

Gaelic4Ma's Programme Evaluation December 2021

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Gaelic4Ma's

Report compiled by Dr. Wesley O'Brien and Irene Hogan

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Evaluation Introduction and Background

Gaelic4Ma's (G4Mas) is a fun, non-competitive and recreational programme for women to play Ladies Gaelic Football (LGF) in their local areas. In light of the current report for enhanced text clarity, Gaelic4Ma's is frequently referred to as G4Mas to heighten readership understanding.

G4Mas stems from the very successful Gaelic4Mothers&Others (G4M&O) that boasts over 250 sites around the island of Ireland. This programme is aimed at females over 25 years of age that are not playing competitively, also targeting those that want to return to playing or those that are new to LGF.

The G4Mas focuses on the greater Dublin area and had 4 sites participating in the initiative from August to December 2021, with weekly sessions occurring across the 5-month timeframe. The G4Mas programme was previously piloted, with 40 participants, in Ballybough and Sherrif Street in 2018, culminating in the women featuring on the RTE Programme with *'Marty & Bernard On The Road Again'*, alongside a final non-competitive match between the two areas in Croke Park. The success of this pilot was evident in the numbers staying constant throughout the programme, and the demand to continue the programme thereafter. Other significant features of the 2018 programme included the attendance of younger children at their mothers' sessions, and the women alluding to not only the physical health benefits, but also the mental health aspects. Through developing a love and interest in LGFA, these women may influence their daughters to get involved and become future volunteers within the community after. Both Ballybough and Sherrif Street were active and supported through the 2021 Ga4Mas, primarily to improve their number of volunteer coaches and facilitate their sustainability.

The Gaelic4Ma's aims to increase participation and community spirit, while nurturing inclusion for all, and ensuring long-term integration into local LGF clubs. The LGFA identified integration as an aspect that needed improvement from previous iterations. G4Mas 2021 was successful, in this regard, based on club integration occurring at a pre-determined time point as opposed to expecting it to happen organically. In 2021, club facilities were the usual training venues, which exposed the women to their local clubs, often for the first time.

The current aim of the G4Mas programme application cited *"To provide an innovative solution to low participation rates of females of all ages in the Inner-City Dublin Area."* This is a highly populated area of Dublin that seeks to focus on increasing the number of females participating in sport and physical activity across the lifespan. This evaluation is based on the experiences of participants from four sites namely Finglas Erins Isle, Coolock Parnells, Crumlin Drimnagh Good Counsel and North East Inner city. The table below outlines the number of participants, at each site, during Gaelic4Ma's 2021

Table: Number of registered participants at each Gaelic4Ma's 2021 site

Site	Number of participants
Finglas Erins Isle,	17
Coolock Parnells,	21
Crumlin Drimnagh Good Counsel	84
North East Inner city*	40

** North East Inner city was an existing site that received additional support and access to the educational suite throughout the 2021 programme*

This G4Mas project is innovative and novel, as it moves beyond the previous programmes that targeted young girls solely in the drive for increased LGF participation. Running alongside the programme was also the Gaelic4Girls programme, which seeks to encourage younger girls (8-12 years) to take part in LGF for the first time (Farmer et al., 2020; O'Brien, Hogan and Coppinger, Under Review). Gaelic4Girls was initiated across all sites and was very successful with in excess of 40 girls participating in 3 of the 4 sites. This G4Mas programme aims to target the mothers along with the knock-on effect of recruiting and retaining girls within sport in the greater inner-city Dublin area.

From other successful initiatives in the area, results have suggested that few participants have transitioned to local LGF clubs afterwards. Among the reasons given include the lack of parental encouragement, alongside the challenge of transport to venues. For these reasons, influencing the parents/guardians to see the benefits of such involvement was an important underpinning rationale for the 2021 G4Mas programme rollout.

Additionally, these participating women had an opportunity to engage in external courses, to enable them to volunteer within their respective communities following this professional development. A variety of courses were planned and delivered such as a First Aid course completed on 3 of the 4 sites and the LGFA Ready Steady Coach Recruitment Programme with a minimum of two participants from each site. A safeguarding programme was not completed, due to tutor availability, but it is scheduled for January 2022. Likewise, a foundation level coach education course is scheduled for early 2022 in each site. These courses should aid the club integration and overall sustainability of G4Mas, however, it is too early to determine if that is the case.

In the 2021 iteration of the G4Mas programme, there was a coordinator, Odharnaith McKenna, appointed by the LGFA in partnership with Dublin City Council. Odharnaith served as a consistent medium of contact for the participating women, which is an essential modality for building trust. Odharnaith was responsible for logistics,

communication and club/school link and through weekly club visits she organised the educational courses and identified coaches for each site.

The programme was evaluated, through both pre- and post- participant self-report questionnaires, specifically to establish if there were any changes in (i) overall physical activity and sport behaviours (ii) perceptions of the G4Mas programme sustainability (iii) interest in volunteering within the local community. With these specific research questions in mind, both quantitative and qualitative questions were used in the pre- and post- questionnaires, resulting in a very large sample size representation across the different sites (n=100 at pre phase, and n=52 at post phase respectively). The responses were analysed, and the report shows the key findings first from a quantitative and then a qualitative perspective.

Quantitative Results for G4Mas Questionnaire

Result 1 Physical Activity and Sport Guidelines:

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, **43%** of participants were meeting the recommended daily minimum of 30 minutes moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) and sport participation on 5 or more days in the week.

Following the participants engagement in the G4Mas programme, it was still encouraging to observe that **33%** of attendees were meeting the recommended physical activity (PA) and sport guidelines for health on 5 or more days in the week.

Overall, it can be reported that participants slightly decreased their participation in PA from the inception to the end of the G4Mas programme.

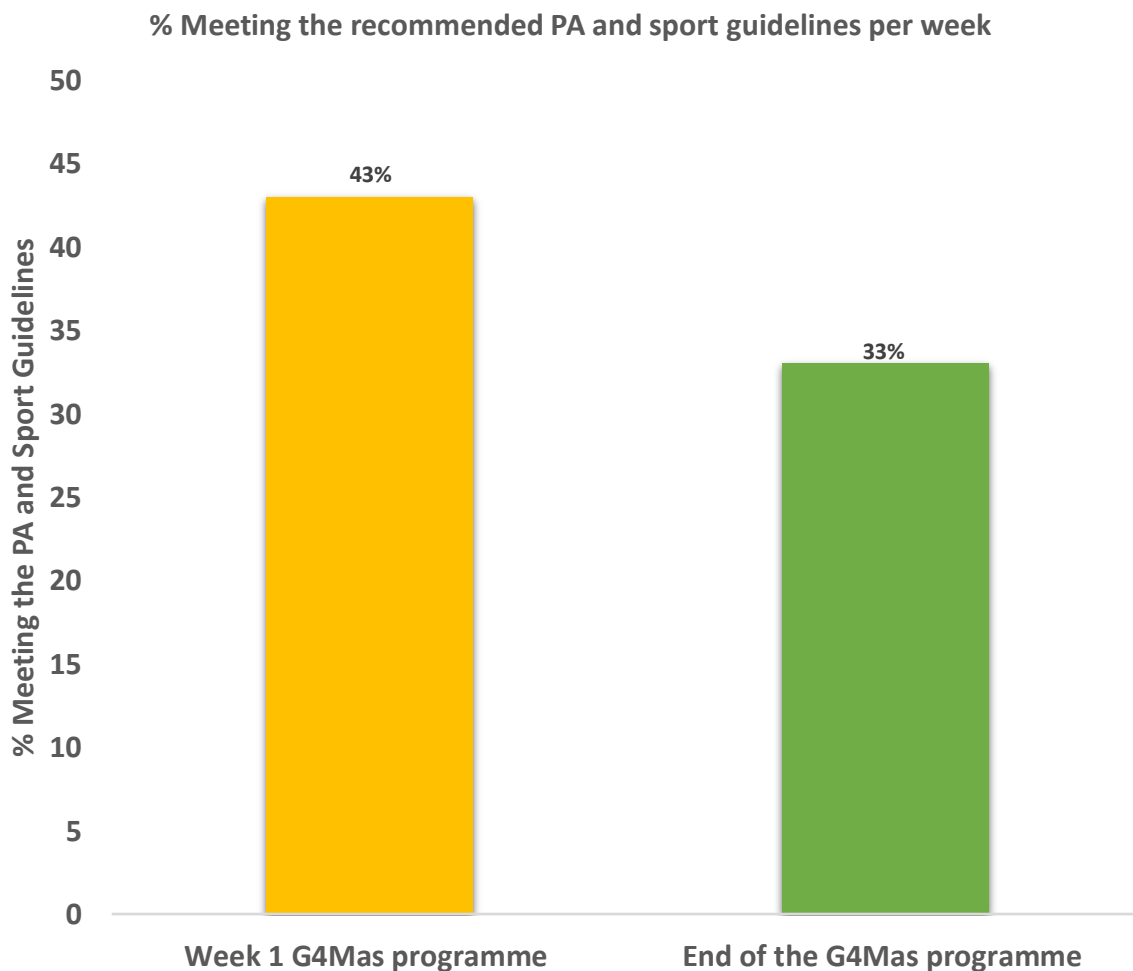


Figure 1. Percentage meeting the recommended PA and sport guidelines per week

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's;

Result 2 Enjoyment Being Active:

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that enjoyed being active was **71%**. Following the participants completion in the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that enjoyed being active rose to **83%**. Overall, it can be reported that participants increased their enjoyment levels when being active between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

