

# Rochdale

## Introduction

**Eve:** Welcome to series two of the GM Moving Podcast where we share with you how we are enabling people to get moving. I'm Eve, Strategic Director at GreaterSport; leading, supporting, and connecting GM Moving, Greater Manchester's movement for movement. Supported by investment from Sport England, Greater Manchester partners have been taking a whole system place-based approach to embed physical activity into everything for happier, healthier, more connected communities and active lives for all.

In each episode we share stories of what this looks like in action in each of the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. I'm back in Manchester Central Library for today's episode, I'm speaking to Sarah Shard from Rochdale. Nicole is joining us again as one of my colleagues at GreaterSport supporting the whole GM Local Pilot network.

Rochdale is estimated to be home to over 218,000 people. The borough is split into four townships; Rochdale, Heywood, Middleton and Pennines, which includes Littleborough. The latest Active Lives results published by Sport England show that 64% of adults in Rochdale are now active for at least thirty minutes a week. Inactivity levels rise however for lower socioeconomic groups, people with disabilities or long term health conditions, and depending on age. We will hear today how Sarah is working with local people and partners to co-design solutions to inactivity. I kick off by asking Sarah where her love of movement comes from and what gets her moving.

## Conversation

**Sarah:** I think going back to the days when I was at school might be showing my age a little bit. There was no internet, my parents didn't drive. So I was limited to what I could do in PE, always playing football with the boys at lunch time. That was my way of staying active when I was young. And then I left school still not knowing what I could do. The only jobs were usually gym teachers and things like that. I started playing football at eighteen, went travelling and then decided to do a sports development degree. And then after that, that's where I started to get involved in the role that I'm doing now. I started playing hockey a few years ago as well. I do running, swimming, cycling as well, and I've done a few triathlons and half marathons as well.

**Eve:** Stop there! Whoa! What do you get out of it then?

**Sarah:** I think it's different things. I like walking with my dogs. That's my way of getting out in the fresh air, hockey's my team sport, the social side of it, and the sense of achievement with your new friends that you've made. And then I also like the individual where I set myself goals, but I do feel more active. My joints are moving, I sleep better and I feel like I'm in a better mood as well when I exercise.

**Eve:** Excellent. Have you been moving this morning then?

**Sarah:** Yeah, I actually cycled here as well. And I've walk my dog this morning.

**Eve:** Okay. Come on Nicole. I know that you are active as well. What do you get up to?

**Nicole:** Yeah, but it pales in comparison to that. I really should have gone first. My story is fairly similar to your's Sarah where I grew up. Where I grew up there was very little opportunities, I think back when I was growing up in the nineties there was a couple of sports that was open to girls like netball or things like that. But I was always hanging around with the boys and I got into football from an early age and I played rugby from around eighteen to my late twenties, but had an injury and stopped playing. But then recently I've picked up playing football. For me it's more of a social league. And I think the reason I started doing that was cuz I've recently moved from down south up to Manchester. So it was a really good opportunity for me to socialise and meet people. And I get a lot of that socialisation out of those sessions. So it's really good as well as keeping me fit and healthy.

**Eve:** So many benefits they just keep flowing. So a bit about your work now, your role and the Local Pilot in Rochdale and what you are doing.

**Sarah:** Yeah. So I've worked in Rochdale for Your Trust, which is formerly Link4Life, for 12 years now. And I've been working with people in disadvantaged areas as well, and started going away from the gym membership so focusing on people that are inactive, and really supporting people to move more. So the last 12 months I've joined the Local Pilot team, and that's more about getting people moving in general away from physical activity and traditional sports. Like how can we just help people to move more in general, things seem to be going well in Rochdale. We're focusing on children and young people outside of the school setting. Also how we can encourage

physical activity for people that aren't in work or who are at risk of losing their jobs as well. And people aged forty to sixty who are at risk of developing long term health conditions. And we've also been doing quite a lot of work in our inclusion as well.

So the Local Pilot has just been great. It's about having that time to try things out that we might not have had time before without any pressures on targets. Like one example is we did some ladies only cycling sessions and we linked in with six different partners and it probably took us six months to get that up and running. And those ladies' voices haven't been heard before, and we really linked into the community and spoke to them ladies. And we've had eighty ladies take part in the last couple of months. And that's just one example of the Local Pilot giving without having that pressure you have to get this many people to your classes.

