



ACTIVE TRANSITION

PROGRAMME

IMPACT REPORT

LEAP Sports Scotland

LEAP



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1. Introduction

Active TRANSition supported 12 trans and non-binary people to improve physical confidence, wellbeing, and community connection while awaiting gender-affirming care, with sustained engagement continuing beyond programme delivery.

The Active TRANSition programme forms part of a wider Scottish Government funded initiative to support individuals on Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) waiting lists and improve access to care. This initiative enabled NHS Boards to work collaboratively with third sector partners to enhance mental health, wellbeing, and community support for trans and nonbinary people awaiting or already using clinical services.

Within NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde (GGC), LEAP Sports Scotland was funded to expand sport and physical activity based interventions that complement existing clinical pathways and services. These interventions were designed to stabilise support provision, reduce isolation, and mitigate preventable mental health deterioration among individuals experiencing extended waiting times for gender-affirming healthcare.





2. Why sport and physical activity matter

Physical activity and sport continue to be significantly underutilised within gender-affirming care. Evidence taken together from our stakeholder surveys, programme evaluations, the Outsport research¹ and NHS needs assessment² highlights that:

Trans people experience the highest levels of exclusion, discrimination, and hostility in sport and fitness settings among all LGBTIQ+ groups.

Early transition periods are a critical window in which individuals are most likely to disengage from physical activity, experience reduced fitness, and encounter heightened health risks.

Many trans people seek support to maintain functional fitness, prepare their bodies for surgery, and use physical activity as part of their transition journey.

However, those on lengthy waiting lists often lack access to safe, affirming environments in which to pursue these goals.

Active TRANSition has been designed to directly address this gap by providing accessible, expert-led, gender-affirming physical activity support well before clinical services become available. By supporting stability, routine, and connection while people wait, early interventions like Active TRANSition can help reduce preventable wellbeing decline during a period of known vulnerability.





3. Sport and physical activity impact from LEAP programmes

Outcomes from LEAP Sports wider Trans Active programme demonstrate the transformative role of trans-inclusive physical activity:

89%

Report increased confidence.

84%

Feel more empowered.

83%

Experience stronger community connection.

>90%

Show >50% improvement in at least one wellbeing metric.

53%

Report increased interest in ongoing sport or fitness, with equal numbers stating they are likely to sustain that interest.

29%

Report increased confidence in using local community facilities.

Qualitative feedback from those engaging with our support programmes emphasise the value of safety, affirmation, and opportunities otherwise avoided in mainstream settings, reflecting the wider need for inclusive community spaces.





4. About the Active TRANSition programme

Active TRANSition is an active wellbeing and personal development programme for trans and non-binary adults on the GIC waiting list or early in their transition. The programme was developed through community consultation to prioritise gender-affirming fitness and emotional wellbeing within a structured and supportive environment.

Active TRANSition follows a pilot programme called “Trans and Non-binary Fitness Programme”, with two consecutive intakes of 6 participants aged 18+. This programme received far more applications (113) than available places (6), demonstrating a substantial unmet need for gender-affirming gym activity.

This pilot was very successful and informed our further work in this area, producing the Active TRANSition programme. This programme used the same model of fitness sessions twice a week for 3 months, but also added more of an emphasis on participants' wellbeing, supporting participants through their fitness and transition journeys, and creating opportunities for connection and learning, because these were areas that were missing but needed for this community. The first iteration of the Active TRANSition programme specifically targeted 16–25-year-olds, reflecting high levels of interest among younger adults in the pilot programme.

We had 12 people go through the first intake, concurrently in two groups of 6. The intake was divided into two smaller groups to accommodate the size of the gym and for personal trainers to be able to pay enough attention to each participant. It was a high-engagement approach with 30 sessions over a 14 week period: 1 one-to-one entry meeting, 24 fitness sessions, 4 group development sessions, and 1 trip. The number of sessions and duration of the programme was determined based on several personal trainers' knowledge on how many sessions in a relatively short term would be required to produce noticeable change for participants.

