

HEAD IN THE GAME IMPACT REPORT

2025

2026



HEAD IN THE GAME



INTRODUCTION

Head In The Game continues to grow as a leading community based mental health and mental fitness charity, using sport as a powerful tool to bring people together, improve wellbeing and prevent suicide.

Since our formation in 2021, our journey has been one of rapid development, innovation and impact. What began as a small community interest company driven by personal experience of poor mental health has evolved into a nationally recognised registered charity delivering life changing programmes across multiple communities.

Over the past five years, Head In The Game has supported more than 1600 people through our mental fitness programmes. In the last 12 months alone we have worked with over 700 participants, demonstrating both the growth of our organisation and the increasing demand for accessible, preventative mental health support.

Mental health services across the UK continue to face enormous pressure. Long waiting lists, limited early intervention services and increasing social isolation mean that many people struggle to access support before reaching crisis point. Head In The Game plays a crucial role in addressing this gap by providing early intervention mental fitness programmes delivered through sport, community and peer support.

Our work does not replace clinical services, but it complements and supports frontline services including the NHS, primary care networks and social prescribing teams. By helping people build resilience, confidence and social connections earlier, we reduce pressure on already stretched mental health systems.

Sport remains at the heart of what we do. These environments provide safe, familiar and non judgemental spaces where conversations about mental health can happen naturally. Participants improve both their physical health and mental wellbeing while forming meaningful social connections.

As Head In The Game continues to grow, we remain focused on our core mission: to prevent suicide, improve mental health and create stronger, healthier communities through sport.

Mark Pinkney

Mark Pinkney
CEO of Head In The Game





HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST 12 MONTHS

The past year has been a period of significant growth & development for Head In The Game.

One of the most important milestones in our journey has been the transition from a Community Interest Company into a registered charity in 2023. Achieving charitable status has strengthened our governance, increased our credibility with funders and partners, & positioned Head In The Game for long term sustainable impact.

Demand for our programmes has increased significantly, reflecting both the growing recognition of our work and the wider mental health challenges facing communities across the UK. Over the last 12 months alone we have supported more than 700 people through our mental fitness programmes.

This growth has been made possible through a combination of diverse funding streams and strong partnerships. While early programmes relied on individual grants, we now work with multiple partners across health, local government and the voluntary sector.

Two of our largest funding partners over the past year have been Herne Bay Primary Care Network and the London Borough of Bexley, who have supported the development of long term community based mental fitness programmes designed to improve mental health outcomes and reduce pressure on primary care services.

Alongside these partnerships, Head In The Game has received funding from numerous grant giving organisations, community foundations and charitable trusts, allowing us to expand the reach of our programmes and support more people than ever before.

We have also continued to strengthen our partnerships with professional football club community trusts, local authorities and community organisations, ensuring that our programmes reach the people and communities who need them most.

OUR STRATEGY



Head In The Game was founded on the belief that early intervention, community connection and physical activity are essential tools in improving mental health outcomes.

Our vision remains clear:

"TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION IN REDUCING SUICIDE AND IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS THE UK. TO USE SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO CREATE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE CAN IMPROVE THEIR MENTAL FITNESS, BUILD RESILIENCE AND DEVELOP MEANINGFUL SOCIAL CONNECTIONS."

We believe that mental fitness should be accessible to everyone. Our programmes are designed to be inclusive and welcoming, supporting men, women and young people who may otherwise struggle to engage with traditional mental health services.

Our work is driven by several key priorities:

- Bringing communities together through inclusive activities
- Helping young people develop confidence and emotional resilience
- Improving physical and mental health outcomes
- Reducing social isolation and loneliness
- Supporting early intervention to prevent mental health crisis

Through these approaches, Head In The Game helps individuals build the tools they need to manage life's challenges while strengthening the communities around them.



SUPPORTING FRONTLINE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mental health services across the UK continue to experience increasing demand. Primary care networks, NHS services and community mental health teams are often the first point of contact for individuals experiencing mental health challenges. However, waiting times and limited capacity can make it difficult for people to access support quickly.

