

Evaluation of the Community Street Soccer Program - 2023

Final Report

**THE BIG
ISSUE**

**STREET
SOCCER**

Prepared for The Big Issue
3 November 2023


synergistiq

INSPIRED | TRUSTED | ADVISORS

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Foreword from Hon Mark Butler

As Minister for Health, I have had the pleasure of seeing The Big Issue Community Street Soccer Program go from strength-to-strength.

Community Street Soccer brings people together to do something healthy and fun where they can also experience what it's like to be part of a team and find a sense of belonging. Since 2007, this successful program has reached out to help disadvantaged people access the health and support services they need.

This new report confirms the broad impact Street Soccer has had on the lives of participants. It confirms that people have felt significant improvements in their self-esteem, positivity, and psychological wellbeing. Significantly, 96 per cent of participants agree that Street Soccer made them feel good about themselves—a great result.

The Australian Government has invested in the Community Street Soccer Program which now operates in twenty-five locations across Australia, including one prison. This wonderful program gets in touch with people who have traditionally been difficult to reach. It achieves this by creating a welcoming environment for people to improve their health and fitness, as well as provide opportunities for employment, housing, and a way forward.

A fond memory for me in 2023 is when the Australian Street Soccer team 'Street Socceroos' competed at the Homeless World Cup in Sacramento, USA. The Minister for Sport was honoured to present the team with their uniforms on Senate Oval, Parliament House before the event and we knew they would represent Australia with pride. What an enthusiastic and excited group! The Street Socceroos had a great tournament, demonstrating what could be achieved with teamwork and having a red-hot go. Congratulations!

While the Community Street Soccer Program is one of a number of initiatives that encourage Australians to be physically active, the Government recognises there are complex problems contributing to the levels of physical inactivity in Australia. Tackling this problem requires a community-wide approach as well as behaviour change by individuals. I hope all Australians will take inspiration from what Community Street Soccer has achieved.

I commend everyone at The Big Issue for what they have accomplished. I thank the sporting clubs, community groups, staff, coaches, and individuals who work on the program with such passion and dedication and I congratulate all the thousands of players, young and old, men and women, who have taken part in Street Soccer over the years.

Hon Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

About Synergistiq

Established in 1990, Synergistiq works to strengthen and measure social impact through education, employment, and engagement. We seek to contribute to an Australia where everyone has equitable access to opportunity to reach their potential.

Our work is guided by our values of collaboration, community, and learning, and underpinned by respect, ethics, reflection, and the courage to speak with integrity, even when challenging.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of lands on which we work, land that has never been ceded. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge their rich and continuing contribution to knowledge, learning and intergenerational understanding of those Elders.

List of Abbreviations

CSSP	Community Street Soccer Program
DHAC	The Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
KPI	Key performance indicator
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Since 2007, The Big Issue has given over 11,300 Australians experiencing homelessness, marginalisation and disadvantage the opportunity to improve their health and positively change their lives through the Community Street Soccer Program (CSSP or street soccer), which operates at 25 sites throughout Australia, across all states and territories. CSSP received \$1.5 million in funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC) to run these 25 sites over the 2022-23 financial year. Moving into the current (2023-24) financial year, CSSP's agreement with DHAC expanded the scope of the program to run at 30 sites, at a value of \$1.65 million.

Synergistiq was contracted by The Big Issue to evaluate the CSSP and determine the extent to which the program has met its key performance indicators (KPIs) for the recent 2022-23 financial year. The KPIs are articulated in the funding agreement and relate to health outcomes for players and program delivery.

The CSSP model is based on The Big Issue philosophy of 'helping people to help themselves'. Unlike more formal approaches to service provision, the traditional CSSP approach is to provide players with free, informal, yet structured, support during weekly training sessions.

CSSP's KPIs require the program to achieve 80% players reporting positive changes in at least one of seven health indicators. CSSP has exceeded this requirement, with five of the health indicators reporting positive changes for well over 80% of respondents (Figure 1). The remaining indicators of a reduction/cessation of smoking and alcohol use still saw impressive results of a reduction reported by over 60% of players (Figure 1). CSSP has also well exceeded its KPIs for the average number of participants per week and new registrations (Figure 2; Figure 3).

In addition to significant health outcomes for players, the evaluation has also found that increased connection, friendship and community were key outcomes for players. The program has also had a positive impact for players beyond health. By connecting many players to services, many secured housing and employment and participated in education.

These significant impacts, seen across multiple domains, have been enabled by strong leadership and planning, allowing CSSP to adapt to the complexities of the post-covid era and shift in player demographics.

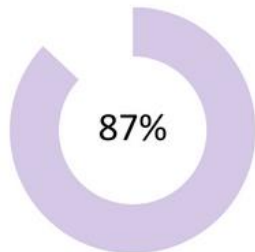
The positive results seen in the 2022-23 period add to CSSP's consistently high performance across KPIs over the past several years. See Appendix A for a summary of survey data associated with each KPI between 2015-2023.

The strength of the program is further evidenced by trend data outlined in the 2020-21 evaluation report. This showed a positive association between player engagement in the program and health outcomes. For example, players who had been involved with CSSP for more than three years were significantly more likely to report having learned about health issues, reducing smoking and alcohol use, and eating healthier (CSSP evaluation report 2021).

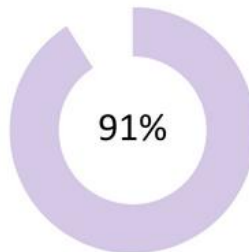
Performance against health outcome KPIs – Player survey snapshot

Indicator 1: Improved health awareness

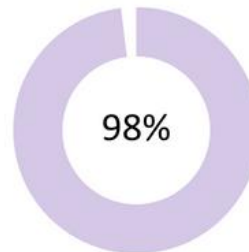
While at Community Street Soccer I have heard about health services I can access



I have learned about health issues

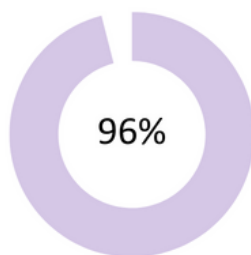


There is always somebody I can get advice and support from at Community Street Soccer

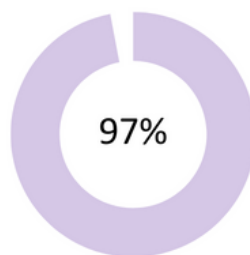


Indicators 2 and 3: Improved self-esteem, positivity, motivation, and psychological wellbeing

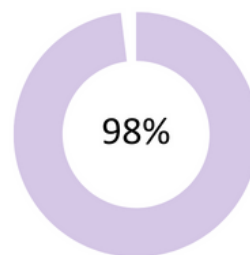
Playing Community Street Soccer makes me more motivated to maintain/improve my physical/mental health



Playing Community Street Soccer makes me feel good about myself

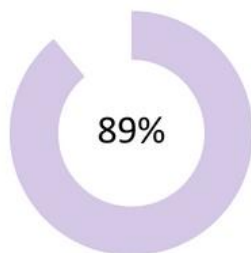


Playing Community Street Soccer has helped me have a more positive outlook

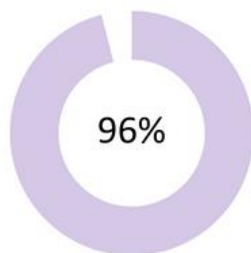


Indicators 4 and 5: Improved nutrition, physical activity and fitness

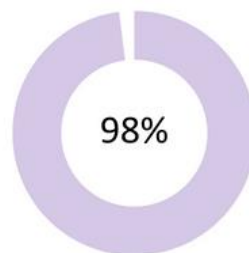
Playing Community Street Soccer has helped me eat healthier food



I do physical activity at Community Street Soccer

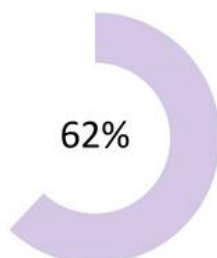


Playing Community Street Soccer has helped me improve my fitness



Indicators 6 and 7: Reduced/stopped smoking, and alcohol use

Playing Community Street Soccer has helped me reduce smoking



Playing Community Street Soccer has helped me reduce alcohol use

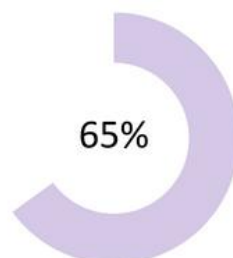


Figure 1. Performance against health outcome KPIs.

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Performance against program delivery KPIs

Over the 2022-23 period, CSSP exceed KPI targets for average weekly players and total new registrations. The program achieved an average of 418 weekly players – well about the target of 300 (Figure 2). It also recorded a total of 1,198 new player registrations for the year, exceeding the KPI of 850 (Figure 3).

A minimum of 300 participants across sites each week



Figure 2. Average weekly players across all sites.

A minimum of 850 new player registrations per year



Figure 3. Total new player registrations.

A minimum of 25 active sites

Having expanded to new sites over the past year, CSSP has met the new KPI of 25 active sites. This evaluation collected data from 22 of the 25 sites. See Table 1 for all 25 active sites.

Table 1. Active CSSP sites.

Sites	
Perth	Canberra
Rockingham	Ballarat
Adelaide	Casey
Port Adelaide	Melton
Townsville	Geelong
Brisbane	Dandenong – Women’s
Caboolture	Dandenong – Mixed
Logan	North Melbourne – Women’s

Newcastle	North Melbourne – Women’s
Sydney	Port Phillip prison
Parramatta	Hobart
Wollongong	Alice Springs
Mt Druitt	

Introduction

About the program

Since its establishment in 2007, The Big Issue's Community Street Soccer Program (CSSP) has given Australians experiencing homelessness, marginalisation and disadvantage the opportunity to improve their health and positively change their life through sport. In enacting this vision, The Big Issue runs CSSP at 25 sites.

CSSP received \$1.5 million in funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC) to run these 25 sites over the 2022-23 financial year. Moving into the current (2023-24) financial year, CSSP's agreement with DHAC expanded the scope of the program to run at 30 sites, at a value of \$1.65 million. The program is serviced by The Big Issue's CEO, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Marketing Officer, National Operations Manager, National Coach and Board, as well as being supported by marketing, finance and editorial teams. There are also state-based coordinators/operations managers, as well as local program coaching and coordination staff at each of the sites. Volunteers are also involved at some sites.