The programme was delivered by the LEAP staff team, with the specialist element provided by personal trainers from Uplifted, a queer-led gym.

Evaluation data was collected throughout programme delivery using a mixed-methods approach including participant registration information, attendance records, and anonymous and voluntary pre- and post-programme feedback. Participants were invited to complete short evaluation surveys and contribute qualitative reflections on their experiences, including perceived changes in confidence, wellbeing, and connection to their body and community. This was supplemented by facilitator and trainer observations and informal check-ins during sessions to capture emerging themes and contextual insights across the programme.



5. Programme structure

Gender-Affirming Fitness Sessions

- Delivered twice weekly in groups of six.
- Led by queer personal trainers from **Uplifted CIC**, a fully LGBTIQ+ inclusive gym.
- Focused on beginner-friendly weight-training and equipment use.
- Adapted to participants' personal goals.
- Exclusive gym access during sessions, gender-neutral facilities, and a quiet room to ensure safety and comfort.

Group Development Sessions

Structured group sessions complemented the fitness component by providing:

- Peer support, social connection, and opportunities to share lived experiences.
- Discussions on navigating society and physical activity as a trans person.
- Setting personal goals and reflecting on progress.
- Yoga and mindfulness to support fitness and wellbeing journeys.
- Community building between the two fitness groups.

Day Trip and Outdoor Experience

The programme culminated in an inclusive outdoor activity day designed to:

- Strengthen confidence and embodiment.
- Provide a safe introduction to outdoor physical activity.
- Reinforce the personal progress achieved throughout the programme.

Accessibility and Support

Participants benefit from:

- Step-free and gender-neutral facilities.
- Travel expense support.
- Sensory accommodations.
- Tailored adjustments based on individual needs.
- Preparatory meetings and supportive calls/emails with facilitators when needed.

This approach taken focuses on ensuring equitable access and fosters sustained engagement. These measures were essential in enabling equitable access, reinforcing the importance of commissioning approaches that actively remove financial, practical, and environmental barriers to participation.



6. Programme outcomes and observations

Physical and Emotional Wellbeing

The programme functioned both as a proactive wellbeing intervention and as a mitigating response to the documented risks of physical and emotional deterioration commonly experienced by transgender and non-binary people while awaiting gender-affirming healthcare.³ By providing early, structured support during this period, the programme helped participants to maintain and strengthen their wellbeing rather than waiting for decline to occur.⁴ Participants demonstrated significant improvements in:

- Physical competence and understanding of functional fitness.
- Emotional resilience and overall wellbeing.
- Confidence in navigating gym environments.
- Connection to and feeling good about their body.
- Feeling in control of their gender affirmation journey.

Many participants reported that this was the first time they had been able to access a safe and gender-affirming fitness space.

The impact on overall participant wellbeing within this programme was very apparent, very quickly. This is summed up well in observations from the personal trainers who note:

“There’s a lot more than learning lifts, exercising and working on physical health, a lot of what we have seen through these sessions has been holistic, mental, physical, emotional and social.”

The intensity of having sessions twice per week also strongly supported this, with facilitators and trainers reporting significant shifts in a short time.

Role of LGBTIQ-Inclusive Coaching

The involvement of queer personal trainers experienced in working with trans and non-binary people proved pivotal in programme success. Participants developed strong trust in the coaches which is an important factor for individuals who may face heightened vulnerability in fitness environments. This contributed directly to programme retention, confidence, and emotional safety. Additionally, participants may have enrolled in the programme partly because the personal trainers and the gym were advertised as trans-inclusive. The trainers reported that **“We have seen how important it is for members of the queer community to feel safe and included while learning new skills, doing something new can feel vulnerable and being around people from your community, being coached by people from your community and in a gym run by queer people is powerful and that is something we hear a lot in feedback about the sessions.”**



Potential for Continued Engagement

A key aim for this programme was to improve how confident participants feel about attending the gym, and to increase the likelihood that they might continue to do so, or to engage in some other programme of physical fitness. By the end of the programme, every participant was feeling more confident about attending the gym than they had been at the start of the programme.

