ISRCTN17438373 https://doi.org/10.1186/ISRCTN17438373

Football Cooperative, a community based physical activity social intervention for men: A feasibility study for scale up

Submission date
07/05/2021

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
16/06/2021

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
16/12/2025

Condition category
Other

[_] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
Football Cooperative (FC) is a social enterprise (SE) established since 2017 for men, by men and uses 'pick-up-football' as the vehicle to bring men together to improve their overall health and achieve social gains for local communities. FC games are a) accessible i.e. local amenities are used for games; b) flexible regarding attendance (played 2-3 nights/week), c) affordable to ensure inclusion of all and d) offered to all levels of fitness and football capacity. 'Pick-up-football' differs from Association Football in terms of the pitch and player numbers. Games (60-90 mins depending on pitch availability) are played on a rectangular pitch with floodlit capability and an astroturf surface to ensure year round activity. Games create a team environment (5-9 a-side depending upon attendance); team formation is crucial to ensuring both the game and social experience is maximised. The Match Coordinator will tactfully select the teams for the game with the objective to find a cumulative balance of football ability while also ensuring the make-up of teams is unique from one game to the next. The values upon which the SE is driven are cultivation of community, inclusivity, sportsmanship and life-long learning.

The proposed study aims to a) investigate the feasibility of the Football Cooperative (FC) intervention using a Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework and b) develop an implementation strategy for the replication of the FC games that could be applied for national scale up.

Who can participate?
Men who are currently playing football with FC at Malahide Astro and those who choose to join before baseline data is completed can participate in the study.

What does the study involve?
Participating in this study involves having your height, weight, waist circumference and time to complete one mile recorded as well as completing a questionnaire at baseline and again in 3, 6 and 12 months post baseline.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Possible Benefits: Participants will be informed of their results on an ongoing basis and the meaning of same in terms of health implications.
Possible Risks: Although there are no physical risks to participating in this project, participants will be asked some personal questions and sensitive data will be collected. Participants are free to refrain from answering any question or to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. However as previously mentioned, all data will be treated with the utmost respect and sensitivity and will be held in the strictest confidence, stored appropriately and reported anonymously.

Where is the study run from?
The study is run by research staff at Waterford Institute of Technology and Institute of Technology Carlow, Ireland while data collection will happen at Malahide Astro, Dublin, Ireland.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
September 2020 to August 2022

Who is funding the study?
The South East Research Development Fund (SERD) (Ireland)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Paula Carroll, PCarroll@wit.ie

Contact information

Type(s)
Scientific

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
WD(SERD)_2020-_54_WSCH

Study information

Scientific Title
An assessment of the impact of community based social football on the physical, mental and social health of male participants and the social return on investment of the intervention

Study objectives
The SROI ratio for FC will demonstrate sufficient social value and cost effectiveness of this primary prevention PAS intervention (3:1) and will be favourable for to scale up for replication.

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 31/03/2021, Waterford Institute of Technology (Main Campus Cork Road, Waterford City, Co. Waterford, Ireland, X91 K0EK; +353 (0)51-305542; ethics@wit.ie) ref: WIT2021REC006

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design

Study type(s)
Quality of life

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Physical, mental and social health of males (average age 38)

Interventions
Football Cooperative (FC) is a social enterprise (SE) established since 2017 for men, by men and uses 'pick-up-football' as the vehicle to bring men together to improve their overall health and achieve social gains for local communities. FC games are a) accessible i.e. local amenities are used for games; b) flexible regarding attendance (played 2-3 nights/week), c) affordable to ensure inclusion of all and d) offered to all levels of fitness and football capacity. 'Pick-up-football' differs from Association Football in terms of the pitch and player numbers. Games (60-90 mins depending on pitch availability) are played on a rectangular pitch with floodlit capability and an astroturf surface to ensure year-round activity. Games create a team environment (5-9 a-side depending upon attendance); team formation is crucial to ensuring both the game and social experience is maximised. The Match Coordinator will tactfully select the teams for the game with the objective to find a cumulative balance of football ability while also ensuring the make-up of teams is unique from one game to the next. The values upon which the SE is driven are cultivation of community, inclusivity, sportsmanship and life-long learning.

