# Gaelic4Teens Programme Evaluation Cavan 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020

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# Gaelic4Teens – Programme Evaluation Report compiled by Dr. Wesley O'Brien and Irene Hogan

#### **Evaluation Acknowledgements:**

The Cavan Gaelic4Teens programme is led by the Ladies Gaelic Football Association and is funded by the dormant accounts funding through Sport Ireland Sports Inclusion Fund. The programme aims to assist clubs to retain their current playing participant numbers, while also recruiting players in the 13-17 years of age bracket, which has been identified as a group with a high drop-out rate. The programme works closely with coaches, influencing the content of their coaching sessions as well as establishing the best ways for coaches to communicate and engage with their players. In addition, the programme examines the club coaching environment required to ensure the long term development of players in the club.

#### Report Background

As part of this Gaelic4Teens programme evaluation, a two-timepoint (pre and post data collection) qualitative research surveillance was undertaken with participating coaches between September and December 2020. In lieu of the COVID-19 public health pandemic, the primary stakeholder involved in this specific research evaluation was:

#### 1. The respective local 'club coach' i.e. a volunteer

In the report that follows, *qualitative data* regarding the Cavan coaches participation in this hybrid (online and part face-to-face) Gaelic4Teens programme will be examined from an online structural delivery context, including an examination of coaching barriers, coaching style, coaching sessions, and match day coaching perspectives. A thematic qualitative analysis on the coaches' 'voice' for the Gaelic4Teens programme will be presented.

The specific mode of data collection comprised of four online zoom *focus group interviews* with between 8 to 10 respective local club coaches from 4 x Cavan Ladies Gaelic Football Clubs. Specifically, the focus groups were used as a strategic means of understanding coaches' engagement within the Gaelic4Teens programme, their level of coach development, and their particular understanding of working/coaching the 'teenager' within sport practice (See Appendix A & B for questions posed).

It is important to note that these online coach focus groups were each collected on two occasions:

- 1. At the beginning of the Gaelic4Teens programme (September 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020)
- 2. At the end of the Gaelic4Teens programme (December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020)

The reason that all measurements were collected on two occasions was to evaluate the impact of the Gaelic4Teens programme over time— in other words, was there any coaching behavioural changes from participating in this new mode of Gaelic4Teens online delivery.

#### **Descriptive information of the Coach Focus Groups**

4 Clubs from the Cavan region represented:

Number of Online Zoom Focus Groups undertaken: 4 (2 each at pre- and post-timepoints)

Number of Coaches involved: 8

The coaches in this evaluation were from 8 different participating clubs in the Gaelic4Teens programme in Cavan, and they took part in both the pre and post focus groups. They were asked for details on their levels of coach education, years of coaching experience, highest level of coaching experience, and the age group that they were currently coaching, as can be seen in Table 1 below. Note: Some coaches did not answer all questions hence 'unknown' elements in the table are flagged.

**Table 1.** Coaching experience - descriptive information from participants

Coach	Coach education completed	Years of coaching experience	Currently coaching	Highest level coached
Female	Foundation	Unknown	Unknown	Club underage
Female	Unknown	Unknown	U14	Club underage
Female	Foundation	Unknown	U14/16	Club underage
Male	Foundation	20	U16	Intercounty U14
Male	Level 1	6	U12/U14 girls	Club underage
Male	Level 1	10	U14/U16	Intercounty underage
Male	Unknown	15	U8/10 & U14	Club underage
Male	Foundation	2	U11/12/13	Club underage

Eight key themes emerged from the focus group data that were pertinent to the long-term investment of the 'Gaelic4Teens' programme, from both a coach and player development perspective. These themes were:

- 1. Features of Quality within Coaching Sessions
- 2. Coach acknowledgement for the game principles of LGFA.
- 3. The Value of Face to Face Professional Development for Coaches
- 4. Player autonomy, confidence and competence.
- 5. Coach appreciation of online and blended learning approaches.
- 6. Active role modelling.
- 7. Timing as an obstacle
- 8. Future Coaching Style