In line with DHAC funding requirements, the program is required to identify and measure the health impacts of the program on participants. Specifically, the KPI for the program is that 80% of participants report positive changes in at least one of the following health outcomes:

- Improved health awareness
- Improved self-esteem, positivity and motivation
- Improved psychological wellbeing
- Improved nutrition
- Improved physical fitness and activity
- Reduction/cessation of smoking
- Reduction/cessation of alcohol use.

In addition to improving health outcomes for participants, the CSSP has three program delivery KPIs:

- A minimum average of 300 participants across all sites each week
- A minimum of 850 new registrations per year (or an average of 71 per month)
- A minimum of 25 active CSSP sites.

About the evaluation

Synergistiq was engaged by The Big Issue to conduct an annual evaluation of the CSSP for the funding period 2023 – 2025, with this evaluation report focused on the performance of the program over the 2022-23 financial year. This evaluation builds on previous annual evaluations of the program between 2017 – 2022. The purpose of the evaluation is to collect and analyse data that informs on the success of the CSSP in addressing the above indicators.

Data collection for this report included a survey of CSSP players (distributed between August – October 2023), a focus group with key staff at The Big Issue and program data provided by The Big Issue.

The player surveys were distributed at the following 23 street soccer sites across seven states/territories, with players from 22 of these completing surveys¹. In total, 232 players completed surveys across the sites (Figure 4). It should be noted that some players attended more than one site, therefore resulting in a greater number of players across sites in Figure 4. Two players did not list the site/s at which they attended CSSP. Among survey respondents, players from Perth totalled the highest, followed by Dandenong – mixed.

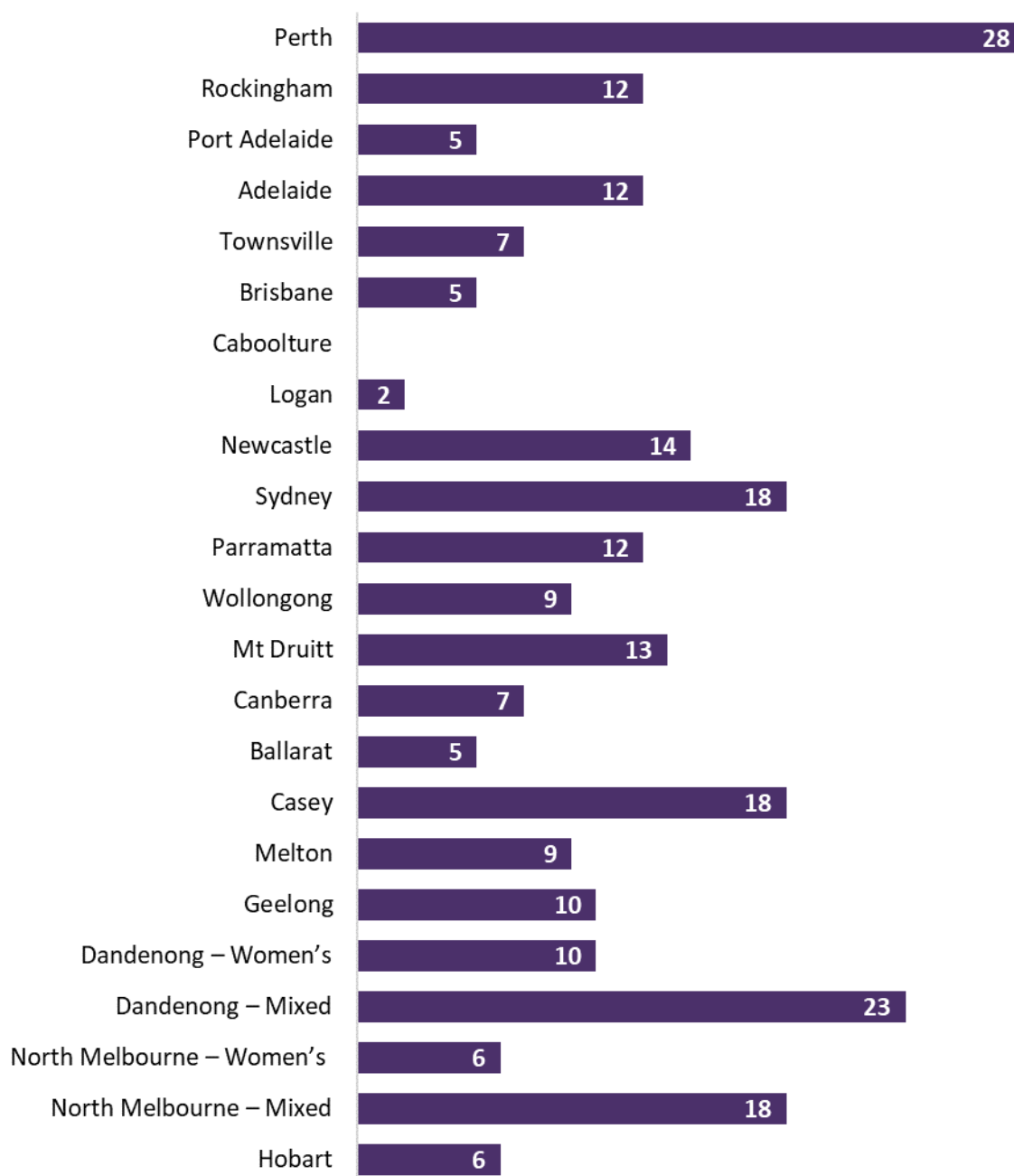


Figure 4. Survey completion by each CSSP site.

¹ No players from Caboolture returned surveys.

Among players surveyed, 29% (n=67) indicated they had been involved with CSSP for more than 3 years, with involvement of between 1 and 3 years most common among players (31%, n=72) (Figure 5).

Almost one third of players surveyed had been involved with CSSP for 1-3 years. (n=229)

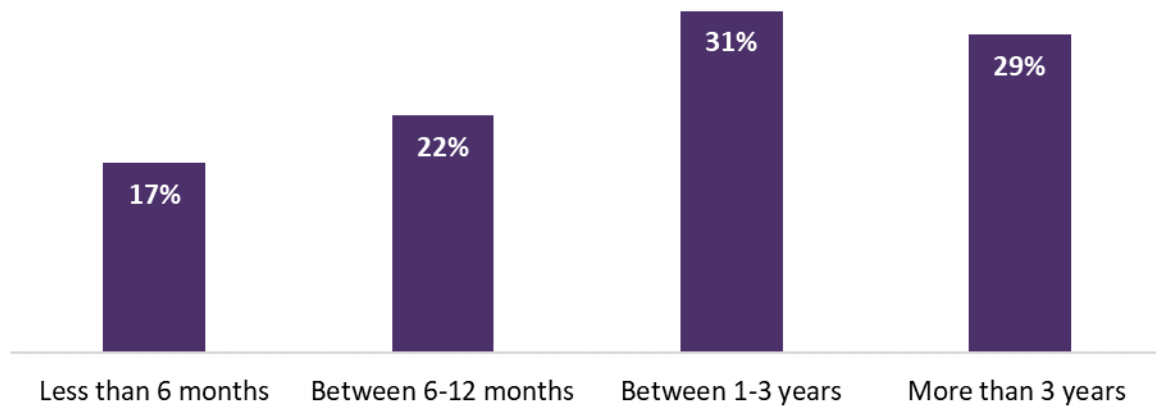


Figure 5. Length of involvement with CSSP.

Players also identified how often they attended CSSP training, with 84% (n= 189) reporting that they had attended 'often (a couple of times a month or more)' (Figure 6).

A majority of players surveyed attended CSSP training often. (n=226)

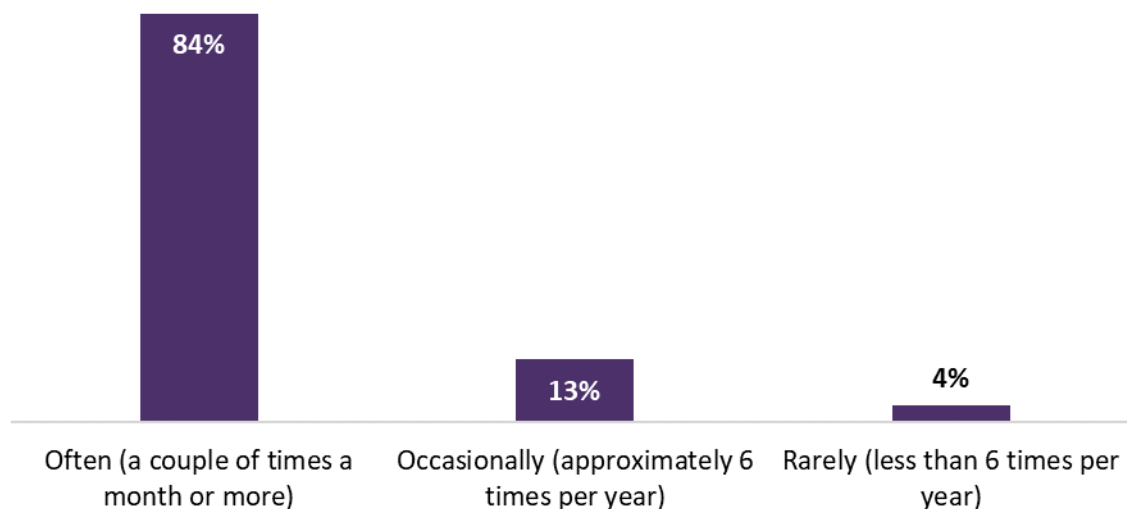


Figure 6. Level of attendance at CSSP training.

With most players suggesting they have attended sessions often and for between 1-3 years, this provides a strong indication of their ability to provide insight into the program.

Findings for each health outcome and program delivery KPI are outlined in the following sections, with a summary of survey data associated with each KPI between 2015-2023 in

Findings: Health Outcomes for Street Soccer Players

As outlined in CSSP's KPIs, the program is required to achieve a majority (80%) of participants reporting positive changes in at least one of the following health indicators:

- Improved health awareness
- Improved self-esteem, positivity and motivation
- Improved psychological wellbeing
- Improved nutrition
- Improved physical fitness
- Reduction/cessation of smoking
- Reduction/cessation of alcohol use.