A core team at FC oversees the governance responsibilities for managing the venue (health and safety, insurance, bookings), driving the strategic direction of the SE (securing funding, training and learning for members, expansion planning), communicating with all FC members, organising social activities around games (e.g. BBQs, fundraising activities) and ensuring that the values of FC are upheld. Match Co-ordinators (multiple at the site) are responsible for the FC games; they will publish a game notification to the participant pool via their 'bespoke game portal' (developed in house as team members have IT expertise) in advance of the activity, they ensure that equipment is onsite and that the FC values are followed by all participants. Games are not refereed and therefore, via leadership from Match Co-ordinators, the onus is on all participants

to manage the situations on the pitch to achieve a fluid, enjoyable and competitive game. After games, the Match Coordinator submits a game report for review by the FC core team; optional details include final score, goal scorers, match incidents i.e participant red card, injury as well as pitch or location problems i.e lights, parking. Notably, FC games are volunteer led and has developed a sophisticated infrastructure (game portal) to ensure self-sufficiency using minimal resources.

The initial site, established in North County Dublin with 160 current active members (x= 38 years), undertook a total of 184 pick-up-games equating to just over 11,000 minutes of football in 2019. A needs assessment in that year reported overwhelming satisfaction of the men with the games. In 2019, FC has also established games at one site in Limerick with 130 active members.
The vision of the SE is to scale up the FC model to bring 'pick up football' games to men in communities across Ireland to reduce isolation and to improve their health at a population level. The current study proposes to evaluate this community based PA social intervention for men to assess feasibility for scale up.

The intervention will begin when COVID -19 restrictions are lifted (expected mid-March 2021). The week prior to the resumption of FC games and on the first night back for participants, baseline (B) data will be collected. Thereafter, data will be collected at 3 (3M), 6 (6M) and 12 (12M) months post baseline. While games are available to participants thrice weekly, for the purpose of this study participation will be defined as playing at least one game weekly with the exception of the Summer slow down phase.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Collected at baseline, 3, 6, and 12 months:
1. Physical fitness measured using the Yo Yo Intermittent Recover Test Level 1

Key secondary outcome(s)
Collected at baseline, 3, 6, and 12 months:
1. Height measured using a portable Seca 213 stadiometer
2. Weight be measured using a Seca 813 electronic weighing scales with participants wearing light clothing, no shoes and with empty pockets
3. Waist circumference measured using a standard tape measure
4. Perceived Health measured using SF-12
5. Lifestyle:
5.1. Alcohol consumption - adapted from National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
5.2. PA frequency - adapted from the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (Brief-IPAQ)
5.3. Smoking - Game of Stones Feasibility Study data
5.4. Fruit & Veg Intake - Men on the Move Study data
6. Mental Health measured using SF-12
7. Self Esteem measured using Rosenburg Self Esteem Scale
8. Life Satisfaction measured using ...
9. Loneliness measured using UCLA Loneliness Scale
10. Sleep measured using Single-Item Sleep Quality Scale (Snyder et al. 2018)
11. Health Economics measured using SFP-12

Completion date
31/08/2022

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Male aged ≥18 years
2. Current or newly recruited FC member in the North County Dublin venue as of the beginning of the intervention
3. Have completed the physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q)
4. Provided written consent

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer

Healthy volunteers allowed
Yes

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
100 Years

Sex
Male

Total final enrolment
71

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
17/05/2021

Date of final enrolment
17/09/2021

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Ireland

Study participating centre

Malahide Astro
Gannon Park
Coast Road
Malahide
Dublin
Ireland
K36 YA97

Sponsor information

Organisation
Waterford Institute of Technology

Funder(s)

Funder type
University/education

Funder Name
Waterford Institute of Technology, South East Research Development Fund

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary
Data sharing statement to be made available at a later date

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article		27/05/2025	30/06/2025	Yes	No
Results article	Pre-adoption characteristics of participants	28/01/2024	30/06/2025	Yes	No
Protocol article		26/04/2023	04/05/2023	Yes	No
Funder report results			16/12/2025	No	No
Other publications		27/11/2025	28/11/2025	Yes	No

Participant information sheet	08/07/2021	No	Yes