



FUN AT BOWLS (FAB) COMMUNITY GROUP

PHILIP WRIGHT CROWN GREEN BOWLING ACADEMY, COLNE, LANCASHIRE

PHILIP WRIGHT CROWN GREEN BOWLING ACADEMY

Philip Wright was a much-loved member of the local bowling community who tragically lost his life in a car accident in July 2009. It is our aim, as his family and friends, to promote the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy in his memory.

The Academy was founded in 2012 through a grant from Sport England and has since grown from strength to strength, with the help of a dedicated team of volunteers. In 2014, the Academy was offered the opportunity to relocate our operations to two unused bowling greens at Alkincoats Park in Colne, and we haven't looked back since. Taking over the full maintenance of the greens, and surrounding areas, the team of volunteers have progressed what we do well beyond our wildest expectations, to become one of the driving forces within bowls development anywhere within the UK.

In 2020, the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy became a UK Registered Charity (1188582) from our work to support the growth of the sport. In addition to this, the Academy has also been awarded with both the 'Pride of Pendle' and Active Lancashire's 'Contribution to Active Communities' awards during the last 10 years.

The underlying objective of the Academy is to promote community participation in healthy recreation, for the benefit of the inhabitants of Colne and the surrounding areas, by the provision of facilities to participate in Crown Green Bowling.

Having already done a great deal of work with both clinical commissioning groups and charities, such as the Stroke Association, in July 2022 we were approached to enquire if we could support individuals with additional needs to play bowls. This enquiry very quickly became the 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group.



'FUN AT BOWLS' COMMUNITY GROUP (FAB)

Support for people with disabilities, and/or additional needs, is an area that crown green bowls unfortunately lacks, in the main. Specialist equipment (such as bowls-specific wheelchairs, 'Bowling Arms', etc....) are very expensive and bulky to store. This prevents them from being an option for many Clubs and, as such, there are very few bowlers with disabilities that play the sport.

Following our initial enquiry, we thought that there was an opportunity for us to fill the void. After much research, within a very short timeframe, we managed to borrow two specialist wheelchairs to support this enquiry and to 'test the water', so to speak. The response was nothing short of overwhelming!!!

Whilst running our first session, we decided to 'post' about it on social media. With the consent of the participants, we shared a few images, and we were inundated with enquiry messages. By the third week of running the 'FAB' sessions, over 30 people were attending and travelling distances of up to 30 miles. Several of the members of the group required wheelchair support and, due to us only having the two loaned wheelchairs, we had to share the time between them. The bowlers were more than happy with this, and it enabled one of the other key aspects of the group to be able to take place whilst waiting – coffee time with a chat.

The success of the first few sessions immediately indicated to us that there was a need to evolve the 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group, and there was an urgent need for us to find funding to support the sessions. More specialist equipment was needed to make sure that we could support the bowlers with varying needs - from wheelchairs, to bowls lifters, to walking frames, to 'Bowling Arms', etc.... A project plan was drawn up and we went away to see how we could source the required funds to meet the costs. The response that we received from the grant providers was incredibly supportive and has enabled us to change the opportunities, and lifestyles, for countless bowlers throughout our catchment areas.



