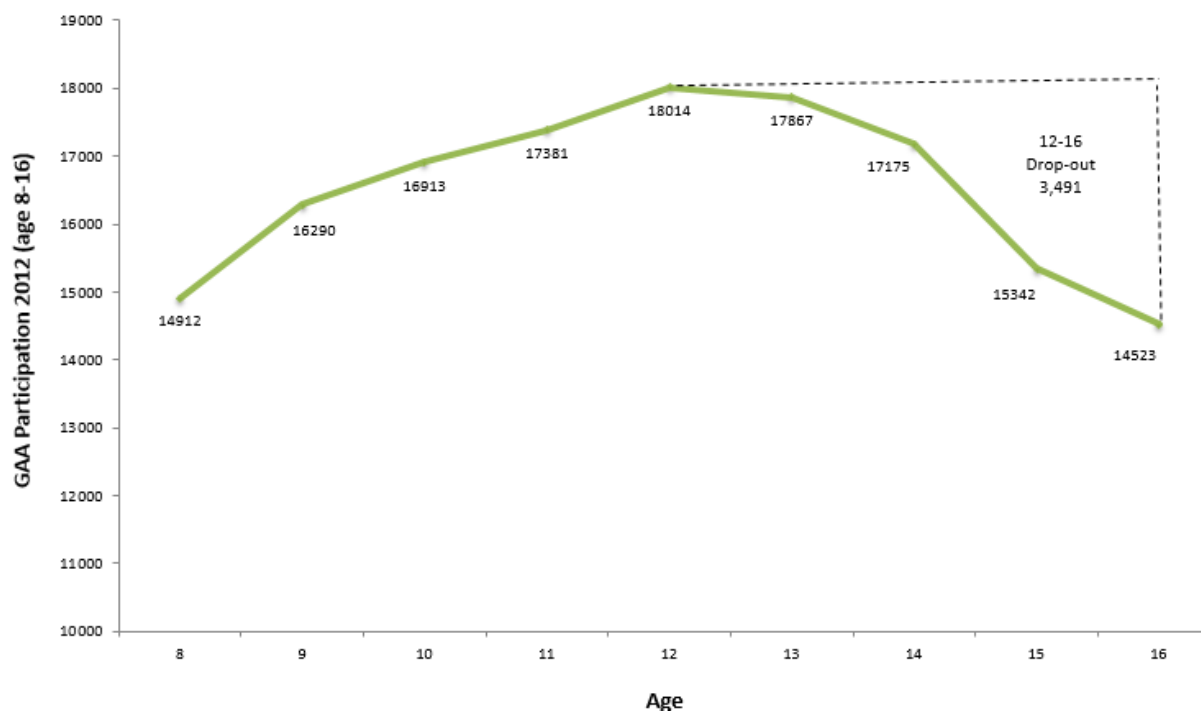


Institution: Abertay University		
Unit of Assessment: 24 - Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism		
Title of case study: Reversing sports participation drop-out from the Gaelic Athletic Association in Ireland		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January - May 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name:	Role (e.g. job title):	Period employed by submitting HEI:
David Lavallee	Professor	August 2017-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: April 2018 - December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) identified a sports participation drop-out rate of 19% among 12-16 year-old male participants in Ireland in 2012.</p> <p>A programme of research led by Professor David Lavallee led to the development of a programme called the Super Games Centre (SGC). Through the establishment of a sustainable network of SGCs the participation drop-out trend was reversed with participation increasing by 28% by March 2019.</p> <p>The research led to changes in practice and policy, and beneficiaries include the GAA, 1,174 GAA clubs, the Ireland mainstream education system, 262 schools and 11,250 school pupils.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Drop-out from youth sport in Ireland (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) was identified as a significant problem in September 2013, with maintaining involvement being the greatest challenge for sports policy [<i>Keeping Them in the Game</i>; Economic and Social Research Institute].</p> <p>The GAA, an organization in Ireland that promotes traditional Gaelic sports (e.g., Hurling, Football, Rounders and Handball), comprises autonomous bodies responsible for male and female participation. The GAA provide oversight for male participation while the Camogie Association and Ladies Gaelic Football Association focus exclusively on female participation. In 2012, the GAA was experiencing major challenges in safeguarding sports participation, with a 19% drop-out rate involving 3,491 male participants between the ages of 12-16 years.</p>		