Nested under some of these 8 themes were a set of identified sub-themes, which specifically emerged from the data. In terms of theme one regarding the 'features of quality within coaching sessions,' the following sub-theme prevailed:

• Fun through Developmentally Appropriate Coaching Sessions

In terms of theme two regarding the 'coach acknowledgement for the game principles of LGFA', the following sub-theme prevailed:

Tactical Appreciation of Coaches

In terms of theme three regarding the 'value of face to face professional development for coaches', the following sub-theme prevailed:

Face to Face Pitch Time for Coaches

In terms of theme four regarding 'player autonomy, confidence and competence', the following two sub-themes prevailed:

- Autonomy Listening to the 'Voice' of the Player through Player 'Input'
- Player confidence instilled through variety

In terms of theme five regarding the 'Coach appreciation of online and blended learning approaches', the following sub-theme prevailed:

- Gaelic4Teens Structures Pushing Coaches towards a 'Philosophy'
- Gaelic4Teens Resources Contemporary and Innovative
- Online Mode of Delivery Efficiency and Ease of Access

In terms of theme six regarding the 'active role modelling', the following sub-theme prevailed:

• Player Ambassadors Involvement for Coach and Player Empowerment

In terms of theme seven regarding the 'timing as an obstacle', the following sub-theme prevailed:

Duration, Season and Digital Literacy

In terms of theme eight regarding the 'future coaching style', the following sub-theme prevailed:

Holistic Vision - Interactive and Approachable with 'Challenge'

#### Thematic Analysis Focus Groups

The following pages provide a descriptive overview and a brief synopsis of the emergent themes and sub-themes from the focus group data with the coaches, following the completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme. The italicised quotes provide meaningful data, which have informed the coaches in the development of their practice. This text is based on a thematic analysis of the qualitative data, following separate initial analysis by both researchers and then an agreed combined final analysis.

#### Theme 1: Features of Quality within Coaching Sessions

Sub-theme 1: Fun through Developmentally Appropriate Coaching Sessions

• This theme has become a consistent emergent finding on both rounds of data collection with the coaches. Participants regularly reported at follow-up about the importance of 'implementing fun', but also ensuring that the coaching sessions have a developmental purpose for maximising players' attention; for example, one coach cited 'not to have three or more players at cone, and to let the girls have their voice and ask them what they think' in terms of their development and decision making within the session.

"The most important factor when planning a session is the fun aspect, it is a big one and a goal to work towards that is more personal for them."

"I now include a fun element and it is not all serious but I challenge players, have varied sessions, looking to keep them entertained and wanting to come back."

• It was very encouraging at the follow-up stage to this Gaelic4Teens programme that the coaches realised that fun is only one important ingredient within purposeful coaching, albeit an important ingredient nonetheless. Coaches frequently reported other coaching skills required in their session, with an emphasis on 'goal setting and talking to the players by making the experience personal.'

"It changed my outlook on how to talk to the girls better, how to understand what they think, give them a goal, give them to a programme to work to."

• This emergent theme of developmentally appropriate coaching sessions was summarised by one coach, who identified the importance 'of involving all players, by toning down the competitive focus' and using coaching skills, such as 'delayed gratification' in order to keep them involved in the sport. These higher order principles of coaching knowledge were clearly related to the effectiveness of the Gaelic4Teens delivery and the coaches' appreciation of the quality of the course, which are clearly outlined in the sample quotes below.

"Excellent course and material, brilliant, really enjoyable, insightful speakers."

"Well run, knew well in advance when sessions were coming up."

#### Theme 2: Coach Acknowledgement for the Game Principles of LGFA.

Sub-theme 1: Tactical Appreciation of Coaches

Tactically appropriate LGFA content was a key pillar associated within
this online Gaelic4Teens programme. It was notable at follow-up post
testing that coaches clearly identified and related to the message of
'training replicating the game demands.' Many of the coaches spoke
about the principles of 'decision making' and all players 'getting their
chance' on the field.

"I changed my coaching structure I ask them what drills they want to do."

 When this theme was probed a little further, coaches higher thinking and appreciation of tactics became more evident, with quotes such as 'to focus on our game, and tactically set up having worked on our kickouts'.

