

Gaelic Athletic Association



Inclusion in Sport Submission

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Introduction

The GAA would not exist without the communities it represents and serves. Every club in the Association already supports the development of its communities in a broad variety of ways, whether that's offering young people the chance to better themselves through sport or by supporting local charities through fundraising events and functions. The GAA's programs highlight how clubs can maximize their positive influence, be that by becoming more age-friendly in engaging older members, supporting diversity and inclusion by encouraging individuals from all backgrounds, religions, sexual orientation, and populations, or supporting the engagement of people with additional needs to become involved in GAA activities.

The journey continues towards the realisation of our manifesto 'Where We All Belong'. We know that persons with disabilities, members of the Travelling Community, members of the LGBT+ community, migrant populations and ethnic minorities, and many other minority groups, are under-represented in sports clubs in Ireland, and the GAA is no exception.

Building a single GAA family

The primary responsibility of leadership in the GAA is one of stewardship. We are all duty bound to develop the Association for future generations such that it is safely handed on better and stronger than before, with its aims and ethos safeguarded and bolstered.

That is a considerable responsibility, and in 2023 it represents both an opportunity and a risk. The GAA strongly believe that the future of Gaelic games is as a combined family governing all our codes. That is the opportunity to be embraced.

Changes in our society, changes in our membership, changes in demographics, changes in attitudes all lead to the same incontrovertible conclusion – Gaelic games will be stronger and more vibrant if we combine our best efforts and pursue our common aims jointly.

There is considerable common ground already. Indeed, almost everything successful that we have embarked upon in recent years has been undertaken together e.g., the Player Pathway, Healthy Clubs, Diversity and Inclusion, Safeguarding, Cúl Camps, Foireann etc. these have all been joint initiatives and their success bears out the value of collaboration.

The appetite is clearly there on the part of the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association to migrate our relationship from shared projects to a shared formal structure.

We are currently engaged in a widespread consultation process among our respective members and stakeholders to inform how best to progress. Interestingly, while each organisation is clearly committed to the journey ahead our shared view of what that formal structure might look like is still evolving.

Sport and Disability

The GAA has two specific disability sports programs, Wheelchair Hurling / Camogie and GAA Football for ALL. There are over 140 special schools, over four provinces catering for 9,338 pupils with different types of disability and special needs.

Among them are special schools for students who have a general learning disability at a mild or moderate level; schools for visually impaired and hearing-impaired students; a few schools for students with physical disabilities; a small number of special schools for students who have emotional challenges. We also have inclusive Cúl Camps and All-Star Programmes which are club Programmes that give everyone in the community the opportunity to come and experience the GAA club.

Wheelchair Hurling and Camogie is an inclusive activity involving a team six-a-side which is suitable for all ages, genders, and abilities. The game encompasses a range of fundamental skills that exist in Gaelic Hurling and Camogie. The rules have been modified to adapt these skills to suit the individuals involved and their capabilities. It aims to enable individuals to grow and maintain optimum participation across the full diversity of Irish community life.

There are inter-provincial leagues during the year hosted in a variety of counties to spread the game and help it grow with the M. Donnelly All-Ireland Final being the pinnacle. It is the most eagerly anticipated date of the year for Wheelchair Hurlers from across the island. The competition comprises of a blitz between teams from the four provinces, vying for the coveted title.

The game itself comprises of some subtle differences to the traditional game – there are six players on each side, with each squad usually containing around 12 or 13 members, and the scoring allows for ground hurling and goals only. Squads are made up of a mix of male and female players. Its popularity has soared, and the GAA is delighted with how it is progressing; numbers in each province have grown year on year.

A phenomenal response nationwide to the Sport for All Disability Supports Club Fund for 2022 saw over 450 clubs from the 26 counties apply for the Government/Sport Ireland 'Sport for All' grants in 2022. A club grant of €1,435 was allocated to the clubs that successfully completed the applications and met the criteria set down by Sport Ireland.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children and partners (including the GAA) held a conference in Croke Park, entitled 'Beyond Limits 19, Empowering Children with Disabilities'. The GAA "Play on the Pitch" was the main event where the children participated in the GAA Fun and Run activity and many other 'GAA for All' Games.