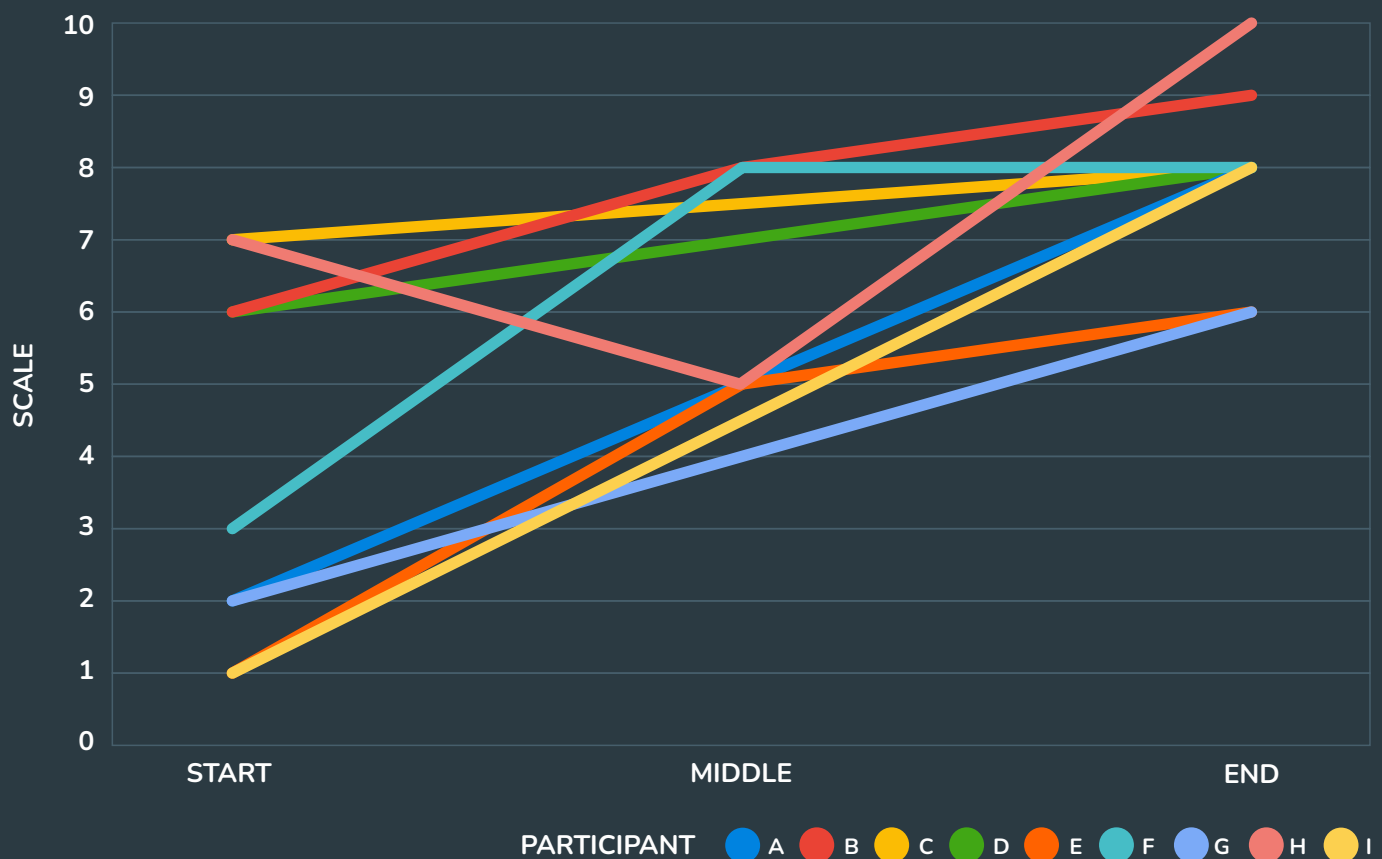
“Being shown the right way to do things and trying a lot of new exercises has really opened up possibilities and variations of what I can do in a gym.”

