

PUNCHING FORWARD: EVALUATION OF THE SUMMER TERM AFTER-SCHOOL BOXING PROGRAMME



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Zero is a Waltham Forest-based Community Interest Company (CIC) dedicated to preventing youth violence and improving the life chances of young people. We work through targeted interventions that engage young people in positive, purposeful activities, helping them to feel safe, raise aspirations, and grow into well-adjusted adults.

Between April and July 2025, Project Zero delivered a 13-week beginner-level boxing programme for secondary school students in Waltham Forest. Held twice a week, these free, non-contact sessions were designed to improve young people's confidence, focus, emotional wellbeing, and physical fitness in a safe and supportive environment.

The programme aligns strongly with local borough strategies, including Waltham Forest's Public Health Charter and Space4All youth provision. It addressed key local needs by providing accessible physical activity, promoting positive behaviours, and offering a trusted space for engagement and development.

Evaluation was conducted via a one-time retrospective questionnaire completed by nine young participants. All respondents reported positive experiences, with average satisfaction scores exceeding 9 out of 10. Participants cited improvements in discipline, focus, anger management, and motivation to exercise. Many reported these benefits extending into their school, home, and social lives.

All participants said they would recommend the programme to a friend, and most expressed a desire to continue boxing beyond the pilot. Around two-thirds believed the positive effects would last at least six months or more.

The findings demonstrate the programme's effectiveness as a preventative and developmental tool, supporting borough-wide ambitions to reduce health inequalities, promote community cohesion, and invest in youth wellbeing. With improved planning, longer-term tracking, and increased gender inclusion, the programme offers strong potential for scale and sustained impact.



ABOUT US



Project Zero is a Waltham Forest based Community Interest Company (CIC) committed to seeing a year when there are been zero deaths of a young person from knife or violent crime. Project Zero seeks to make this happen through our aims:

- engaging young people in positive activities to promote social inclusion, reduce anti-social / offending behaviour and strengthen community cohesion
- raising the aspirations of young people in reaching their full potential and grow into well-adjusted adults
- helping young people to feel safe and part of their community.



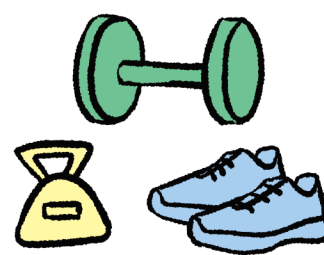
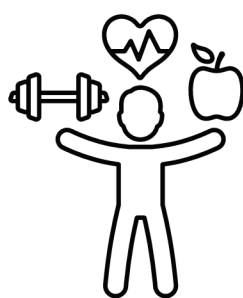
**Our mission is to see
a YEAR when there
has been ZERO
deaths of a young
person through knife
or violent crime.**

INTRODUCTION



Prior to 2023, the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) identified a significant gap in consistent, accessible provision for young people. In response, Space4All was launched in January 2023. Space4all is a network of youth hubs located in trusted community settings. These hubs were developed in collaboration with young people, whose voices shaped the design and delivery of services. Through this process of co-production, young people made it clear that they needed safe spaces to socialise, free access to structured activities, and free access to food. Waltham Forest's Space4All initiative provides accessible youth spaces to support the mental health of young people and as a means of increasing crime prevention.

As part of this borough wide response, Project Zero delivers free after school youth space sessions every Tuesday and Wednesday during term time. These sessions provide a supportive environment for young people to engage in informal learning, build relationships, and access enriching activities. A key feature of the offer is a bi-weekly beginner-level boxing programme, designed to support physical and emotional wellbeing, confidence, and discipline. This model aligns with NHS England guidelines, which recommend that children and young people aged 5 to 18 years participate in weekly aerobic exercise and muscle and bone strengthening activities. The inclusion of boxing provides both the structure and physical activity necessary to contribute meaningfully to these public health goals.



Funding



The sessions were commissioned by Stadium Place Tenants & Residents Association (TRA) as part of a programme of healthy activities for all ages, funded by L&Q Walthamstow Stadium Community Sports Trust. Further funding was received from Boxing4Life.