The #Signmeup initiative includes the Gaelic games ISL video which shows the most used GAA terms in Irish Sign Language. Throughout the video as a Gaelic Games skill or action is demonstrated while the related ISL Sign is being shown. The aim of the video is to create greater awareness of ISL and provide the viewer with the opportunity to learn some elements of our third national language and how it can be integrated into Gaelic games activities.

The GAA has developed a SAFE Club program which oversees the key areas of health and safety, and accessibility for all.

Inclusive Club Initiative

A very special initiative was set up for children with special needs aged 9yrs -12yrs in 2016 called 'The Raheny All Stars'. Their main objective was to include children that could not take part in a typical team game, assisting them with ball skills, exercise, and of course, fun and enjoyment in a safe environment. Another important goal was to promote the ethos of inclusion in the community and the club.

The children need 1:1 or 1:2 support. The group is child-centered with an emphasis on keeping the children and young people safe when they come to sessions. All of the coaches adhere to best practices and are all Garda vetted have received Child Protection training, GAA inclusion module training, and completed CARA Disability Inclusion training.

This program reflects the popularity and growth in clubs of All-Star training and games opportunities for persons with special needs and the number of children with additional needs now participating in Inclusive Camps (over 752 mainstream Camps in 2022 facilitated involvement by participants with additional needs; some 2,309 children were identified as requiring as special needs assistant (SNA) on the registration page).

The GAA held it first National All Star Inclusion Day in Croke Park in August 2022. Children, coaches and parents from across Ireland attended on the day. The main objective of the programme was to promote an ethos of inclusion and participation in GAA clubs. Coaches support the children to take part in a team game, assisting them with ball skills, exercise, and of course, fun and enjoyment in a safe environment. Another important goal was to promote the ethos of inclusion in the community and the club. The massive stadium of Croke Park provided a safe and secure environment for all to enjoy an All-Ireland Final Feeling Day.

Sport and LGBTQIA+ Communities

The GAA, the LGFA, and the Camogie Association were officially represented at last year's Belfast Pride and have participated in the Dublin Pride Parade since 2019 and have become the first sporting organisations to set up a Gender Diversity Working Group.

The Gender Diversity Working Group was established to look at the promotion of gender diversity and includes members of each of the Gaelic games family along with external people with expertise in the area.

There are several pillars, the first pillar called the participation of the LGBTQIA+ community in Gaelic Games has been completed and sent for consultation to the three Associations.

Na Gael Areach and Areach Uladh GAA clubs have been leading the way in welcoming many new individuals from the LGBTQIA+ community to a create safe and welcoming environment in the GAA community and in other local sports clubs.

The Gaelic Games Transgender Working Group was formed in 2022 and to produce a white paper designed to inform policy regarding the participation in Gaelic Games by persons from the transgender/non-binary community. The White paper has been completed and will be submitted for consideration to the Safeguarding, Player Welfare and Sport Science committees for policy recommendations.

A safe and supportive sports club eLearning project is also in progress, with Belongto and other sporting bodies, around LGBTQI+ educational coaching terminology and understanding.

Intersectionality in Sports.

People are more than a single identity. We all have a gender, ethnicity, nationality and sexual orientation etc. Intersectional is a recognition of all these multiple identities and the understanding that multiple forms of discrimination can occur at the same time. The GAA know this is very important and that is why we have developed an inclusion policy because it helps us to understand that one size does not fit all. The GAA uses the methodology of a Human right based approach. The development of the TRUST (The TRUST online course introduces learners to key concepts on human rights education through sports) online resource in 2020 by the GAA and partners is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is based on the international Human right standards and operationally directed to promote and protect human right.

Sport and Ethnic minorities

The GAA For All Committee represents the GAA, the LGFA, the Camogie Association, GAA Handball, and the Rounders Association along with many other stakeholders. This committee engages in awareness campaigns and the development of guidelines for inclusion.