Research into this problem, led by Professor Lavallee, involved the feasibility testing of an intervention (i.e., feasibility research at Stirling University) and post-intervention follow-up (i.e., underpinning research at Abertay University). A central feature in the intervention design involved planned modifications to the GAA participation experience to reduce the intention to drop-out. Super Games Centre's (SGCs) introduced new modifications to traditional sport participation experiences (e.g., rules were introduced that everyone must play and also that teams earned additional points for providing positive feedback to teammates and opponents) to increase social support based on values (i.e., positive feedback, respect, belonging, empowerment, enjoyment, effort) to positively impact participation in youth sport.

The feasibility research was delivered with male participants aged 12 to 16 years over a 24-week period. Experienced sports coaches were recruited and trained specifically to deliver the intervention across 10 location sites in Ireland. These location sites were selected across a range of community support settings. The timing and duration of the feasibility research was aligned with two key school semester periods (i.e., September-December 2014, and January-April 2015). The underpinning research was conducted in January-May 2018 and employed the same procedure that had been used to calculate the 19% drop-out rate (3,491 participants) in 2012 [3.1].

The feasibility research found that the participants who received greater levels of social support reduced their intention to drop-out. Furthermore, social identity was determined to be a significant mediating factor in explaining the association between changes in social support and intentions to drop-out of GAA participation.

The underpinning research used a rigorous approach to identify an increase in youth participants by 28% (i.e., 7,012 new 12-16 year-old participants), reversing the 19.38% drop-out rate and providing the follow-up evidence required to achieve the impact [3.1]. The Irish Sports Council (Sport Ireland) stated the following in relation to the research findings:

"The lessons learned from the Super Game Centre research can be applied right across Irish sport and thus ensure that we can maximize youth participation on a whole sport basis".

The Principal Investigator was David Lavalley, Professor at Abertay University (since August 2017) and previously Professor at Stirling University (2011-2017). Dr. Pete Coffee (Stirling University) was a Co-Investigator and Dr. Daragh Sheridan (Stirling University) was a PhD Research Student. The feasibility research was conducted between September 2014 and April 2015 (Stirling University) and underpinning research was conducted in January-May 2018 (Abertay University; Professor Lavalley collected and analysed the data and formulated recommendations for the GAA to help translate the findings into impact).

3. References to the research

3.1 Lavalley, D., Sheridan, D., Coffee, P., & Daly, P. (2019). A social support intervention to reduce intentions to drop-out from youth sport: The GAA Super Games Centre. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 28, 11-17. <https://doi.org/10.5093/pi2018a15>

4. Details of the impact

The GAA used the underpinning research findings to create a sustainable network to support its members in establishing Super Games Centres (SGCs) in locations across every county in the Republic of Ireland, as well as in the United Kingdom, United States and Singapore.

The overall purpose of SGCs is to provide participation opportunities for youth aged 12-16 years not adequately catered for or served through traditional competitive sport structures. SGCs can be based in club, school, and community locations, and offer small-sided, informal playing opportunities where participants oversee the organisation of the game format.

A key part of the implementation programme was the translation of the research findings into a sustainable network to enable and support GAA clubs to establish SGCs in club, school, and community locations after they became aware of the underpinning research [5.1]. The GAA decision to roll-out the programme nationally was informed by the research, and Professor Lavalley worked with the GAA from April 2018 to translate the research findings into a sustainable network of SGCs.

The GAA Director of Games Development and Research outlines the developments as a result of the underpinning research [5.2]:

“As of March 2019, a total of 1,174 Super Games Centres have been established. This is a significant increase from 115 Super Games Centres that were established by September 2017”.