INITIAL FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT

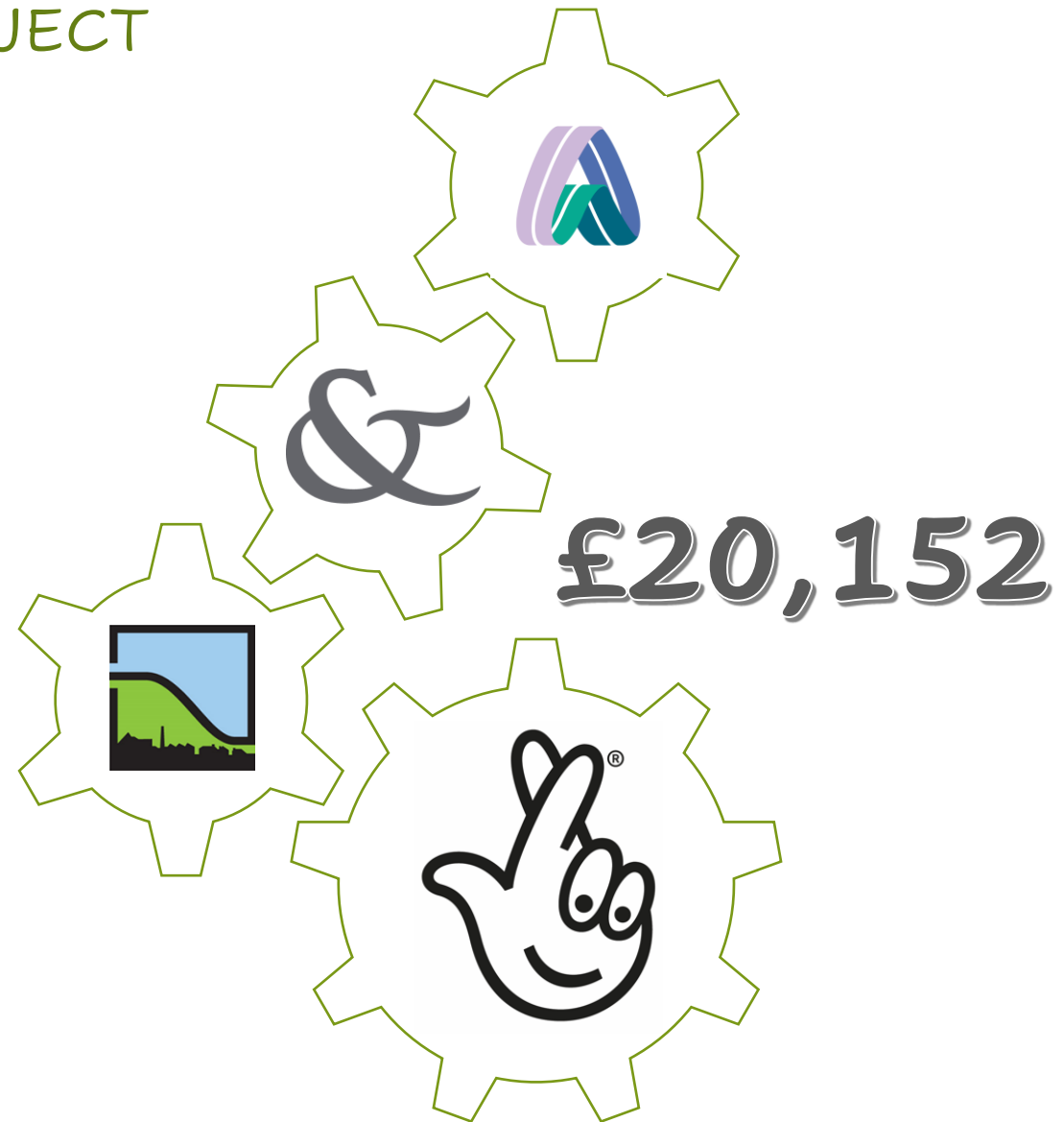
The 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group has been funded predominantly, by four main grant awards and/or donations.

Our first port-of-call was to Active Lancashire. Following telephone conversations around what we were trying to achieve, the organisation couldn't have been more supportive. They took our case forward to Sport England's 'Together Fund' and supported our application all the way. In total, we were awarded £4,860 (plus an additional £500 a few months later).

Our second award was through the National Lottery's 'Community Fund'. Building our project around the Active Lancashire application, we were awarded an additional £9,460 towards equipment costs for the project.

Thirdly, we spoke to our local Councillors about the work that we were undertaking within the local community. We explained the needs of the project, and the results that we had already demonstrated. On the back of these conversations, we received Councilor grants of £2,974 to purchase a specialist motorized bowling wheelchair.

Finally, from speaking to the Management team at Graham & Brown Wallpapers (based in East Lancashire), they held a 'Charity Day' and donated £2,358 towards the 'FAB' project.



SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT PURCHASED

The most significant expenses associated to the 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group project, have been the purchasing of the specialist equipment. In total, so far, the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy has invested in:

- 4 Manual Wheelchairs
- 3 Motorized Wheelchairs
- 8 'Bowling Arms'
- 2 Bowling Green Walking Frames
- 4 Bowling Green Walking Sticks
- 8 Bowls' Lifters
- 20+ Sets of Smaller Sized, Colourful Bowls
- 'Bowls Buddies' Bowls Equipment



SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT – IN DETAIL



Specialist Bowling Green Wheelchairs - Manual

We have invested in 'Bradshaw Buggy' wheelchairs in manual options. These chairs have been identified as the best option on an outdoor green, due to the size, and positioning, of the large wheels.

