

Introduction

Since its inception in 1884, the GAA has been concerned with the health and wellbeing of the Irish people and nation. In a modern Ireland, the Association has worked tirelessly to respond to the ever-changing needs of its members and the communities it serves. This may present itself in providing new and interesting ways for young people to enjoy physical activity, or by providing safe environments that help support their social and emotional development. In providing part of the solution to the childhood obesity challenge facing Ireland, the GAA takes a holistic approach to wellbeing, recognising that our members' physical, emotional, and social health are interrelated and linked.

Any attempt to address the consequences of the obesogenic environment in which much of modern society operates requires a multifaceted, all of government, all of society, response. The GAA proudly plays its part by helping swathes of our juvenile population achieve their recommended weekly physical activity levels, while exposing them to positive values, experiences, habits, and role models that scaffold them on their journey through life.

Part 1 (pages 2-7 inclusive) of this submission outlines the vast tapestry of games opportunities made available through the GAA Games Development Department. It outlines a unique player pathway that offers young people of all abilities the opportunity to engage with Gaelic Games in a way that reflects their individual abilities, interests, and values, while exposing them to the exponential growth opportunities of community and team dynamics.

Part 2 (pages 8-10) highlights the work of the ground-breaking Healthy Clubs project. This award-winning project aims to turn GAA clubs into 'Hubs for Health' in their communities. Using an evidence-based approach that has been independently evaluated, the project has been proven successful in delivering health promoting programmes, policies, and partnerships to young and old through the medium of their local GAA club. The submission looks specifically at the successful Recipes for Success healthy eating programme, that is teaching young members practical cookery skills and fun, engaging way.

Part 1: GAA Games Development & Research Submission

'A shared vision is not an idea...it is rather, a force in people's hearts...at its simplest level, a shared vision is the answer to the question 'What do we want to create?'

- Peter Senge,

The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organisation

GAA Games Development aims to grow the future of Gaelic Games by creating an environment in which people – players, coaches, parents, personnel and volunteers – are constantly challenged and encouraged to stretch¹ themselves, to reflect on their behaviours, to develop character and to put learning at the centre of all activities, whether on or off the field.

The All Blacks have a mantra '*better people make better All Blacks*', in GAA Games Development the belief is that better learners not only make better GAA players but also make better people, better citizens, better coaches, parents and friends.

Year-on-year, GAA Games Development develops new and innovative approaches to increasing participation in Gaelic Games by pushing the boundaries to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. All initiatives are primed to optimise learning opportunities and to enhance the motivation to continue to grow and develop.

In this context, Games Development is keen to progress with the concept of a WeLL (Wellbeing & Lifelong Learning) as the key source of human growth and holistic development across the four CORE (Communal, Occupational, Recreational and Educational) domains of foot of a bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework.

The spiritual & value-laden elements in this concept are enshrined in the acronym "I MOULD TEAM", which is made up of the first letter from each component value (**I**ntegrity, **M**odesty, **O**bjectivity, **U**nity, **L**oyalty, **D**ignity, **T**enancy, **E**mpathy & **M**aturity).

The work carried out in 2017 bears testimony to the value-laden ideal "I MOULD TEAM" and the following report outlines some of the on-going and new initiatives that has played no small part in ensuring that 'Better Learners make Better People and Values Optimise **I**ntention, **A**ttention and **P**otential' and in countering the impact of childhood obesity.

Pat Daly, GAA Director of Games Development & Research

The 2017 GAA Games Development & Research Report highlights current participation levels in the various Games Development activities undertaken in 2017 and outlines proposals for future initiatives that will further increase participation.

The highlights from 2017 can be summarised as follows:

- **142,467 participants on Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps – an increase of 11.5% on 2016 – making it the biggest Child Sport promotion in the world;**
- **The launch of GAA Fun & Run, which is geared to grow inclusivity among able-bodied & disabled cohorts and which is also primed to optimise participation within multi-ethnic, lower socio-economic and multi-generational cohorts.**
- **The launch of the GAA 5 Star Centre to significant acclaim from the INTO and Teacher Training Colleges because of its potential to increase levels of physical activity through the medium of Gaelic games in Primary Schools;**
- Attendance of 783 at the 2017 annual Games Development Conference making it the longest running and best attended Conference of its type in the world – running since 1997 where issues relevant to the Child, Youth & Adult player are addressed in a manner that has regard for GAA values and ethos.

2017 in Focus

The following section provides a summary of the various projects and initiatives undertaken by GAA Games Development Personnel that are relevant in a childhood obesity context.