**Eve:** So other than having a bit more time and space with the work you're doing with different partners, anything in particular that you've learned in terms of how to then engage in that example, those women in that cycling over this period?

**Sarah:** Yeah, so with ladies we've had a link worker as well so she's from the same areas and they feel like they can relate to her and just having that person in the community has made a big difference rather than me just trying to go in.

The other example, we've used as well is we've had a new Pioneers Project as well which is some residents who are a little bit isolated and just need a bit of support in everyday life. So rather than try to push 'em straight into physical activity. We've looked to help them out straight away. So for example if someone whose washing machine was broken and that was really important to them. So instead of just trying to push physical activity on them we help them get the washing machine sorted, we'd help people get a job and that's the main thing. Just getting people mentally stable, before we try to throw 'em straight into traditional sports and then we took the approach where we'd actually walk, go take 'em out on a day trip or walk to show 'em different areas of the borough. Because in lockdown a lot of people have just spent the same time in the communities, and they're a bit fed up with that now. So it's just encouraging moving more through things like walking rather than just saying, can you come to this exercise class? Can you come to the gym?

And going back to the cycling, we had one lady and she heard about the cycling and she'd found out that she couldn't walk anymore, she'd got osteoarthritis. So she'd lost that walking network, that social side of things. And she was just at

home for three months, a bit depressed. And when she found out about the cycling, it's like the best decision she'd made in her life, she said. She's got this new way of getting about now as well, a new hobby which is not impacting on her knees.

**Eve:** Brilliant.

**Nicole:** I think this is something that's really interesting about the Local Pilot. Part of it is giving us space to do something different and have physical activity is maybe a bit of a byproduct rather than the absolute focus of what we are doing. And there's loads of different outcomes and positive things it can impact on.

So I remember we had a conversation and you were saying about the cycling sessions and they'd started to have a bit of informal gathering afterwards where they'd each bring some food along and have a chat and have some food. And then I think one of the ladies she was on a bit of a health kick wasn't she. And she was like sharing her journey and she encouraged the people to bring healthier foods and things like that. And it's stuff that shoots off of physical activity. That's so important. Talking about getting people together and reducing social isolation and encouraging people to try and eat a bit better. And so many positive things that you can get out of physical activity.

**Sarah:** And another thing as well is the ladies wanted it in their community, they felt safe. So we really struggled to find a venue. And then once we went down met the lady built that rapport they actually felt safe then. And when we had to move the session they all travelled together then and it's like a day out for them that session. And we did it outside one of our leisure centre's and one lady just said, proudly, 'this is my gym'. Gave her that sense of belonging. We had one lady as well, and she said, 'I came here alone and I left with family.'

**Eve:** Great. So go on that all sounds warm and fuzzy and wonderful, life changing. Where's it been hard?

**Sarah:** Yeah. I think the main things, obviously Covid, we've been trying to get things back up and running.

We've been trying to set up our work at a local park, Stoneyfield Park, where we are having a new path installed, a new playground service, some picnic benches, some gates, some plum trees and a wild meadow. That's part of the Local Pilot. We've had that time to try to get things up and going and there have been delays with Covid and then after Covid with the contractors and the

resources have had a bit of a backlog. It's been difficult. We've had to try to keep the community and also our partners involved and just update them, be honest. There's been a lack of trust in the past where things have been promised or not happened. And it's that lack of trust that we won't deliver. So for us it's just managing people's expectations and being realistic. So the way we've done that is we've just kept people informed. We've been honest with them. We've just told them to keep our trust in them. We've just sent a local newsletter out as well. Which has gone to 6,000 residents updating them.

We're also trying to get a sign and notice board installed. We've funded that as well. So that'll have local updates for people and we've linked in with the council. So the trust, and the rapport, and just being honest has been key for that.

**Nicole:** The important part about Stoneyfield Park and that investment is that the feedback that you got from residents was that the park was essentially a bog for nine months of the year because there was no drainage there. So residents were saying to you, 'it's a great space, it's a great pocket park. But we can't access it when it's raining'. And it rains quite a lot up here. So in terms of that usage, it's gonna increase the usage. You've put a path in there as well. So you are more likely to get that usage increased.