Head In The Game works alongside these services by providing preventative and early intervention programmes that support individuals before their mental health deteriorates further.

Many of our participants are referred through social prescribing networks, GP surgeries and community health partners, allowing people to access structured, supportive programmes that improve both their physical health and mental wellbeing. By creating safe spaces for people to connect through sport, our programmes help participants build confidence, develop coping strategies and reduce feelings of isolation.

This approach not only improves individual wellbeing but also contributes to reducing pressure on frontline services, ensuring that clinical resources can focus on those who require specialist care.



HEAD IN THE GAME BY THE NUMBERS

Since launching in 2021, Head In The Game has grown rapidly from a small community initiative into a nationally recognised charity delivering sport based mental fitness programmes across multiple communities.

Our programmes use sport, connection and peer support to improve mental health, reduce social isolation and support people before they reach crisis point.



- 1600+ people supported through Head In The Game programmes since 2021

- 700+ participants supported in the past 12 months alone

- Programmes delivered across multiple communities in Kent, London and beyond

- Partnerships with professional football club foundations, local authorities and health services

SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

- Up to 98% of participants reported feeling mentally stronger

- Up to 93% felt more able to address their problems and concerns

- Up to 88% reported increased confidence in themselves

- Participants' average wellbeing scores improved from between 3.8–5.8 at the start of programmes to between 7.9–8.9 on completion

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

PHYSICAL HEALTH OUTCOMES



- Up to 90% of participants reported feeling physically fitter
- Increased levels of physical activity and healthier lifestyle habits reported across programmes
- Participants reported improvements in sleep, routine and overall wellbeing

SOCIAL IMPACT



- Participants consistently reported reduced social isolation and increased connection with others
- Many participants went on to form new friendships and support networks through programmes
- Peer support and group environments created safe spaces for open conversations about mental health

PROGRAMME SATISFACTION



- 100% of participants reported feeling healthier after completing programmes
- 100% said they would recommend Head In The Game to a friend

THE AWARD WINNING NUMBERS

1600+ people supported since 2021

700+ people supported in the past year

98% felt mentally stronger

93% better able to address problems

90% felt physically fitter

88% improved confidence

100% felt healthier

100% would recommend Head In The Game





OUR PARTNERS, SUPPORTERS + FUNDERS

LONDON BOROUGH OF BEXLEY
Herne Bay Health Care Bringing Care Together
active Kent & Medway
RED ZEBRA
COLYER FERGUSON CHARITABLE TRUST
tmactive
SPORT ENGLAND
itrust
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Sevenoaks DISTRICT COUNCIL
Rite TORC SERVICES
COMMUNITY FUND
DOVER Smart Project
THE FORE
DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL
THE LAWSON TRUST
DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL
Kent County Council kent.gov.uk
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE
SELLEBRITY™ SOCCER
GO OP
OUR leisure
QUOTE ME TODAY
KRESTON REEVES
canterbury city council
Big Local
ASH CONSTRUCTION GROUP
Kimberly-Clark
POWR by heyr.
RUNWAY TRAINING educating & inspiring
Garfield Weston FOUNDATION
WANTSUM SELF STORAGE
STONES MUFC in-the-community
#HER GAME TOO
At The Bridge 100% BRITISH A CHELSEA FC PODCAST
1st Step WILLS & Trusts
SPiRiT
Lead-Well
KENT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
National Suicide Prevention Alliance

WORKING WITH HEALTH SERVICES

The demand for mental health support continues to rise across the UK, placing increasing pressure on frontline services including GP surgeries, primary care networks, NHS mental health teams and social prescribing services.

At Head In The Game, we play an important role in supporting this system by providing early intervention, community based mental fitness programmes that sit alongside traditional healthcare.

Our approach is simple but effective. We create safe, inclusive environments through sport where people can improve their mental health, build resilience and form meaningful social connections before reaching crisis point.