“I feel a lot more comfortable in a gym environment now and I’m confident in a lot of the exercises which has made me more confident to maybe try one of my local gyms.”

“I have much less anxiety about going to a gym and not knowing what to do with the equipment or the exercises.”



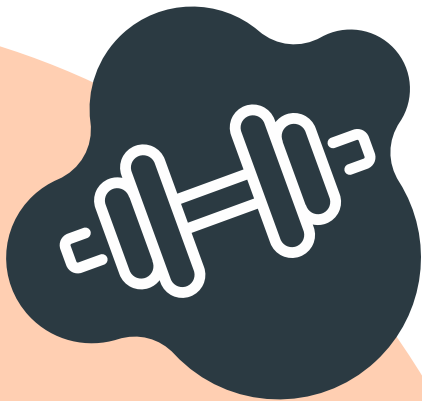
How confident do you feel going to the gym at the moment?





There was a high degree of positive expressed intention and some evidence of immediate action towards continuing the physical activity and fitness journey.

“I just had my first group session with the Glasgow University weightlifting club, and I’m going to continue at the Glasgow University gym. I would have been far too intimidated to try that before this program. I think it did a really good job of preparing me and giving me the confidence to advocate for my own place in open gyms now.”



Since the programme finished, 8 of the participants have continued going to gym sessions every week at the Uplifted gym. A further two participants attend these gym sessions occasionally, and two participants have started going to their own local gyms independently. Therefore, all 12 participants have either kept going to the same gym, started training in a local gym, or are doing weight training at home. Additionally, four of these participants also competed in Uplifted’s annual strength competition. Two participants have started 1-1 coaching with one of the personal trainers, and another has expressed interest in online coaching for training in a local gym. Two participants have also reported continuing some other kind of physical activity after the programme.