With all indicators, except smoking and alcohol use, seeing over 80% of players reporting an improvement, CSSP has met the KPI for this result in at least one health indicator. In addition, reduction/cessation of smoking and alcohol use saw strong results, with approximately two thirds of players (62%, 65%) reporting improvements in these areas.

Indicator 1: Improved health awareness

Weekly CSSP sessions run across the country are used as an opportunity to offer players information to assist them in improving their physical and mental health. Consistent with the program's approach to street soccer, this is approached in a structured but informal manner.

As a result of this information provided, most players surveyed reported learning about health issues at CSSP sessions (91%, n=203) and becoming aware of health services they could access (87%, n=201) (Figure 7).

A majority of players surveyed learned about health issues and heard about health services at CSSP.

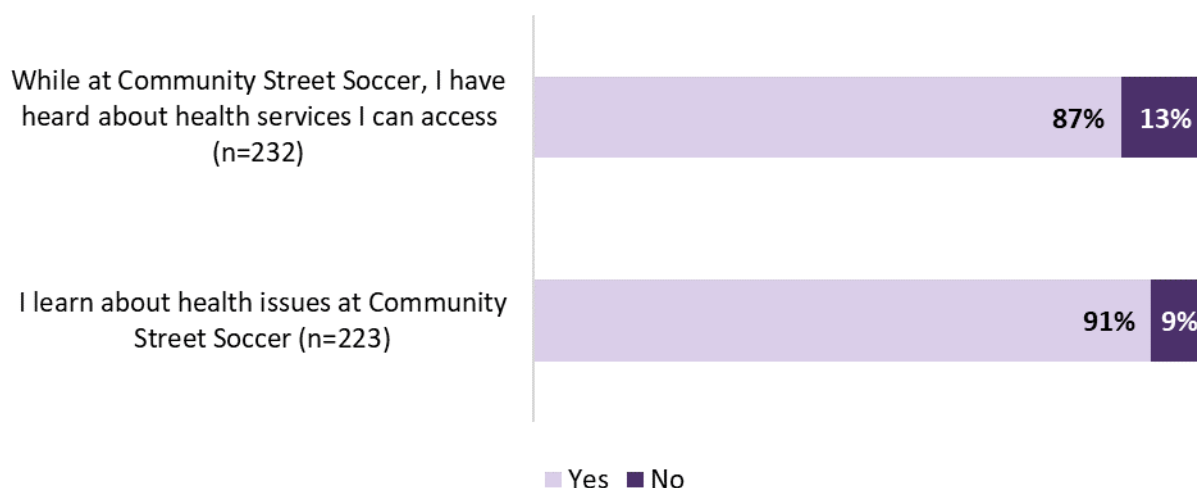


Figure 7. Increased awareness of health issues and health services.

These service offerings, coupled with coaches facilitating the street soccer at each site, aim to provide players with a range of supports. In surveys, almost all players reported that there was always somebody at CSSP that they could get advice or support from (Figure 8).

Almost all players surveyed could seek advice or support from someone at CSSP. (n=230)

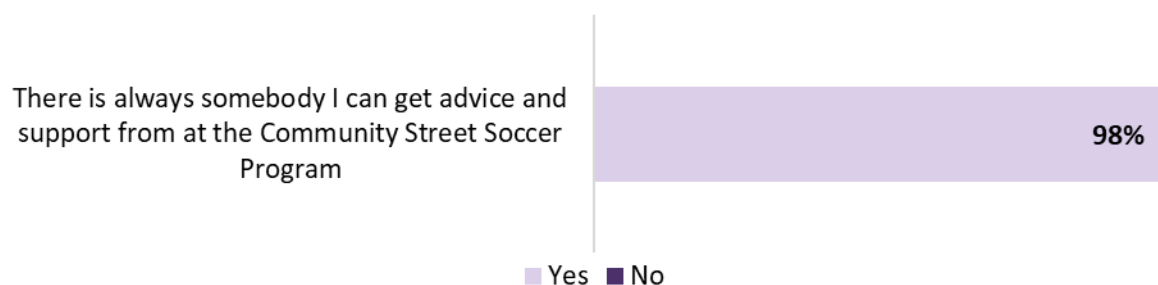


Figure 8. Availability of support and advice for players. Labels for values of 5% or less have been omitted from this figure.

Elaborating in open response questions, several players commented on the role of increased health awareness in enabling them to adopt healthier lifestyles. Players reflected on learning about fitness, and the effects of smoking, alcohol and drugs. Two commented that the health challenge in particular contributed to their increased health awareness. The health challenge referred to by players was an initiative of one CSSP site, where coaches independently instigated health awareness activities to encourage healthier lifestyles among players. Two players identified quitting smoking as a result of learning about health and another player described learning about health as one of the best things about CSSP.

“I quit smoking during one of our health challenges. I just realised I was spending so much money and it was really bad for me. After that I just quit cold turkey.” Street soccer player.

In surveys, players indicated both how aware they are of support services as a result of CSSP, as well as whether they had accessed any of these services (Figure 9). Of 232 players who responded to the survey, approximately three quarters identified that they became aware of physical health services (76%, n=177), and two thirds became aware of mental health services (66%, n=152). Approximately one quarter of players surveyed became aware of alcohol and other drug services (27%, n=63) and programs to stop smoking (26%, n=60). Of these, almost two thirds of those aware of physical health services accessed them (62%, n=110), as did nearly half of those who became aware of mental health services (47%, n=72). Approximately one quarter of those who had heard of alcohol and other drug services (22%, n=14) and programs to stop smoking accessed them (28%, n=17) (Figure 9)².

² A total of 232 responded to the question about awareness of services, with 231 responding to the question on accessing these services. The percentage of players who indicated that they “accessed” a service is taken from the proportion of respondents who were first aware of that service.

Almost two thirds of players surveyed who had heard of physical health services accessed them.

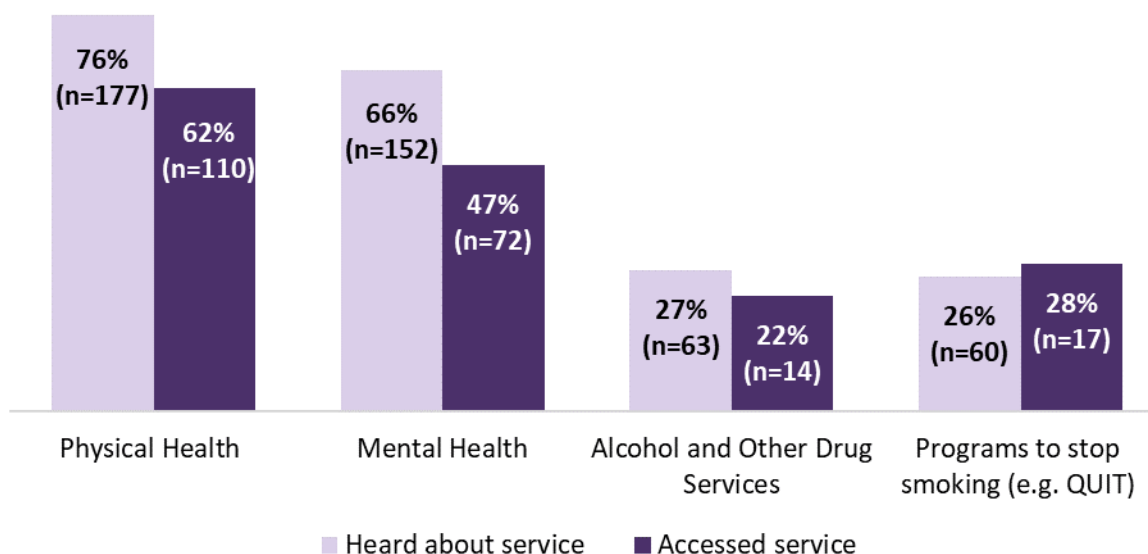


Figure 9. Awareness and access to health services.

In open responses, two players suggested that access to services played an important role in improvements in their health. Meanwhile, another commented that access to health services was one of the best things about CSSP.

“Having access to supports like oz harvest and mental health awareness has been more positive.” Street soccer player.

Indicators 2 and 3: Improved motivation, self-esteem, positivity, and psychological wellbeing

A key aspect of the CSSP model is to provide players with a safe and welcoming environment. The program actively promotes respect, inclusion, connection and support. New players sign a code of conduct agreeing to abide by these principles.

Players who responded to the survey reported the CSSP had led to improvements in their mental health, measured through improved motivation, self-esteem, positivity and psychological wellbeing. These concepts were selected as a proxy to measure improved mental health because reported improvements in these areas by players are aligned to the program’s KPIs.

Improved self-esteem, positivity and motivation

Self-esteem is a concept that reflects a person’s beliefs or feelings about themselves. Positivity is a similar concept insofar as it relates to positive self-assessment, but also relates to joy, hope, interest, inspiration, and optimism, among others.

Almost all players who responded to the survey reported that they were more motivated to either maintain or improve both their physical (96%, n=216) and mental health (96%, n=215) as a result of playing street soccer (Figure 10).

A majority of players surveyed were more motivated to maintain/improve both their physical and mental health.

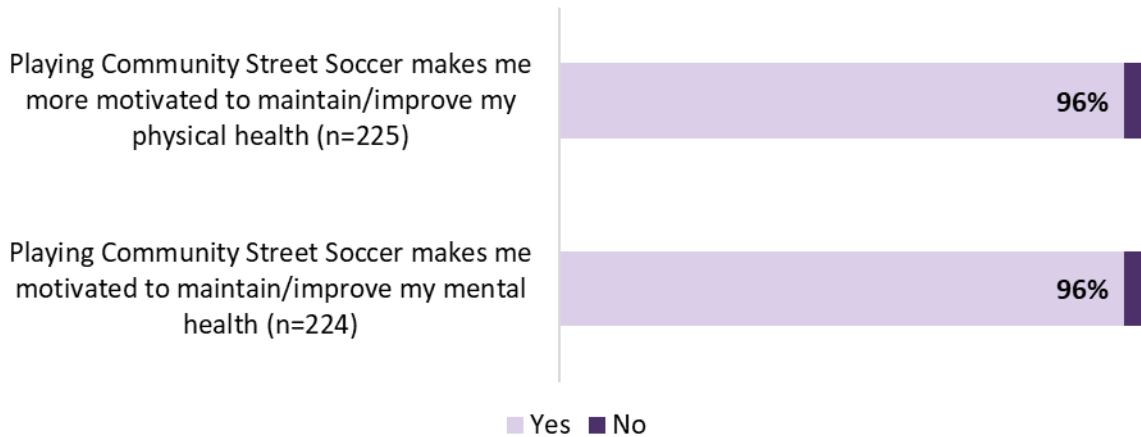


Figure 10. Increased motivation to maintain/improve mental and physical health. Labels for values of 5% or less have been omitted from this figure.

