake, S., Domone, S. and Mann, S. (2017) A  
36  
37 formative review of physical activity interventions for minority ethnic populations in  
38  
39 England. *Journal of Public Health*, **39**, 265-274.

40  
41  
42  
43  
44 Telenta, J., Jones, S.C., Francis, K.L., Polonsky, M.J., Beard, J. and Renzaho, A.M.  
45  
46 (2019) Australian lessons for developing and testing a culturally inclusive health  
47  
48 promotion campaign. *Health Promotion International*, February 25, 2019:  
49  
50 10.1093/heapro/day118.

51  
52  
53  
54  
55 Weed, M., Coren, E., Fiore, J., Wellard, I., Chatziefstathiou, D., Mansfield, L. et al.  
56  
57 (2015) The Olympic Games and raising sport participation: a systematic review of  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 evidence and an interrogation of policy for a demonstration effect. *European Sport*  
4  
5 *Management Quarterly*, **15**, 195-226.  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 Whiteman-Sandland, J., Hawkins, J. and Clayton, D. (2016). The role of social capital  
11 and community belongingness for exercise adherence: An exploratory study of the  
12 CrossFit gym model. *Journal of Health Psychology*, **23**, 1545-1556.  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18

19 Wiltshire, G. and Stevinson, C. (2018) Exploring the role of social capital in  
20 community-based physical activity: qualitative insights from parkrun. *Qualitative*  
21 *Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, **10**, 47–62.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 World Health Organization. (2010) Global recommendations on physical activity for  
29 health. [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44399/1/9789241599979\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44399/1/9789241599979_eng.pdf)  
30  
31  
32 (last accessed 22 April 2017).  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

38 Anonymised author, 2018

39  
40 Anonymised author, 2013  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

## **Action research with parkrun UK volunteer organisers to develop inclusive strategies**

### **Abstract**

This article addresses the challenge of promoting physical activity through a focus on equity and engaging physically inactive citizens through the development of inclusive strategies within parkrun UK- a free, volunteer-led, weekly mass community participation running event. We discuss how a UK-based action research design enabled collaboration with volunteer event organisers to understand participant experiences, constraints and develop localised inclusive practices. In contrast with ‘expert’ driven health behaviour interventions, our research pursued a ‘ground up’ approach by asking what can be learnt from the successes and challenges of organising community events, such as parkrun UK, to promote inclusion? A modified participatory action research approach was used with four parkrun sites across England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, that involved quantitative and qualitative analysis of survey data (N = 655) that informed the process. Our analysis explored parkrunners’ and volunteer organisers’ perceptions relating to i) the demographics of parkrun participation and ii) actions for change in relation to the challenges of engaging marginalised groups (women, ethnic minorities, low income, older people, those with disabilities or illness). We discuss the challenges and opportunities for addressing (in)equity and inclusion through volunteer-based organisations and the implications for translating knowledge into organisational strategies.

**Key Words:** parkrun; inclusion; community; running; action research; physical activity

## Introduction

Like other advanced economies, the United Kingdom (UK) has developed physical activity and sport promotion strategies to engage inactive citizens and target socially marginalised populations (Sport England, 2016). The interconnected issues of widening social disparities, inequitable access to sport and persistent health inequalities (affecting quality of life and expectancy) have been consistently associated with lower participation. These involve populations such as those on low incomes, women, people with disabilities and chronic illness, older persons and those from ethnicity minorities (Cleland *et al.*, 2018; Such *et al.*, 2017). In addition to ‘top down’ policy approaches, calls have been made to develop ‘ground up’ and practice-led knowledge of physical activity promotion through analysis of community-based events (i.e. not designed by public health experts) (Reece *et al.*, 2018; Wiltshire and Stevinson, 2018).

Developing inclusive physical activity programmes that address constraints to sport and physical activity is important for reducing the likelihood that universal promotion could actually *increase* health-related inequality (Carey *et al.*, 2017; Hanson *et al.*, 2016). People with greater socio-economic resources are likely to be more active and derive greater health and social benefits than those who are poorer (xx 2018; Wiltshire and Stevinson, 2018). This article focuses on parkrun<sup>1</sup> as one of the fastest growing global community-based running events, to examine the potential for developing equitable local strategies for physical activity promotion. We seek to contribute a methodological perspective on the processes and findings of an action

---

<sup>1</sup> parkrun is written with a lowercase ‘p’ throughout this article which reflects their branding.

1  
2  
3 research project that engaged volunteer-led physical activity organisers in the  
4 development of inclusive strategies. parkrun provides a unique health-oriented  
5 organisational context for understanding the challenges and opportunities of  
6 developing inclusive volunteer-led events.  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

13  
14 Community-based sport events that promote social interaction have been identified as  
15 successful across a number of sites and localised programs (e.g., running and walking  
16 groups, public exercise classes) (Heath *et al.*, 2012). Other studies have focused  
17 specifically on the potential of leveraging mass participation sport events to sustain  
18 regular participation in physical activity, particularly for traditionally ‘harder to reach’  
19 groups, such as women (Lane *et al.*, 2015; Murphy *et al.*, 2015). Focusing on an Irish  
20 running event, Lane *et al.* (2015) identified the issue of ‘relapse’ after ‘one off’ event  
21 participation. An intervention was designed to promote local physical activity  
22 opportunities with some success amongst women. Yet, mass sport events have also  
23 come under scrutiny for their narrow focus on elite ‘sport identities’ that fail to  
24 connect with diverse groups. This scrutiny also focuses on their top down  
25 (commercial or non-profit) management and the lack of a demonstrable effect on  
26 community participation after the extensive promotion of mega-sport events (e.g.  
27 Olympic and Paralympic Games) (e.g., Weed *et al.*, 2015). Subsequently, working  
28 with local communities needs to be at the heart of tackling inactivity and engaging  
29 under-represented groups in more diverse forms of sport and recreation provision  
30 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015; Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011).  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55