Child Level – Play to Learn

At Child level, Games Development personnel, volunteer coaches and Primary School teachers undertake a range of activities and projects to ensure that every child can 'Play to Learn'. These project and activities are delivered in a fun, safe and age-appropriate manner in Clubs and Primary Schools the length and breadth of Ireland with a view to providing a quality introduction to Gaelic games. These include:

Club Go Games Blitzes

In 2017, the total number of players participating in a Go Games Blitz Programme amounted to approximately 77,626 children – 15% of whom were female.

Primary School Go Games Blitzes

In 2017, approximately 189,842 pupils participated in the Hurling Go Games Blitz Programmes (54% male and 46% female) while 217,532 pupils played in 5 or more Gaelic Football Go Games Blitzes (53% male and 47% female).

Primary School Coaching

In 2017, more than a quarter of a million Primary School pupils received coaching as part of a Primary Schools Coaching Programme (326,493 children – 53% male and 47% female).

Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps

The Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps are a flagship Games Development initiative at Child level and the number of Camps (1,200) and participants continued to increase in 2017. A total of 142,207 children aged 5 – 13 participated in the 2017 Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps – an 11.5% increase on 2016 participation figures (127,473). The attendance at Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps equates to 20% of all Primary School pupils nationwide. Incredibly, 13 Counties attracted over 30% of the Primary School-going population to their Camps.

National Go Games Week and Croke Park Activity Days

National Go Games Week 2017 took place from Saturday 24th March to Sunday 8th April 2017. During the week 38,616 children participated in Blitzes held nationwide. Furthermore, the four Provinces had the opportunity to participate in Activity Days held in Croke Park during 2017.

2018 Games Development & Research Priority Area's:

GAA 5 Star Centres:

A priority area identified by GAA Games Development & Research in 2017 was to develop a Massive Volunteer Army comprised of individuals who make a considerable effort to promote and develop Gaelic games in line with the underlying values of the Association.

The GAA set about achieving this through the roll-out of the GAA 5 Star Centre Initiative. The purpose of the GAA 5 Star Centre Initiative is to recognise and support Primary Schools that provide pupils with 60

minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Activity per week. Through the initiative, Primary Schools will be invited to apply to become a GAA 5 Star Centre and to deliver a range of approved activities that will ensure that the pupils will experience fun, friendship, fairness, freedom and ultimately improve their fitness through Gaelic games. The initiative has been developed to address the fact that only 18% of Primary School pupils receive 60 minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Activity per day and 1 in 4 Irish children are now classified as obese according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

This level of inactivity is further compounded by increased urbanisation² and changes to traditional housing norms³, which are leading to decreased access to facilities and areas for play. GAA Games Development believes that by running this initiative in a school-setting it will be able to circumvent a range of challenges arising due to urbanisation.

The GAA 5 Star Centre is based upon the development of children's fundamental & functional movement skills – culminating in bi-lateral coordination - and wellbeing through the following activities:

1. *Have-a-Ball* 2. *Fun & Run* 3. *Strike It & Catch & Kick* 4. *Go Games* 5. *Skills Challenges*

These activities provide a framework for the delivery of a '5 Star' programme of Gaelic games in Primary Schools, which is age-appropriate and meets the developmental needs of the children. The impact of these activities will be fully researched and evidenced through the "Moving Well - Being Well" research study, which is currently being undertaken by the GAA Games Development Department in partnership with DCU.

Participation by a School in the initiative is designed to reinforce the concept of intrinsic motivation with a view to promoting a growth mindset among participating Schools. The Schools that deliver upon these activities with a view to ensuring each child receives a minimum of 60 minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Activity per week will be recognised as 'GAA 5 Star Centres' and supported by the Games Development personnel at County level.

The initiative was launched in December 2017 and will be piloted with a select number of schools from September 2018. The objective is to have 90%+ Primary Schools registered and operating as a GAA 5 Star Centre (3,560 schools) by 2022. It is anticipated that the volume of activity generated would be in the region of 16 million hours per annum.

² 63% of Primary School Children now live in urban areas (town with a population of 1,500+);

³ The number of pre-school children living in flats/apartments increased by 24.3% since 2011 to 31,891.

GAA Fun & Run:

GAA Fun & Run was successfully piloted in 2017 and the project received grant-aid under the Dormant Account Funding. The following is a broad overview of how the project will be progressed in 2018:

- GAA Inclusion module: Pilot 1 (29/01/18);
- GAA Inclusion module: Pilot 2 (20/03/18);
- GAA Healthy Club Day – 40 Clubs invited to participate in GAA Fun & Run (03/03/18);
- General Induction Day for GAA Fun & Run Project – (28.03.18 – Abbotstown)
 - Stakeholders will receive GAA Inclusion Training and a GAA Fun & Run pack worth €500;
 - Stakeholder will receive communication training;
 - Present on the day -
 - Games Development Managers – linked to LSP locations;
 - LSP/SIDO – 10 LSPs linked to Games Managers locations;
 - Teachers (10 schools – Special Schools/mainstream);
 - Healthy Club coordinators (40 Clubs);
- GAA Fun & Run to be operationalised for a minimum of six weeks with the support of the full-time Games Development personnel and Healthy Club Coordinators (anticipated outcomes, review and report structures will all be built into the process).