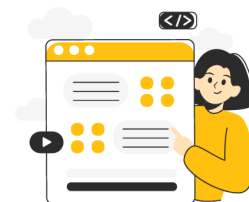
This investment directly supports Waltham Forest's priorities around improving young people's health and wellbeing, reducing youth violence, and increasing access to positive after-school activities. The partnership between Project Zero, Stadium Place TRA, and Boxing4Life demonstrates the impact of cross-sector collaboration in meeting community needs.

The Programme

Between April and July 2025, Project Zero delivered a 13-week beginner-level boxing programme for secondary school students in Waltham Forest. Held twice a week, these free, non-contact sessions were designed to improve young people's confidence, focus, emotional wellbeing, and physical fitness in a safe and supportive environment.

The programme seeks to:

- provide young people with a foundation in boxing
- improve physical fitness and mental wellbeing
- provide a safe and positive space for young people
- reduce the risk of antisocial behaviour and young people falling into criminal activity.



Evaluation purpose and objectives

This evaluation seeks to understand what participants gained from the programme, assess changes in behaviour, motivation and confidence, and finally collect feedback to improve future delivery. This evaluation seeks to:

- Understand young people's motivations for attending
- Measure changes in wellbeing, focus, and confidence
- Capture experiences to improve future programming

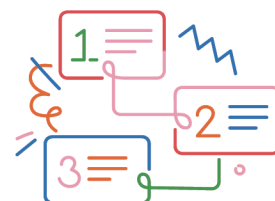


Evaluation process

The monitoring, evaluation and learning team (MELT) recognised that quantitative data collection through questionnaires were the most appropriate method of data collection.

The questionnaire design was a collaborative process which featured the Project Zero staff (MELT and senior management) and the external Boxing instructors to determine the most appropriate outcomes and outcome measures.

A one-time retrospective questionnaire was shared at the end of the programme among the young people attending the Boxing sessions to recount their experiences from the previous 13 weeks.