#### Theme 3: The Value of Face to Face Professional Development for Coaches

Sub-theme 1: Face to Face Pitch Time for Coaches

• During the first round of data collection with the coaches, it was observed that coaches realised the importance of coaching the teenager beyond the pitch in terms of life skill development. Interestingly, as the programme progressed, and at post-test follow-up, coaches identified the importance of having 'a little bit more one to one on the ground', with 'face to face' pitch days. While participants understood the obstacles in 'face to face' delivery, this applied rich learning style of delivery is of value to coaches and would be a welcome refresher in 2021 again. One coach at follow-up stage, when probed about the online delivery said 'it was fine, but you need to meet on the field.'

"Visit to the field was excellent so a mixture of both is good."

"Other years it might be easier for clubs in an area to come together and get a visiting coach in, nice to see coach doing work with your players."

#### Theme 4: Player Autonomy, Confidence and Competence.

Sub-theme 1: Autonomy – Listening to the 'Voice' of the Player through Player 'Input'

- Undeniably at post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme, the coaches coaching style had made a significant shift towards athlete-centred environments. One coach participant spoke about 'their outlook changing towards more talking with the girls' and 'giving them a goal to work with.'
- When listening to the voice of players, coaches highlighted that they are
  more aware of effective communication with players and noted the
  following: 'feedback from the girls, talk to them, it is amazing what they
  understand.'

"I am more aware of what I do now with them, no one gets more attention than anyone else."

- These higher order principles of coaching knowledge were clearly related to the effectiveness of the Gaelic4Teens delivery, which reinforced that 'players have choices on what they need to improve on'.
- One particular phase of the data at follow-up clearly reinforced the importance of 'individual players setting milestones' under the structured guidance from coaches.

"Autonomy for older girls, my style with underage girls is collaborative but putting bit more emphasis on player pathway and having little skills test at end of year see where players are at and where they need to work on a bit more."

#### Sub-theme 2: Player Confidence Instilled Through Variety

- Again, at post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens
  programme, the coaches realised the importance of having contextually
  rich and 'varied training sessions.' By seeking to improve players'
  confidence, 'challenging players' at training with 'extra coaches' allows
  more time for skill development, which has a positive cyclical effect on
  higher levels of players enjoyment.
- When listening to the voice of players, coaches highlighted that they
  are more aware of effective communication with players and noted the
  following:

"I am definitely more aware of communication side of it and getting feedback from girls as it is amazing what girls know about football when you ask them."

> These higher order principles of coaching knowledge were clearly related to the effectiveness of the Gaelic4Teens delivery, which reinforced that 'players have choices on what they need to improve on'.

"The way you talk to the girls, give them decision making, get them involved and letting them make decisions."

#### Theme 5: Coach appreciation online and blended learning approaches.

Sub-theme 1: Gaelic4Teens Structures – Pushing Coaches towards a 'Philosophy'.

- At post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme, it was evident that the coaches involved deeply valued the structural protocol in place by the LGFA for this programme rollout in Cavan.
- One coach mentor spoke of the lead facilitator being an 'anchorman', whereby the participants (coaches) were challenged to think about their unique coaching philosophies.

"It makes you look at your own coaching style and philosophy and are you trying to do this for yourself or for the players."

 Furthermore, the coaches felt that the Gaelic4Teens programme helped them as a club to focus on their respective philosophies and structures, as the following coaches cite:

"As a club we did stuff around our club philosophy and game time for u12s is okay but an unofficial rule that u14s get to play with your age group so we need a strong statement on it now from club."

"We need to get our club structure in order – that is something I am taking from this."

 Other coaches spoke about the Gaelic4Teens programme informing and upskilling their knowledge about 'educating the girls to make decisions.'
 Coach education concepts like 'player ownership, autonomy, physical fitness, nutrition, hydration, and mental wellbeing' were covered comprehensively over the course of this programme through the regular 'interactive components'.

"Very interesting to hear elements about mental health and making the whole player."