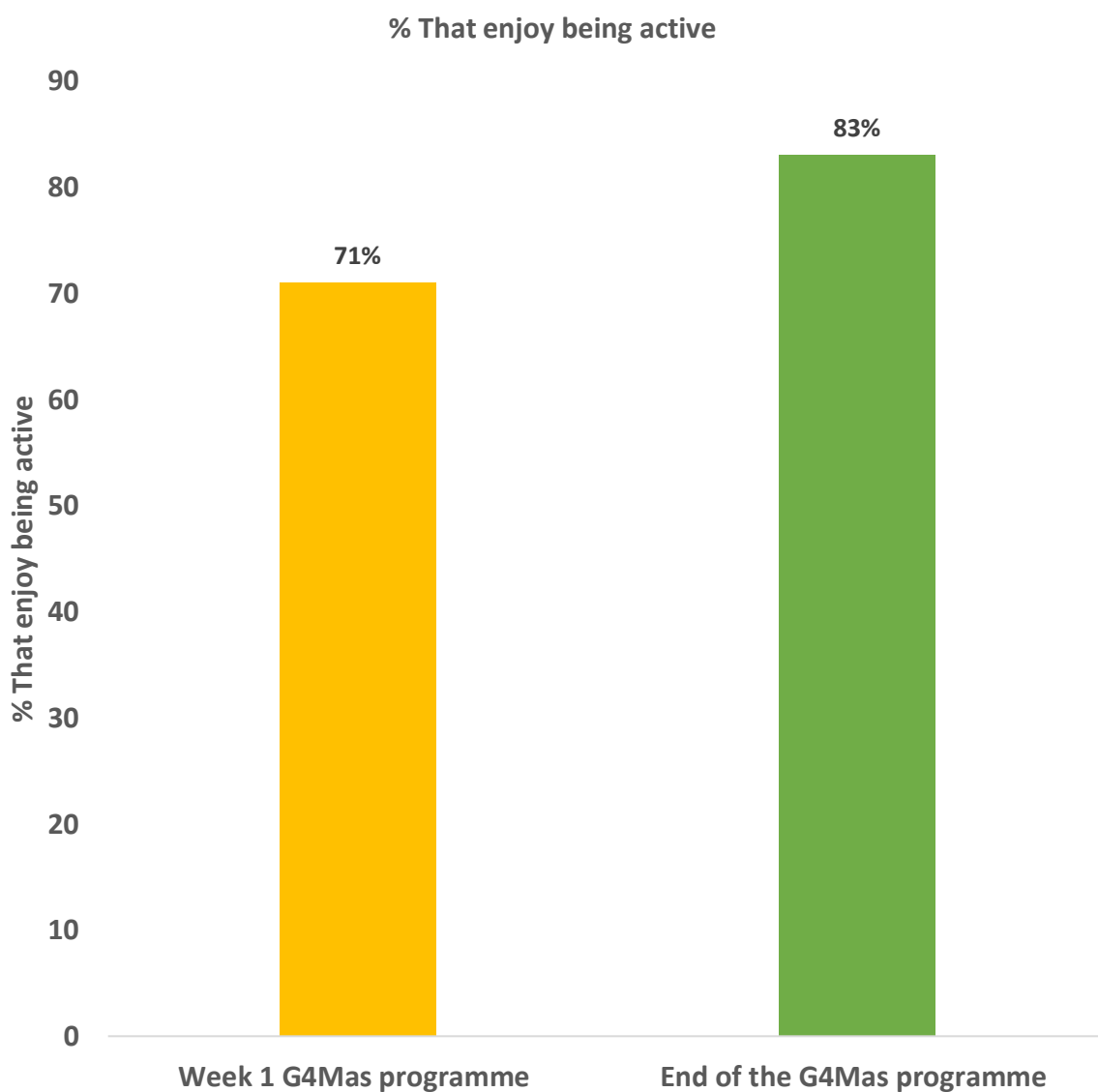


Figure 2. Percentage that enjoy being active.

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 3 Personally Feel Good When Doing Physical Activity

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that felt personally good when doing PA was **80%**. Following the participants completion in the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that felt personally good when doing PA rose to **89%**.

Overall, it can be reported that participants increased their personal feel good levels of being active between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

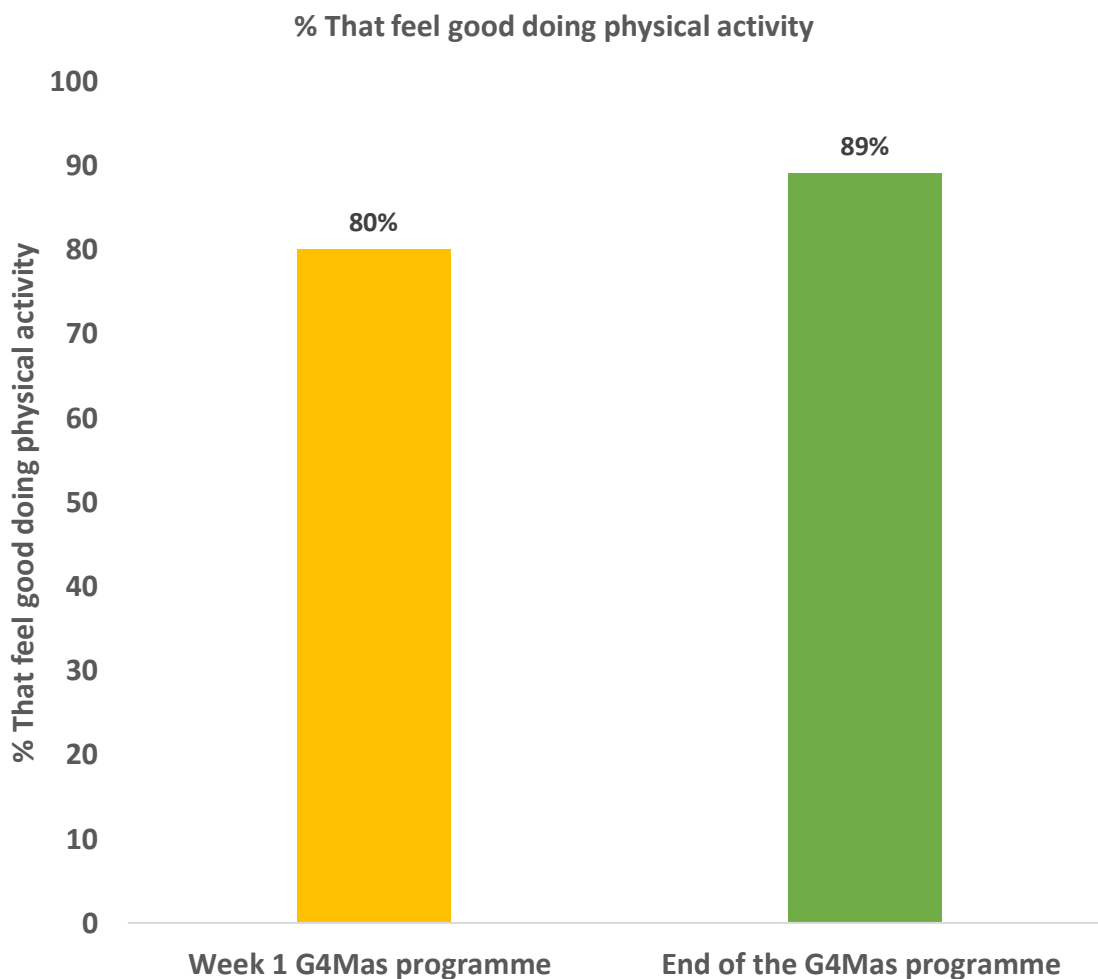


Figure 3. Percentage that feel good doing physical activity

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's;

Result 4 Body Feel Good When Doing Physical Activity

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that felt their body had a good feeling when doing PA was **61%**. Following the participants completion in the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that felt their body had a good feeling when doing PA rose to **75%**.

Overall, it can be reported that participants increased their feelings towards their own body when being active between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