56 Our parkrun research project emerged out of a ‘sandpit event’ held by the UK-based  
57 charity Cancer Research UK that brought together a range of academics, health  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 professionals, and charity organisations to fund innovative approaches to prevention  
4 research with ‘hard to reach groups’. The research team was composed of  
5  
6 professionals (Cancer Prevention Ireland and the Islington Bangladeshi Association)  
7  
8 and academics from different disciplines (sociology, psychology, physiotherapy). The  
9  
10 collaboration was formed through a shared desire to understand how parkrun worked  
11  
12 as an informal health promotion setting, to address inequalities affecting participation  
13  
14 and the prevention of chronic illness. Physical activity interventions that *engage*  
15  
16 citizens who experience inequality and poorer health outcomes have been identified  
17  
18 as important approaches in the broader ‘social ecology’ of preventing non-  
19  
20 communicable diseases (World Health Organisation, 2010). A recent Public Health  
21  
22 England report echoes this approach to valuing community-centred approaches when  
23  
24 it states: ‘participatory approaches directly address the marginalisation and  
25  
26 powerlessness caused by entrenched health inequalities’ (Public Health England,  
27  
28 2015, p. 5).  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

### 38 **parkrun Research Literature**

39  
40 The emerging body of research on parkrun from the UK and Australia has identified  
41  
42 the capacity of the event to engage people who are less active and experience  
43  
44 constraints to participation: those with lower levels of education (Sharman *et al.*,  
45  
46 2018), women, older people, those with various health/ mental health conditions or  
47  
48 disabilities (Cleland *et al.*, 2018; Grunseit *et al.*, 2018; Morris and Scott, 2018;  
49  
50 Stevinson and Hickson, 2014; Wiltshire and Stevinson, 2018). One of the first studies  
51  
52 conducted with over 7000 parkrunners in the UK identified the majority as not having  
53  
54 been regular runners prior to their parkrun registration and reported benefits related to  
55  
56 psychological well-being and sense of community (Stevinson *et al.*, 2015). More  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 recently, in a prospective 12-month study of newly registered parkrun participants (n  
4 = 354) showed that the participants benefited from improved fitness. In addition, to an  
5 increase in weight loss, participants also reported an increase of 39 minutes of  
6  
7 increased physical activity per week (Stevinson and Hickson, 2018).  
8  
9

10  
11  
12  
13  
14 parkrun has been consistently identified as a site of social interaction that connects  
15  
16 people in local places (Hindley, 2018) and across places with the rise of ‘parkrun  
17  
18 tourism’ (Sharman *et al.*, 2018). However, parkrun also risks entrenching inequitable  
19  
20 patterns of access to social and cultural capital if inclusion is not addressed (Wiltshire  
21  
22 and Stevenson, 2018). Stevenson and Hickson (2014) identified lower engagement  
23  
24 with participants with low incomes and culturally diverse backgrounds. There has  
25  
26 also been little research that has explored the more nuanced, intersectional relations of  
27  
28 inequality (connecting income, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality etc) that  
29  
30 shape participation. Importantly, the organisational identity of parkrun has evolved as  
31  
32 it has grown over time and moved from a ‘sport’ orientation to a focus on community  
33  
34 inclusion, collaboration and engagement for a ‘healthier and happier planet’ (Reece *et*  
35  
36 *al.*, 2018, p. 327). Our research sought to move beyond an assumption that parkrun  
37  
38 ‘is’ inclusive because it is free, local and non-traditional, to explore *how* parkrun  
39  
40 volunteers can be engaged to develop knowledge and inform strategies that are  
41  
42 responsive to the localised context of participation.  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

## 51 **Background**

52  
53 Since it began in 2004 parkrun has continued to expand across the UK and in April  
54  
55 2019 there were 616 sites. parkrun has maintained its ‘free’ participation policy  
56  
57 through a volunteer-based model of delivery. Core funding for the small paid staff  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 team and operational costs is obtained from corporate sponsors (e.g., sport clothing,  
4 insurance) which align with its mission. As a citizen-led community organization,  
5  
6 parkrun has sought to replicate its model across the globe and there are currently 1809  
7  
8 sites across the world (<https://www.parkrun.com/> last accessed 13 April 2019). In  
9  
10 April 2019, there were 1,996,908 parkrunners registered in the UK (who have  
11  
12 averaged 13.8 parkruns each). The average completion ‘times’ have steadily  
13  
14 lengthened, indicating a growth in walkers and slower runners (Reece *et al.*, 2018). In  
15  
16 recognition of the potential of parkrun to engage less active groups, strategic  
17  
18 relationships were developed with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games  
19  
20 and Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games legacy plans to support new events in  
21  
22 these cities. In December 2018, Sport England announced specific funding to  
23  
24 establish 200 new parkruns in areas of social deprivation and to encourage people  
25  
26 who experience marginalisation (women, low income, culturally diverse, older,  
27  
28 disabled etc) to become more physically active ([https://www.sportengland.org/news-  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60](https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-features/news/2018/december/12/sport-england-partner-with-parkrun-for-three-years-with-3-million-investment/)), last accessed 20 May 2019).

parkrun promotes running (and invites walking) as physical activity where the event is ‘a run not a race’. The parkrun website articulates a participatory sport or physical culture:

“parkrun is all about inclusiveness and wellbeing. We want as many people as possible to feel part of a real local community brought together by our events, as well as our global parkrun family... parkruns are never more than 5km – it’s a distance that anyone can complete (even if some of us are walking by the end...).

1  
2  
3 And it's why we've kept the format of parkrun so simple: register once, then turn  
4  
5 up and take part wherever you want, whenever you want....parkrun's simple  
6  
7 concept should – and really can – exist in every town in the world. So no-one  
8  
9 should ever have to pay to go running in their community regularly, safely and  
10  
11 for fun". <http://www.parkrun.com/about/>  
12  
13  
14

15 The uniqueness of parkrun lies in its global governance structure, non-for-profit status  
16  
17 and industry partnerships that shape the growth of active local and global  
18  
19 communities. This occurs through a grassroots volunteer culture and innovative use of  
20  
21 digital media (e.g., Facebook, Flickr, Twitter). Such an event subsequently offers a  
22  
23 unique opportunity to understand the “how, what and why” of parkrun's success as  
24  
25 well as the challenges. By collaborating with volunteer organisers to identify localised  
26  
27 strategies that could be embedded in delivery we can begin to unpick such areas.  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