And I think the really important thing about it is just reflecting on what you said about that engagement. That community has been constantly engaged and engaged and engaged, and then partners sometimes for various different reasons haven't been able to deliver on what they've promised or is taken on time. That kind of thing. That investment has allowed you to build that trust up with that community by delivering, like you said, and there has been challenges but I think your approach has been really good in constantly keeping them updated and in a constant dialogue with them. But you can see in the relationships and just the progress that you've made is brilliant. It's really good.

**Sarah:** I think now maybe going forward as well, the difficulties, a lot of activities in the past might have been funded for free in some areas before and the funding runs out and it's how to sustain them activities. So one of the things we're focusing at the moment is that aspect of things and trying to encourage some smaller donations towards an activity. But then at the same time, the people that can't afford it can we look at some voluntary donation of their time or can we encourage moving more. Things that aren't cost effective, the cost is a barrier to keep them running in the long term.

And then now we go into the rising cost of living for people who just don't have the money. So they've been the challenges and we're looking at options and we are linking in with other authorities from the Local Pilot as well to learn what they're doing as well.

**Eve:** So we've heard how sometimes money can get in the way. And it can be a key enabler, it can do both. So how has the investment that's come from Sport England into the Local Pilot, how have you used that?

**Sarah:** Yeah, it's just been really useful. We've used it in different ways. We've used it to develop the Stoneyfield Park infrastructure in the park that we are putting in and, and that'll be there long term. So it's not money that is just gonna go on like staffing costs and stuff like that, so that'll be a long term funding through that. We've done work with the new Pioneers as well to focus on the place based approach. And then we've also been using it to recover from Covid to start some of our activities back up as well.

**Nicole:** And you've also got the Community Investment Fund as well haven't you, that you set up with the local voluntary organisation Action Together? So that enables that money to go straight into the community. The community are coming forward, aren't they and they're speaking to you about activities that they'd like to see in their area. And then they can apply for this fund and you are supporting them as they go along to make sure that the sessions are accessible and sustainable and things like that.

**Sarah:** Yeah, another area as well is we are focused on our inclusion as well so we want everyone to feel inclusive with some multi-sport sessions, some chair yoga as well. And then now we're looking at a new session with adaptable bikes as well. So we want our activities to be inclusion, friendly, so that could be setting up specific sessions or linking people into them. Another part of the project as well is the fact that we've got some grant funding as well, so we've not specifically relied on Sport England funding, we've got a lot of township funding. We've linked in with public health, even Cycling UK and Transport for Greater Manchester. So a lot of our projects are match funded by different organisations so that the money has managed to oversee things for a long time.

**Eve:** Great so there's changes to the physical environment. So it's more accessible whatever the weather, which is key for all of us. There's that partnership working and really, both co-investment then for multiple partners and working together to make activities and resources far more inclusive and take it to where people are. And then some great points there around obviously

access to some of the things that enables us to be active. So be that adapted cycles for example thinking more inclusively.

So trust has been a big feature in a lot of what you've said there, with a real focus on how to involve the local community and build up trust. Their trust in you effectively and in the council and in those partners, it goes both ways doesn't it? So have you seen a shift in terms of the trust that then people you are working with, in people and in communities cause that's often critical if you want to shift where power is and where resources are. Any changes in terms of actually trusting people to lead the way?

**Sarah:** During Covid our community development team, the council came to us and we all worked on the emergency response hub. So ordering food parcels and prescriptions. So we were all based to support linking in with the community to over like eighteen months, that's been key. We've built our partnerships up and I think us changing our name to Your Trust has given both partners and the community that trust in us. The word started getting out on why we're called that, why we've got our values. So we are now getting partners coming to us who trust us, and then we trust the community as well.

There's a new cycle without age group and that's just led by volunteers as well. So I feel like before we got on with things but now partners are linking in with us as well.

**Nicole:** Yeah, I was just thinking about the new Pioneer sessions that you've had. I know we've had a couple of conversations, and I think there's a bit of a struggle sometimes that isn't there with our wider system that we work with. They still feel that pressure of getting people into sessions and bums on seats. And I know that you've been really good at pushing back and saying to them, 'no, there's no pressure here it's absolutely fine, speak to the residents, speak to the people, what is it that they want. Let's be led by them, let their energy take us.' And, I think that's been really key to trust in them. And when they're talking to you, listening as well, rather than just glossing over it or whatever, you've really taken their feedback on board and tweaked the sessions. And I just think you've done a really good job there.