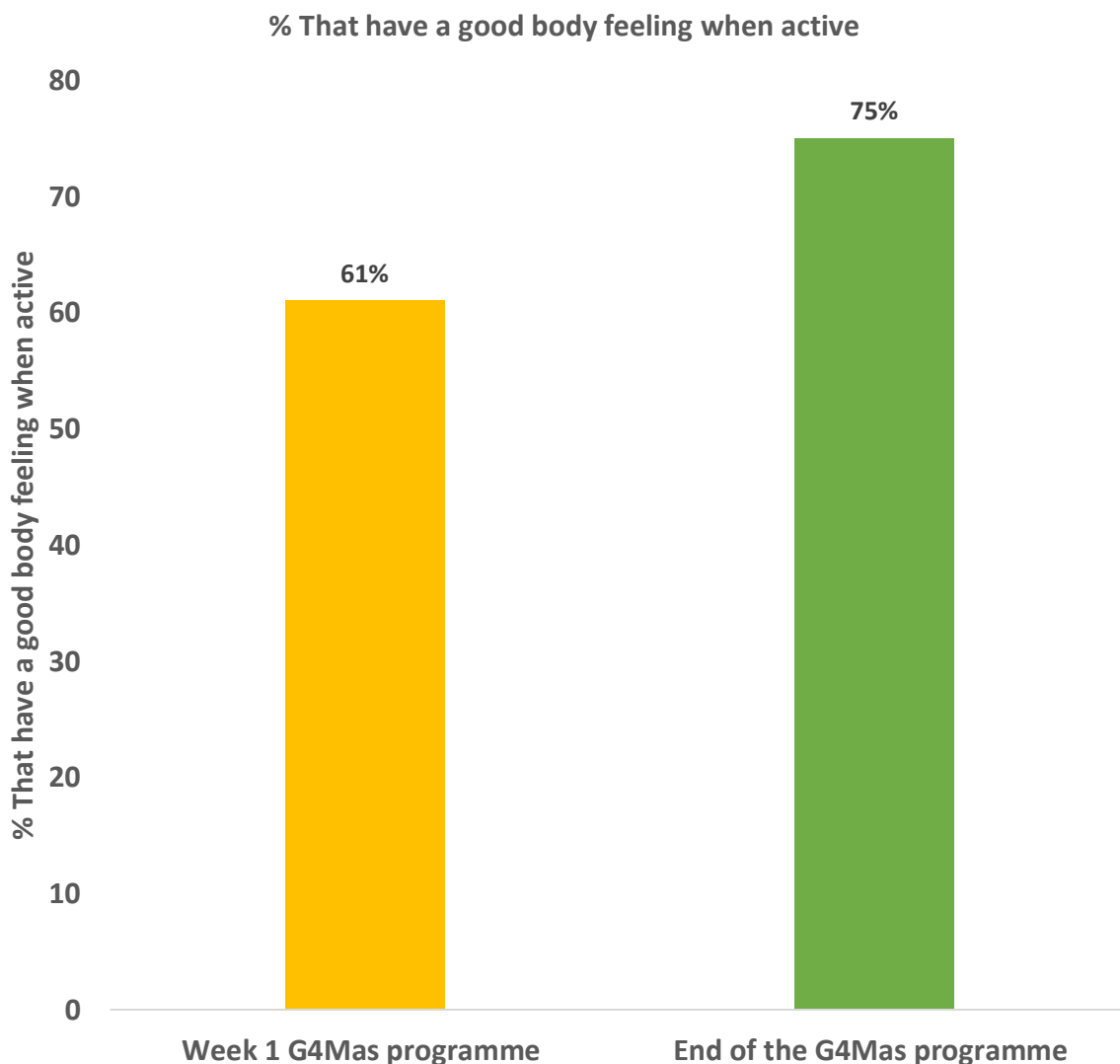


Figure 4. Percentage that have a good body feeling when active

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 5 Excited When Being Active

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that felt excited when doing PA was **39%**. Following the participants completion in the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that felt excited when doing PA rose to **50%**. Overall, it can be reported that participants increased their excitement levels when being active between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

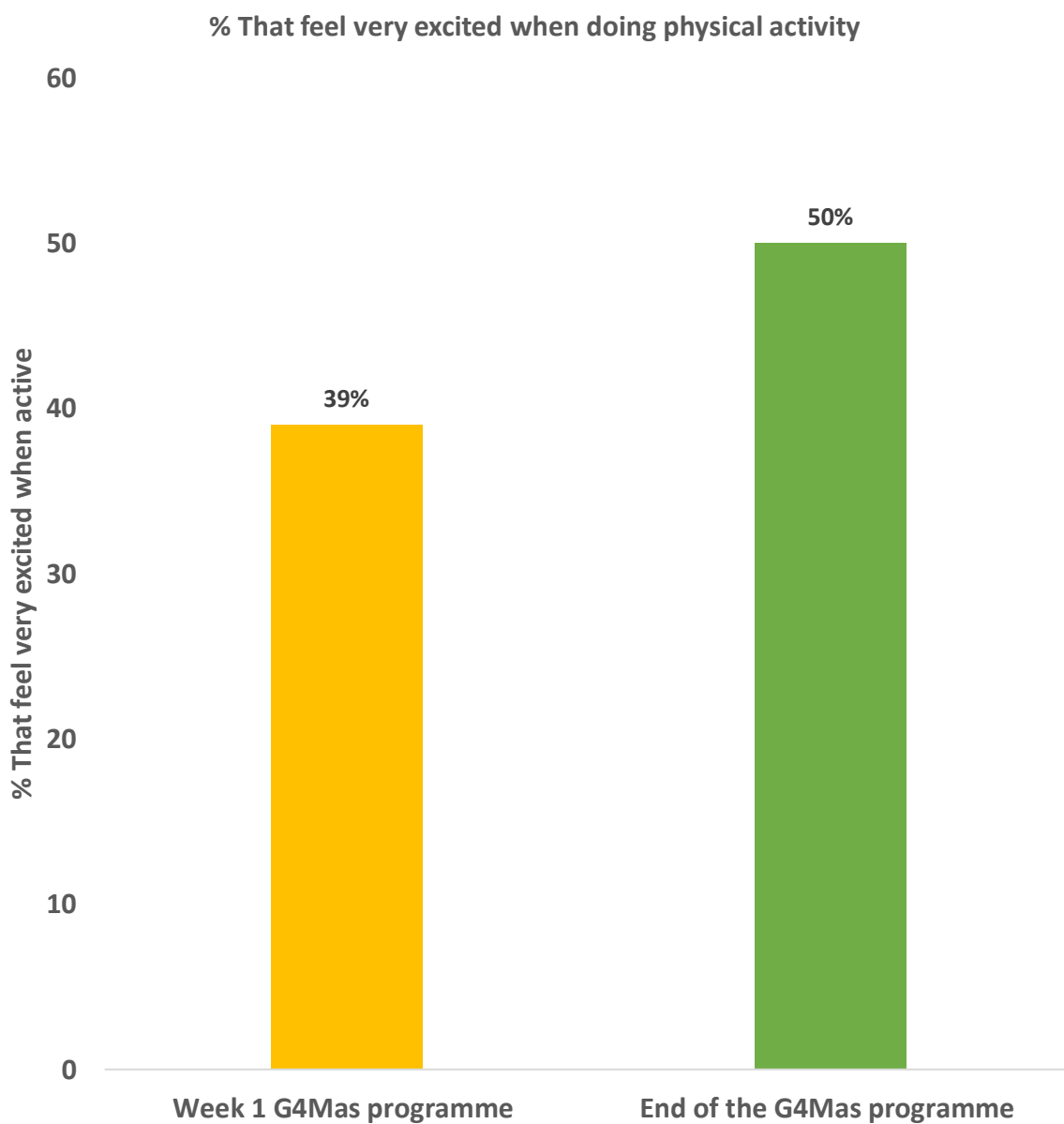


Figure 5. Percentage that feel very excited when doing physical activity

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 6 Feeling of Success When Being Active:

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that had a strong feeling of success when being active was **52%**. Following the participants completion in the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that had a strong feeling of success when being active rose considerably to **67%**.

Overall, it can be reported that participants increased their strong feeling of success when being active between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

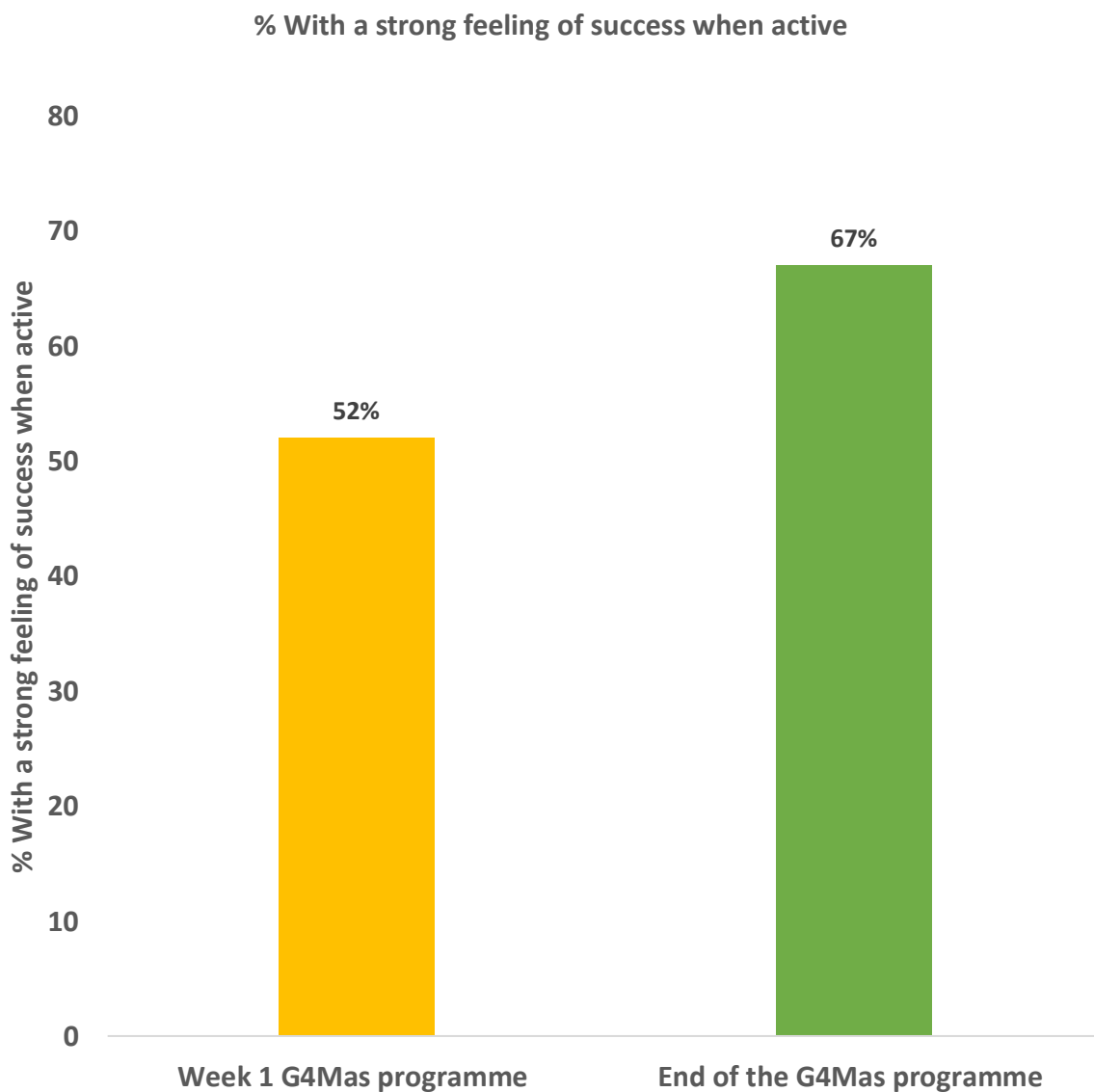


Figure 6. Percentage with a strong feeling of success when active

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 7 Time as barrier in becoming active

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that viewed time as a barrier in becoming active was **45%**. Following the participants completion of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that viewed time as a barrier in becoming active rose significantly to **65%**.