### 33 **Research Design and Methodology**

34  
35  
36 **Design:** The project used a modified participatory action research (PAR) design  
37  
38 across four parkrun sites in the UK (Northern Ireland (NI), South West England  
39  
40 (SWE), Inner London (L) and Scotland (S)). A PAR design seeks to involve research  
41  
42 participants in each step of the research process. This is to enable shared  
43  
44 understandings to be produced through an ‘action-reflection’ cycle to effect social  
45  
46 change (Frisby *et al.*, 2005). Steps generally include framing questions about social  
47  
48 change, selecting methods, collecting data, analysing and reflecting upon the findings  
49  
50 to identify actions for change. The specific context of the research funding shaped our  
51  
52 decision to adopt a ‘modified’ PAR approach. The collaborative sandpit process  
53  
54 required each team to develop research questions and methods that were reviewed as  
55  
56 part of the funding process during the sandpit. Therefore, there was no involvement of  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 the parkrun co-researchers at the formative stage. In addition, the timeframe for data  
4 collection and analysis was limited by funding to one year 2014-15 (with a one year  
5 follow up in 2016 to identify the implementation of actions for change). The  
6  
7 following research questions shaped the direction of the study and the parkrun co-  
8  
9 researchers contributed to refining the study questions within the methods used:  
10  
11  
12  
13

- 14 1. How inclusive is parkrun of non-traditional participants/ marginalised groups  
15 who are less active (low income, cultural diversity, disability, age, gender, and  
16 health conditions)?  
17  
18  
19  
20
- 21 2. What do parkrunners identify as important aspects of the ‘participatory culture’  
22 that sustains their engagement?  
23  
24  
25
- 26 3. What actions do parkrunners identify as potentially improving the engagement  
27 of non-traditional participants to create a more inclusive parkrun culture and  
28 engage marginalised groups?  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 We drew upon a concurrent and mixed methods approach that was oriented by a  
36 *qualitative* emphasis on interpreting equity issues that affect participation (Leech and  
37 Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Hence, we adopt a constructionist approach that also  
38 acknowledges the situated context of our research (human experiences and non-  
39 human elements such as weather, parks, survey instruments, websites, audio  
40 recorders, meeting notes, cake) and the partiality of all knowledge (participants’ and  
41 our own). In this way we acknowledge Mantoura and Potvin’s (2013) critique of  
42 normative notions of participation and consider the dimensions of knowledge  
43 production that involve human and non-human actors. We were also guided by the  
44 work of Baum *et al.* (2006, p. 854) who describe the epistemological approach of  
45 PAR in terms of the process of researchers and participants co-producing shared,  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 change-oriented contextual knowledge: ‘at its heart is collective, self-reflective  
4 inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and  
5 improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they  
6 find themselves’.  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

13  
14 Below we outline the key phases of the collaborative action-reflection learning cycle  
15 that guided the research process and ongoing interpretation of data collected through a  
16 mixed methods approach. We followed the same process in each of the four research  
17 sites.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

## 24 25 26 **Undertaking a Participatory Action Research Process**

27  
28  
29 *Phase 1: Collaborating with volunteer organisers to understand the localised context*  
30 *of parkrun participation*  
31  
32

33  
34 The four sites were selected due to their proximity to the primary research team  
35 locations across the UK to develop an ongoing relationship with a local parkrun site  
36 (SF and JS: South West England; GO: Scotland; MA, SF and SP: London; SA:  
37 Northern Ireland). The volunteer run directors at all four parkrun sites that were  
38 approached, enthusiastically agreed to be involved in researching strategies to support  
39 inclusive participation. The four sites have been anonymized for publication and  
40 included quite diverse characteristics with respect to socioeconomic, cultural, and  
41 geographic differences. The Northern Ireland parkrun was located in a local parkland  
42 in walking distance from the centre of a regional town with a number of low income  
43 areas. The Scottish parkrun was located in a popular park on the outskirts of a semi-  
44 rural setting of a university town. The London parkrun was located in a multiuse park  
45 on the border of an affluent and deprived area with a large British South Asian  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 population. The South West of England site was located in a popular parkland area on  
4  
5 the fringes of a regional town with limited public transport and areas of middle and  
6  
7 low income nearby.  
8  
9

10  
11 This phase involved forming a parkrun co-research team in each site (average of 6  
12  
13 volunteer members involved in organising their local parkrun). Each team met  
14  
15 formally three times on average over the project and informally with their research  
16  
17 team member(s) on numerous occasions (e.g., during parkruns, via email). Minutes  
18  
19 were taken of meetings by the researchers and formed part of the dataset. The first  
20  
21 meeting involved a discussion of the project, ethical issues and an invitation to  
22  
23 contribute to refining the methods that had been selected within the timeframe. At  
24  
25 least one researcher facilitated a discussion of key questions to identify the  
26  
27 assumptions and perceptions of parkrun volunteers. Topics discussed included the  
28  
29 inclusiveness of parkrun, who does and does not participate from their local  
30  
31 community, reasons for participating and constraints to participation.  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36

### 37 *Phase 2: Researching parkrun participation and localised issues*

38

39 The online and paper-based surveys were developed by the academic team with  
40  
41 piloting and input from co-researchers in the context of the broader literature. The  
42  
43 survey monkey link was distributed by the run directors via their local social media  
44  
45 accounts two weeks before the site visit. On the day of the main site visit (by the  
46  
47 whole academic team), paper surveys were distributed and participants were invited  
48  
49 to fill in the questionnaire at the end of their run/volunteer shift. Announcements were  
50  
51 made to ensure that no one was filling it twice, although this could not be guaranteed.  
52  
53  
54 Each researcher who was assigned to their local parkrun site conducted numerous  
55  
56 visits over 12 months to observe, facilitate meetings with the co-research team and  
57  
58 also participate in parkrun. Overall, 655 on-line (393) and paper based (262) surveys  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 were completed by respondents aged 16 years and older. We do not have data on  
4  
5 response rates or reasons for non-completion. Questions covered motivations for  
6  
7 participation, benefits, participation frequency, demographic details, perceptions of  
8  
9 inclusiveness and suggestions for change to increase inclusion of parkrunners from  
10  
11 diverse backgrounds. For example, ‘how has your involvement in parkrun impacted  
12  
13 on your health and wellbeing? ‘Has attending parkrun had an impact on your  
14  
15 friendships and social interactions?’ And, ‘what strategies could be used to support  
16  
17 parkrun to be more inclusive of people who don’t often participate?’  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