Several of the GAA For All initiatives are inter-cultural activities working collaboratively with Sport Against Racism Ireland “Sport fest”. Diversity and Inclusion training workshops are delivered in clubs together with seminars and online webinars.

GAA clubs have been working closely with culture migrant centres across Ireland. The GAA, UNHCR and SARI are pro-actively working in collaboration to support members when an issue of racism, discrimination or other forms of hostilities arises. All administrations, mentors, stewards, coaches, referees, and members will continue to be trained in how to respond to racism, discrimination or other forms of hostilities,

The GAA encourages and creates awareness that cultural competence in the club is the embedding and putting into everyday practice cultural awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity.

The GAA Diversity and Inclusion Officer, along with the GAA Intercultural ambassador Zak Moridi, work with the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) on the 'ALL against Racism' campaign; Zak Moridi became one of the main presenters of this National campaign.

Grassroots sport and *socioeconomic diversity*

One of the most exciting movements in recent years in Gaelic Games is the growth of social games. The LGFA's Gaelic for Mothers & Others established a successful template and following the launch in 2021 of GAA for Dads & Lads (social football and hurling targeting men aged 35+) by the GAA some 98 clubs have registered teams, including two international units.

In addition to football and hurling, social offerings have also been devised by Rounders, Handball, and Camogie, and are being promoted through the Healthy Clubs network and beyond.

Such games support the GAA's mission of delivering lifelong participation while offering retired, lapsed, or first-time players an enjoyable stimulus for their physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing.

GAA National Inclusion Fitness Week

The GAA's National Inclusion Fitness week began in 2019 with 127 clubs participating, designed to ensure those who may not traditionally participate in the activities associated with Gaelic games get the opportunity to do so.

In 2021 and 2022 over 280 events were held over 13 counties through the GAA Healthy Club Programs with an est. 12,200 participants. This year the GAA will engage with the 470 GAA Irish Life Healthy Clubs to roll out an Inclusive event as part of their output covering Diversity and inclusion.

Through our collaboration with CARA (now Active Disability Ireland) over 480 GAA clubs signed up to the Sports Inclusion Charter as of the end of 2022.

Ballyhauis GAA in Co. Mayo was the first GAA club to host a multicultural community seminar with the GAA Diversity and Inclusion officer Ger McTavish and Sean Óg O Halpin participating in panel discussions.

The GAA continue to work with DCU- Centre of Excellence in diversity and inclusion on a collaboration project. Research studies are ongoing with Trinity University, Tangent Academy with their five regional projects to focus on Diversity and Inclusion in the GAA context.

GAA Healthy Club Conference

The 2022 GAA Healthy Clubs Conference (sponsored by Irish Life) took place on November 12th in Croke Park; 400 delegates representing over 200 clubs from across Ireland attended representing clubs already in the programme and those eager to join.

The theme 'Living our Values' sought to explore the values that are common across the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie associations, namely: Community Identity and Pride; Teamwork and Volunteerism; Inclusiveness; and Player Welfare and Respect. Workshops across these themes, brought to life through a healthy club case study, involved delegates discussing the key facilitators and barriers to implementing these values in their clubs and in Gaelic Games as a whole. These case studies clubs were as follows:

- Player Welfare and Respect - Ballygunner GAA, Waterford
- Community Identity and Pride- East Belfast GAA club, Down
- Inclusiveness - Blessington GAA, Wicklow
- Teamwork and Volunteerism Éire Óg Ennis GAA, Clare

Oisín McConville delivered a powerful keynote address along with an insightful panel discussion with Manus O' Boyle (Donegal), Niamh O'Sullivan (Meath), Pádraig O' Hora (Mayo), and Margaret Farrelly (Cavan).

Ireland Lights Up (National Program)

Ireland Lights Up came to an end in March 2023 with over 1000 clubs signing up; over 1200 clubs signed up to ILU & Steps challenge combined. A selected number of clubs from Monaghan, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Limerick, Dublin, Tipperary and Laois were showcased on the RTE Operation Transformation programme.