Overall, it can be reported that participants increased their strong feelings that time was a barrier in becoming active between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme, which was a somewhat unexpected result.

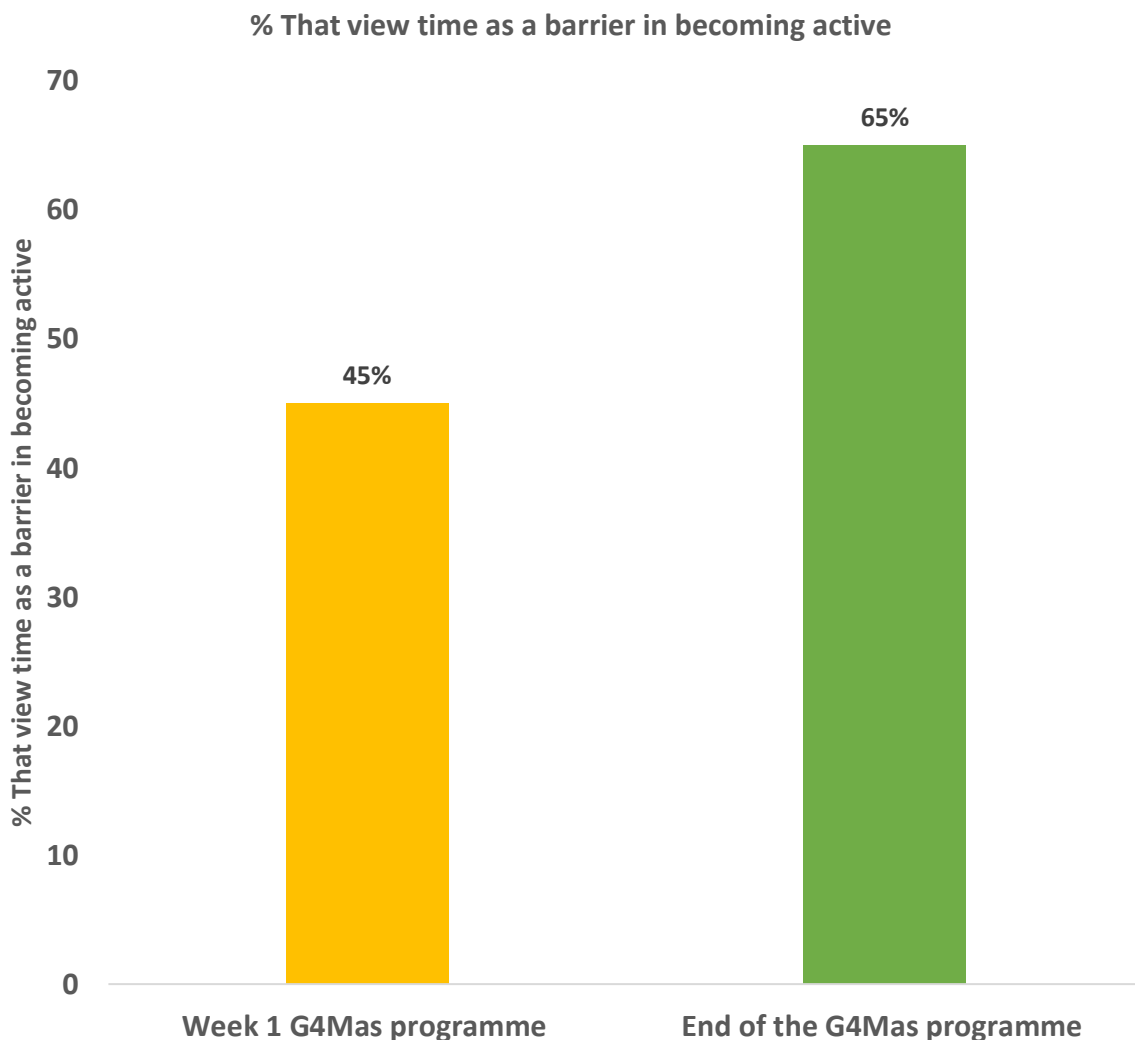


Figure 7. - Percentage that view time as a barrier in becoming active.

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's;

Result 8 Fear of Injury as a Barrier

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that feared getting injured as a barrier in becoming active was **38%**. Following the participants completion of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that viewed fear of injury as a barrier in becoming active notably dropped to **29%**.

Overall, it can be positively reported that participants decreased their fear of getting injury through activity between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

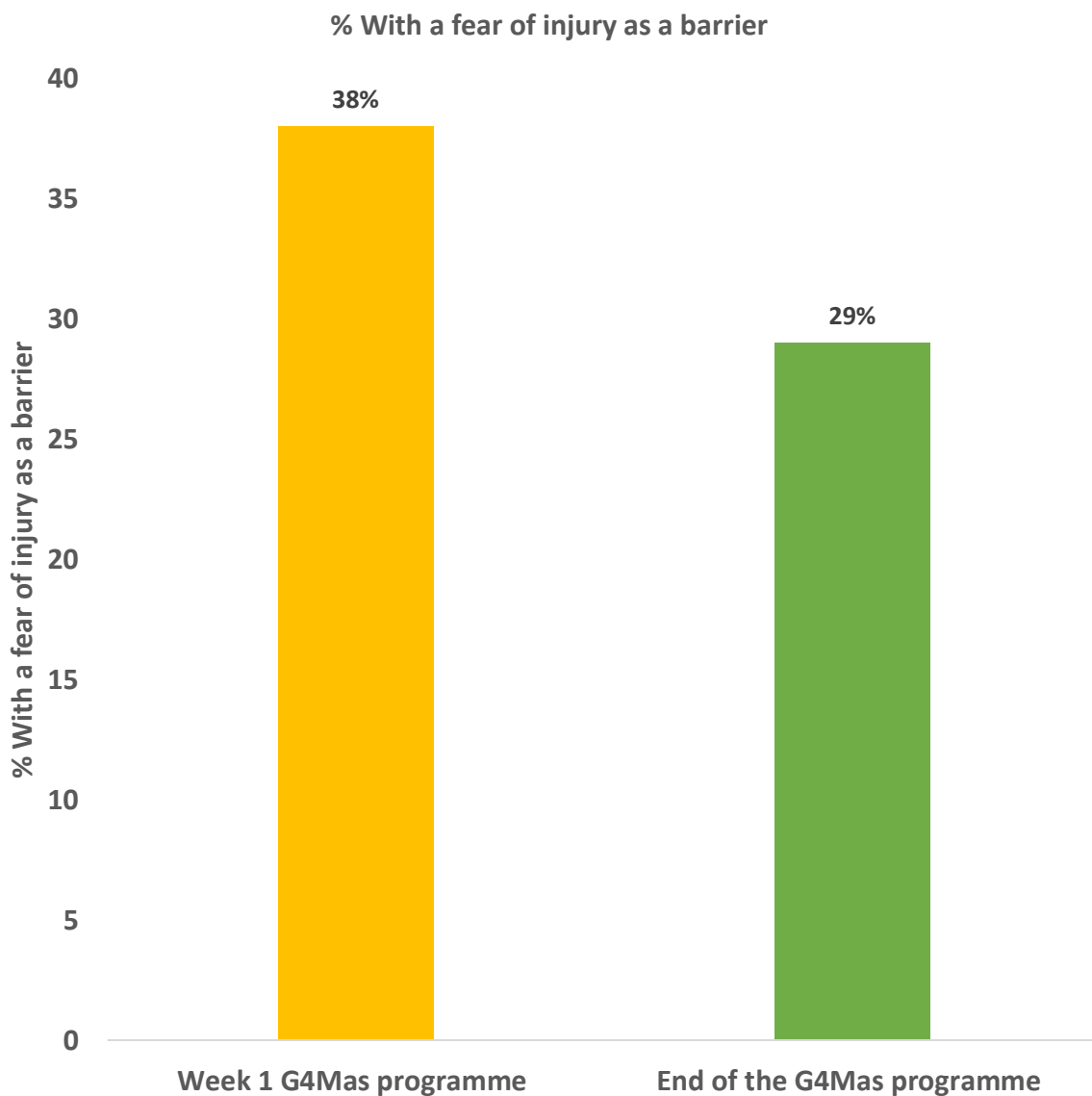


Figure 8. Percentage with a fear of injury as a barrier

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 9 Learning New Sport Skills as a Barrier

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that considered learning new sport skills as a barrier in becoming active was **23%**. Following the participants completion of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that considered learning new sport skills as a barrier in becoming active slightly dropped to **19%**.