24 We developed the above items rather than using existing validated measures and this  
25  
26 is acknowledged as a study limitation. During the site visits to administer the surveys  
27  
28 the academic team engaged in participant observation by either completing the run or  
29  
30 observing volunteers/runners. At each site in-depth interviews were also completed  
31  
32 (19 in total) after each event to explore the meanings of participation and perceptions  
33  
34 of inclusiveness (several involved a photo elicitation component and will be reported  
35  
36 elsewhere). Three in depth interviews were also conducted with core paid parkrun  
37  
38 staff to explore their perceptions of challenges relating to inclusion and organizational  
39  
40 learning. The interviews will be reported separately.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

47 *Phase 3: What do we know about parkrun participation? Creating shared*  
48  
49 *understandings of the survey data*  
50  
51

52 The second co-research meeting was held at each parkrun site to discuss a draft  
53  
54 summary report that the academic team produced on the preliminary survey findings.  
55  
56 These reports provided data (graphs and text) on participant demographics, perceived  
57  
58 benefits and motivations, event management and communication. This phase of the  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 project provided an important opportunity for discussing the volunteers' assumptions  
4 and perceptions of parkrun's inclusiveness, against the data collected about the local  
5 context. In terms of the issues raised by the data (a common observation was the low  
6 numbers of people from culturally diverse backgrounds), the process of discussing the  
7 reports enabled a shared understanding to develop about how inequalities shape  
8 (non)participation. Surfacing assumptions and biases was important given that many  
9 volunteers passionately believed that parkrun was naturally inclusive of everyone. We  
10 also acknowledge that bias shapes the sample and hence we do not make any claim to  
11 representativeness. Summary reports were revised slightly following the contributions  
12 of co-researcher interpretations about the localised context (via multiple forms of  
13 personal and professional expertise). The reports provided an important reference  
14 point in the ongoing process of reflecting on who was not participating and how they  
15 could be better engaged.  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

#### 33 *Phase 4: Identifying actions for change*

34  
35  
36 A final group meeting was held with each parkrun co-research team to discuss a  
37 finalised summary report that included further analysis of survey data on the  
38 perceptions of inclusiveness and suggestions for change. This stepped process of  
39 sharing research data during different phases enabled the co-researchers time to  
40 reflect on issues and consider the strategies for change offered by parkrunners in their  
41 event. Through reflective discussion of the reports, a set of draft actions for change  
42 were produced by each site that responded to local issues. Summary reports were then  
43 updated to include these local actions for change and circulated within the co-research  
44 teams. Research team also created a one-page summary outlining key issues and  
45 actions for change that was shared publicly in each of the four parkrun sites via social  
46 media. Parkrunners were encouraged to provide any further feedback to their parkrun  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 volunteer teams or directly to the academic team. After further discussions amongst  
4  
5 the teams about informal feedback, minor changes were made to the site reports as a  
6  
7 result. For example, one site wanted the description of the health inequalities  
8  
9 reframed to avoid perpetuating negative perceptions (from ‘deprived’ community to  
10  
11 issues of inequality relating to access to recreation). This action-oriented process was  
12  
13 designed to engage the parkrun community at each site in the conversation about  
14  
15 inclusiveness and raise awareness.  
16  
17  
18  
19

#### 20 *Phase 5: Sharing knowledge about actions for change*

21  
22

23 The one-page summary reports were also shared with organizations named in actions,  
24  
25 such as, local public health professionals or community groups. To encourage  
26  
27 knowledge exchange across the parkrun organisation, each summary report was  
28  
29 shared across the four parkrun co-research teams and presented at an annual parkrun  
30  
31 conference for regional ambassadors and event directors. While there was not scope  
32  
33 within the project to undertake an extensive follow-up twelve months afterwards, we  
34  
35 were aware of certain changes that had occurred. For example, one local authority  
36  
37 included parkrun in their active living strategy to address the need for better ‘joined  
38  
39 up’ communication in the area (see Table 1).  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44

#### 45 *Phase 6: Reflecting upon changes and challenges*

46  
47

48 We conducted a brief one-year follow-up via email and phone with each of the four  
49  
50 parkrun co-research team leaders to identify what actions had been implemented and  
51  
52 what key challenges arose in the process. Later we discuss the strategies and  
53  
54 implementation challenges that arose in the process of conducting this kind of PAR  
55  
56 research within a short time frame. The modified PAR approach enabled the  
57  
58 involvement of the four parkrun co-researcher teams over a concentrated period of  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 time at key points in the process. The interpretation of different data produced  
4  
5 through qualitative and quantitative methods was crucial to designing actions for  
6  
7 change. The academic team assumed primary responsibility for data collection,  
8  
9 preliminary analysis, and report writing (which importantly lessened the demands on  
10  
11 co-researcher time given they were already active volunteers and many also had paid  
12  
13 work and unpaid care roles).  
14  
15

### 16 17 **Analysis and Discussion**

18  
19  
20 In this article we report on both the qualitative and quantitative data from the survey  
21  
22 that was interpreted within the action research approach. The analysis of the whole  
23  
24 dataset (across the four sites) was undertaken at the end of the project and in this  
25  
26 article we focus on the overall findings from the survey with reference to distinctive  
27  
28 site specific issues as they emerged in the research findings. Hence, we emphasize the  
29  
30 constructionist approach to knowledge that underpins our collaborative analysis of the  
31  
32 demographics of participants, the multiple meanings produced about the parkrun  
33  
34 culture, and the actions for change (Ponic and Frisby, 2010). Within the action  
35  
36 research cycle, the research team completed the initial analysis of the datasets and  
37  
38 each site visit involved academic team meetings to synthesize results. The closed  
39  
40 survey questions were analysed using SPSS to produce descriptive statistics by three  
41  
42 members of the academic team. The open-ended survey questions were thematically  
43  
44 analysed using a coding framework developed by two researchers with cross checking  
45  
46 and reflection occurring across the broader team (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A manual  
47  
48 coding framework was developed for the limited number of survey questions.  
49  
50 Examples of qualitative codes developed for the survey analysis included: reasons for  
51  
52 and benefits of participating (health, social interaction, helping others, sense of  
53  
54 achievement, event organization) and strategies for change (communication and  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 outreach, images of diversity and expanding inclusive ethos, accessibility and location  
4 and event format).  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11