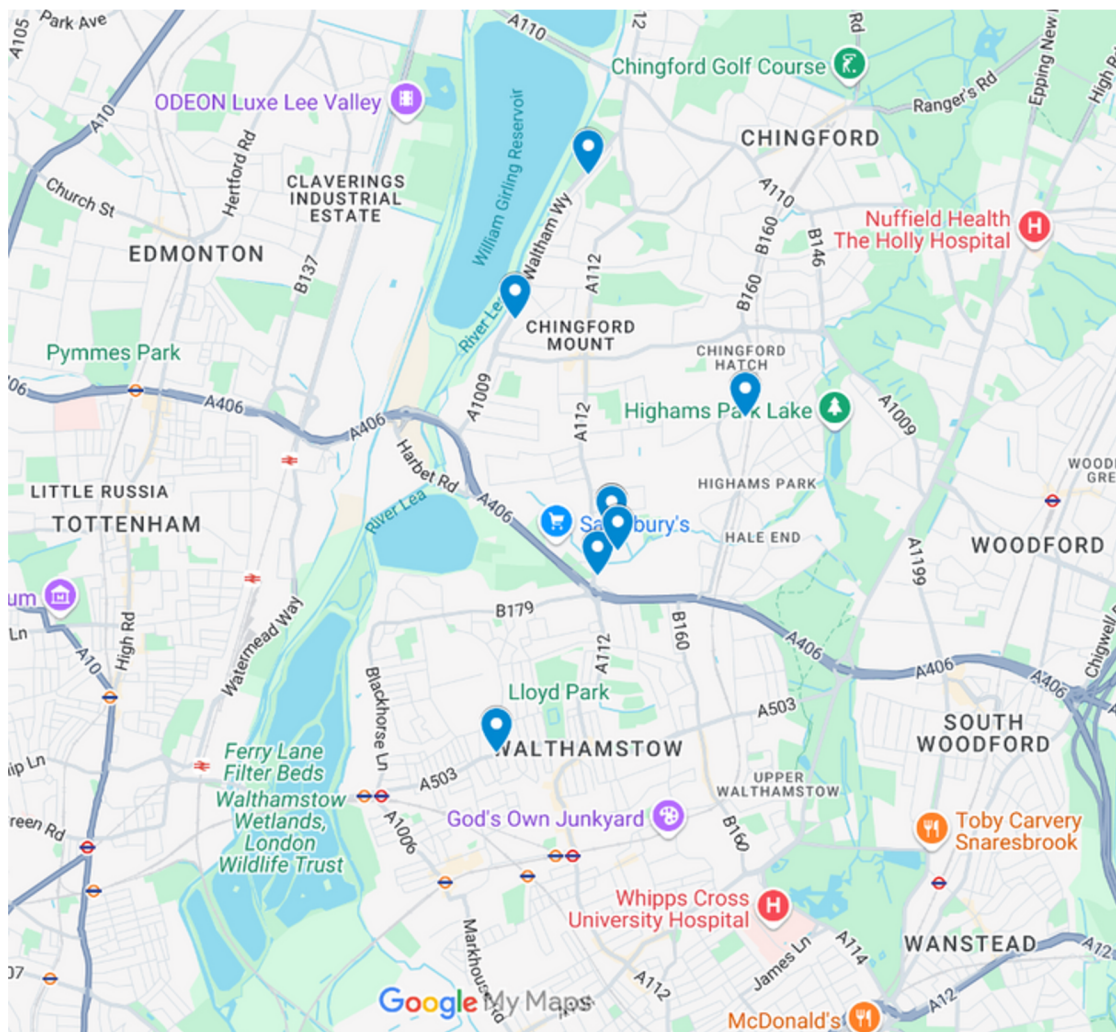
EVALUATION FINDINGS

Who took part?



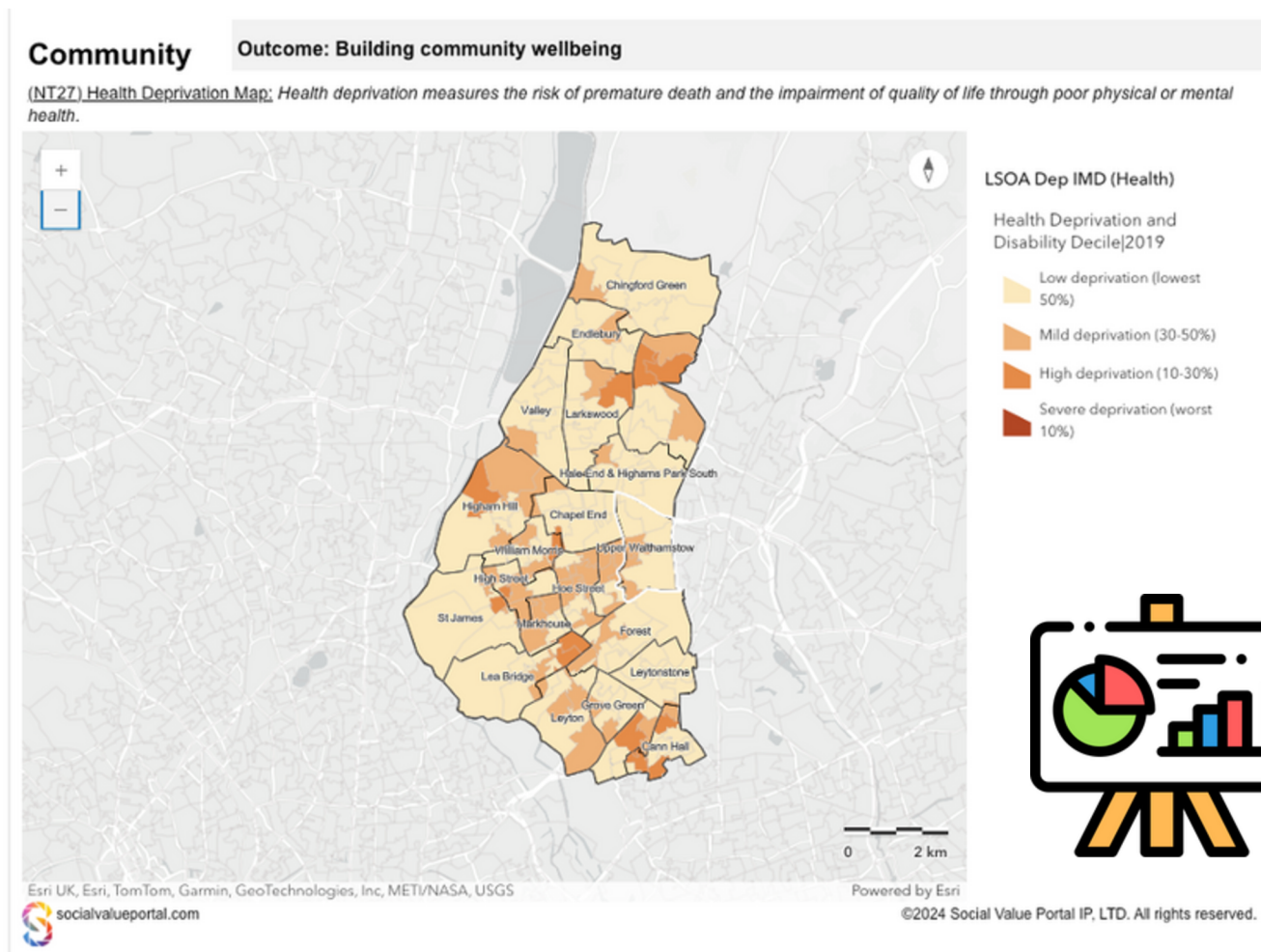
A total of nine young people completed the retrospective questionnaire. All respondents were male, with ages ranging from 11 to 17 years and representing school years 7 to 12. The group reflected a range of ethnic backgrounds, though these are not listed individually to maintain anonymity. All participants lived in areas identified as experiencing mild to moderate deprivation, with an average Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile of 5, and a range spanning from 3 to 7 out of 10. Their geographical distribution is illustrated in the map below (Figure 1). This distribution can be contextualised by the health deprivation map (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Participant locations by postcode