Sub-theme 2: Gaelic4Teens Resources – Contemporary and Innovative

 At post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme, it was evident that the coaches involved thought that the online mode of delivery using the GAA eLearning portal was a practical tool which enhanced their coaching knowledge.

"Programme was excellent and having resources on the portal makes it easier to go back and see what to pull out for a session."

One coach spoke about the course being 'very good', whereby the
participants (coaches) obtained a significant amount of information and
'learned loads'. Other coach mentors spoke about the Gaelic4Teens
programme informing and upskilling their knowledge about 'educating
the girls to make decisions'

Sub-theme 3: Online Mode of Delivery – Efficiency and Ease of Access

 At post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme, it was evident that the coaches involved thought that the online mode of delivery 'worked really well.' Coach mentors spoke about the shared online dialogue between peers at webinars, for example, 'getting perspectives from other coaches with similar stories'.

"Taking perspectives from other clubs would be great as you think you are on your own at times, but listening to other coaches show we are all in same boat".

- One coach mentor spoke about the course having 'inspirational speakers', which allowed participants to learn new content.
- Time efficiency with the online mode of delivery was very evident at posttest follow up, with many coach mentors outlining that the 'reduction in travel' and the allowance to 'work at your own pace' were features of quality within the Gaelic4Teens Programme.

#### Theme 6: Active role modelling.

Sub-theme 1: Player Ambassadors Involvement for Coach and Player Empowerment

- One of the strongest themes to emerge within this Gaelic4Teens evaluation has been the significant contribution of 'player ambassadors'.
   Across many of the different coaching sites, the player ambassadors 'all brought something different' to the coaching sessions.
- From a coach education perspective, the player ambassadors modelled the principles of positive youth development in coaching through their 'time keeping, questioning of the players, technical supporting skills advice and their communication.' While these were notable features of quality from the player ambassadors when coaching, their communication and planning to maximise players engagement on the field was also very evident in their practice i.e. 'coaches thinking on their feet, and the session was go, go, go...'.
- Many of the Cavan inter-county players as ambassadors served as
  active role models for the players, through the wearing of the 'Cavan
  Gear', and modelling principles of 'fun and respect' with the players,
  alongside being well organised and planned.

"Coaches in our club really engaged with the ambassadors and would have liked more as they all bring something different and all were completely player centred."

#### Theme 7: Timing as an obstacle

Sub-theme 1: Duration, Season and Digital Literacy

 At post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme, it was identified that the duration of the '16-week' programme was a big commitment for coaches in 2020, in lieu of COVID-19 and other gamerelated factors.

"Over 16 weeks may have put some people off as it is a big commitment and it probably seemed longer than what 1 weekend would be and we didn't get much time to put things into practice as were not training for a while."

One coach spoke about the clashing with 'the club situation' during the
perceived competitive phase of the year. Other coaches spoke about the
small number of club coaches and parents/guardians available to assist
with 'player recruitment for the programme.'

"I didn't get a chance to implement any of the resources so better at the start of the year before games start."

"Only negative is this year we were in competition and it is hard to get buy in when so near matches."

While in general, the online mode of delivery for the Gaelic4Teens programme was well received, there was a cohort of coach mentors who identified the significant challenge in bringing their coaching peers 'in on the webinars' – many factors may have impacted such low login response, however, the digital commitment for accessing proved to be a barrier.

"Not an issue with the programme more an issue with some coaches in our club not buying into the programme."

"Only barrier was trying to get coaches to buy into webinars and I think they would have learned so much."

#### Theme 8: Future Coaching Style

Sub-theme 1: Holistic Vision - Interactive and Approachable with 'Challenge'

 At post-test follow up upon completion of the Gaelic4Teens programme, it was identified that coaches' future practice would be highly influenced by an athlete centred coaching environment. When probed about their future endeavours as coaches, many of the participants at follow-up spoke about engaging players more 'interactively' through listening and talking to the players in an 'approachable' capacity. "I probably introduced more fun, more breaks so they can talk to each other, give them more autonomy especially with u16 group, gave them control and I am a bit more relaxed."

"I now build in breaks or fun activity towards end."