Unfortunately, these are no longer available from new, and there is a need for the products.



Specialist Bowling Green Wheelchairs - Motorized

We have invested in both 'Bradshaw Buggy' and 'Bowls Royce' wheelchairs.

As mentioned, the 'Bradshaw Buggy' models are excellent in performance. We have found the 'Bowls Royce' to be a little more restrictive to bowlers on outdoor greens, with the wheels protruding from the frame.



Drakes Pride 'Bowling Arm'

These aids support a bowler who struggles with either bending, balance or upper-body movement.

The bowl can be lifted using the 'Bowling Arm', and then positioned within the 'grip'. The aid is then swung like an extension to the bowler's arm and the bowl is delivered when the 'trigger' is released.



Bowling Green Walking Frame

The wheeled walking frame is an ideal aid for a bowler that doesn't need, or want, to use a wheelchair, but requires a little extra support for walking across the green.

We have invested in both two- and four-wheel options to give the maximum choice to the bowler.

SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT – IN DETAIL



Bowling Green Walking Stick

Similar to the walking frame, the walking stick is designed to support the bowler when walking across the green.

In addition, the walking stick also incorporates a bowl lifter, along with a wide base plate to enable the bowler to use the walking stick as a 'rest' when delivering the bowl.



'Collapsible' Bowls Lifters

These aids are designed to help anyone who has a difficulty in bending down. By using the 'prongs' on the base of the lifter, both the jack, and bowls, can be easily picked up from the green.

The bowls lifters are also fully collapsible so that they can easily be stored within a bowls bag.



Small-Sized and Mixed Coloured Bowls

We have invested in a high volume of both smaller sized, and brightly coloured bowls for the project.

The smaller bowls make it much easier for the bowler to be able to deliver the bowl a greater distance, whilst the brightly coloured ones enable anyone with vision restrictions to be able to identify the bowls at distance.

Bowls Buddies



'Bowls Buddies' Bowls

These bowls are constructed from a polyurethane rubber but are still fully 'biased' in the same way as a standard bowl.

They offer an alternative to a bowler that may have 'grip' restrictions (such as arthritis, etc....), and enable children to take part with other age groups across the community.

THE FORMAT OF THE SESSIONS

The 'Fun at Bowls' sessions take place on Thursday afternoons between 1.00pm and 3.00pm. They are advertised through the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy's social media channels, through word-of-mouth, and on notices on the outside of the Pavilion.

The sessions, in the main, are kept very informal, and can be tailored to the needs of the individuals taking part. There are always at least 3 qualified coaches present (with DBS and safeguarding certification) to support local community volunteers (anything up to 8 per session) who both bowl, and interact socially, with the bowlers.

When a new bowler attends their first session, they are welcomed by one of the coaches who will gain an understanding of what the person would like to get from the sessions and, if applicable, what support they require. The coach will make sure that the new bowler is made to feel both welcomed, and comfortable, and will help them to take part in the session quickly. As part of this informal induction, the coach will cover all health and safety aspects, as well as ensuring that all equipment is safe for the bowler to use. Following this, basic details will be taken from the bowler (securely stored) and the bowler will be added, with their permission, to the 'FAB' register which documents any equipment needed, size of bowls, etc.... for future sessions.

All sessions are worked around what the bowlers want. For example, some bowlers may play as a group, with volunteers, whilst others may want to bowl 1-on-1 with a coach. Some will bowl for most of the session, others might only bowl for 15 minutes and then go for a coffee with other members of the group. The key driver behind the sessions is to allow the bowlers to do what THEY want to do, and not something that is a rigid structure.