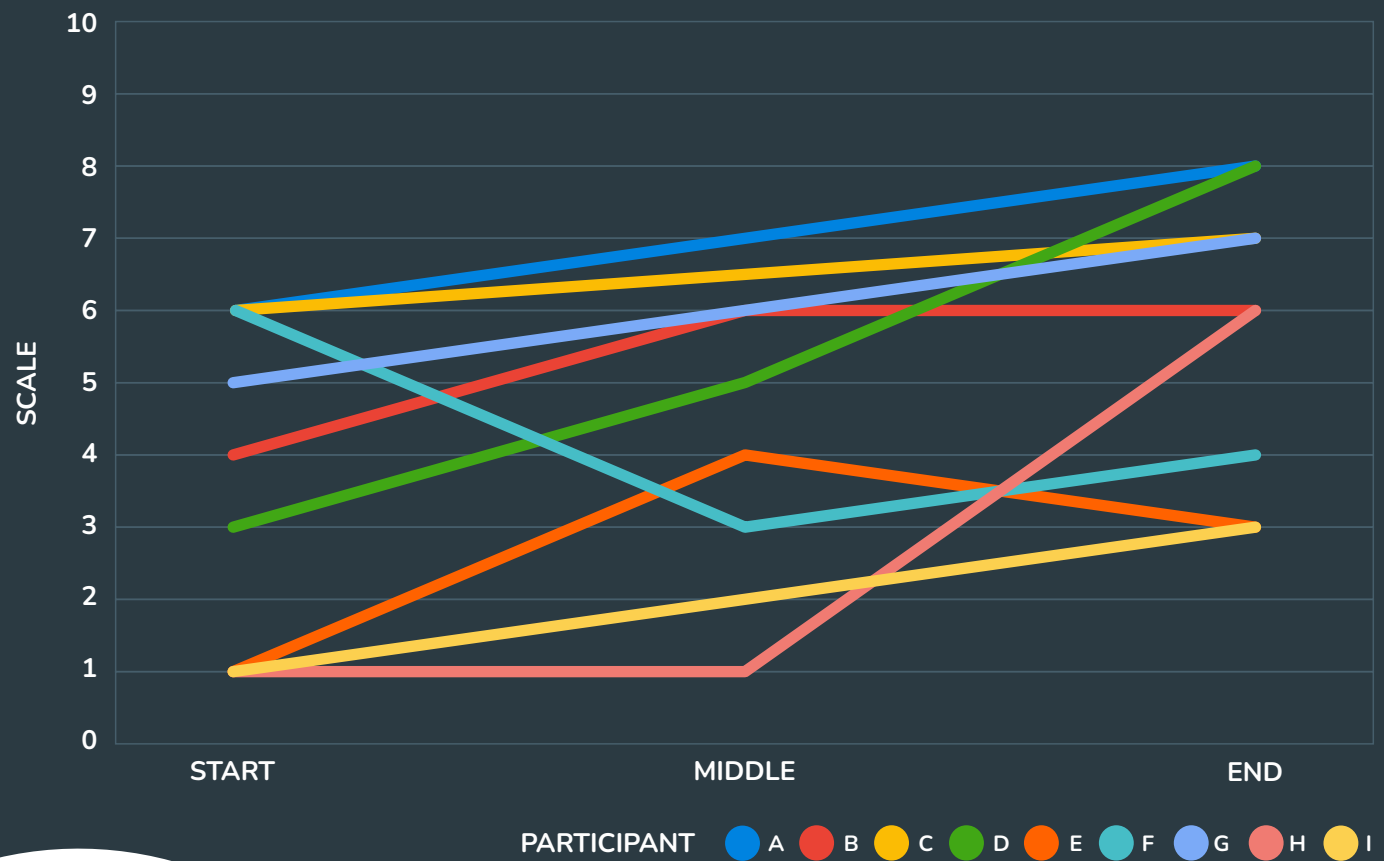
A key gap is whether participation continues in the long term and what enables or prevents sustained engagement. Understanding these pathways could inform future programme design.



Reducing isolation and increasing connectedness

The programme aimed to increase how connected participants felt to the local LGBTIQ+ community. We asked specifically about connections to the trans community in Glasgow, and 8/9 participants told us that they were more connected by the end of the programme than at the start.