Several players elaborated on this in short answer questions, identifying CSSP as motivating them to engage in physical activity when they would not have otherwise, finding it a positive, comfortable, and encouraging environment. Several suggested that the regularity of sessions also helped them.

Some players also commented on by-products of increased physical activity, with several suggesting they were happier as a result of their regular participation in CSSP.

Most player respondents (97%, n=217) identified CSSP as having a positive impact on their self-esteem, suggesting it makes them feel good about themselves (Figure 11).

Almost all players surveyed reported that CSSP makes them feel good about themselves. (n=224)

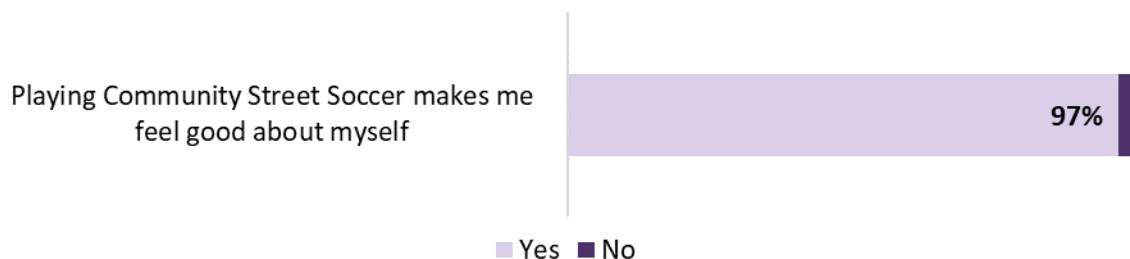


Figure 11. Improved self-esteem. Labels for values of 5% or less have been omitted from this figure.

As key impacts of CSSP, a few players cited increased confidence, with another several pointing to increased motivation and dedication. A further two players identified improvements in their time management skills.

“It made me a more confident person and a good player” Street soccer player.

Several players outlined feeling supported and encouraged at CSSP sessions, with a similar number describing them as a positive environment. One player suggested that CSSP's informal and community-focused approach made them more comfortable, describing it as non-competitive. Several players also described coaches as often enabling this encouraging environment and being invaluable sources of individual support and motivation.

"The people who run it. They are positive people and they provide networking for us young people" Street soccer player.

"My coaches gave me support in preparing to have my first baby. Just having someone to talk to and chat about the changes to my life that are going to happen has been really helpful." Street soccer player.

Likewise, a few players commented on the support offered by fellow players.

"I see soccer as a peer support program." Street soccer player.

A majority of players surveyed reflected positively on their sense of inclusion and connection at CSSP. Almost all players felt welcome to participate (99%, n=222), and reported having met new people (99%, n=220), with a majority having made new friends through the program (96%, n=219) (Figure 12).

Almost all players surveyed felt welcome, met new people and made friends at CSSP.

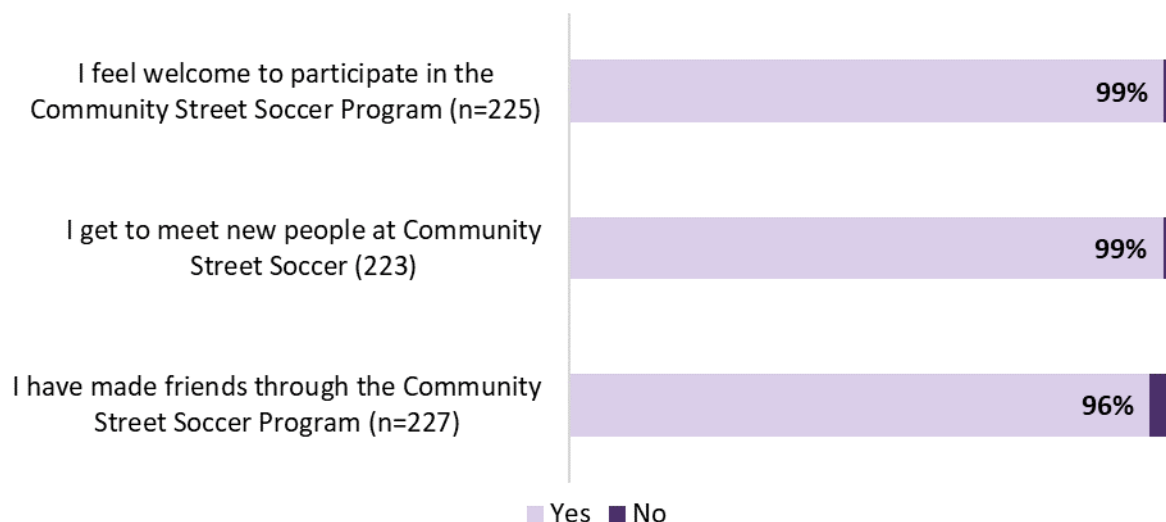


Figure 12. Players' sense of inclusion and connection. Labels for values of 5% or less have been omitted from this figure.

Connection, friendship and community were significant themes raised by players in the survey. CSSP was widely viewed as a social outlet by players, with fifty players identifying meeting new people and socialising as the best thing about CSSP and twenty-one suggesting being more social was the most significant change in their lives.

"The social aspect has been a highlight." Street soccer player.

Similarly, when asked for examples of how CSSP has helped players achieve physical and mental health impacts, twenty-two players commented on the friendships they have developed. Thirty-nine players indicated friendships were the best part of CSSP and sixteen described this as the most significant impact of the program.

"Seeing friends every week has a big impact on my life outlook." Street soccer player.

"As football united people together, I met with more good people, and we play together. I called them my family team because we spent more than 4 years together." Street soccer player.

"I found my first friends in Aus." Street soccer player.

Likewise, several also described the value of community, being part of a team and a sense of belonging. A few suggested taking part in CSSP has made them feel welcome and one noted that it increased their sense of social inclusion. A few described a sense of unity, camaraderie and care among players, as well as this being fostered by their coaches. Several players identified this sense of community and belonging as the biggest impact of the program in their lives, with one player stating that they no longer felt "alone".

"Soccer helps me feel welcome." Street soccer player.

"New sense of belonging." Street soccer player.

Several players also identified the inclusive and diverse nature of the CSSP sessions as aiding participation. A few suggested there was an emphasis on everyone being able to play, and two commented that the sessions were accessible and inclusive of those with disabilities.

"[I] get to do sport with people that have disabilities." Street soccer player.

"I don't feel like I have a vision impairment, I feel good about myself." Street soccer player.

For some players, CSSP provided an opportunity to connect with people who may have had similar experiences, and a space to share with one another. Two players described being able to share their

“life stories” as a positive aspect of CSSP. Another player found value in connecting with others who had shared interests.

Improved psychological wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing is a broader concept that encompasses the constructs of motivation, positivity and optimism. Regarding the impact of the program on players’ overall psychological wellbeing, nearly all of the respondents to this question indicated that the training makes them feel happy (98%, n=221) and believed that the training gave them a more positive outlook on life (98%, n=202) (Figure 13).

Almost all players surveyed reported that CSSP makes them happy and has helped to improve their outlook on life.

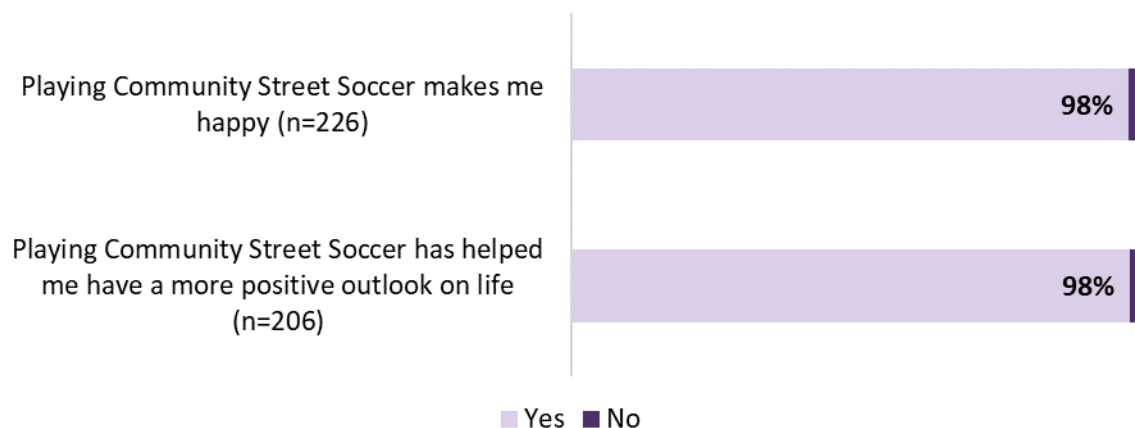


Figure 13. Increased overall psychological wellbeing. Labels for values of 5% or less have been omitted from this figure.

In open responses, 36 players identified improved mental health as being the most significant change in their lives as a result of CSSP. A few detailed the physical aspect of street soccer as aiding their mental health, while others suggested that socialising or learning about mental health assisted their wellbeing. A few also suggested that improved mental health contributed to accessing employment, education and housing services.

“Being there helps you forget your problems – so involved with the session, having a good time with everyone ... especially helpful when feeling depressed.” Street soccer player.

“It helps with my mental health ... I have schizophrenia and soccer helps me because I get tired at night and sleep better which helps with my condition.” Street soccer player.