## 12 Findings

### 13 1. Who participates in parkrun?

14  
15 While we do not claim that the survey results are by any means representative of  
16 parkrun participation, they do align with broader patterns for runners in the UK  
17 (white, middle class, younger age groups) (Department for Culture, Media and Sport,  
18 2015). However, the demographic profile for our parkrun sample does reflect greater  
19 participation by women than is evident in national sport and recreation data. We also  
20 acknowledge the bias that is always present in survey recruitment and the challenges  
21 of engaging people who may have low levels of literacy. Across the four sites there  
22 were six hundred and fifty-five survey respondents (South West: N = 267; London: N  
23 = 120; Northern Ireland: N = 98 and Scotland: N = 140; Missing: N = 30) who  
24 completed the online survey or paper surveys that were distributed on the day of field  
25 visit. 309 participants identified as men, 332 as women and 3 preferred not to say.  
26 This fairly even gender distribution is also similar to the gender breakdown of parkrun  
27 registrations where women make up approximately 50% (although women  
28 parkrunners actually participate at lower rates than men; *personal communication*  
29 *with parkrun*).  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51  
52 The mean age of respondents was 41.9 years (SD = 11.18; Range: 16-79; 22 missing)  
53 with the highest participation age groups being 35-54 years (58.3%), 16-34 years  
54 (28.9%) and  $\geq 55$  years (12.8%). The ethnic background of the sample was  
55 predominantly white (93.1%; 17 missing), while 4.9% of the respondents reported a  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 disability (19 missing), of these 1.7% reported physical impairment and 1.5%  
4 reported visual impairment. The majority of parkrunners were in current employment  
5 (86%; 18 missing) and 56.8% had a university or college degree or higher (19  
6 missing). 4.3% reported less than £430 as monthly income before tax, 19.1% as £431-  
7 1500, 25.8% as £1501-2600 and 17.2% reported at least £4301 monthly income  
8 before tax (7.9% preferred not to say; 26 missing). 35.9% of the respondents had been  
9 attending parkrun for less than a year (3.1% for 5 years or more: 27 missing). In  
10 terms of frequency, most respondents reported participating monthly (47%) or weekly  
11 (37.3%).

12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25 The pattern of participation revealed largely middle-aged, white, more rather than less  
26 affluent and mostly abled bodied parkrunners as the norm and is in line with  
27 previously reported findings from a larger study by Stevinson & Hickson (2014).

28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
These patterns provoked discussion about local demographics, constraints and ideas  
for change. Each parkrun site team also emphasised 'exceptions' to the norm relating  
to certain individuals, families or groups who were identifiably part of the 'parkrun  
family' (such as, a prominent volunteer organiser with British-Caribbean heritage,  
older runners who had survived cancer and heart attacks). Discussions often moved  
between reflections on the participation gaps in the data and the 'exceptional' stories  
that were shaping perceptions of inclusiveness in relation to the broader parkrun  
narrative. Next, we turn to the survey data that reveal the perceptions of parkrunners  
across the four sites about inclusiveness as an ethos and practice.

## 2. Inclusive parkrun ethos and practice

There was a common perception that the parkrun ethos (the 'parkrun family' is a  
common descriptor) was inclusive of diversity, as this London respondent states: 'it  
brings in people of all different ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds'. The majority

1  
2  
3 of survey respondents (70.1%) reported that they felt parkrun images and promotion  
4 reflected the diversity of people in the community. This inclusive ethos was  
5 articulated in relation to parkrun being accessible to all because it was local, free and  
6 welcoming. The research methodology importantly opened up the perception of  
7 inclusiveness through the shared process of reflecting on the different datasets,  
8 assumptions and discussions within co-research teams. In London parkrun, for  
9 example, it was evident through the research that the ethnic and religious backgrounds  
10 of parkrunners was not reflective of the majority of local residents in this culturally  
11 diverse neighbourhood. There were number of comments about the need to address  
12 the *lack of diversity* among participants (in terms of socio-economic status and  
13 ethnicity), as these London respondents stated: ‘more work with local councils and  
14 schools. parkrun is very middle class, there could be more interaction with people  
15 from working class families’. Furthermore, a respondent suggested that,

16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

‘It would be good if the general atmosphere was warmer and more inclusive. The  
runners at London parkrun do not seem to represent the 30% Bangladeshi  
population in the area - I don't know why this is or how it can be improved, but  
perhaps it suggests that many local residents feel it is 'not for them', which is at  
odds with parkrun's ethos as a community venture’.

The survey responses to open-ended questions about the strategies local parkruns  
could use to be more inclusive were a major source of discussion amongst co-  
researchers to identify local actions for change. In these discussions we oriented  
conversations around the possibility of change, rather than solely focus on

1  
2  
3 ‘constraints’. This acted as a means of increasing awareness about what existing  
4  
5 practices were working and how change could be enacted.  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 When survey respondents were asked about how parkrun could develop strategies to  
11  
12 engage people from diverse backgrounds, the majority of comments related to the  
13  
14 need for more *promotional strategies* about the nature of the event (friendly ethos, run  
15  
16 at your own pace or walk) to reach the broader community. Typical comments  
17  
18 included: ‘people may worry they are too slow or unfit to take part (as I first did),  
19  
20 perhaps more could be done to focus on how parkrun is not a race or about a time’  
21  
22 (London respondent) and ‘people think you have to "run" but you can walk it’ (NI  
23  
24 respondent). In terms of the friendly parkrun culture, some respondents felt that there  
25  
26 was an insider/outsider dynamic created by established social networks in running  
27  
28 groups. Such groups were often mentioned in relation to their more visible ‘sport’  
29  
30 identity (club clothing, competitiveness) which was thought to exclude non-sporty  
31  
32 runners as a NI respondent said, ‘be less exclusive i.e. if you're not in X [name of a  
33  
34 running group] runners you're an outsider’. In contrast, other respondents commented  
35  
36 on particular inclusive practices that had become part of parkrun and could be  
37  
38 expanded upon. The NI site had begun to support a parkrunner-walker with a visual  
39  
40 impairment and this was commented on by many respondents: ‘guide dogs offered  
41  
42 and course to help people learn how to guide a person with a visual impairment  
43  
44 running/walking’. Respondents in the Scottish parkrun site also commented on the  
45  
46 role that café plays and how opening the café over winter would encourage post-run  
47  
48 socialising.  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 *Access to local parks* was also identified as a constraint to participation for sites that  
4 were not easily reached by foot or public transport (the London site was the exception  
5 in terms of a highly accessible location). 43.7% of respondents indicated that they  
6 strongly agreed that parkrun was hard to get to without using a car. While parkrun is  
7 a free event, the transport costs and car use is an equity issue for those on low  
8 incomes or with mobility needs. In the next section we discuss what each of the  
9 parkrun sites identified as the strategies for change and whether they managed to  
10 implement these over a twelve-month period.  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