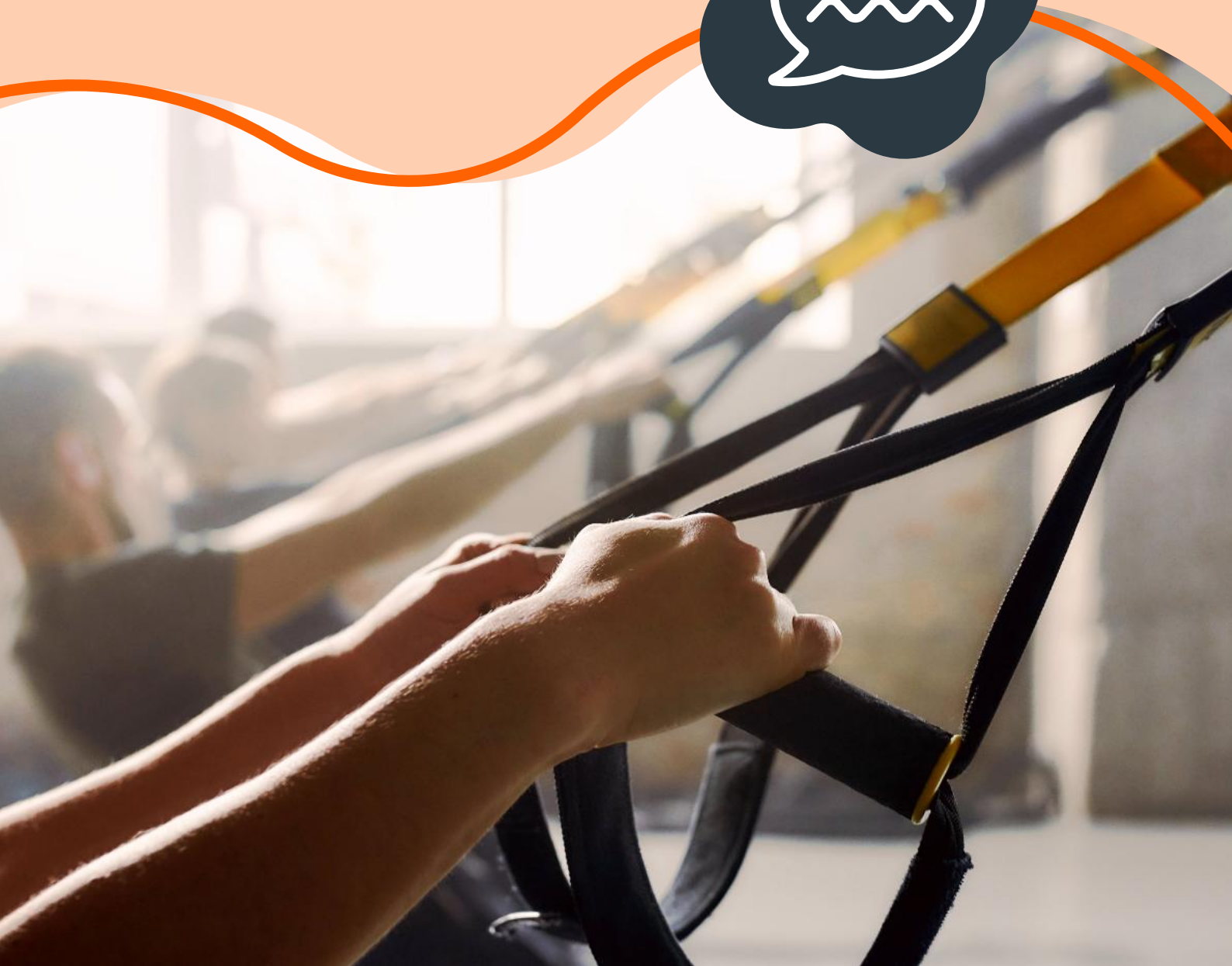
How connected do you feel to the trans community in Glasgow?





“The programme has had a big impact on my life and has really helped me come out of my shell as a person and be more confident around people. Before the programme I didn’t know many LGBTQIA+ people and always felt isolated from the community and this programme has helped change that and I’ve met some really amazing people who always encouraged me and made me feel accepted. This has been the first sports related thing I’ve done for years and I really enjoyed it and feel like I’ve fallen back in love with fitness and sports.”

The personal trainers noted that participants started the sessions without a lot of clear connections to the queer community, but bonded with each other throughout the programme, socialising outside the gym sessions, and some exploring new pronouns in sessions due to the safety of the space. The facilitators also noticed clear improvements in participants’ social confidence from beginning to end of the programme and heard participants mention an increased sense of belonging.