Several players identified having a more positive outlook, with few suggesting that this change in outlook was the most significant change in their lives as a result of CSSP. Similarly, thirteen players described being happier as the biggest impact of the program.

“Keeps me active which in turn helps me to have a more positive outlook on life, including being more social and making new friends.” Street soccer player.

Several players identified street soccer as providing them with something to look forward to. A similar number suggested it was a reason to get out, and a few commented on the benefit of being outdoors.

“Something to look forward to every week something that consistently makes you feel good.” Street soccer player.

“Gets me out of bed and helps me to think positive.” Street soccer player.

Two players identified having a reduced sense of loneliness due to their involvement with CSSP. Another described experiencing severe mental health challenges prior to participating in street soccer and found speaking with others at sessions invaluable for their mental health.

Several players commented that the regularity of CSSP sessions was one of the best things about the program, valuing its consistency and that they can always rely on it.

Indicators 4 and 5: Improved nutrition, physical activity, and physical fitness

Improved nutrition

A majority of players surveyed identified that CSSP has helped them eat healthier food (89%, n=173) (Figure 14).

CSSP helped a majority of players surveyed to eat healthier food. (n=195)

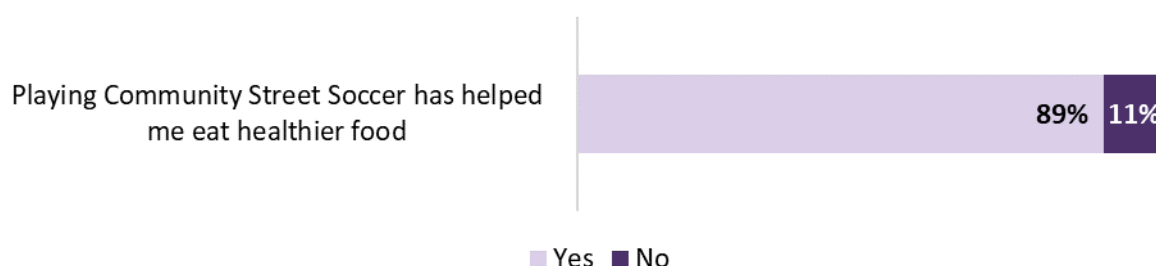


Figure 14. Improved nutrition.

In surveys, several players detailed improvements in their nutrition, describing eating healthier as a result of the program. Players commented that the health information they were provided was a contributing factor to this, and a few also noted that the food provided by CSSP was one of the most valuable parts of the program.

“Since playing soccer I’ve tried to keep on a healthier diet.” Street soccer player.

“Eating healthier is the priority to improve my physical wellbeing.” Street soccer player.

A further twenty players also suggested they felt healthier or had a healthier lifestyle in general due to CSSP participation, describing this as one of the biggest impacts of the program. A few players detailed how they were now more conscious about their health.

Improved physical activity and fitness

A majority of player respondents reported engaging in physical activity at CSSP (96%, n=218), and that as a result CSSP helped them to improve their fitness (98%, n=217). Over two thirds of players also identified taking part in other sports in addition to their involvement in CSSP (68%, n=155) (Figure 15).

Almost all players surveyed saw improvements in their fitness due to CSSP.

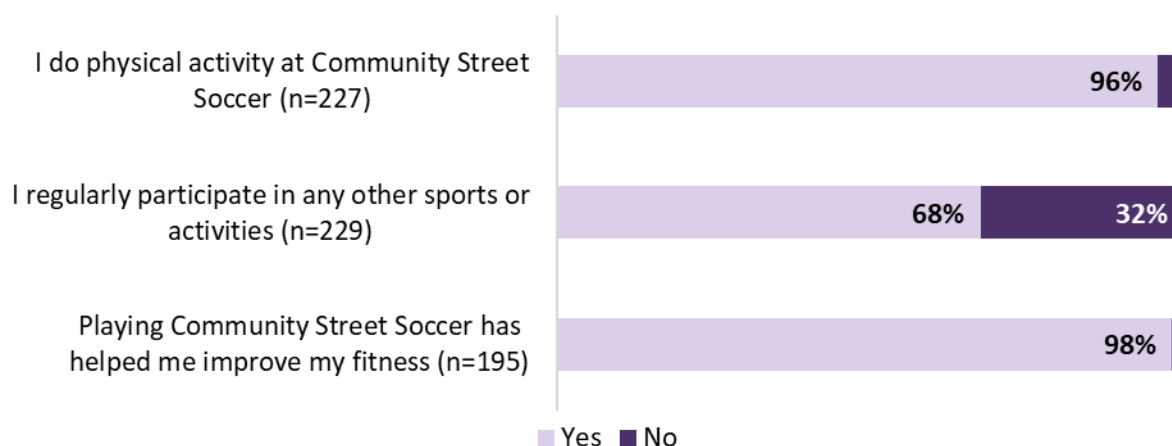


Figure 15. Increased physical activity and fitness. Labels for values of 5% or less have been omitted from this figure.

In short answer questions, approximately one quarter of respondents (n=56) described being more active and reported improvements in their physical health. Twenty-three players described increased physical activity and fitness as one of the best things about CSSP, while forty-three suggested it was the most significant change they had noticed in their lives.

A few players commented that they now enjoy physical activity more and several described feeling better physically, with two players noting they were more energetic than they had been. A few also commented that they had lost weight as a result of their involvement in CSSP.

“It has helped me improve my fitness because I can play longer now. I am always filled with positivity after soccer.” Street soccer player.

For many players, the sport itself was the most valuable aspect of the program, with thirty commenting that playing soccer was one of the best parts. Several also identified improving their skills or learning new ones as a highlight.

“Playing with my mates every week and improving my skills.” Street soccer player.

Indicators 6 and 7: Reduction in smoking and alcohol use

CSSP proved influential on some players’ smoking and alcohol use, with approximately two thirds of those surveyed reporting a reduction in these (62%, n=80; 65%, n=86) (Figure 16).

CSSP helped approximately two thirds of players surveyed reduced their smoking or alcohol use.

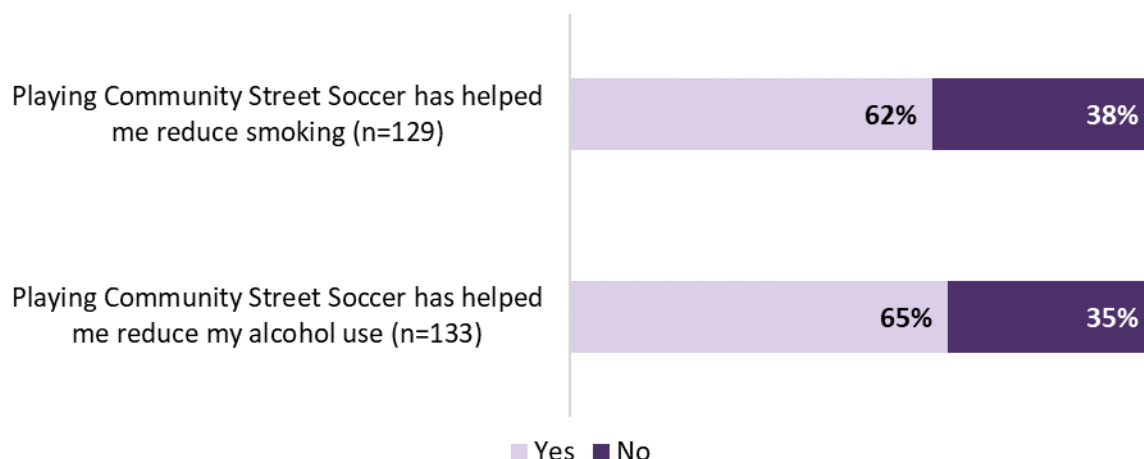


Figure 16. Reduced smoking and alcohol use.

In short answer questions, several players detailed either stopping or reducing smoking as a result of CSSP. Two players also identified having reduced their alcohol use. Players suggested that health information provided by the program, including the health challenge, had influenced their reduction in smoking and alcohol use. Players reported learning about the negative effects of smoking, drugs, and alcohol use, as well as the financial cost associated with these and cited a desire to be healthier and look after their bodies. Three players described quitting or reducing smoking as the most significant change in their lives after taking part in CSSP, while another player reported staying sober as the biggest impact.

“Cutting down my smoking because of the health challenge we did at Street Soccer.” Street soccer player.

“[Street soccer] has kept me away from drugs and alcohol. I found street soccer when I wanted [to be] sober and [it] has helped me stay sober.” Street soccer player.

Findings: Additional outcomes for street soccer players and areas for improvement

Improved housing/accommodation, education and employment

In addition to significant health outcomes for players, the evaluation has also found that the program has had a positive impact in the areas of housing, education and employment. These outcomes are a notable achievement of the program, and indicative of its breadth of impact.

One third of players surveyed were aware of education and training services (33%, n=76), with approximately one quarter indicating awareness of housing/accommodation (25%, n=59) and employment services (27%, n=63) (Figure 17). Over half of those who had heard of education/training services reported accessing them (55%, n=42), and more than one third of those who had heard of housing/accommodation (37%, n=22) and employment services (41%, n=26) accessed these services³.

Over half of players surveyed who had heard of education/training services accessed them.