### 24 **3. Inclusive strategies for change**

25  
26 Table 1.1 identifies key themes that encompass the types of inclusive strategies that  
27 are being, or could be mobilised by volunteers to effect change at each parkrun site.  
28  
29 The central research team analysed the strategies developed across the sites to identify  
30 meso or organisational level themes that can inform parkrun's local and global  
31 capacity building strategies; i) promoting the parkrun 'ethos' in ways that attract  
32 diverse participants, ii) developing joined-up relationships with local organisations  
33 (e.g., cultural groups) to enable pathways to parkrun and access to parks, and iii)  
34 fostering an inclusive culture that supports less confident runners from diverse  
35 backgrounds. The challenge of change lies with both the *formulation and*  
36 *implementation* of inclusive strategies that rely on volunteer labour and centralised  
37 support from parkrun and partner organisations.  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53

54 [*insert* Table 1.1 Inclusive strategies and actions for change here]  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 The twelve-month follow-up identified a number of constraining factors that impacted  
4 on the parkrun teams' ability to follow through on some of their identified actions.

5  
6  
7 These issues reflect local differences between the contexts of parkrun sites and culture  
8 of volunteer teams, as well as broader socio-political issues and challenges of  
9  
10  
11 of volunteer-based community organisations. Run directors and volunteer teams  
12  
13 identified immediate issues with managing the growing numbers of parkrunners (and  
14  
15 hence needing more volunteers). There was some reluctance to actively promote  
16  
17 parkrun to attract *more* participants, despite the desire to address inequalities. The  
18  
19 demands on volunteer organisers were felt to be increasing with the growth of various  
20  
21 bureaucratic requirements (e.g., safety, child protection requirements, managing  
22  
23 others) (see also, Nichols, 2017).  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30  
31 For some parkrun sites, such as London, the question about how to engage with  
32  
33 culturally diverse communities raised a more complex set of issues about cross-  
34  
35 cultural understanding, engagement with groups and appropriate forms of promotion.  
36  
37 Culturally sensitive strategies arose (NI) when there was a local parkrun champion to  
38  
39 support initiatives (e.g., supporting the translation of parkrun promotional material  
40  
41 into different languages) given that there was no budget to support additional costs  
42  
43 (on the process of developing culturally inclusive promotion see, Telenta *et al.*, 2019).  
44  
45

46  
47 For those parkrun sites that were not centrally located, within walking distance or  
48  
49 well serviced by public transport, the issue of transport proved to be difficult to  
50  
51 address in the context of cuts to local government budgets. A number of sites wanted  
52  
53 to have parkrun signage put in their local parks but without funding or park  
54  
55 management support this did not happen, except in NI where they had both. Signage  
56  
57 of free events within and beyond parks has been identified in relation to promoting  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 participation to regular events in low income neighbourhoods. On the other hand,  
4  
5 successful initiatives such as ‘first-timers welcome’ that Scottish parkrun initiated  
6  
7 were continuing (through news in local media/Facebook/word of mouth where more  
8  
9 time would be given to first timers in the beginning of parkrun every 2 months).  
10  
11  
12  
13

14 The effects of austerity in the UK are exacerbated by some local councils that had  
15  
16 introduced charges for parking and were considering outsourcing the management of  
17  
18 parks. This raises the threat of parkrun being impacted on by other events (charity fun  
19  
20 runs that paid for park use). In the follow up, SWE parkrun identified a drop in  
21  
22 parkrun participation after parking charges were introduced. Broader initiatives that  
23  
24 were beyond the immediate remit of parkrun organisers provide more difficult to  
25  
26 implement (e.g. car sharing schemes or improved public transport access) and  
27  
28 highlight the need for joined-up planning for active living. In the context of austerity,  
29  
30 parkrun faces certain constraints in developing inclusive events. Especially when  
31  
32 local park authorities desire to charge for use, despite central health promotion  
33  
34 policies that emphasise the importance of physical activity (xx, author).  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42