Drug & Alcohol Workshops

Three presentations containing educational content for club members were developed by representatives from the HSE's Regional & Local Drug & Alcohol Task Forces; training for clubs will roll out in the coming months.

National Substance Misuse Webinar

In March 2023, the GAA hosted a Substance Misuse webinar which focused on supporting clubs to develop Substance Use Policies within their own clubs. Delivery of the webinar was supported by Western Regional Drugs Task Force and ASCERT.

Dermot Earley Youth Leadership Initiative (DEYLI)

A total of 220 young people across 14 clubs completed the DEYLI 2021/2022 programme. Clubs included: Cuala, Kilcock, Eire Og, Castleknock, Sarsfields, Ballinderreen, Clontarf, St Eunans St Kevins, Round Towers, Na Fianna, Curry, Kilmacow, Dromard. A number of these young people will go on to complete the third and final module, enabling them to graduate from NUIG with a Level 6 Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action in October.

Youth Leadership & Engagement

Research continues to highlight the disproportionate impact of the Covid pandemic on the lives of younger people. The GAA Future Leaders TY programme, delivered in partnership with the PDST (Professional Development Services for Teachers) remained a significant touchpoint for young GAA members or those interested in finding out more about the GAA who are in transition year. With dropout rates from organised sport high during the transition out of secondary school, Future Leaders seeks to engage tomorrow's male and female leaders across multiple elements of the broader Gaelic Games experience. Modules include event management and sports administration, coaching, wellbeing, nutrition, history, refereeing, sports journalism, history, and sustainability – all explored through the prism of Gaelic Games. Approximately 400 schools in the 26 counties registered for the 2021-22 academic year, with over 7,000 students engaged to date. Highlights of the year gone include the return of the #GAAsolo skills and wellbeing challenge and the Podcast series led by Sally Fox covering topics from women in sport to nutrition and strength and condition for students.

Establishing a strong school-club link will be a priority for the programme into the future, including close alignment with Irish Life GAA Healthy Clubs.

Sport and older people

The GAA Social Initiative continues to grow in its capacity to enrich the lives of all older members of our communities while specifically reaching out to isolated older men across the island. From its genesis in the observations of then President Mary McAleese of a dearth of older men at events she attended across the island of Ireland, it has grown from a small pilot project involving GAA clubs across four counties to one of the Association's flagship community outreach projects.

The mission of the GAA Social Initiative is to make clubs more age-friendly, by increasing the participation of older members of society, with a focus on older men, through events specifically designed to enrich their lives and respect the important contribution they have made and can continue to make to community life.

The GAA's mission statement states: "The GAA is a community-based volunteer organisation promoting Gaelic Games, culture and lifelong participation". For many age-groups, our games can meet their participation needs; however, as an adult gets older their needs increase while

participation opportunities diminish. The reality is that many fall away from their GAA club and the connection with what once was an integral part of their lives dwindles. This can in turn lead to less engagement with their community. The GAA is committed to reversing this trend through the Social Initiative.

Age Friendly Stadia

Croke Park Stadium has been formally recognised as being Age Friendly by the World Health Organisation Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities and Age Friendly Ireland. The GAA is currently working with ALONE on a pilot project of social events for older adults. The first Alone Connacht events hosted in Castlebar Mitchells GAA (Mayo) and Eslin GAA (Leitrim). This encompass and UPMC/GAA/ALONE Exercise classes and Walking Football.

Executive Summary

The GAA is, first and foremost, a community organisation. Our strength lies in the fact that we are active and vibrant element of community life all over the island of Ireland and indeed further afield. We strive to promote life-long participation in sport and in the community, and to champion the concept of volunteerism. Irish society is changing and evolving, and the GAA must evolve in tandem.