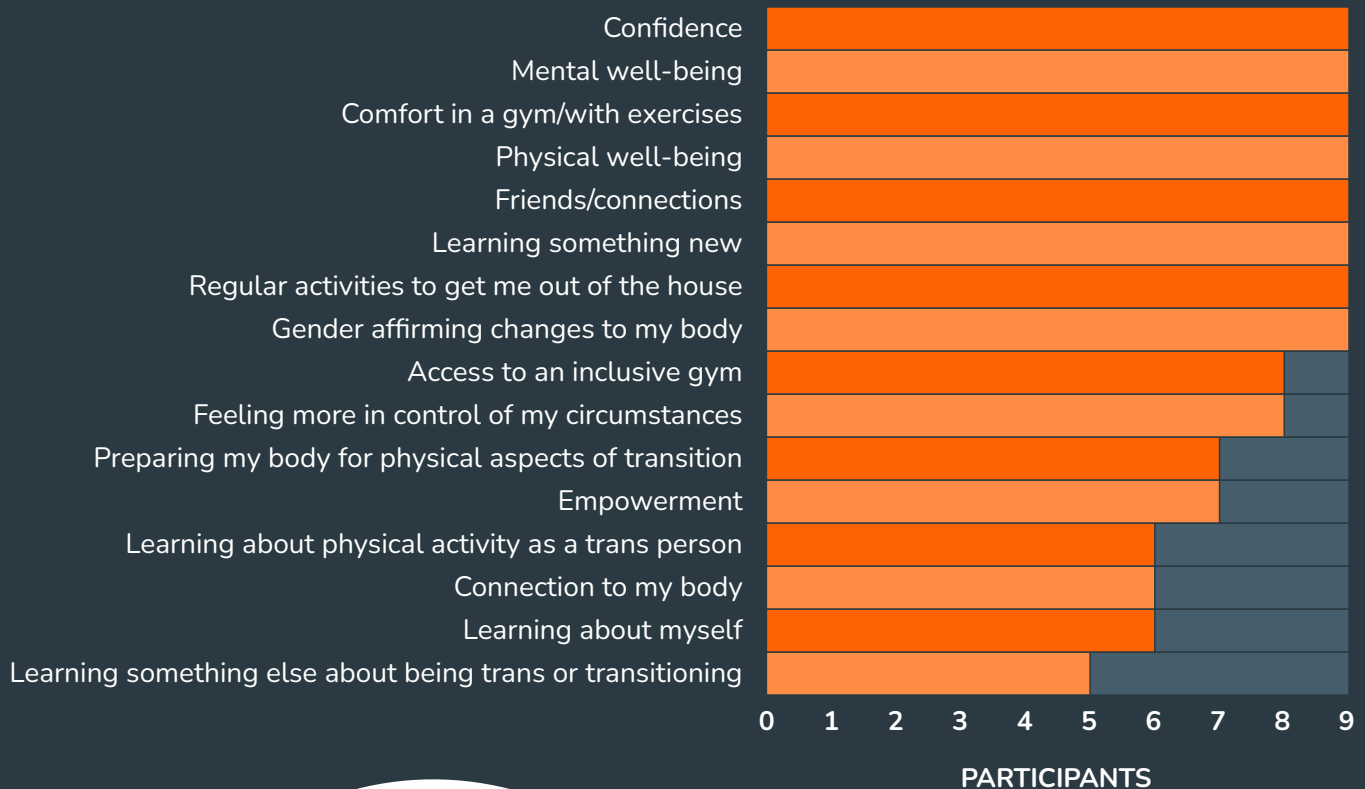




Participant overall perceptions of impact

We asked participants in a final summative exit from the programme, what they gained from their participation and how they felt about the impact of the programme on them.

Feedback from the 9 participants who completed this step are summarised in the chart below, demonstrating the wide array and significance of benefits the programme provided.



Strengthening Community Collaboration

While working with Uplifted or other LGBTIQ-led groups was not a new venture for LEAP, including Uplifted in Active TRANSition has strengthened the partnership and is a positive example of LGBTIQ+ charities working together to deliver impactful services within the community; “From our perspective at Uplifted [the outcomes] show the importance of programs like this but also of queer organisations working together.”

Uplifted further noted that the partnership work with LEAP, running projects for LGBTIQ+ people, feels very important and “hugely beneficial” to them as a charity and gym. Delivering the sessions is also very important to the personal trainers “as queer people working in an industry where [they] are in the minority”. They have learned a lot and feel privileged to work with the participants for this programme.



7. Implications for policy and provision

Active TRANSition provides compelling evidence for the value of **structured, gender-affirming physical activity provision** as part of a broader system of support for people awaiting gender-affirming healthcare. The programme demonstrates that dedicated, community-based interventions can play a meaningful role in reducing isolation, improving confidence, and supporting both physical and emotional wellbeing during a recognised period of vulnerability.