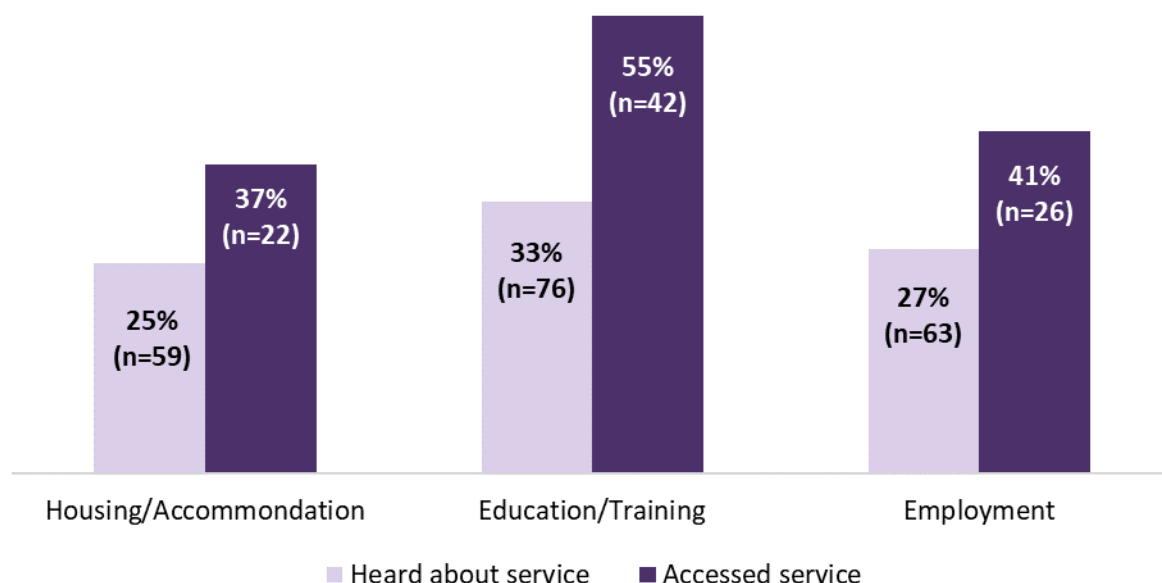


Figure 17. Awareness of and access to housing/accommodation, education/training and employment services.

Approximately one quarter of players surveyed (24%, n=55) suggested that they had participated in education or training as a result of referrals made through CSSP. Twelve percent of players surveyed (n=27) improved their housing situation, with 10% (n=24) finding stable accommodation/housing through the program. Likewise, 10% of players (n=23) reported finding employment.

When asked about changes made through referrals, more players reported either securing stable housing/accommodation (10%, n=24) or improving their housing situation (12%, n=27) than had

³ A total of 232 responded to the question about awareness of services, with 231 responding to the question on accessing these services. The percentage of players who indicated that they “accessed” a service is taken from the proportion of respondents who were first aware of that service.

identified accessing these services. Likewise, an increased number of players reported participating in education/training as a result of referrals than suggested they had accessed these services (24%, n=55). Ten percent (n=23) of players all players surveyed identified finding employment as a result of referrals made through CSSP (Figure 18).

Approximately one quarter of players surveyed participated in education or training. (n=232)

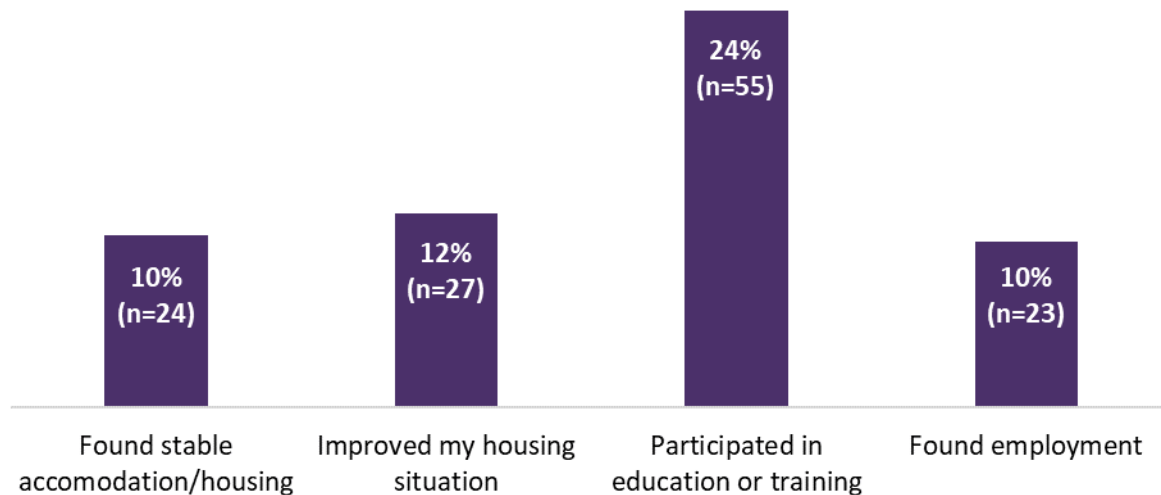


Figure 18. Changes made through contacts/referrals made at CSSP.

In open responses, several players indicated that they had become aware of housing, education, and employment services they could access. A few players described being referred to education opportunities, with another commenting that they had participated in education due to referrals from CSSP.

Two players identified being told about employment opportunities, while a further four commented that they had gained employment via referrals.

"I have found a job by getting information about youth programs." Street soccer player.

"I signed up as a Big Issue vendor this year. It's one of my first paying jobs because of my disability." Street soccer player.

Two players suggested they had received information on accommodation options. Another two reported finding stable accommodation, with one describing this as the most significant impact of CSSP for them.

"I'm off the streets and have my own place." Street soccer player.

Findings: Program reflections and areas for improvement

Program reflections – post-covid program delivery

Recruitment challenges

The previous CSSP report (2022) highlighted recruitment challenges experienced by program staff, with some community agencies expressing hesitancy to refer their clients to CSSP. In response, the program partnered with organisations to boost recruitment levels.

A similar challenge has persisted over the last financial year, with program staff identifying challenges in reconnection with services in the post-covid environment. As an example of this, they pointed to one large, stable group of long-term residents at one hospital who are not currently involved with the program due to hesitancy from the hospital in the post-covid era. This has led CSSP to a process of widening the field of the hospitals they engage with.

Program staff also described the shift to increased one-on-one support provided by health agencies during covid, which limited the number of group activities through which CSSP have traditionally been able to engage several players at once. Program staff suggested the reengagement with some service agencies had been a slow process, however cited positive progress with some, viewing the enthusiasm shown by staff at some services as encouraging.

Shifts in player demographics

An emerging trend of a shift in the demographic make-up of CSSP to include a greater proportion of players with disabilities was also identified in the previous report. Program staff described this trend as continuing and becoming further established over the past year, with more National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services referring their clients to the program. The previous report suggested that this shift necessitated a need for appropriate training for coaches to enable them to adequately and appropriately manage this demographic shift to ensure inclusivity. Program staff commented that this has since been a focus over the past year, with emphasis being placed on equipping coaches to manage players with intellectual disabilities, in particular. While this shift in demographic has added an additional layer of complexity to sessions, program staff described this as a positive stage in the program's progression.

"You can't find a more inclusive community group as ours, it's so diverse ... and that's special in itself. So, any barriers and challenges that it provides are far outweighed by the positives to my mind and so I always celebrate that. So yeah, slight shift in probably our response as well in our roles, but some of it's a natural sort of evolution of the sector." Program staff.

Program staff suggested that this shift has been well-received by players, with CSSP having a pre-existing culture of diversity and acceptance, and a welcoming atmosphere.

Program staff described that work to adapt sessions to involve and respond to the needs of people with disabilities is ongoing. They also noted that balancing the focus of the program to engage a variety of players remains key.

Value of social connection, inclusion and consistency

As suggested by players throughout survey responses, program staff indicated that there has been a heightened importance placed by players on social connection during the post-covid period. Players had shown a greater desire to connect and be a part of a community due to having lost this during covid.

“Everybody was so happy to come back to street soccer and reconnect ... there was more of an emphasis on “Well we’ll turn up” ... we’ve had bad weather days and people are still turning out because they’re more concerned with just catching up with everybody ... valuing that regular social connection maybe a bit more than they did before.” Program staff.

Program staff credited coaches in particular with fostering connection at CSSP sessions, describing how they have created a safe, encouraging and inclusive environment which celebrates diversity. They described how, while soccer is the initial thing which brings players together, the environment enables them to connect with one another beyond just the game.

“I think that’s the unique and special thing about our program that people do connect really well. And even though it’s for two hours of the week, it’s a bit of magic that happens, but everyone contributes to it ... whether you’re in Townsville, or Rockingham, or Melbourne, you get that same good feel.” Program staff.

Program staff described how this increased importance of social connection, coupled with the shift in player demographic has necessitated changes in their approach to health promotion across the program, and a reflection of where the program fits within the broader ecosystem of services.

As identified by players themselves, program staff suggested that the consistency of CSSP for players was one of its strengths, as well as the support and inclusiveness offered the program. As suggested by players, program staff commented that CSSP sessions often provide players with something to look forward to.

“The consistency, definitely people know that ... we are always going to be there. So, they know that they can rely on us and they can come to us. And I think that sort of welcoming, supportive nature that is very inclusive.” Program staff.

Post-covid mental health

While an increase in mental health challenges has been seen across sectors in the post-covid era, program staff described this as not being a notable challenge experienced by CSSP. They suggested that the program has already sought to specially engage people with severe mental health challenges, and therefore were unable to identify any difference post-covid. They also described players in this cohort as potentially having exhibited a greater level of resilience during the pandemic due to prior experiences of social isolation.

Establishing new sites

With a few new CSSP sites in operation over the past year, program staff detailed the process of establishing these. New sites were determined in consultation with DHAC, with The Big Issue suggesting a range of locations based on levels of disadvantage. Added layers of complexity which contributed to establishing new sites included understanding the make-up of services in each location, through which to engage new players, as well as recruiting coaches for the new sites, which program staff described as challenging at times.

Areas for improvement

Program staff suggested that one key focus area for the program was a continued strengthening of staff's skill sets and ability to focus on individual needs of players. Another was an increased focus on logistics, such as coordinating alternative locations for sessions during hot weather.

In surveys, players were also asked whether there was anything that could make CSSP even better. Of the 122 responses, 20 commented there were no areas for improvement, wanting to see CSSP continue as is. Other players, who detailed ways the program could improve, offered the following:

- **People:** Fifteen players suggested expanding CSSP to include more people would be beneficial, with one suggesting an increase in the number of volunteers in order to expand the program. Another four players commented that they would like to see more women participating.
- **Changes to play:** Thirteen players commented on improvements to how street soccer is played. These included more opportunities for warmups, drills, training for new players, and skills development. Others suggested a greater focus on playing well as a team and abiding by the code of conduct.
- **Food:** Thirteen players suggested offering more food as a key area for improvement. One suggested that these offerings should be consistent across locations as they are often a drawcard for players.
- **Competitions:** Ten players commented that they would like to see more opportunities for competitions or tournaments.
- **Events and social opportunities:** Eleven players identified greater events and opportunities to connect as areas for improvement. Two players suggested having "more events", with others suggesting having guest speakers or an event with a pro footballer in attendance. Four players saw value in more opportunities to connect with their team and players at other sites, with some suggesting friendly games, BBQs, or hosting a lunch. Another player suggested taking players on camps or excursions.
- **Better equipment:** Nine players identified having better equipment as making CSSP better, such as better goals and new soccer balls.
- **Time and number of sessions:** Eight players commented that longer sessions would be an improvement, with two others suggesting holding sessions at better times. A further nine players suggested that having sessions more often, such as twice a week, would be beneficial.
- **Uniforms:** Four players suggested that having uniforms would be helpful, while another commented that wearing bibs should be enforced.