PROJECT ZERO EVALUATION FINDINGS

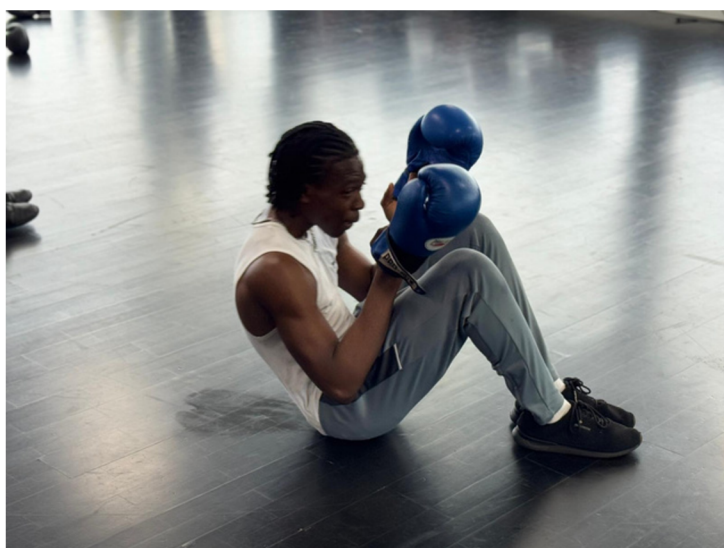
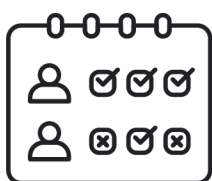
Figure 2: Health Deprivation Map (source Waltham Forest Local Needs Analysis)



Engagement and attendance

A majority of participants (88.8%) reported attending the sessions regularly, either most weeks or occasionally. Most had some prior boxing experience before joining the programme. When asked what motivated them to take part, the young people shared a range of personal reasons including:

- a desire to train,
- spend time with friends,
- manage anger issues,
- develop discipline,
- recommendations from school
- encouragement from a sibling.



EVALUATION FINDINGS

Experience quality and impact

All participants rated the boxing sessions highly, with scores ranging from 8 out of 10 to 10 out of 10. Every respondent stated they would recommend the programme to a friend, highlighting the positive reception of the sessions. When asked what they enjoyed most, participants mentioned pad work, learning how to box properly, the physical challenge of the hard work, the coaches, and skipping.



Perceived longevity of impact

67% of participants believed the positive benefits would last six months or longer, suggesting meaningful change beyond the programme duration.