Overall, it can be positively reported that participants decreased their thoughts that learning new sport skills was a barrier between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

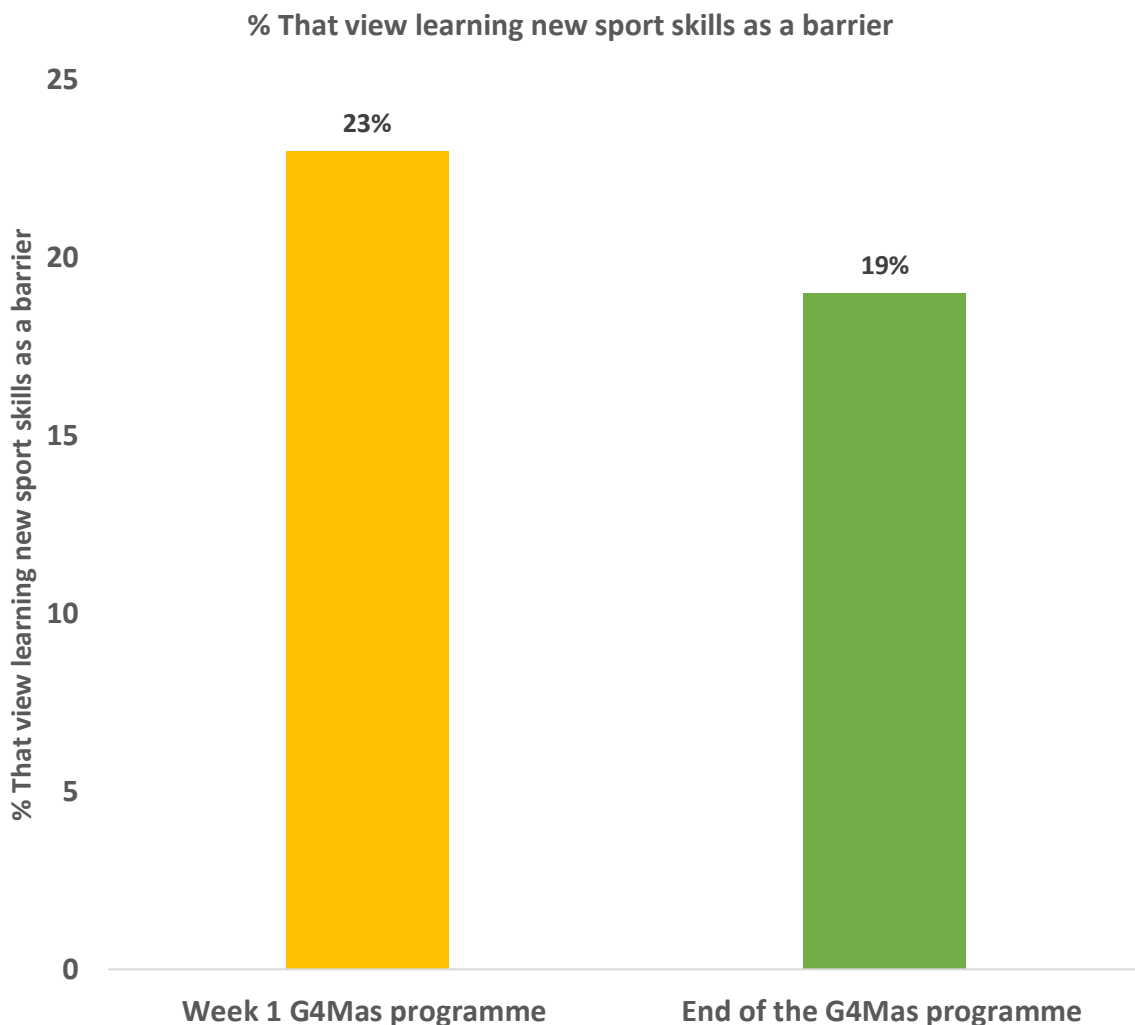


Figure 9. Percentage that view learning new sport skills as a barrier

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 10 Feeling Welcome in the Local Community

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that felt welcome in their local community was **87%**. Following the participants completion of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that felt welcome in their local community somewhat rose to **91%**.

Overall, it can be positively reported that participants increased their feelings of being welcomed in their local community between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

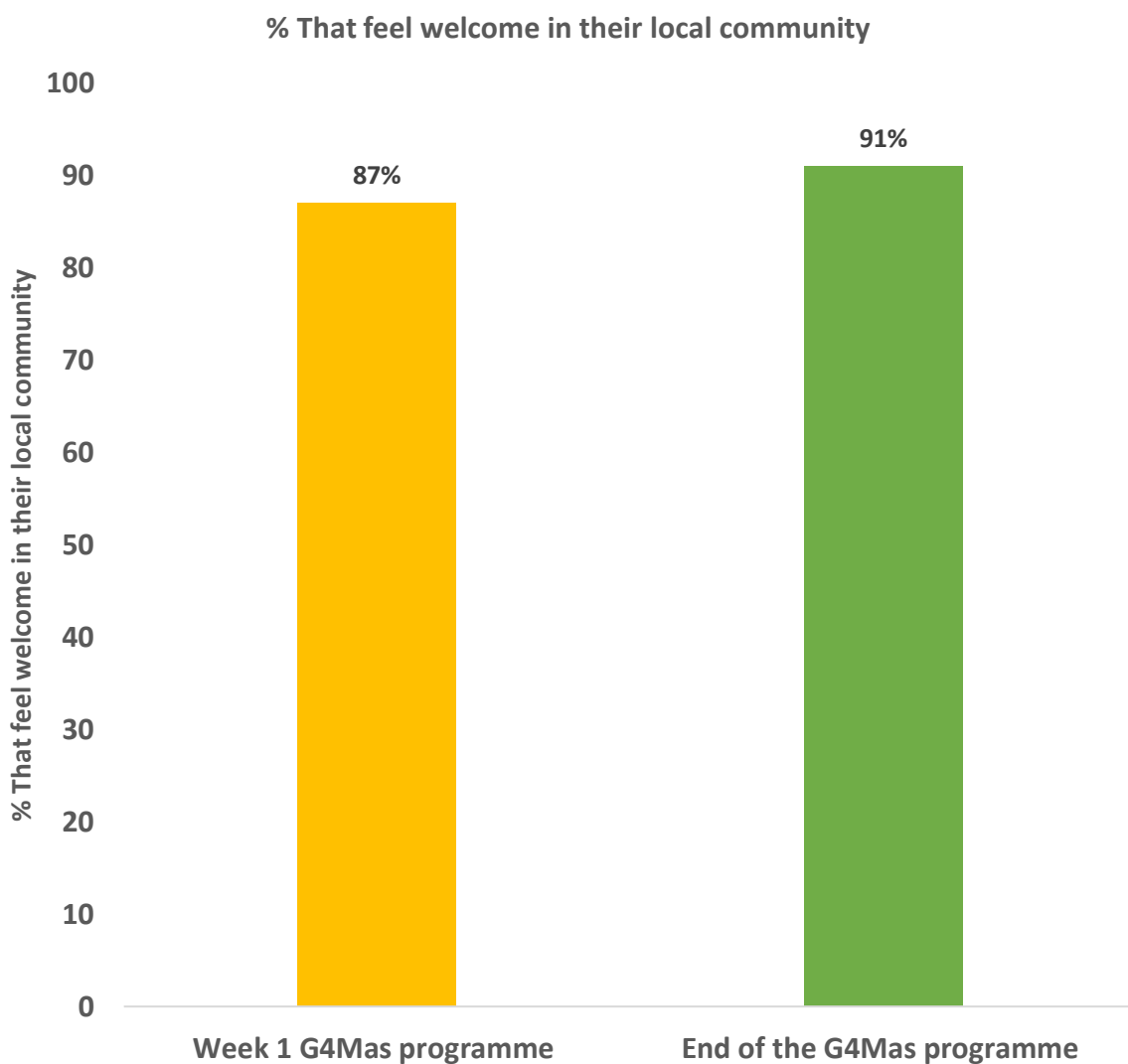


Figure 10. Percentage that feel welcome in their local community

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 11 Wanting an Insider to Run Local Community Initiatives

At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of participants that wanted an insider to run local community initiatives was **14%**. Following the participants completion of the G4Mas programme, the prevalence of attendees that wanted an insider to run local community initiatives doubled in numbers to **28%**.

Overall, it can be positively reported that participants increased their feelings of wanting an insider to run local community initiatives between week 1 and the end of the G4Mas programme.