**Eve:** So I know Rochdale Pioneers is leading the way in terms of cooperatives and cooperation, made a massive difference. When you are talking about the Pioneers in Rochdale, can you talk to us a little bit about what do you mean? Who are they, what role do they play?

**Sarah:** Yeah, so part of the Local Pilot was to link in with the council and the workforce and the work, health and skills team. So we've had Emma on our team as well.

**Nicole:** Shoutout to Emma. She'd be fuming if she doesn't get a name drop.

**Eve:** Did you hear that Emma? Shout out.

**Sarah:** Yeah so Emma's done an amazing job and she's linked in with the workforce just in general and trying to get physical activity on work agendas and things like that. Who's also linked us into Susanne who is leading on the new Pioneers project. So it's a project run through the council and it's focusing on people who might be a bit isolated in the flats and who just need that bit of support.

One of the key things about that is the link worker will actually be person led. They'll do a lot of one-to-one support for that person. So it's different to other projects. Whereas if they get that person into work, they don't just leave them then because that person will still have problems with their bills, they'll still have other things like that. So they'll just really focus on supporting the person in general as well for as long as they need. There is no like, 'right, tick box!'

What we learned as well through the project is we give them a survey and we are like, what you interested in and now start reflecting. Sometimes you tick the boxes that you might want to tick, and don't really get that honest answer. We tried to set a few activities up and it was low attended. So we put on an engagement event as well, cuz we wanted them people to feel part of that community. And they all came along and someone said, 'I arrived feeling nervous and I left with a smile feeling pride in my community.' And just by the Local Pilot, instead of diving in and putting a badminton session in, we did some consultation. We're like what do you actually enjoy? I like watching TV. So then it's like could we look at maybe doing that activity walking them to see a film and walking is the physical activity element. So the key part there was to build that rapport up. And going back to the partnership work.

There was me and Claire, I'll put Claire in as well, me and Claire have like used our expertise on getting things ready in the background. Whereas Susanne's just been that lead to link in. She's got the trust, she knows what the pioneers want. They've got a WhatsApp group and stuff like that. It has been really good. We've had one gentleman, and we held an event and one of the new pioneers he wanted to get involved. So he was a person on the desk doing the registration

and now he wants to look at a career maybe in events stewarding and things like that. We had volunteers at the events as well.

So with the group we've done activities like we've done healthy eating and they all shared it on the WhatsApp group as well. We took them to Hollingworth Lake, cuz after Covid a lot of people are just bored, like we said before, being in their own area. So it's working with that group. I think there's maybe fifty people in the area. and it's just exercise is sometimes the sidekick of it.

**Eve:** It sounds like you've done a lot of weaving, Rochdale's known for its weavers as well.

**Nicole:** That's what I was gonna say cuz I've been working with Rochdale from the Local Pilot team at GreaterSport for three, four years now, and I've definitely seen a real shift in that partnership approach. So just the amount of names that you've reeled off there and the different places that they're from it's not just one organisation that's pushing this work in Rochdale.

There's a real variety of people around that table that you've got people like the work and health team at the council, got public health involved, Action Together are there as well. They believe in this work and they wanna improve the health and the wellbeing of people in Rochdale, it's fantastic to see it really is. And it's that strategic leadership as well isn't it. And I think I've really seen a shift in that as well. And loads of those people there that have created that space for us to work in this way, because you do need time don't you, you've reflected on it. It does take time to build those relationships and make sure that your approach is right. Well done to them.

**Sarah:** Yeah and I think it is having that trust from both ways. We've got the trust from the community and the trust from the top. So we are trusted that we'll get on with it and we are left to it in a way without saying why has nothing happened?

And the linking with the councillors has been huge as well. Just developing Stoneyfield Park, they've allocated some of their township funding to enable the park to develop. And they're really passionate about what's going in and we've got local community groups who feedback to the community who we can't directly contact.

**Eve:** It's that freedom and autonomy comes across as well. Anything else I suppose, around the conditions within the place and within the system that you think has been a particular enabler?

**Sarah:** I think it's just adapting to each individual and community, like we've developed Stoneyfield Park in one area. We've got park walks in another area like bench to bench sessions of all of our other activities as well. It's just knowing what that community wants. And like we were saying before, just listening to people as well, like what works in one area might not necessarily work in another area.