DISCUSSION



This evaluation focused on the impact of a 13-week non-contact boxing programme delivered by Project Zero. All respondents were young males aged 11–17, reflecting a gender imbalance that should be explored in future programme design. Although the current cohort was limited in size, its ethnic diversity demonstrates the programme's appeal across demographic lines. The boxing programme has shown to boost participants' confidence, and emotional regulation. This is consistent with wider research that suggests that as confidence increases, self-control increases and aggressive and impulsive behaviours decrease.

Attendance and barriers

Most participants reported attending "most weeks" or "occasionally", indicating moderate engagement. Understanding the barriers to consistent attendance such as family responsibilities, transport, competing activities, or school pressures would help strengthen engagement strategies.

DISCUSSION

Inclusivity and reach

The sessions successfully engaged beginners and novices, supporting research that early-stage physical activity programmes can be a key hook for harder to reach young people. However, no female participants responded, highlighting a gap in gender inclusion. This aligns with broader concerns across physical activity sectors about the underrepresentation of girls in structured sport. 62% of girls want to be more active in school but there are barriers such as lack of confidence, menstruation, and being watched by others that prevent them from doing so. Future iterations of the boxing programme should explore co-designed engagement strategies for girls.

Positive youth development

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with all participants rating the programme at least 8/10 and stating they would recommend it to a friend. Key benefits included:

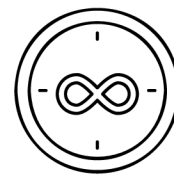
- Improved emotional regulation (e.g. managing anger)
- Greater physical confidence and fitness
- Increased motivation to exercise
- Peer bonding and social engagement



These outcomes map directly onto the 5 Cs of Positive Youth Development

(Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring). Moreover, boxing's structured, disciplined format offers a vehicle for emotional growth, particularly for young men navigating behavioural challenges.

Enduring impact



Over two-thirds of respondents believed the benefits would last six months or more, suggesting potential for longer-term wellbeing gains. This is encouraging given the short duration of the intervention, and speaks to the need for continued access to positive routines beyond the programme's lifespan.

Wider relevance



The findings reinforce the value of community-based, culturally responsive programmes that combine physical activity with youth work principles. The programme aligns with:

Waltham Forest's Space4All priorities (youth engagement and safe spaces)

Public Health England's physical activity targets

National discourse on violence reduction and early intervention

DISCUSSION



Limitations

This evaluation is based on a small sample size, which limits the generalisability of the findings.

As a retrospective questionnaire, the data may also be subject to recall bias.

Future evaluations will aim to include pre- and post-programme data collection, alongside a six-month follow-up to strengthen the evidence base.

Additionally, the attendance question could be improved by asking for specific numerical data rather than using subjective terms like "most weeks" or "occasionally." The drop-in nature of the sessions also posed a challenge for consistent data capture across participants. The MELT team will explore ways to mitigate against this.





01 — Strengthening evaluation methods



- Future evaluations should include both baseline and follow-up questionnaires to reduce recall bias and better measure change.
- Use attendance registers to determine a minimum participation threshold before inviting young people to complete follow-up questionnaires.
- Include questions to identify which school participants attend and how they found out about the programme to inform outreach strategies.

02 — Programme development



- Respondents expressed interest in sparring and weighted strength training to enhance the sessions.
- Due to limited access to free weights, consider integrating bodyweight exercises and calisthenics.

03 — Engagement and inclusion strategies



- Investigate the low level of female participation and develop strategies to encourage greater gender balance.
- Consider trialling a girls-only boxing session to create a safer, more inclusive space for female participants.
- Establish a referral pathway to local boxing clubs for young people interested in continuing the sport beyond the programme.

PROJECT **ZERO** CONCLUSION

This 13-week boxing programme has successfully engaged young people in positive physical activity, contributing to improved wellbeing, self-discipline, and community cohesion. With nearly all participants expressing a desire to continue, the sessions provide a strong foundation for future youth-led health interventions in Waltham Forest.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without support from the community and local organisations, it would not be possible to make the impact that we seek to. We would like to extend thanks to L&Q Housing Association, Stadium Place, Walthamstow Dog's Better Gym, Boxing4Life, and Space4all.



**If you have any more questions,
please contact us at
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