GAA NRG Hubs:

The aim of the GAA NRG Hubs is to develop a player-centred initiative that combines games-based and learner-led activities - including Body-by-Mind (BXM) Workshops - which can be adapted for delivery in Clubs, Post-Primary Schools and in dedicated venues in the Community for the following age grades:

- 12/13 years; 14/15 years; 16/17 years.

The Project will provide informal developmental opportunities – on and off the field of play - for players at Youth level, which will complement the existing Youth performance pathway. Through the Project young people will experience fun, friendship, fairness and ultimately develop their fitness, which derives

from engaging in 60 minutes of Moderate to Vigorous Activity per week through a combination of the following:

1. Super Games Blitzes (Hurling and/or Football) 2. Catch & Kick 3. Strike It 4. Fun & Run

The Project will operate in three key contexts: a) Club; b) Post-Primary School; c) Community.

- In Clubs: Club/s can sign up to host the delivery of the Project over a series of weeks for an age-grade. The Project will be delivered in Clubs by a team of volunteer NRG Facilitators, who have received training on the delivery of on-field and off-field activities;
- In Schools: Schools can sign up to deliver the Project as part of a 100-hour PE Short Course. The Project in Post-Primary Schools will be delivered by Teachers;
- In Communities: A Community Centre/LSP or Games Development Personnel can sign up to host the delivery of the Project over a series of weeks in a 'pop-up' facility for an age-grade. Suitable facilities will include County and Provincial Centres of Excellence or Third Level facilities. The Project will be delivered in a Centre by a team of volunteer NRG Facilitators, who have received training on the delivery of on-field and off-field activities.

Participation in the GAA NRG Project will be organised, operationalised and coordinated through an online system that will be made available through the existing website www.nrg.gaa.ie. Through the website, interested Clubs, Schools and Communities will be able to register an interest in hosting or delivering a GAA NRG input and a National Coordinator will work with these groups to ensure that capacity, resources and guidance are provided to deliver upon this.

Crucial to all of this will be the Learning & Development aspect for GAA NRG Facilitators – this will include both face-to-face training and online inputs. It is envisioned that the Learning & Development aspects will be included in the pilot with Clubs (September 2018) and with Post-Primary Schools (September 2019). In the interim, any Games Development personnel seeking to establish a Super Games Centre separate to a GAA NRG Hub will be provided with training on request.

Youth Level – Learn to Compete

Retaining young players as they enter the Youth level of the GAA Player Pathway is a key objective for Games Development. The following activities are designed to support this objective and ensure that the young players 'Learn to Compete':

Super Games Centres

In 2015 a total of 10 SGCs were organised, this number increased to 115 SGCs in 2016. In 2017, a total of 793 Clubs and 381 Post-Primary Schools participated in 3 or more Super Games Blitzes.

20,091 boys played an average of 5 Super Games Blitzes each at Club level while 14,884 boys and 1,751 girls played an average of 4 Super Games Blitzes each at Post-Primary School level.

Part 2 - Prepared by Colin Regan, GAA Community & Health manager

The **Community & Health Department** is the newest department in the headquarters of the GAA.

It was formed in 2014 following increased requests for support from clubs and counties around the country and internationally relating to health and wellbeing topics. The Association had in 2006 introduced the ASAP (Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention) programme in partnership with the HSE. The creation of the Community & Health department was a natural progression from this, broadening and formalising the scope of the Association's work in contributing to the health of its members and the nation.

The Healthy Club Project

The Healthy Club Project is the department's flagship project. It involves a formal partnership between Healthy Ireland (including the HSE and National Office for Suicide Prevention) and a CSR partnership with Irish Life. It aims to transfer the evidence-based practices of health promotion to the GAA club setting while supporting clubs in becoming 'Hubs for health' in their communities.

Phase 3 of the project (which will run until Oct 2019) involves 150 clubs across the 32 counties. An independent evaluation by Waterford IT's Centre for Health Behaviour Research has endorsed the project's unique capacity to deliver health promotion through a partnership model direct to communities. It is hoped to open the project to all 1,600 clubs in Ireland in Phase 4, which will launch in early 2020.