## 43 **Conclusion**

44 The growth of parkrun arguably reflects changing participation trends with the rise of  
45  
46 informal community sport and physical activity events. The lessons learned from this  
47  
48 volunteer-led movement can contribute insights to inform the development of  
49  
50 inclusive, joined up strategies for physical activity promotion across sport, health  
51  
52 promotion, community organisations and local government sectors. This article has  
53  
54 sought to contribute knowledge about how participatory research processes can  
55  
56 mobilise the expertise of volunteers and participants to inform future strategies within  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 physical activity programmes. Participatory research methodologies can also inform  
4  
5 knowledge translation practices by drawing upon the practical knowledge of  
6  
7 participants to consider how equity can be approached in sport and health promotion  
8  
9 contexts (Edwards and Rowe, 2019; Ponc and Frisby, 2010; Schaillée *et al.*, 2019).  
10  
11 One of the major limitations of our research was the constrained timeframe and  
12  
13 funding. This reduced our capacity as researchers to develop ongoing collaborations  
14  
15 with the parkrun sites and to consider the issues arising in the implementation of their  
16  
17 strategies. We also acknowledge that the sample is not representative of parkrun  
18  
19 participants and we do not have data on response rates and nor for reasons for non-  
20  
21 completion and further research into understanding diverse perspectives is needed.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 For many community-based sport organisations with a centralised governance  
29  
30 structure (such as federated organisations), translating research into practical actions  
31  
32 to effect ‘bottom up’ change is an ongoing challenge with respect to inclusion.  
33  
34 parkrun continues to evolve as an agile, hybrid organisation with the capacity to  
35  
36 engage committed parkrunners, volunteer organisers, sponsors and research partners  
37  
38 in a change agenda. Our findings contribute knowledge about understanding the  
39  
40 perceptions of volunteers and identifying local actions that enact parkrun’s strategic  
41  
42 focus on creating a ‘healthier and happier planet’ and an inclusive ‘parkrun family’  
43  
44 (Reece *et al.*, 2018). There are further implications concerning the translation of  
45  
46 research findings into multi-level organisational strategies that build capacity for  
47  
48 inclusive practice across key areas (Batra *et al.*, 2016). Closing ‘the gap’ between an  
49  
50 inclusive parkrun ethos and who actually participates, requires strategies to increase  
51  
52 awareness of equity and inclusion across the organisation. This transcends through  
53  
54 and from governance boards, developing volunteer training resources, online  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 knowledge sharing platforms, diversity sensitive marketing, supporting champions of  
4  
5 change, as well as partnering with multiple stakeholders and research organisations to  
6  
7 develop effective implementation and monitoring practices. As our research has  
8  
9 demonstrated, there is a great deal of expertise within community based-  
10  
11 organisations, such as parkrun, that can be harnessed through participatory processes  
12  
13 to create organisational change.  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18

### 19 Funding

20  
21 This work was supported by Cancer Research UK [anonymised grant number  
22  
23 XXXXXX]  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

### 31 References

32  
33 Batras, D., Duff, C. and Smith, B. (2016) Organizational change theory: Implications  
34  
35 for health promotion practice. *Health Promotion International*, **31**, 231–241.  
36  
37  
38  
39

40 Baum, F., MacDougall, C. and Smith, D. (2006) Participatory action research.  
41  
42 *Journal Epidemiol Community Health*, **60**, 854-857.  
43  
44  
45

46 Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative*  
47  
48 *Research in Psychology*, **3**, 77–101.  
49  
50  
51  
52

53 Carey, G., Malbon, E., Crammond, B., Pescud, M. and Baker, P. (2017) Can the  
54  
55 sociology of social problems help us to understand and manage ‘lifestyle drift’?  
56  
57 *Health Promotion International*, **32**, 755–761.  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6 Cleland, V., Nash, M., Sharman, M.J. and Clafin, S. (2018) Exploring the health-  
7  
8 promoting potential of the ‘parkrun’ phenomenon: What factors are associated with  
9  
10 higher levels of participation? *American Journal of Health Promotion*, **33**, 13-23.  
11

12  
13  
14 Department for Culture Media and Sport. (2015) *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for*  
15  
16 *an Active Nation*

17  
18  
19 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486622](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622)  
20  
21 [/Sporting\\_Future\\_ACCESSIBLE.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf) (last accessed 22 April 2017).  
22  
23

24  
25  
26 Edwards M.B. and Rowe, K. (2019) Managing sport for health: An introduction to the  
27  
28 special issue. *Sport Management Review*, **22**:1–4.  
29

30  
31  
32 Frisby, W., Reid, C. J., Millar, S. and Hoerber, L. (2005) Putting “participatory” into  
33  
34 participatory forms of action research. *Journal of Sport Management*, **19**, 367-386.  
35

36  
37  
38 Gilchrist, P. and Wheaton, B. (2011) Lifestyle sport, public policy and youth  
39  
40 engagement: Examining the emergence of parkour. *International Journal of Sport*  
41  
42 *Policy and Politics*, **3**, 109–131.  
43  
44

45  
46  
47  
48 Grunseit, A., Richards, J. and Merom, D. (2018) Running on a high: parkrun and  
49  
50 personal well-being. *BMC Public Health*, **18**, 59.  
51

52  
53  
54  
55 Hanson, S., Cross, J. and Jones, A. (2016) Promoting physical activity interventions  
56  
57 in communities with poor health and socio-economic profiles: A process evaluation of  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 the implementation of a new walking group scheme. *Social Science & Medicine*, **169**,  
4  
5 77-85.  
6  
7  
8  
9

10 Heath, G.W., Parra, D.C., Sarimientto, O.L., Andersen, L.N., Owen, N., Goenka, S. et  
11  
12 al. (2012) Evidence-based intervention in physical activity: lessons from around the  
13  
14 world. *The Lancet*, **380**, 272-281.  
15  
16  
17  
18

19 Hindley, D. (2018) "More than just a run in the park": An exploration of parkrun as a  
20  
21 shared leisure space. *Leisure Sciences*, January 10, 2018:  
22  
23 10.1080/01490400.2017.1410741.  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 Lane, A., Murphy, N. and Bauman, A. (2015) An effort to 'leverage' the effect of  
29  
30 participation in a mass event on physical activity. *Health Promotion International*, **30**,  
31  
32 542-551.  
33  
34  
35  
36

37 Leech, N. L. and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009) A typology of mixed methods research  
38  
39 designs. *Quality & Quantity*, **43**, 265-275.  
40  
41  
42  
43

44 Morris, P. and Scott, H. (2018) Not just a run in the park: a qualitative exploration of  
45  
46 parkrun and mental health. *Advances in Mental Health*, August 13, 2018:  
47  
48 10.1080/18387357.2018.1509011.  
49  
50  
51  
52

53 Murphy, N., Lane, A. and Bauman, A. (2015) Leveraging mass participation events  
54  
55 for sustainable health legacy. *Leisure Studies* **34**, 758-766.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Nichols, G. (2017) Volunteering in Community Sports Associations: A Literature  
4  
5 Review. *Voluntaristics Review*, **2**, 1–75.  
6  
7

8  
9  
10 Ponc P. and Frisby, W. (2010) Unpacking Assumptions About Inclusion in  
11  
12 Community-Based Health Promotion: Perspectives of Women Living in Poverty.  
13  
14 *Qualitative Health Research*, **20**, 1519–1531.  
15  
16