Another couple of projects we've just started to link into as well is working with some asylum seekers. So we've linked in with family support workers at the council as well. When the children are at school the parents are a bit isolated. So we're looking at coffee mornings. So again, we've had four weeks of coffee mornings, the young children have signed up already to some of our activity programmes. And it's just made this like nice little group as well. And we've not even mentioned physical activity yet. We're just building that rapport, letting it be their session. And then in a couple of weeks time we'll start to see what they actually want from the group.

Another example was a sheltered accommodation manager came through to us a few weeks ago and said we're looking at putting some exercise classes on. Can you do some gentle exercise? So we had a conversation in a bit more detail and was like well is that what the residents actually want? And when there was that wider conversation, an honest conversation, it's the fact that they're still not leaving their flats from Covid as well. So it's like can we look at taking them on a trip shopping to get 'em feeling confident back out in the community. So instead of just putting an exercise class on that might not be sustainable, let's go right back to basics. What's in one community we can learn, but it might not work in another one, so it's just knowing each area.

**Eve:** Simple stuff isn't it? Simple but so powerful. These stories just keep coming.

**Sarah:** I think like we mentioned before just being on that response hub was a huge turning point for us because, I think there's about twenty of us that stepped in. And we were working all hours through the Covid. I think a lot of people, and our relationship with the council got stronger then as well. And people realise that we are more than a couple of leisure centre's. We do a lot of outreach work. We do a lot of community work and we are completely focused. And I think a lot of the borough partners actually realised what we can do. And we all pull together and we've all got a wide variety of skills, knowledge, and experience. And if someone needs to know something they'll just go to someone else, and between us we should work it out hopefully. And we'll go out of our way, nothing's too little. And sometimes you do have to say no if stuff isn't

possible, but if there's a will there's a way. And if we can't do it, we'll try to get there somehow.

**Eve:** It's been a real conscious effort hasn't there in terms of supporting that culture within Your Leisure, and already influencing in terms of the rest of Greater Manchester, in terms of the work around leisure trusts pivoting towards health and wellbeing it feels like that's what you're doing in action. That's what you're talking about. Really supporting, putting people what matters to them, their health and wellbeing absolutely first and being a team that will all recognise that and do what absolutely you can. Rather than just saying that your job is to sell physical activity, which is the ripple effect across Greater Manchester it's already seen and felt isn't it?

In terms of what next, what does the future look like in Rochdale?

**Sarah:** The Local Pilot's been a big eye opener as well, funding's been great. And it's just reflecting on what we've learned now and the way that we work and feeding that back to other people that we work with as well. Just the approaches of not diving in with traditional activities, learning more from the community, building our partners' links, and then the projects that we're working on as well. So Stoneyfield Park we are developing the infrastructure and then we'll start to take a seat a bit further back, and we want the community to take some ownership. With speaking to people as well, and, getting them to think of new innovative ways of being active rather than your traditional ways of moving more.

And we've got really good links with Sport England as well. And we've just developed an active travel forum as well, steering group, which is really going well. So linking into climate change and living costs and stuff like that. And then the next focus now is community safety, we are just looking at how to link into that. If we can make the community a safe place people are more likely to feel comfortable. I feel like there's still lots to come

**Eve:** And if there's people listening completely inspired by what they've heard. And they've heard that everyone's got a role to play. Any advice about how they can get involved?

**Sarah:** Yeah. Just like don't be afraid to do anything like everyone's got their own personal goal and achievement. It might be that you go for a walk on your own to clear your head. You might go for a walk with your friends to socialise. You might have your own individual goal. There's something there for everyone

and just don't think of exercise as a tick, we want it to be something that you enjoy.

**Eve:** Brilliant. Well, thank you Sarah. Fantastic advocate and yes lovely conversation. Enjoy the rest of your day wherever it takes you.

## **Outro**

**Eve:** We've heard how moving matters to everybody and how we can all play a role to design moving back into everyday life. Now we'd love to hear how you keep moving, and the ways you are supporting others to live an active life. You contact us on our socials. We are on Facebook and Twitter, just search GreaterSport, and don't forget the #GMMovingInAction.

Please do share this episode to people and organisations who will find it useful and join the movement for movement. A big thank you to everyone who's investing in this work and playing their part to test, to learn and to make this happen. This series is a MIC Media production.