All participating clubs must appoint a **Healthy Club Officer** and project team. Training is provided to these volunteers by GAA tutors. (The same training is available to clubs not yet formally participating in the project readying them for future engagement. In 2017 some 400 Healthy Clubs officers were trained around the country). The training guides Healthy Clubs to pursue and foster policies, partnerships, and programmes, that support a health-enhancing culture and environment. It aims to make the healthy choice the easy choice while making available services and resources that might not otherwise be easily accessible in their communities.

As part of their journey, participating clubs ask their members and communities: 'What areas of health would you like us to focus on?' The most common responses (based on 1,400 questionnaires) were:

- Healthy eating
- Physical activity for non-playing members
- Mental health/ emotional wellbeing
- Gambling, drug, alcohol, and tobacco education

- Community development (including engaging older members of communities, providing games for persons with special needs, and reaching out to ‘new Irish’ populations)

Recipes for Success

To respond specifically to the demand to support healthier eating amongst child and juvenile playing populations, the Community & Health department developed in 2016 the innovative Recipes for Success initiative. Devised in partnership with St. Angela’s Home Economics Teacher Training College, Sligo, and Dr Crionna Tobin, a leading sports nutritionist, the healthy eating programme contains several unique elements designed to engage the young male and female GAA player:

1. All the recipes, while healthy and based on nutritious whole foods, are performance enhancing. This speaks to the young athlete who is trying to become the best player they can be.
2. Participants enjoy a two-hour practical cookery ‘training session’ with their team hosted in their local secondary school by the Home Economics teacher. This is coordinated by the Healthy Club Officer. The session is viewed as a ‘team bonding exercise’ and this helps encourage engagement.
3. Leading GAA stars have endorsed the manual, outlining their favourite performance-enhancing health meals in the resource.
4. The only cost to clubs is to cover the ingredients, which typically coast between €50-80 for a squad of 25 people.

Recipes for Success targets teenage players primarily, seeking to deliver life-skills that will serve them well both on and off their field. An evaluation of the project by St. Angela’s revealed that:

- Over 400 young people participated in workshops across 32 clubs in 2017.
- Of a sample size of 224 participants with a mean age of 16-years-old, 170 were male. Amanda McCloat, Head of Home Economics at St. Angela’s, found the percentage of males remarkable normally very difficult to engage this age-group in cookery classes.
- 74% reported themselves ‘definitely more confident’ at preparing healthy meals for themselves.
- Over a quarter reported increased nutritional knowledge because of the programme.
- Interest in healthy eating and nutrition increased by 10% overall.



Juvenile members of Kilmacud Crokes enjoying a Recipes for Success workshop.

Healthy Clubs that participate in Recipes for Success have two additional requirements made of them.

1. They must adopt healthy eating guidelines (template provided by the Community & Health department based on information provided by *SafeFood* and our inhouse nutritionist).

GAA Healthy Eating Guidelines:

- a. Promote the use of fresh fruit and water after games and training instead of crisps, confectionary, junk food, or sugary/sports drinks. This has proven very popular amongst parents, coaches, and most importantly young players.
 - b. Advise against the use of any sports supplements by persons under the age of 18.
 - c. Recommend that clubs are mindful of appropriate sponsorship regarding food
2. Clubs are also required to host a nutritional talk for the wider club membership and community, spreading the positive message and influence beyond the playing population.



Healthy Club ambassadors Philly McMahon (Dublin All Ireland winner and All Star) and Anna Geary (former Cork All Ireland winning All Star) bring audiences through a healthy recipe during one of four Healthy Club roadshows that reached over 500 people in 2017.

This work is designed to help GAA clubs become hubs for health within their communities, and to show leadership and example on societal issues such as childhood obesity. It also reflects the GAA support for the Healthy Ireland framework, fulfilling our part in the understanding that health is everyone's responsibility and should be accessible to all in their own communities.

Community & Health Department Recommendations:

1. This work is all undertaken by volunteers at club and county level. To better support them, the Healthy Clubs project should be formally recognised as a viable setting for the delivery of health promotion and should be included in the workplans of HSE health promotion officers and nutritionists. Having such experts available to deliver talks/training to Healthy Clubs would greatly accelerate this work while showing tangible endorsement and support for the tireless efforts of volunteers.
2. For the Healthy Club project to achieve its full potential and a national scale (involving 1,600 clubs, one in every community in Ireland) provincial coordinators are required. The GAA requires

additional support to recruit such personnel and we ask that this committee support a request to increase the GAA's existing SLA with the HSE to facilitate this, offering exceptional return on investment for the Government.

3. The GAA is open to delivering an equivalent of Recipes for Success designed to target pre-teen players and their parents. This could be piloted as part of the Healthy Clubs project before being rolled out across the Association. Safefood could serve as a potential statutory partner, offering expertise and seed funding.