 That being said, while interactive sessions were identified as possible features of quality in the participants future coaching, many of the coaches spoke about the necessity to 'challenge the players' through respectful means i.e. 'one good coach' was referred to.

"Players want us to interact more which is something I take from this as players want us to challenge them more."

"Players want someone that will raise the bar for them and challenge them."

• There was a notable change in mindsets from pre to post in terms of the coaches perceptions of the important factors to consider when planning a training session, which moved from focusing on the practicalities of equipment to the inclusion of fun elements in all sessions, and allowing the players a chance to talk during the session. This transfer in mindset illustrates that the coaches are now player/athlete-centred in their approach, as well as being cognisant of what the teenage player wants. The quotes below illustrate the mindset in the pre-test focus group, when compared to all the previous quotes at follow-up (i.e. athlete-centred).

"I do like to be prepared in most things that I do so I would like to know what I'm doing ahead of it and have things setup."

"I would be planning to take a lot of skills a lot of set pieces."

"Keep it structured try and look at where they need to be improved."

 However, not all coaches had the change in mindset, and for one coach, it was obvious they would be slow to allow younger teenage players have a voice in what happens, as they were conscious of how it would make them look.

"I do not know how young I would go with letting them choose what they wanted but with the 16s giving them a chance to make decisions on warm ups worked alright but I don't know if I would be comfortable going down to u12s as it could get out of hand, we will just have to trial and error it but I don't not want people to think its madness down there"

- Furthermore, one coach felt that they 'needed to be a dictator as well if there was too much messing going on, make it enjoyable but serious enough they get the message', while another mentioned 'being fair in control and getting respect'.
- Nevertheless, given the overall emergent findings across this 16-week
  Gaelic for Girls evaluation, it would be reasonable to conclude that the
  coaches identified the importance of their future coaching endeavours
  reflecting the principles of 'holistic player development.'

#### **Conclusion/Future Recommendations**

Overall, the coaches were very happy with the programme, and spoke very highly of the content, facilitators, ambassadors and guest speakers. Coaches clearly appreciated the access to the content in an online forum, most noted in the fact that they could access material in their own time. All coaches intend to continue coaching and in particular, coaches want to maintain their time working with the teenage players. Coaches revealed that they have a better understanding of what works for teenagers, as a direct result of their participation in the Gaelic4Teens programme.

While the course was extremely positive, there are some recommendations that emerged following the pre and post focus groups, which include as follows:

- Continue with the online delivery of certain theoretical content with support videos and allow access to the GAA eLearning portal for further assimilation of the content.
- The practical elements and club visits need to be in a face to face format for the
  best learning experience, and consideration should be given to increasing the
  club visits, ambassador visits while also providing an opportunity for
  participating clubs from the same region coming together for practical coaching
  sessions.
- Allow the coaches from various clubs to have an opportunity to learn from each
  other, either remotely or face to face, as many coaches will face similar issues.
   For example, a discussion forum on the GAA eLearning portal or an overall
  "Gaelic4Teens 2020" texting group in which coaches could opt into and engage
  in peer learning and support would be welcome.
- As some of the uptake in clubs was poorer than the coaches and co-ordinators
  would have hoped, it is recommended that the Gaelic4Teens clubs receive
  some guidance from the LGFA on recruiting coaches and seeking coach buy
  in. This LGFA guidance could be based on feedback from previous
  Gaelic4Teens clubs, as to what works and does not work in this regard.
- Have a way of checking in with the coaches to see if new learnings from the programme are being applied. It was evident between the pre and post focus groups that some coaches did not change in practical terms, even though they were aware of the theory and the benefit of same. In this regard, a suggested short questionnaire for the players to fill in on their experiences of the coach before and after they take part in the Gaelic4Teens programme might be helpful, specifically to evaluate if there have been some positive coaching adaptations over time (based on the teenager's voice). It is envisaged that this questionnaire data will remain with the coaches to act as a self-reflection tool to improve their coaching practices going forward.

To conclude, the Gaelic4Teens programme is worthy of high praise from the participating coaches, and with some of the recommendations mentioned above, Gaelic4Teens has the potential to be even more beneficial to club coaches in the 2021 playing season.