17  
18  
19 Public Health England. (2015) A guide to community-centred approaches for health  
20  
21 and wellbeing [http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-services/publichealthengland/171382A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_briefi_.pdf)  
22  
23 [services/publichealthengland/171382A\\_guide\\_to\\_community-](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-services/publichealthengland/171382A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_briefi_.pdf)  
24  
25 [centred\\_approaches\\_for\\_health\\_and\\_wellbeing\\_briefi\\_.pdf](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/health-services/publichealthengland/171382A_guide_to_community-centred_approaches_for_health_and_wellbeing_briefi_.pdf) (last accessed 22 April  
26  
27 2017).  
28  
29

30  
31  
32  
33 Reece, L.J., Quirk, H., Wellington, C., Haake, S.J. and Wilson, F. (2018) Bright  
34  
35 Spots, physical activity investments that work: Parkrun; a global initiative striving for  
36  
37 healthier and happier communities. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, **53**, 326-327.  
38  
39

40  
41  
42 Schailleé, H., Spaaij, R., Jeanes, R. and Theeboom, M. (2019) Knowledge translation  
43  
44 practices, enablers, and constraints: Bridging the research – practice divide in sport  
45  
46 management. *Sport Management Review*, March 5, 2019: 10.1123/jsm.2018-0175.  
47  
48

49  
50  
51 Sharman, M. J., Nash, M. and Cleland, V. (2018) Health and broader community  
52  
53 benefit of parkrun - An exploratory qualitative study. *Health Promotion Journal of*  
54  
55 *Australia*, **30**, 163-171.  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Sport England. (2016) *Towards an active nation: Strategy 2016–21*. London: Sport  
4  
5 England.

6  
7  
8  
9  
10 Stevinson, C. and Hickson, M. (2014) Exploring the public health potential of a mass  
11  
12 community participation event. *Journal of Public Health*, **36**, 268-274.

13  
14  
15  
16  
17 Stevinson, C. and Hickson, M. (2018) Changes in physical activity, weight and  
18  
19 wellbeing outcomes among attendees of a weekly mass participation event: A  
20  
21 prospective 12-month study, *Journal of Public Health*, doi:10.1093/pubmed/fdy178.

22  
23  
24  
25  
26 Stevinson, C., Wiltshire, G. and Hickson, M. (2015) Facilitating participation in  
27  
28 health-enhancing physical activity: A qualitative study of parkrun. *International*  
29  
30 *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, **22**, 170-177.

31  
32  
33  
34  
35 Such, E., Salway, S., Copeland, R., Haake, S., Domone, S. and Mann, S. (2017) A  
36  
37 formative review of physical activity interventions for minority ethnic populations in  
38  
39 England. *Journal of Public Health*, **39**, 265-274.

40  
41  
42  
43  
44 Telenta, J., Jones, S.C., Francis, K.L., Polonsky, M.J., Beard, J. and Renzaho, A.M.  
45  
46 (2019) Australian lessons for developing and testing a culturally inclusive health  
47  
48 promotion campaign. *Health Promotion International*, February 25, 2019:  
49  
50 10.1093/heapro/day118.

51  
52  
53  
54  
55 Weed, M., Coren, E., Fiore, J., Wellard, I., Chatziefstathiou, D., Mansfield, L. et al.  
56  
57 (2015) The Olympic Games and raising sport participation: a systematic review of  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 evidence and an interrogation of policy for a demonstration effect. *European Sport*  
4  
5 *Management Quarterly*, **15**, 195-226.  
6  
7

8  
9  
10 Whiteman-Sandland, J., Hawkins, J. and Clayton, D. (2016). The role of social capital  
11  
12 and community belongingness for exercise adherence: An exploratory study of the  
13  
14 CrossFit gym model. *Journal of Health Psychology*, **23**, 1545-1556.  
15  
16

17  
18  
19 Wiltshire, G. and Stevinson, C. (2018) Exploring the role of social capital in  
20  
21 community-based physical activity: qualitative insights from parkrun. *Qualitative*  
22  
23 *Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, **10**, 47–62.  
24  
25

26  
27  
28 World Health Organization. (2010) Global recommendations on physical activity for  
29  
30 health. [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44399/1/9789241599979\\_eng.pdf](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/44399/1/9789241599979_eng.pdf)  
31  
32 (last accessed 22 April 2017).  
33  
34

35  
36  
37 Anonymised author, 2018  
38

39  
40 Anonymised author, 2013  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

**Table 1.1 Inclusive strategies and actions for change**

<b>Key areas of change</b> [abbreviations: NI Northern Ireland, SWE South West England, SCOT Scotland, LON London]	Parkrun sites that identified actions
<b>1. Promotion of parkrun ‘ethos’ to attract diverse participants in local areas.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing facebook photo to reflect the ‘back end’ of the group, not fastest runners up front</li> <li>- Holding ‘first timer’ targeted event promotion through local media and social media</li> <li>- Inviting local politicians on ‘parkrun day’ to raise awareness and gain support</li> <li>- Creating YouTube videos</li> <li>- Presentations at Community Relations Week, Inter-ethnic forum and promotional posters in different languages and diverse images in press releases used</li> </ul>	SWE SCOT SWE, SCOT, SCOT NI  SWE, SCOT NI
<b>2. Developing joined-up relationships with other local government and NGO organisations to support better promotion, pathways into parkrun and support for the use of local parks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- develop relationships with running groups and beginner programmes (couch to 5km) to foster pathways to parkrun participation (course completion ritual with first parkrun)</li> <li>- start new targeted running groups with a focus on non-traditional participants through collaboration with local organisations (eg. Social housing &amp; councils)</li> <li>- Hosting a forum with council for all parkruns and clubs in the area</li> </ul>	All sites  NI  NI
<b>3. Fostering an inclusive culture within parkrun activities to engage participants who are less confident runners and/or are from diverse backgrounds.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular ‘welcome talks’ to orient new runners before the run begins &amp; hosting ‘bake offs’ to encourage socialising after the run</li> <li>- Make use of cafes (fixed or mobile) after runs to support socialising</li> <li>- Work with local organisations and individuals to identify ways to support involvement of people with disabilities (eg., guide runners/walkers for those with visual impairment)</li> </ul>	LON  LON, SCOT, SWE, NI  NI