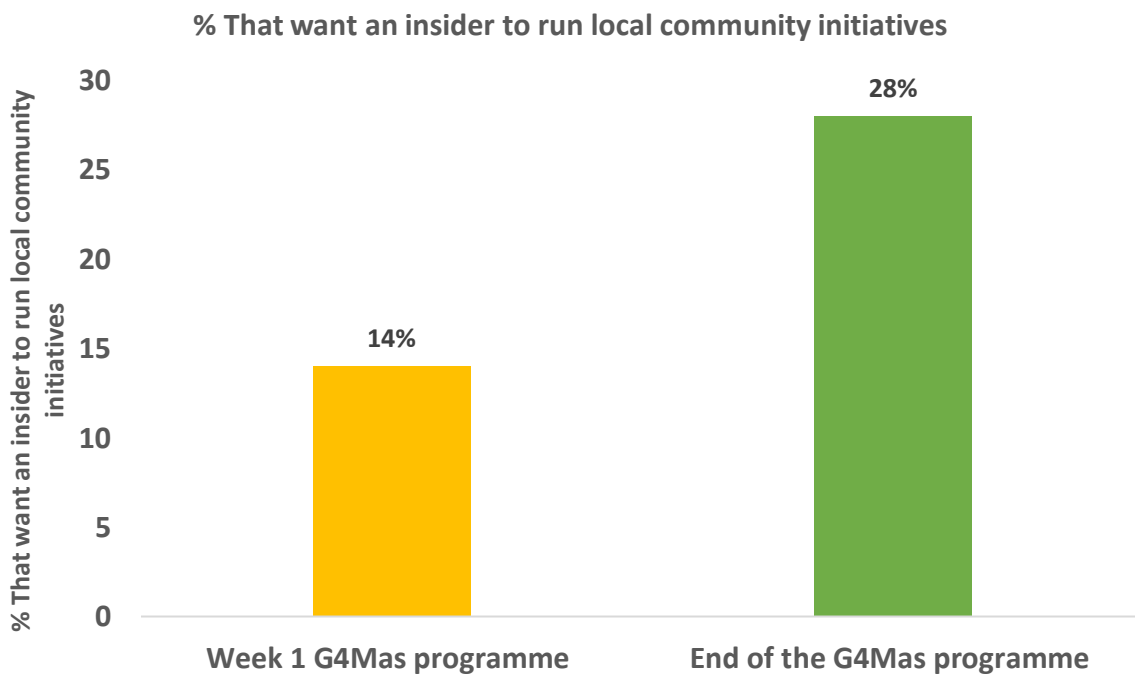


Figure 11. Percentage that want an insider to run local community initiatives

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Result 12 Overall G4Mas Feedback

Between the beginning of the G4Mas programme and the end of the G4Mas programme, specific data relating to team games, participation in this type of programme, overall session attendance, overall programme enjoyment, the top 3 emergent benefits for G4Mas participation, and likelihood of recommending G4Mas to significant others were collected. The reported data below was overwhelmingly positive and sheds an excellent light on the quality of the 2021 G4Mas programme.

The following 6 results are reported:

1. At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, 99% of participants wanted more team games.
2. At the beginning of the G4Mas programme, 99% of participants outlined that they would participate in this type of LGF initiative in the future.
3. Upon completion of the G4Mas programme, 73% of participants attended most or all of the G4Mas sessions.
4. Upon completion of the G4Mas programme, 100% of participants reported enjoying the G4Mas programme.
5. Upon completion of the G4Mas programme, 96% of participants reported that they will recommend LGF to friends, family and children
6. The top 3 favourite aspects of the G4Ma programme reported by participants were being physically active, learning new LGF skills, and having some 'ME' time.

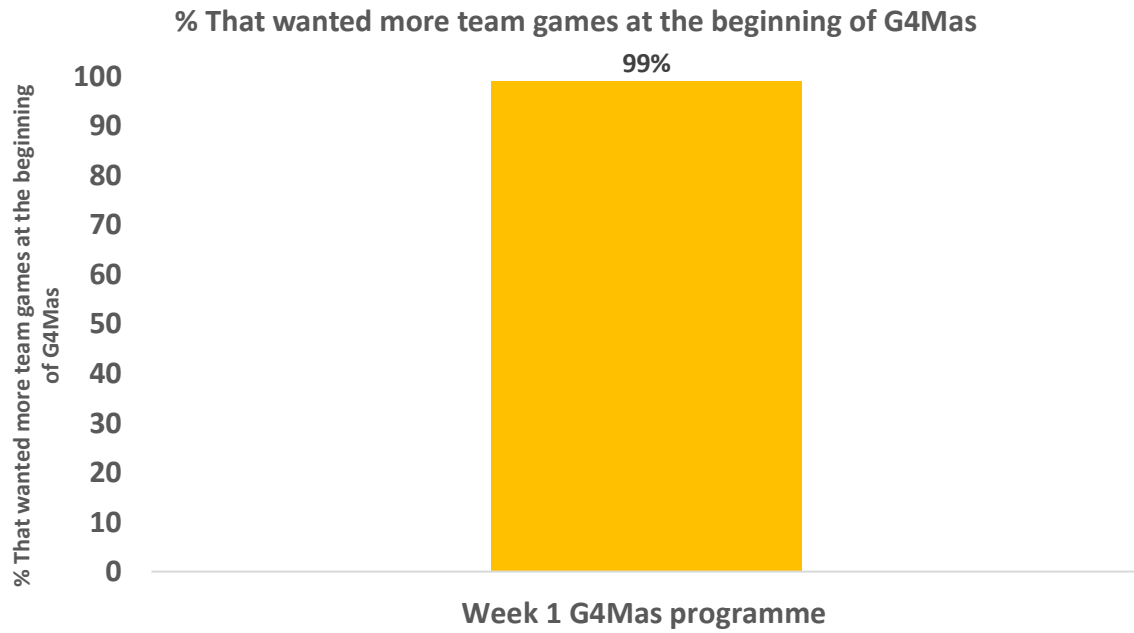


Figure 12.1: Percentage that wanted more team games

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

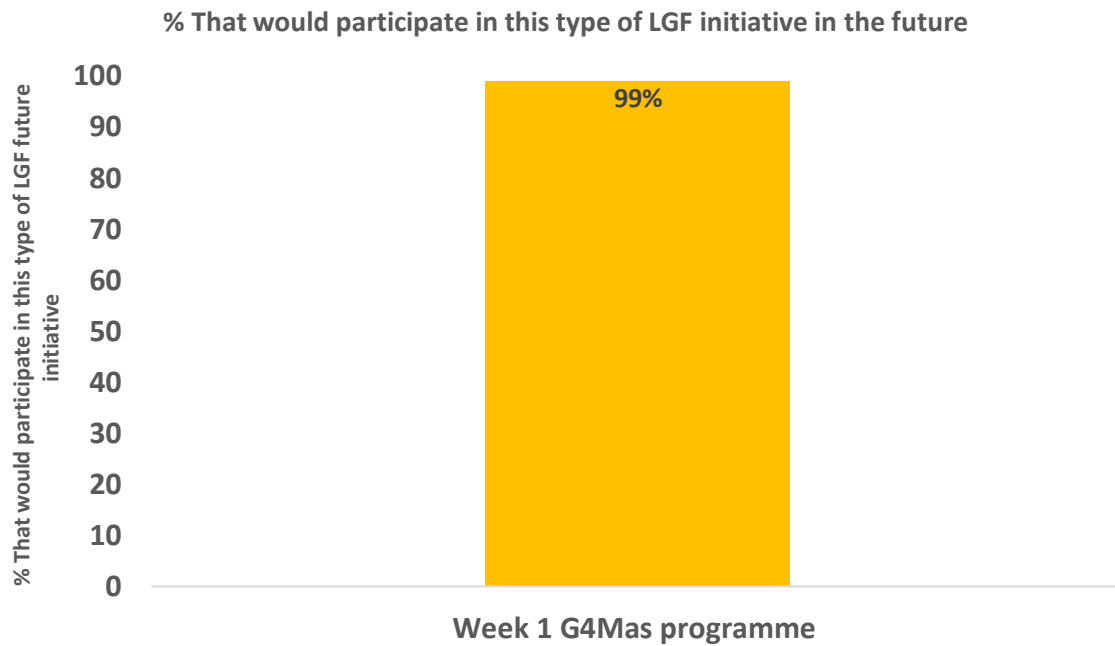


Figure 12.2: Percentage that would participate in this type of LGF initiative in the future