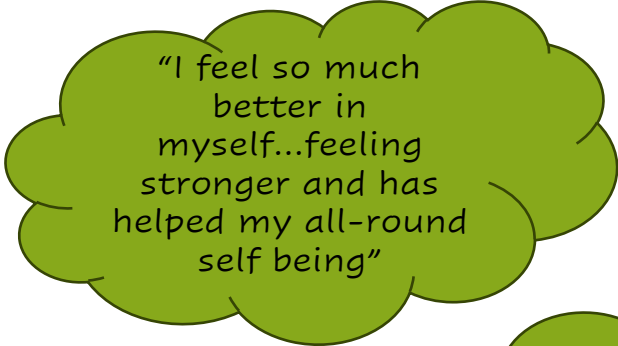


FEEDBACK FROM THE BOWLERS


Throughout September 2023, we circulated a survey to all bowlers, and volunteers, to get their feedback on the sessions, their thoughts about how they supported them, the wider bowling community, and anything else they would like to see within the sessions.

The feedback received from the bowlers at the 'Fun at Bowls' sessions is nothing short of astounding. Almost without exception, the positivity is overwhelming, and highlights the work that the team at the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy undertakes.

As mentioned at the outset, the opportunities for bowlers with disabilities (or for potential new bowlers) to enjoy the sport are significantly restricted. It is an almost unique environment that the 'FAB' sessions have created, to enable bowlers from all walks of life, with additional needs and/or disabilities, to be able to both bowl, and socialize, together with their friends.




"I feel so much better in myself...feeling stronger and has helped my all-round self being"



"A wonderful place to have a coffee and chat...everyone is made to feel welcome"



"Good fun, good company, good friends"



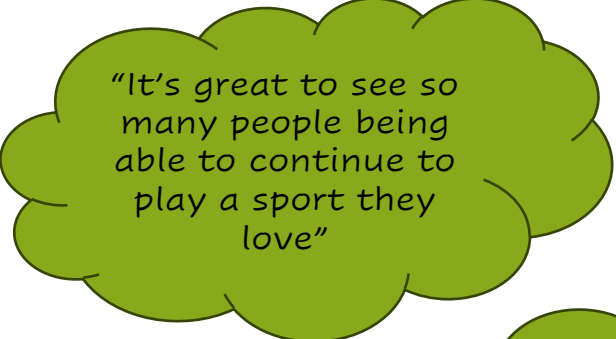
"Very nice, kind people....they make me happy"

FEEDBACK FROM THE VOLUNTEERS


Operationally, the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy relies on volunteers to support their activities. Since our formation in 2012, we have developed a strong ethos of support within our members, and this is highlighted with the members that volunteer at the 'Fun at Bowls' sessions.

The over-riding feedback from volunteers is that they enjoy meeting new people and being able to support them, to play the sport, that the volunteers themselves love. They appreciate how difficult it is for people with disabilities to be able to access specialised equipment, and love to see how they grow in confidence when using it. The volunteers appreciate that everyone's situation is different – some bowlers need a little bit more support, whilst others want to be independent – and they respond perfectly to each individual.


Even though the volunteers help to make the sessions what they are, as one of them says, they don't feel like they do anything special – they enjoy the sessions just as much as the people that they're supporting.




"It's great to see so many people being able to continue to play a sport they love"



"We don't feel like we do anything special....why can't more Clubs do this?"



"I really look forward to every Thursday afternoon"



"What a great group of friends"

FEEDBACK FROM GOVERNING BODIES

On a wider scale, we have showcased our sessions to both Mark Bircumshaw (CEO of the British Crown Green Bowling Association) and Lisa Graham (Managing Director of the Bowls Development Alliance) and both were very impressed with all facets of them. Both Mark and Lisa spent time with the participants, volunteers and coaches to gain an understanding of the mechanics, and demand, for the sessions.

Mark commented:

"The work that the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy have done with the 'Fun at Bowls' sessions is exceptional. I really enjoyed the time that I spent there, being able to speak to many of the participants, and gain a real understanding of the difference that this project has made to them personally. It's fantastic to see our sport being accessible to everyone and the team should be very proud of what they're achieving. The next steps, from a Governing body perspective, is to evaluate ways that we can replicate this project, with support, to more Clubs across the sport."

Mark Bircumshaw, CEO - British Crown Green Bowling Association

Lisa added:

"The Bowls Development Alliance are really impressed with the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy, and the activity it is supporting. It's a great example of a Club delivering bowling sessions that are truly accessible, as well as being fun! We want to support and enable more Crown Green Clubs to follow their example and realise the potential of bowls to be fully inclusive of everyone in our society. Well done to the everyone involved."