- **Information:** Three players identified value in increased information on mental health and housing, while a third wanted more “advice on life”.
- **Promotion:** Four players suggested a need for increased promotion of CSSP to improve awareness.
- **Funding:** Three players suggested that CSSP funding should be maintained or increased.
- **Facilities:** Two players suggested using indoor facilities for CSSP sessions more often, while another suggested a better pitch would be useful.

Findings: Program delivery

In addition to improving health outcomes for street soccer players, the CSSP has three key program delivery KPIs as stipulated in its funding agreement with DHAC. These are:

- a minimum of 300 participants across all sites each week
- a minimum of 850 registrations per year
- a minimum of 25 active street soccer sites.

Performance against program delivery KPIs

Across the July 2022 – June 2023 period, players attending CSSP sessions totalled 18,558, with 1,695 unique players participating during this time. The program saw an average attendance of 418 players per week across sites, increasing from the average of 383 achieved in the previous financial year. This figure is also well above CSSP's performance indicator of 300 participants (Figure 19).

A minimum of 300 participants who participate across all sites each week

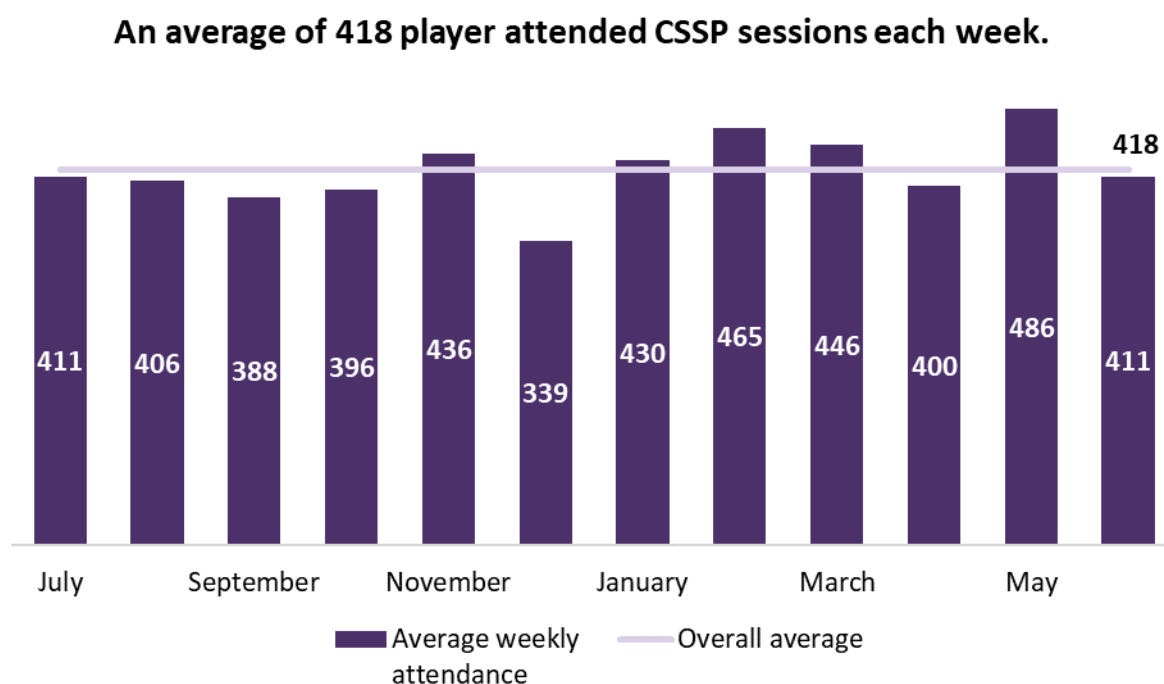


Figure 19. Average number of players per week by month (program data collected by The Big Issue).

A minimum of 850 registrations per year (or 71 per month)

Over the same period, CSSP recorded a total of 1,198 new player registrations – or an average of 100 new players per month, exceeding the KPI target (Figure 20). The total number of new players has seen an increase from the previous reporting period, which had achieved an average of 70 new registrations per month.

A total of 1,198 new players registered in 2022-23.

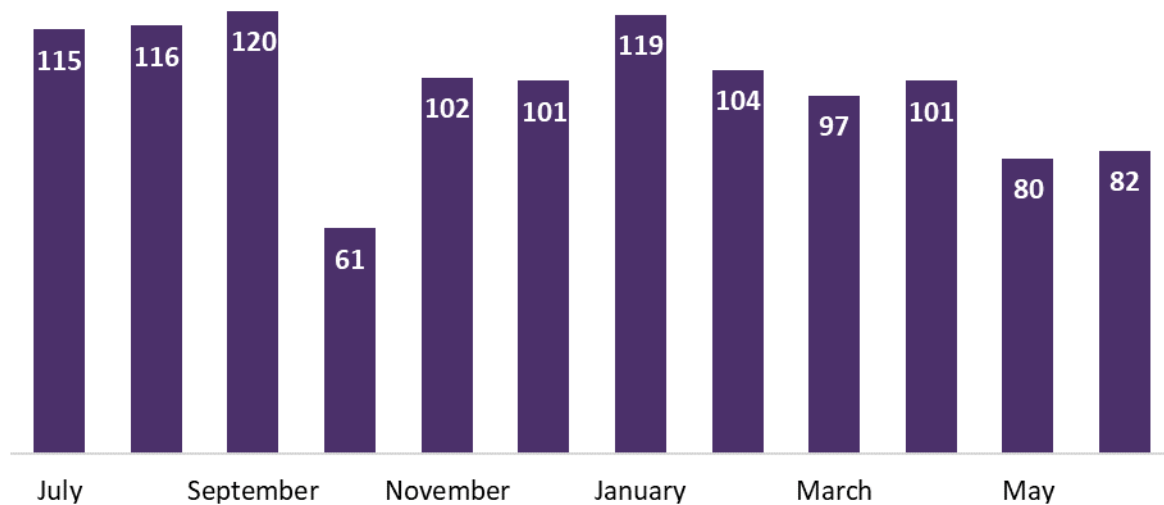


Figure 20. Average number of new registrations by month (program data collected by The Big Issue).

A minimum of 25 active Street Soccer sites

CSSP currently operates across 25 sites, achieving the increased target set out in its performance indicators. While operating across 25 sites, this report has only collected data for 22 of those sites. Table 2 below lists the CSSP sites included in the evaluation, with the sites either not included or where no data was collected from highlighted.

Table 2. Active CSSP sites.

States	Sites
Western Australia	Perth
	Rockingham
South Australia	Adelaide
	Port Adelaide
Queensland	Townsville
	Brisbane
	Caboolture
	Logan
New South Wales	Newcastle
	Sydney
	Parramatta
	Wollongong
	Mt Druitt

Australian Capital Territory	Canberra
Victoria	Ballarat
	Casey
	Melton
	Geelong
	Dandenong – Women’s
	Dandenong – Mixed
	North Melbourne – Women’s
	North Melbourne – Women’s
	Port Phillip prison
Tasmania	Hobart
Northern Territory	Alice Springs

Discussion

The findings outlined in this report are illustrative of the continued strength of CSSP's performance over the 2022-23 period. In keeping with similar results seen in previous reports, CSSP has exceeded both its health outcome and program delivery KPIs. CSSP's health KPIs require the program to achieve 80% players reporting positive changes in at least one of seven health indicators. CSSP has exceeded this requirement, with five of the health indicators reporting positive changes for well over 80% of respondents. The remaining indicators of a reduction/cessation of smoking and alcohol use still saw impressive results of a reduction reported by over 60% of players. The program also saw an average number of weekly players and total new registrations well above targets.

These impressive results have been enabled by strong leadership and planning, as detailed in 2020-21 and 2021-22 CSSP reports. These characteristics have seen the program effectively navigate the covid and post-covid periods. As outlined earlier in this report, strategies have been adopted over the past year to address the challenges of reconnecting with services and recruiting players, as well as to mitigate the effects of this on an ongoing basis.

The emerging trend of a shift in the demographic make-up of CSSP identified in the previous report to include a greater percentage of players with disabilities has continued and gained greater prominence over the past year. While presenting some challenges for the program, namely requiring it to adapt by upskilling coaches to adequately cater to individual needs, this has and continues to be a key focus for the program to include all players. As a testament to this, many players surveyed commented on the inclusive nature of CSSP sessions and that "anyone can play".

Meeting new people, forming friendships and being a part of a community were strong themes seen throughout players' survey responses, with this being seen as equally valuable as physical health outcomes. Many described the invaluable effect these connections and sense of belonging on their mental health. This is consistent with program staff's reports of an increased importance placed on social connection among players. Beyond the value of connection, many players reported improved psychological wellbeing as a result of participating in CSSP, with some suggesting that it improved their anxiety and other mental health challenges.

Physical health impacts were seen by many players as one of the best parts of the program. Players suggested that they felt fitter and healthier, with many feeling equipped with additional knowledge about health and nutrition. For a few, a health challenge run at one site was particularly influential for this. Greater health awareness was identified by some players as propelling them to either reduce or quit smoking and alcohol use. Across survey respondents more broadly, approximately two thirds reported a reduction in smoking and alcohol use, which is a strong result for the program.

Program staff suggested that seeking out housing, employment or education/training services was less of a focus for players than it had been previously, with players more concerned with health and social connection aspects offered by the program. However, despite this, a significant number of players surveyed still reported accessing these services once they had become aware of them through CSSP and many went on to secure stable housing or improve their housing situation, find employment, or participate in education/training.