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

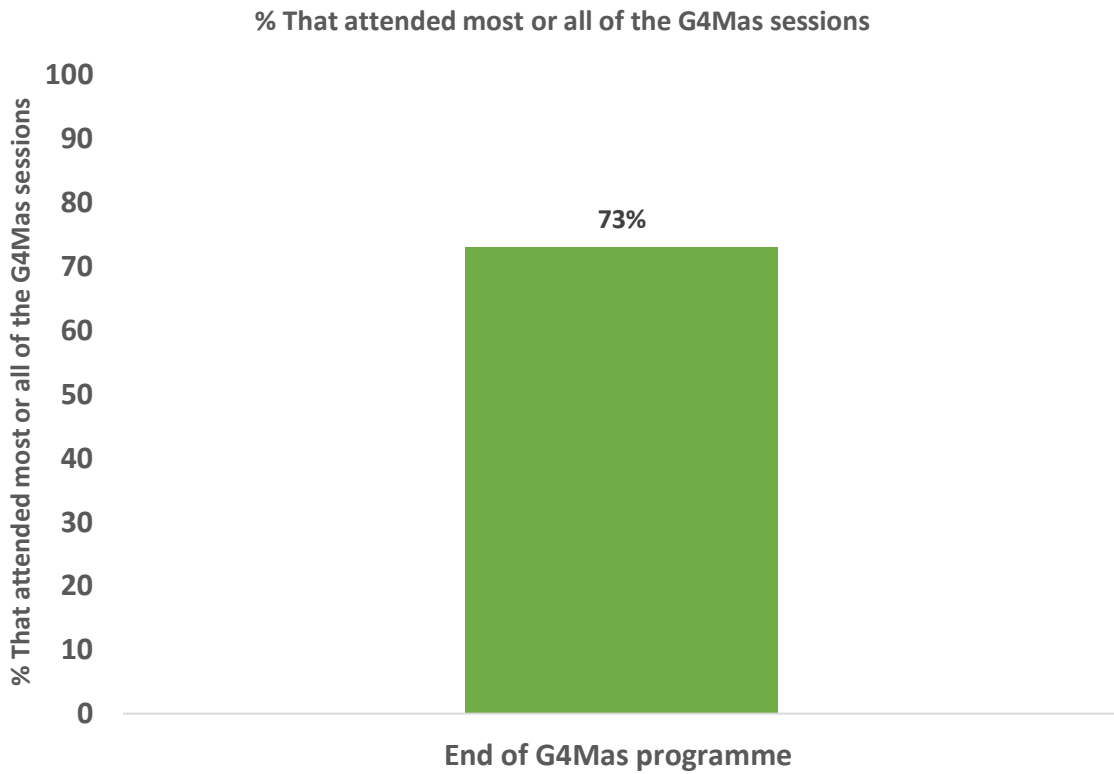


Figure 12.3: Percentage that attended most or all of the G4Mas sessions

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

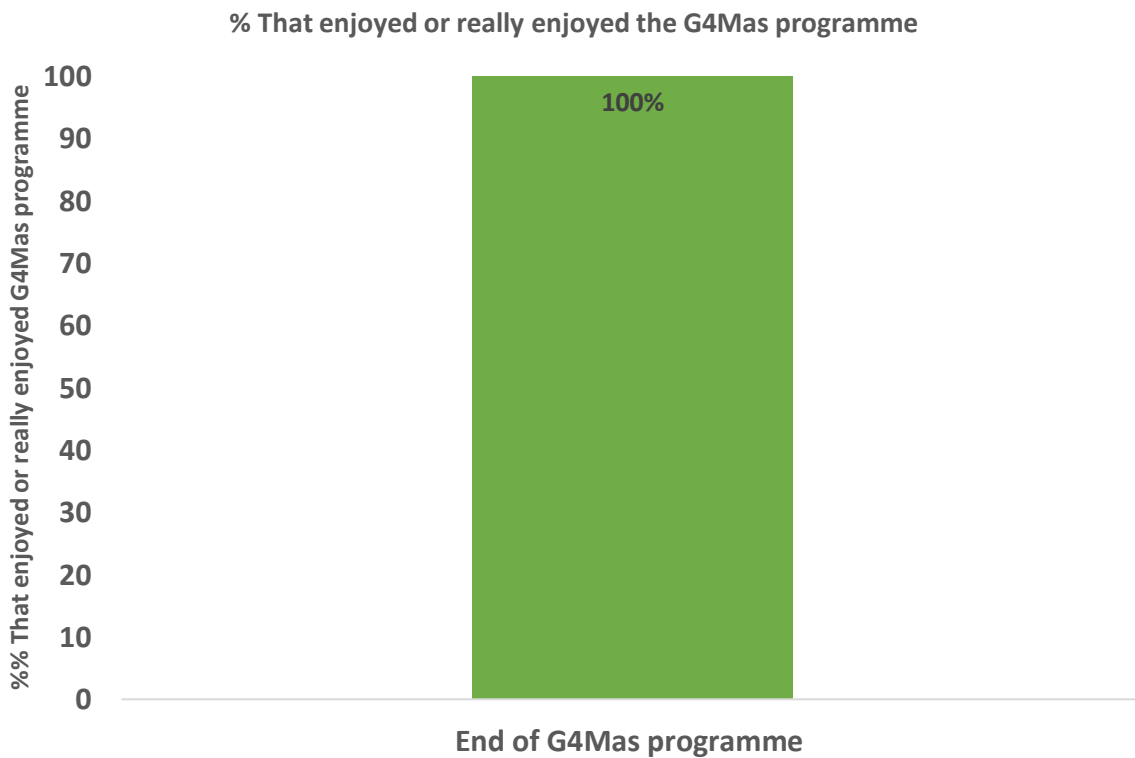


Figure 12.4: Percentage that enjoyed the G4Mas programme

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

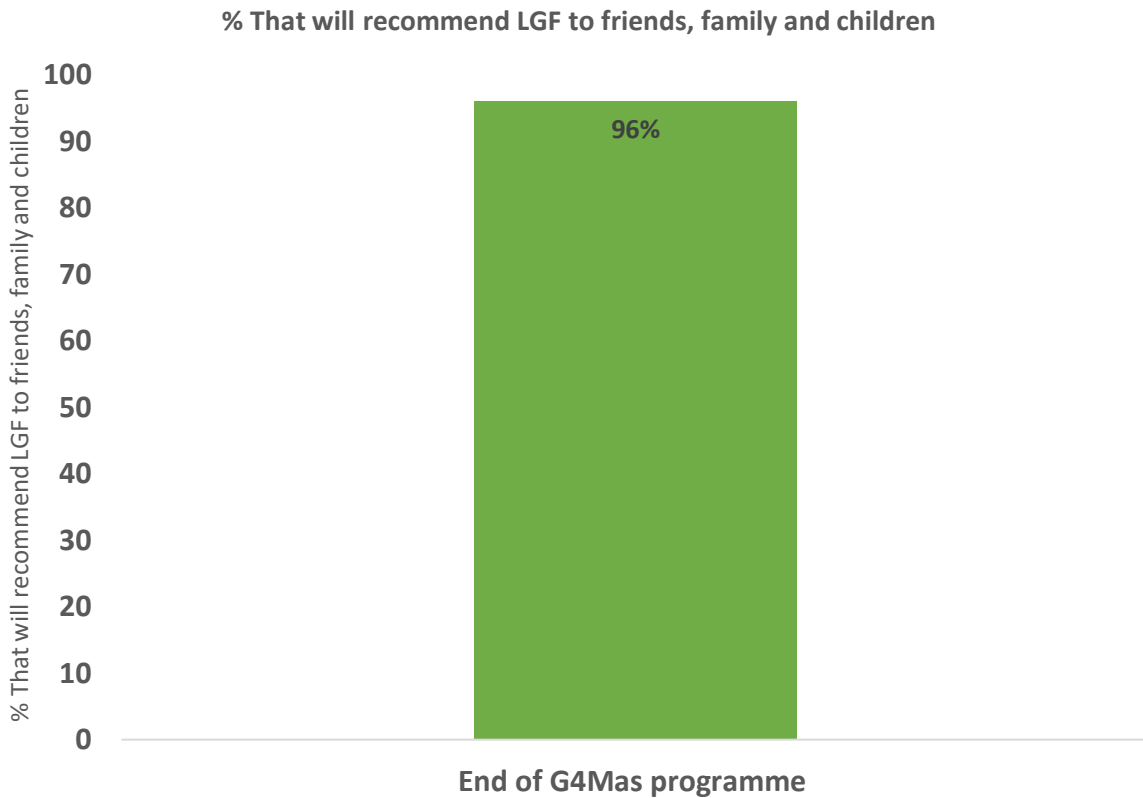


Figure 12.4: Percentage that will recommend LGF to friends, family & children

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

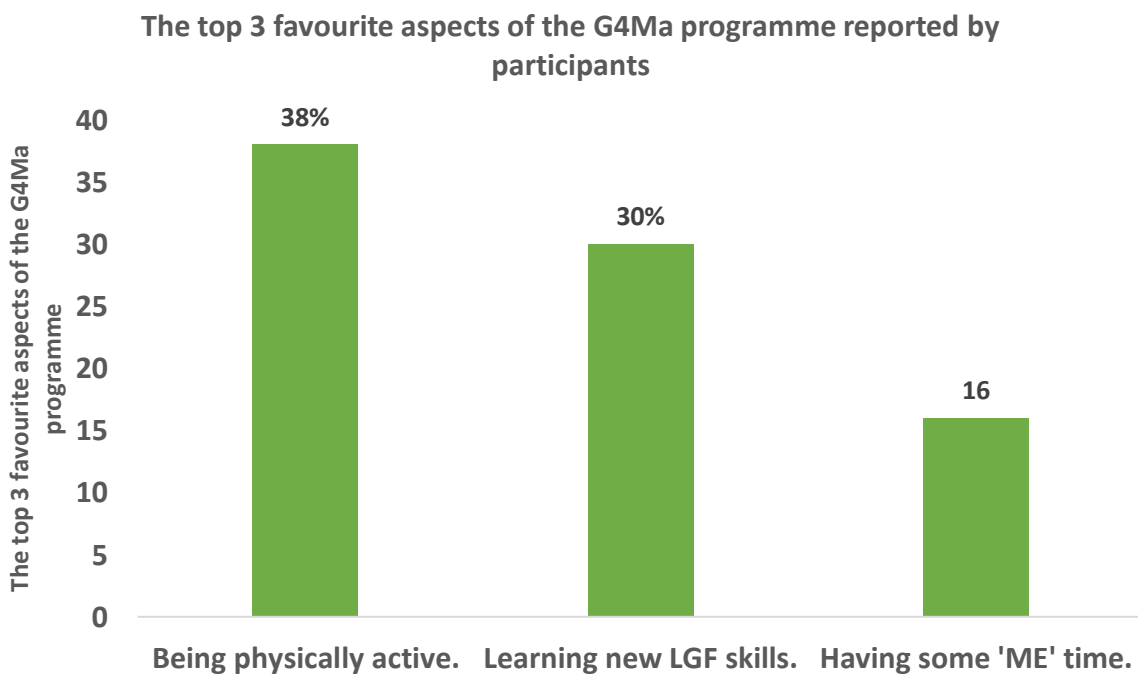


Figure 12.6: The top 3 favourite aspects of the G4Ma programme

Note. G4Mas = Gaelic4Ma's

Summary Overview of Main G4Mas Questionnaire Findings from the Participants

In summary, positive findings over time were observed across 17 variables and domains of interest within the G4Mas programme in Dublin 2021 – these are denoted in the table below with a green tick identifiable. Two unexpected findings regarding challenges to consider for the G4Mas in 2022 were identified from a PA and sport guidelines perspective, alongside finding time with your day to participate in PA and such community sport initiatives - these are denoted in the table below with a red X identifiable. In sum, quantitative self-report measurements were taken at the beginning of the G4Mas programme in week 1, and upon completion of the G4Mas programme. The data presented above suggests a very effective G4Mas programme rollout in Dublin 2021, further demonstrated across the 17 variables within the table below:

Table: Summary of the questionnaire indicators, which resulted in specific changes over time (green tick = positive; red x = challenges to consider)

Physical Activity & Sport Guidelines	
Physical Activity Enjoyment	
Physical Activity Makes Me Feel Good	
Physical Activity Makes My Body Feel Good	
Physical Activity Makes Me Feel Excited	
Physical Activity Gives Feeling of Success	

Time Is A Barrier To Participation	
Fear Of Injury Is A Barrier To Participation	
Learning Sport Skills A Barrier To Participation	
Feel Welcome In The Community	
Want Insider To Run Community Initiatives	
Want More Team Games To Participate In	
Further LGF Initiatives Like This In The Future	
G4Mas Session Attendance High	
G4Mas Programme Enjoyment	
G4Mas Recommend Significant Others	
Top 3 Benefits G4Mas: Health, Skills & Me Time	

Qualitative Results for G4Mas Questionnaire

The qualitative questions posed on both the pre- and post- questionnaires were to establish the women's expectations of the G4Mas programme, and their experiences once completed. Baseline data was determined on their PA behaviours before and after the programme to establish if the programme led to any specific changes. Additionally, the questionnaire examined participants' thoughts and perceptions on community involvement, alongside their current and future volunteering plans, as a result of the G4Mas participation.

In the pre-questionnaire a lack of confidence, time, and childcare responsibilities were heavily cited as the reasons for not getting involved in community volunteering. Moreover, the women stated that *"not being from the area"*, having to do *"too much paperwork for it"* and an overall *"lack of awareness of what volunteering opportunities were available"* were further obstacles to volunteering. However, the women were looking forward to *"getting back playing football"*, *"meeting new people"* and *"keeping fit for their kids"* and stated these as reasons for joining G4Mas in the first instance. Others mentioned the LGF sport specifically and were *"looking forward to bringing mams and nanas together playing our national game"* and *"learning how to play the game"*. For many, the role reversal with their daughters now coming to watch them playing was a key attraction as alluded to in these quotes:

"Absolutely brilliant, great fun, great for mental health brilliant idea and actually learning the sport you watched your kids playing for years. The excitement on your grown children's faces when you told them I'm joining GAA - priceless"

"I'm having great fun I never thought I would do this but delighted I did, I now know how my kids feel on the pitch"

"I think it's a great initiative for parents to get off the side lines of the pitch and experience what it feels like for their kids to play in a team sport"

Participating was a way for the women to do something for themselves and as part of a group - *"Looking forward to being part of a great group and doing something for myself"*

This lure of being part of a group and making *"new friends"* in a safe environment where your *"your level of fitness or knowledge of GAA was not an issue"* was something the participants took from just the initial night of training - *"It's a great initiative and very good for complete beginners"*. This type of positive affirmation was often alluded to by the women, strongly reinforced within this quote:

"I'm delighted it has started as I never had the opportunity to do team sports or be in a club as a kid and feel I've missed out. Great opportunity now to give it a go and who knows maybe I'll be good at it!"

Overall, there was a sense of great excitement as the women referred to it as a journey:

"Looking forward to my journey in the Gaelic4Ma's"

Considering the positive comments from the women, the questionnaire also sought to determine the women's thoughts on what factors were necessary to continue in their site/club for the 2022 season. The question *'What would help your site/club to keep Gaelic4Ma's active in 2022'* noted varied responses, with the key themes that emerged discussed below through relevant quotation support.

- ***Increase in advertising to attract new members***

The strongest theme to emerge was the need to increase the advertising both on *"social media platforms, notices in shops in the area"* and to *"promote it and have greater awareness"*. The participants felt that a positive in this regard would be to *"Spread the word on how enjoyable it is"* along with *"Continuing to encourage new joiners"* and the *"word of mouth"* will also help to *"get more participants involved"* and *"increase the number of members"* which would all be welcomed by the women.

- **Increase in available resources**

This sub-heading focuses on the physical resources in terms of “*floodlighting*”, “*more helpers*” and “*more funding to pay the coaches fairly*” and the need to have “*more trainers*” in general. Other resources mentioned included bibs that were appropriate for women and not youths, so that participants did not feel bad when the bibs did not fit. While the participants requested more coaches and helpers, they were very complimentary throughout about their current coaches.

“Fantastic to get involved, meeting a lovely bunch of ladies and feeling so supported by my coach”

“I have been having great fun, the coaches are great and make me feel very comfortable.”

“The coaches were brilliant and really helped to develop our skills”

The words comfortable and supported that were assigned to their coaches are very positive attributes for women taking part in G4Mas.

- **More opportunities for matches**

Opportunities for games was a common theme among the majority of responses through challenge matches with other sites:

“Perhaps consider a few matches or blitzes for those interested.”

“Maybe organise a blitz with the other Gaelic4Ma's teams”

There was also a suggestion by a number of participants that the initiative links in with the existing ‘G4M&O’ programme, as the more games afforded to the participants, the better:

“I feel we should affiliate with the LGFA Gaelic4Mothers and Others Programme, and play challenge games against other teams in the area. Blitzes are great fun too, also perhaps play with our children in club events”

Along similar lines, the research team further asked participants for ‘Any recommendations to the LGFA/other sites (clubs) that may run this programme in the future?’

The responses centred on their positive experiences and telling clubs to “go for it”

“I think every club should run it. It gave me a better experience at something I never thought in a million years I could do. But I did it and loved every bit of it so thank you”

Likewise, there were some constructive recommendations for future roll out that should be considered either regarding the educational courses, and the level of competitiveness within the sessions such as the following:

“Maybe one session could be dedicated to health and safety/First Aid”

“More focus on skills and fun, tone down the competitiveness as injuries are easier to come by and longer to overcome when you are older and lack skill”

One participant thought a more directed recruitment drive aimed at mothers of nursery and underage children might boost numbers just to give them enough notice:

“Again promotion is key. Target parents at nursery program and underage teams. Give them enough notice 3 or 4 weeks”.

There was an overarching sense that all would recommend other sites/clubs to start it in their area and that the LGFA should continue with it as a programme through increased advertisement strategies across multiple mediums. The women reported both physical and mental health benefits, as well as providing an opportunity to meet new people, as referenced in these quotes:

“It benefits in so many ways, it's more than physical activity and it is the best thing for mental health”

“Fun way to exercise and meet other mams”

“It was more than I expected, and I really enjoyed it. I really hope it continues”

“The coaches were excellent, and the group involved were very connected I really enjoyed the experience the fun the new skills learned”

The following quotes sum up the ethos of the all-inclusive programme that showcases the active for life section of the LGFA pathway.

“It was very welcoming, everyone was in the same boat and there was no judgement. Really was one of the best things I did.”

"It is a great way to learn a skill that you might think was only for younger people."

The positive affirmations and increased participant confidence are significant benefits of the programme that can only bode well for their continued involvement in PA environments.

"This program gave me the confidence to join the Mothers and others after years of being nervous to join"

The self-confidence is further added to by the option of having some well-deserved "me time" along with the social aspect of being involved in the G4Mas

"I loved it! Really hope it continues, it was so much fun and really gave us Ma's a bit of time to ourselves!"

"I wasn't sure about going to it, but I've surprised myself at how enjoyable it is, both the training and the social side"

The main feelings and words used to sum up the women's experiences are displayed in the word cloud below.

Ultimately, the women were united in stating that it was such a positive experience and they want it to continue in 2022

"It would be great to continue throughout 2022"

"Keep Up the good work they are doing"

"Just keep doing what they are doing, they're brilliant already"

A few of the women proposed that the initiative ran "for longer the next time" and/or "to have more sessions" as summarised by this participant that spoke so highly of G4Mas.

"An overall amazing initiative to start for the ladies within our community, the whole programme carries many components such as being active for health reasons, social purposes, friendships, a sense of belonging a sense of purpose and a sense of achievement, I personally love it so thank you, PS another night's training would be amazing but that's just my preference!"



Gaelic4Ma's Future Recommendations

- Continue to invest and fund the Gaelic4Ma's programme, inclusive of resources, equipment and personnel (such as the co-ordinator and coaches, given these extensive benefits cited in this evaluation). Incorporate the minor adjustments suggested to Gaelic4Ma's that will further enhance the programme.
- Increase Gaelic4Ma's promotional activities (e.g. Peil Magazine, videos, infographics, social media, leaflet drops, posters etc.) using the voices of the 2021 participants, via the quotes cited in this evaluation to market the next iteration for increased programme awareness, participation, and scope.
- Finally, ensure the Gaelic4Ma's programme is rolled-out (where possible) during the summer months to increase participation, and ensure adequate notice is given to participants in advance of programme commencement.

Gaelic4Ma's Conclusion

As this Gaelic4Ma's programme was not evaluated in Year 1, this 2021 evaluation offers a key timepoint evaluation for the current programme, and the potential for future programme sustainability. This Gaelic4Ma's evaluation establishes that such an initiative can be rolled out in other areas of social disadvantage to increase the sports participation and physical activity levels of females over the age of 25. These women can then become advocates and positive role models for their daughters and other females, specifically to influence them to take part in LGF and physical activity more generally speaking.

One dimension that is clear is that the current Gaelic4Ma's sites must have a link with a local LGF club in order to achieve long term programme sustainability. The authors of the current evaluation finish this work with a quote from a participant that sums up what this Gaelic4Ma's initiative and evaluation has concluded:

“So fantastically designed. Seems near perfect for me.”