Lisa Graham, Managing Director - Bowls Development Alliance

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

- 100% of respondents enjoyed attending the 'Fun at Bowls' sessions.
- 100% of respondents stated that the sessions had helped them to improve their levels of activity, health or wellbeing.
- 58% of respondents had bowled prior to attending the 'Fun at Bowls' sessions.
- 28% of respondents travelled over 10 miles to attend, with 67% being within 5 miles of Alkincoats Park.
- 83% of respondents expressed that they travelled to the sessions as they couldn't access specialised equipment anywhere else.
- 100% of respondents felt that governing bodies needed to do more to both support bowlers with additional needs, and to promote where opportunities were available to access.
- 100% of respondents felt that there was a need for other Clubs to develop their inclusivity offerings.
- 100% of respondents would be happy to pay an annual fee to access specialised equipment, with monetary responses varying from £20 upwards.
- Respondents identified the following as their main reasons for attending:
 - Meeting new people
 - Regular exercise
 - Coffee and a chat
 - Inclusive culture

NEXT STEPS

The first full 'bowling' season for the 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group has highlighted a significant need for similar projects to be rolled out across other Clubs. The sessions have been exceptionally well attended (with between 30 and 40 participants attending on a weekly basis) and the feedback from everyone concerned has been fantastic.

Our plan is to initially invite like-minded 'Academies', and Clubs, from across the County to come and view the project (and equipment) and understand how this can be rolled out in different areas. We have already secured the backing of the County Management Committee and discussions will commence during Autumn/Winter 2023/4. This case study will be circulated to all affiliated Clubs, and regional presentations will be done for all interested parties. The aim of these presentations will be to open people's eyes to how Club's need to become more inclusive and, on the back of this, the opportunities that Club's have to develop their membership.

One of the key learnings is that the sessions offer an excellent way for the bowlers to undertake regular exercise – something that they had found difficult prior to attending. Every response that we received indicated that the sessions had helped them to improve their levels of activity, health or wellbeing. This is something that is essential to develop, going forwards, as a way to encourage increased activity.

As the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy, our next steps are to continue to build on the sessions for 2024 and beyond. We will be increasing our promotion of the sessions and also investigating the opportunity to introduce 'Bowls 4 Health' sessions, in conjunction with the Bowls Development Alliance and local clinical commissioning groups. Bowls is a sport that can be utilised as an introduction to exercise, as well as a gentle sport that can help with rehabilitation following illness or injury. Both of these give us a great opportunity to further support our local community.

In the main, the feedback received points to us having a good balance of sporting activity and social interaction. This is something that we will maintain going forward and appears to be an essential mix for the enjoyment of the bowlers. We will also investigate ways to develop this social interaction through additional community activities and events.

PROJECT SUMMARY

In the first twelve months, the 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group has enabled over 50 people with disabilities (either physical or learning) to play the sport. The majority of these bowlers have attended the sessions on a regular basis and benefitted significantly from the project, especially with regards to their undertaking of regular activities.

In addition to this, we must also acknowledge both the contribution, and benefits to, of the volunteers. Without them, the sessions would be impossible to run, but we cannot understate the benefits that the volunteers actually gain themselves. As they have highlighted, they feel an enormous sense of pride and well-being in being able to support the bowlers. They also gain friendship and social interaction – something that they may not get in their normal day-to-day experiences.

At the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy, we feel that the project has been an overwhelming success and is something that we will continue (and develop further) over the coming years. Times have changed, and Clubs need to adapt and change quickly. Clubs must become fully inclusive and support anyone that wants to play our sport. This project has highlighted what can be achieved, and more importantly, the way that it is received by the bowlers.

Are the 'Fun at Bowls' sessions perfect? – no.

Do we do everything 100% correctly? – no.

Are we keen to learn, and develop, as we support our local community? – YES!!!

The project has been a learning curve for us all, but it's one that we are proud of undertaking, and one that we will continue to travel upon.

Bowls IS a sport for EVERYONE.

Project Image Gallery









If you would like any additional information with regards to the 'Fun at Bowls' Community Group, or the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy, please don't hesitate to get in touch:

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