The programme also highlights the importance of **safe, affirming environments and specialist trans-inclusive coaching**. For many participants, mainstream gyms and sport settings are inaccessible due to fear of discrimination, lack of confidence, or previous negative experiences. This suggests that policy approaches which rely solely on “mainstream inclusion” may not be sufficient for some trans and non-binary people, particularly those early in transition or experiencing heightened dysphoria and anxiety.

Active TRANSition further illustrates the value of **third-sector and community partnerships** in providing preventative, early-stage support while clinical waiting times remain long. Integrating, or formally signposting, gender-affirming physical activity and wellbeing programmes within NHS pathways would strengthen the “no wrong door” approach and help ensure people can access the right support at the right time, regardless of where they first present.

Finally, the sustained engagement seen beyond programme delivery indicates that **short-term, high-quality interventions** can create longer-term behaviour change and community connection. This supports the case for continued investment in scalable, repeatable models that build confidence, reduce barriers to participation, and connect people into sustainable local activity options.



8. Conclusions and recommendations

The first Active TRANSition programme has demonstrated to us that:

- Gender-affirming physical activity interventions can be highly effective at improving confidence, wellbeing, and social connection for trans and non-binary people.
- Demand significantly exceeds current capacity, highlighting the need for continuation and repeat delivery, including dedicated provision for different age groups.
- Specialist, inclusive spaces, along with skilled LGBTIQ-inclusive coaching, are crucial for enabling safe reconnecting and participation in sport and physical activity.
- Early-transition support during extended GIC waiting periods can have meaningful impact and should be recognised as an important component of wider service design.
- Provision during the waiting period is not an optional add-on: it is an early intervention that can help prevent avoidable deterioration in physical and emotional wellbeing while people await care.

Overall, the programme offers a strong model for cross-sector collaboration between healthcare providers and community organisations, helping to bridge gaps in current provision and supporting improved health outcomes for trans communities.





Good practice

What good practice looks like in commissioning and delivering trans-inclusive physical activity support includes:

- Dedicated affirming space (or protected time and privacy within an inclusive facility) where participants can engage without fear of scrutiny, discrimination, or misgendering.
- Trans-competent, LGBTIQ-inclusive coaching grounded in trauma-informed and person-centred practice, supporting confidence, autonomy, and safety.
- Clear referral and signposting routes from NHS services and third-sector partners to ensure early access while individuals await gender-affirming care.
- A structured group-based programme model that combines physical activity with peer connection, reflection, and practical wellbeing support.
- Accessibility and removal of practical barriers, including travel support, adaptable sessions, and sensory/environmental adjustments where required.
- Planned pathways beyond programme delivery, such as supported transitions into local facilities, reduced-cost access, follow-on sessions, or community activity options to sustain participation.

The Active TRANSition model is also highly transferable and could be replicated across other NHS areas through partnerships with trusted queer-led and/or third-sector providers.





9. Further programme findings

This section represents additional learning that will shape future iterations of this programme.

- Future intakes will increase the personal development focus through increasing the number and structure of group development sessions.
- Future intakes will include additional optional workshops about relevant topics that support participants in their fitness and transition journeys, as an opportunity for deeper learning.
- The sessions running twice a week, had a marked impact on participant commitment as well as the intensity enabling clearly attributable impact. This model will be repeated.
- The final trip was a nice celebration ending to the programme, but did not enhance the outcomes further than other elements of the programme, so this element will be dropped in future intakes.

1. Outsport Research (2019) <https://leapsports.org/files/1402-Outsport%20Main%20Report.pdf>
2. NHS GGC (2022) <https://www.stor.scot.nhs.uk/server/api/core/bitstreams/7c5d033f-dd63-4eb6-b6f5-c681cf443bf4/content>
3. Scottish Government (2025) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-impact-scottish-government-funding-gender-identity-healthcare/pages/16/>
4. Henderson, N., Selwyn, V., Beezhold, J., Howard, R., Gilmore, R., & Bartolome, I. (2022) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9567995/>



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LEAP

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