Beneficiaries of the widespread implementation of the SGCs have been GAA clubs who now have a sustainable network to support youth sport populations not adequately served by regular school or club games through the traditional competitive structure. GAA clubs have benefitted further, as the underpinning research formed a distinct part of the GAA attracting €3M from Sky Sports to support youth sport participation [5.3]. Sky Sports partnered with the GAA after becoming aware of the sustainable network of SGCs to provide support to each SGC from May 2018 with new sports equipment and role model ambassadors who would visit SGCs to meet participants and contribute to activities around Ireland for five years [5.3].

In October 2018 the GAA president, said [5.4]:

“The GAA Super Games Centres are an innovative way of helping the GAA tackle the world phenomenon that is the fall-off of teenagers when it comes to participation in sport”.

In terms of reversing the sports participation drop-out rate through the establishment of a sustainable network of SGCs in Ireland, the GAA Director of Games Development and Research noted the following [5.2]:

“As of March 2019, 17,017 participants have taken part in Club Super Games Centres, while 15,259 participants have taken part in Post Primary School Super Games”.

Other beneficiaries include young people (females and males) and schools in Ireland who participated in the Future Leaders Transition Year Programme (FLTYP). The establishment of a sustainable network of SGCs formed a distinct part in establishing the FLTYP, a new cross-curricular initiative developed as part of the mainstream education system in Ireland to give transition year pupils the knowledge and skills to support all roles required in the effective staging of Gaelic Games [5.6]. The transition year is an optional one-year school programme in Ireland available to pupils (normal age 16 years) after the three-year Junior Cycle (normal age 12-15 years) and before the two-year Senior Cycle (normal age 17-18 years). The mission of the transition year, according to the Ireland Department of Education and Skills, is to promote leadership skills in pupils.

As part of the Programme that commenced in August 2018, transition year pupils are challenged to organise and run a SGC for younger students [5.5]. The Professional Development Service for Teachers in Ireland are partners with the GAA in the FLTYP and provide training and development to the schools involved. The underpinning research influenced this new FLTYP initiative and fostered collaboration as evidenced in [5.2].

“Super Games are also an important aspect of the Future Leaders Transition Year Programme that was launched in 2018/2019. As of March 2019, 262 Post-Primary Schools are currently participating in the Future Leaders Transition Year Programme during the 2018/2019 academic year with approximately 11,250 students benefitting from this programme”.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic all GAA activities, including SGCs, were suspended in March 2020 [5.7]. There were plans for all SGC activities to continue, so impact could have continued. For example, additional Post Primary Schools and pupils who had registered to participate in the FLTYP and organise SGCs for younger students in 2020-21 would have benefited.

The SGCs have achieved broader, international reach with a version of the FLTYP in the United States [5.8] and SGCs established in the United Kingdom, United States and Singapore in 2019:

“Super Games Centres are ideally suited to the promotion & development of Gaelic Games in the International setting, as reflected in the establishment of Super Games Centres in London and the United States. The expansion of the GAA internationally has also seen a Super Games Centre setup in Singapore in 2019” [5.2].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Web pages on the GAA website outlining the Super Games Centre:

<https://www.gaa.ie/my-gaa/getting-involved/super-games-centers>

5.2 Testimonial letter from Pat Daly GAA Director of Games Development and Research, 25 March 2019

5.3 GAA partnership with Sky Sports to support Super Games Centres:

<http://sportforbusiness.com/sky-backing-play-to-stay-with-gaa/>

5.4 Statement from GAA President, October 2018:

<http://sportforbusiness.com/sky-looking-to-youth-with-gaa-partnerships/>

- 5.5** Web page on the GAA website outlining the Future Leaders Transition Year Programme:
<https://learning.gaa.ie/futureleaders>
- 5.6** Future Leaders Transition Year Programme:
<https://www.gaa.ie/news-archive/news/more-than-260-schools-sign-up-to-gaa-pdst-future-leaders-ty-programme/>
- 5.7** Web page on the GAA website announcing suspended activities as a result of COVID-19 pandemic
<https://www.gaa.ie/news/gaa-camogie-association-and-the-lgfa-suspend-all-activity/>
- 5.8** Webpage with evidence of international reach:
<https://www.gaa.ie/news/gaa-s-future-leaders-are-making-their-mark/>