Overall, CSSP has continued to see increasingly positive results across program outcomes. Continuing to establish connections with services and adapt the program to meet the needs of a shift in demographic will be key areas of focus for the program over the 2023-24 period.

Appendix A: Summary of Health Outcomes, 2015-2023

Have heard about a service they can access:

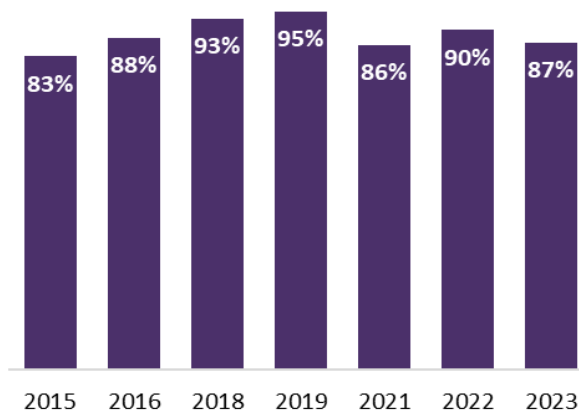


Figure 21. Players heard about services they can access.

Have learned about health issues:

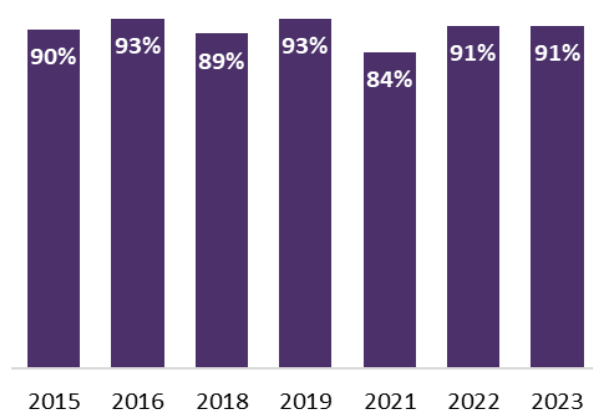


Figure 22. Players have learned about health issues.

Said there is always someone they can get advice from:

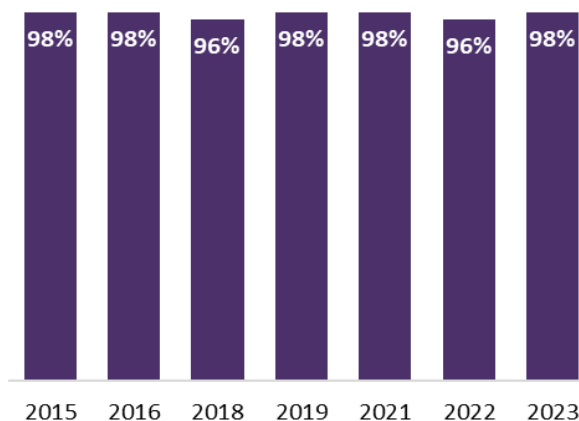


Figure 23. Players said there was always someone they could get advice from.

Are more motivated to maintain/improve their physical and mental health:

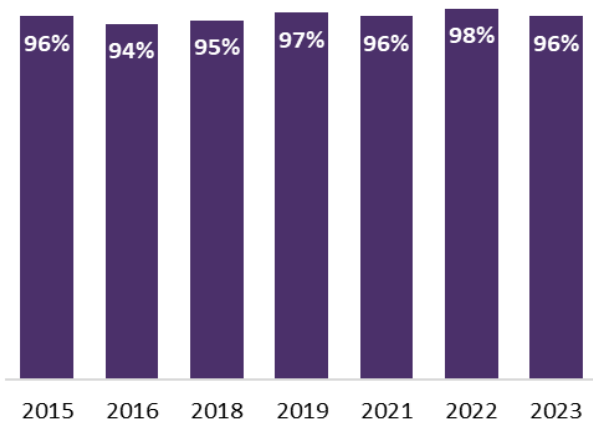


Figure 24. Players are more motivated to maintain/improve their physical/mental health.

Said that street soccer makes them feel good about themselves:

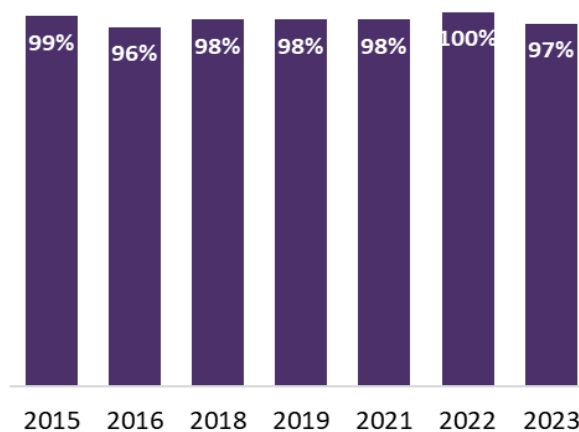


Figure 25. Players said that street soccer makes them feel good about themselves.

Said that street soccer has given them a more positive outlook on life:

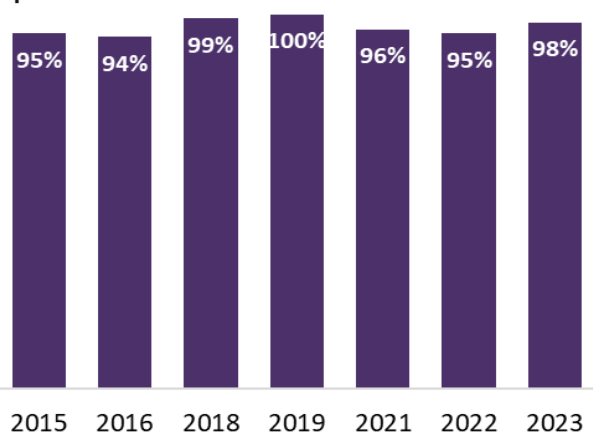


Figure 26. Players said that street soccer has given them a more positive outlook on life.

Said that street soccer has helped them to eat healthier food:

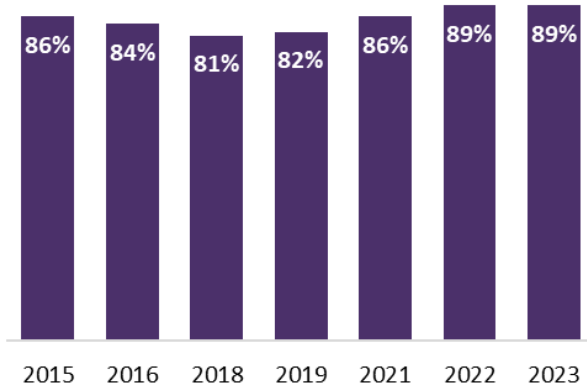


Figure 27. Players said that street soccer has helped them to eat healthier food.

Undertake physical activity during the training sessions:

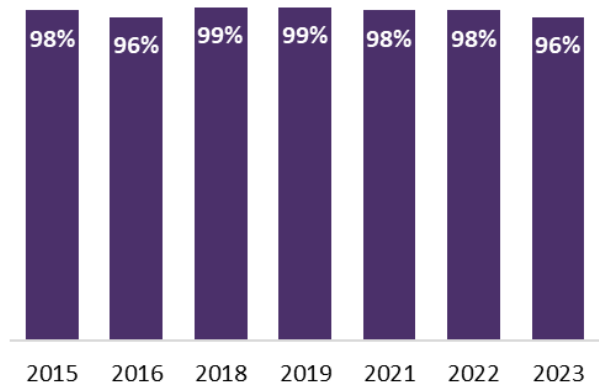


Figure 28. Players undertake physical activity during training sessions.

Have improved their physical fitness:

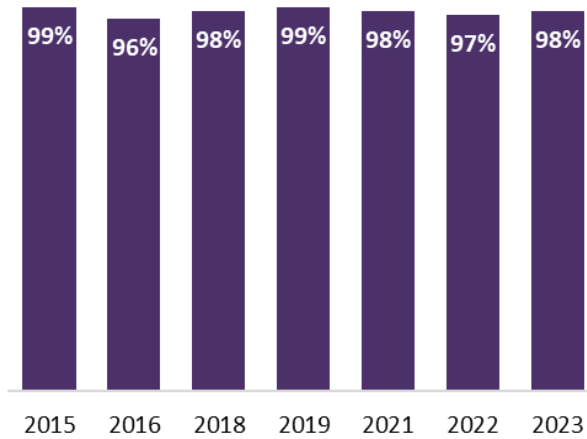


Figure 29. Players have improved their physical fitness.

Said street soccer has helped them to reduce smoking:

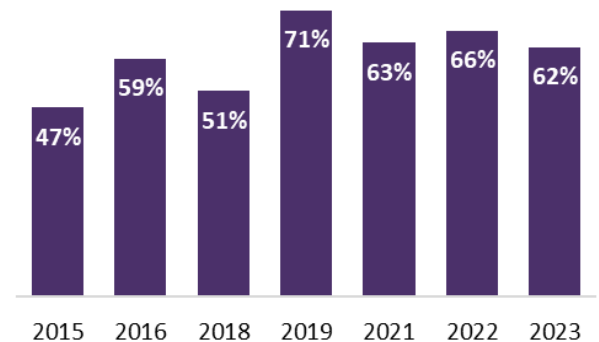


Figure 30. Players said street soccer has helped them to reduce smoking.

Said street soccer has helped them to reduce alcohol use:

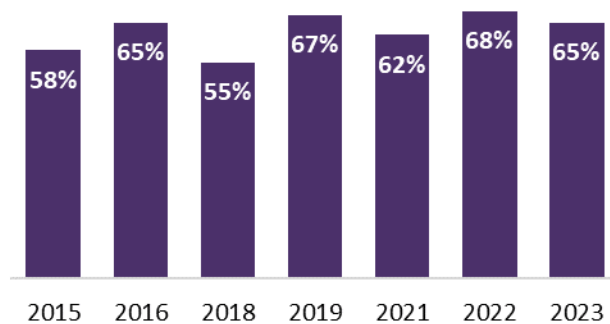


Figure 31. Players said street soccer has helped them to reduce alcohol use.