We aim to extend a welcome to people of all backgrounds, genders, ages and abilities. The GAA aims to be a positive influence in the lives of our members and that our membership is as large and as diverse as possible. These aims are valid not just because of the impact we believe we can have in the lives of those we serve, but because a diverse GAA is a better GAA and will serve us well as we strive to maintain our place at the heart of Irish sporting and cultural life.

The programmes and initiatives detailed in this document present a brief illustration of the means by we strive to fulfil those aims. Much of our work is undertaken in partnership with other organisations and agencies, and we are fortunate to enjoy many such fruitful relationships.

The Association welcomes this opportunity to present out thinking to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on our initiatives, our progress and our challenges. Our ambitions are limited only by our resources – meaning not just funding, but crucially, volunteer time. We welcome, too, the opportunity to learn from other sporting organisations and to play our part in advancing the role that sport can play in fostering the values that can make Ireland an inclusive and welcoming society.

These are the values that the GAA espouses and that we try our best to live by, making the GAA a place “Where We All Belong”.

Appendix 1

References

<https://www.gaa.ie/my-gaa/community-and-health/social-inclusion/>
<https://www.gaa.ie/news/zero-tolerance-for-racism-in-the-gaa/>
<https://learning.gaa.ie/communityandhealth>
<https://www.ihrec.ie/allagainstracism/>
<https://trustsport.net/online-course/>
<https://learning.gaa.ie/diversityinclusion>
<https://www.gaa.ie/my-gaa/community-and-health/social-inclusion/social-initiative>

Appendix 2

Healthy Club Initiatives Delivered 2020- 2021, this small sample of Diversity and Inclusion data is currently from 272 clubs that have update the healthy Club portal. Monitor and Evaluation still ongoing for accurate data.

1. Delivered/Reported priority areas:

	Physical Activity	Community Development	Social Inclusion	Substance Use/Gambling	Mental Fitness	Healthy Eating
%	30.9%	22.9%	15%	11.7%	11.9%	7.6%

2. Gender Engagement across all initiatives:

Male	Female	Other
45.2%	45%	9.8%

3. Numbers reached per priority area:

	Physical Activity	Community Development	Social Inclusion	Substance Use/Gambling	Mental Fitness	Healthy Eating
Numbers	20,283	30,510	10,717	14,472	13,176	10,205
%	20.4%	30.7%	10.8%	14.6%	13.3%	10.3%

4. Age Groups Engaged:

	0-11	12-17	18-39	40-54	55-64	65+
Numbers	5523	9661	45775	21147	3480	13777
%	5.6%	9.7%	46.1%	21.3%	3.5%	13.9%

5. Primary Audience Target Reached

Primary Audience	Total Programs	Numbers Reached
General Community	366	61181
Club Members	213	27805

Older Adults (65+)	65	5925
Other	38	3331
Individual(s) with a disability	19	353
Individuals Over 35	14	617
Ethnic Minorities	3	38
LGBTQI+	3	113

6. Social Inclusion Gender Engagement

Male	Female	Other
4971	5247	499
46.4%	49%	4.7%

7. Social Inclusion Gender Engagement by Programme

Programme	Males	Females	Other
GAA for all	377	286	92
Social Initiative (for Older People)	2592	2745	253
Gender Diversity and LGBTQI+	49	85	1
Intercultural Activities (Minority Groups/Different Cultures/ Nationalities)	53	0	0
Other (please specify)	1900	2131	153

8. Social Inclusion Engagement by Age Group

Programme	0-11	12-17	18-39	40-54	55-64	65+
GAA for all	321		28	249		
Social Initiative (for Older People)			451	240	542	4357
Gender Diversity and LGBTQI+			81			

Intercultural Activities (Minority Groups/Different Cultures/ Nationalities)	3		35			15
Other (please specify)	240		1541	773	684	317

9. Social Inclusion Audience reached by program and overall numbers

Primary Audience	Total Programs	Numbers Reached
Individuals Over 35	3	139
Ethnic Minorities	3	38
General Community	31	3743
Older Adults (65+)	37	4478
Club Members	10	1668
Other	6	251
Individual(s) with a disability	16	299
LGBTQI+	2	101