

CASE STUDY —

The Red Shed – Together Fund, Walking Football

The Red Shed provides garden-based activities and experiences for people with Dementia, their carers and their families. They aim to improve and enhance physical and mental health and decrease loneliness and isolation. They deliver three weekly Garden Club sessions providing activities and social opportunities. These sessions are designed to help people to get active, connect with others, be creative and feel a part of a team. They also provide monthly sessions for isolated older people in the local area. These involve a craft activity, usually run in the garden and a chance to meet others in a safe environment. The Red Shed provides evening sessions of Walking Football on their dementia garden site, for people living with dementia and their careers.

The Red Shed also hosts a monthly carers café supports carers with practical advice about dementia and information on other organisations that can provide support. In addition, they hold several other events, such as Garden Parties and Wire Craft sessions. They regularly use their Croquet Set, purchased with Active Local funding in 2021, including an evening visit to Letchworth Croquet Club.

Limited activities are available in the evenings for those involved in the Red Shed. In the summer, it will be a welcome opportunity for people to enjoy social time outside. Learning new activities and keeping active positively affect both physical and mental wellbeing. The sessions are made available to current Red Shed participants as well as others in the community who are living with dementia and their carers. After completing the sessions, The Red Shed will continue offering Walking Football as part of their Garden Club activities. This inclusive sport is a great way to encourage people to enjoy being in the garden.

15 people joined us over the sessions, five of those had dementia diagnosis and 10 were carers and family members. Further members of The Red Shed used the equipment at their Summer Lunch party and during one of their weekly Garden club sessions, this has led to more people trying the activity and benefiting from the experience.



“It has been our pleasure working with Su and The Red Shed to deliver the Walking Football sessions over the summer. It has been incredible to watch the participants get involved and enjoy themselves in a safe and supportive environment, whilst benefitting from being active. Whether it was someone living with dementia, a carer or even volunteers, everyone got involved and made the most of these fun sessions. We would love to work with The Red Shed again in the future and offer more sessions like this.”

Hannah Marsh, Head of Health & Wellbeing at Stevenage Football Club Foundation

“Everyone feedback how much fun it was and there was a lot of laughter, there were also several reports of aching limbs the morning after which was all felt as a positive indication of being active. This activity also meant that folk from different groups at The Red Shed were able to meet and connect with each other.”

Su Harvey, CEO at The Red Shed Project

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This project is funded by the Long-Term Health Conditions Together Fund pot from Sport England to bring communities together and create more active opportunities for groups after Covid-19. The project, hosted at The Red Shed Garden, began in July 2023 and ran until August 2023. The project cost £911. Below is a breakdown of costs.

The funding covered:

- The cost of promoting the project and coordinating the sessions to ensure they are welcoming and safe for participants
- Equipment - goals and footballs recommended by Stevenage Football Club Foundation (SFCF) and coloured bibs to denote teams
- The cost of a coach from SFCF to provide instruction and referee experience
- Refreshments and snacks to encourage a sociable experience.

Walking football aims to keep people playing the game as long as possible by enforcing rules such as no running and low impact tackling. This promotes cardiovascular fitness whilst producing the least stress on the body. The activity had physical benefits for the participants and a range of mental, social and emotional benefits. The sessions offered good flexibility for the supporters and carers of the participants, who could choose to stay and watch the game, socialise with other carers or join in playing football. Attendees and their carers reported that it had improved sleep, which was particularly important for one participant whose dementia had recently led to bad sleeping cycles.

Some members who were not keen on the idea of football were worried it sounded too athletic, even with 'Walking' in the title. This meant less people initially came along to the first sessions than we had hoped. However, following feedback from those who attended, others joined for the latter weeks.

The three Zoftskin Bell Balls purchased for the sessions were a little too soft, so we purchased a further ball as the coaches from Stevenage FC recommended. The softer balls have been great for target practice and we made some coloured targets to hang from the goal top for participants to aim at. This has been a 'spin-off' from the football, and we found it a great way to increase confidence and help coordination. They also purchased some additional Pom Poms for those unable to play who used them as cheerleaders. It helped keep them engaged with the activity and feel involved.



One couple are now very keen to continue with Walking Football and are looking at the group run by Stevenage FC which was signposted to the group. At the last session there were lots of requests to continue the activity and the logistics of doing this will now be considered. Together, through this partnership, funding will be looked at to develop this programme further.