**Figure 1.** The following diagram visually illustrates the emergent eight themes and sub-themes from the focus group data with the coaches.

# G4T programme specific

- Timing as an obstacle
  - Duration, Season and Digital Literacy
- Coach acknowledgement for the game principles of LGFA.
  - Tactical Appreciation of Coaches
- Coach appreciation of online and blended learning approaches.
  - Gaelic for Teens Structures Pushing Coaches towards a 'Philosophy'
  - Gaelic for Teens Resources Contemporary and Innovative
  - Online Mode of Delivery Efficiency and Ease of Access
- Active role modelling.
  - Player Ambassadors Involvement for Coach and Player Empowerment

# Individual coach specific

- Future Coaching Style
  - Holistic Vision Interactive and Approachable with 'Challenge'
- Player autonomy, confidence and competence.
  - Autonomy Listening to the 'Voice' of the Player through Player 'Input'
  - Player confidence instilled through variety
- Features of Quality within Coaching Sessions
  - Fun through Developmentally Appropriate Coaching Sessions
- The Value of Face to Face Professional Development for Coaches
  - Life on the Pitch for Coaches

## Appendix A – Pre Focus group questions

#### **Exploring Cavan Coaches Perspectives on Gaelic4Teens**

#### <u>Section 1 (General Opinions on Gaelic 4 Teens programme)</u>

- **Q1.** From what you know to-date as a coach, what are your thoughts/perspectives on the 'Gaelic 4 Teens' (Gaelic4Teens) programme?
- **Q2.** What is it about the Gaelic4Teens programme that attracted you to apply or to be involved as a coach?
- **Q3.** Are there any barriers or challenges that are hampering or impacting your participation as a coach in the Gaelic4Teens programme?
- **Q4.** How do you feel about the move in 2020 to a blended online model (self-paced learning, webinars, and practical) for the Gaelic4Teens programme?
- **Q5.** Is there anything different at this stage that you would like to see in the Gaelic4Teens programme?

#### Section 2 (Coach Development)

- **Q6.** What is your current coaching style when working with female teenagers at club level?
- **Q7.** When planning your coaching sessions in training, what are the most important factors to consider?
- **Q8.** As a coach in the lead up, and on the game day, what are the most important factors to consider?
- **Q9.** From your coaching experience, how do you find coaching the female teenager?

#### **Section 3 (Teenagers)**

- **Q.9** Research continues to show that girls' participation in sport drops significantly coming into the teenager period. In your experience as a coach or a parent/guardian, why have some girls stopped playing on their local club team?
- Q.10 From the eyes of a teenage participant, what type of coach do they prefer?
- **Q.11** Why have you decided to get involved with the teenagers in your local club?
- **Q.12** Finally, when are the teenagers at their 'happiest'?

### Appendix B – Post Focus group questions

#### **Exploring Cavan Coaches Perspectives on Gaelic4Teens**

#### Section 1 (General Opinions on Gaelic 4 Teens programme)

- **Q1.** From what you know to-date as a coach, what are your thoughts/perspectives on the 'Gaelic 4 Teens' (Gaelic4Teens) programme?
- **Q2.** Are there any barriers or challenges that are hampering or impacting your maximum engagement as a coach in the Gaelic4Teens programme?
- **Q3.** How do you feel about the move in 2020 to a blended online model (self-paced learning, webinars, and practical) for the Gaelic4Teens programme?
- **Q4.** Is there anything different at this stage that you would like to see in the Gaelic4Teens programme?

#### Section 2 (Coach Development)

- **Q5.** Has your coaching style changed when working with female teenagers at club level as a result of the Gaelic4Teens programme?
- **Q6.** When planning your coaching sessions in training, what are the most important factors to consider?
- **Q7.** As a coach in the lead up, and on the game day, what are the most important factors to consider?

#### **Section 3 (Teenagers)**

- **Q.8** From the eyes of a teenage participant, what type of coach do they prefer?
- **Q.9** How did the club visits with the ambassadors demonstrate good coaching?
- **Q.10** Would you get involved with teenage teams again in the future?