Supporting Primary Care and Social Prescribing:

We work closely with Primary Care Networks, GPs and social prescribing teams, providing a trusted referral pathway for individuals who would benefit from structured, non clinical support.

Participants are often referred into our programmes when they are:

- Experiencing low mood, anxiety or social isolation
- Waiting for further mental health support
- Struggling with confidence, routine or motivation
- At risk of their mental health deteriorating without early intervention

Our programmes provide an accessible and engaging alternative that helps individuals take positive steps towards improving their wellbeing. By supporting people earlier, Head In The Game helps to reduce the demand on overstretched services.

Our programmes:

- Help prevent escalation of mental health challenges
- Support individuals while they are waiting for clinical services
- Reduce repeat GP visits linked to social isolation & low level mental health concerns
- Improve overall wellbeing, reducing the need for more intensive interventions

This preventative model is increasingly recognised as a vital part of the wider mental health system.





BUILDING STRONG HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

Over the past 12 months, we have continued to strengthen our partnerships across health and local government.

Key partnerships include:

Herne Bay Primary Care Network, supporting the delivery of long term mental fitness programmes within the community

London Borough of Bexley, investing in targeted provision to improve mental health outcomes for local residents

Alongside these, we work with a growing number of social prescribing teams, community organisations and local services to ensure that support reaches those who need it most.

A COMMUNITY LED APPROACH

What makes Head In The Game different is our ability to engage people who may not access traditional services.

Through sport, we create environments where:

- People feel comfortable opening up about their mental health
- Peer support develops naturally
- Individuals build confidence and routine
- Communities come together in a positive and supportive way

This approach aligns closely with national priorities around prevention, early intervention and reducing health inequalities.

CASE STUDIES

ROBERT VINCE

Head In The Game Participant - Bexley



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My biggest challenge has always been motivation. I'd often set good intentions, but when it came to actually doing something, I'd bail out. My day-to-day routine wasn't bad, but I've picked up some helpful tips from the coaches, like avoiding tea first thing in the morning and aiming for at least seven hours of sleep.

If I'm honest, I initially signed up because I missed playing football. I didn't expect to get so much more out of the experience than just time on the pitch. I was apprehensive at first. I'm not an overly social person, so getting to that first session was a big step. But within 10 minutes, with the support of Mark & Wiltsy, I started to feel at ease and come out of my shell.

What really stood out was the positivity of the coaches. Their energy, humour and the way they encouraged everyone made a big difference. I used to be the quiet one who kept to myself, but the sessions helped me grow in confidence.

What surprised me most was how passionate the coaches are. I thought it would just be a casual kickabout, but they genuinely care about each participant and are dedicated to helping us feel better and develop lasting tools for our wellbeing.

The coaches played a massive role in my progress. They were always there to offer advice, encouragement and support. Their praise and humour created a really enjoyable environment.

One thing that's stuck with me is the 1-11 system, which I now use daily, especially on tougher days.

I would 100% recommend this programme. It's a great way to meet new people, improve both physical and mental fitness, and pick up practical tools to make better decisions in life. I'll carry what I've learned with me and continue using it in my day-to-day life.

Winning the crossbar challenge was definitely a highlight! But honestly, the whole experience was a personal highlight. I thoroughly enjoyed every session, and my 1-11 score always went up by the end.”

HEAD IN THE GAME



DANIEL GEE

"I felt a sense of compassion & understanding"

“

As someone who has struggled with mental health challenges, I cannot express enough how impactful the Head In The Game programme has been for me. This comprehensive mental health initiative has truly revolutionised the way I perceive and manage my mental well-being. From the moment I joined the programme, I felt a sense of compassion and understanding from the dedicated team of mental health professionals who also have the same passion as football as myself. They created a safe and non-judgmental space, where I could openly share my thoughts and emotions without fear. The program's approach was personalised, taking into account my unique needs and experiences, which made me feel seen and valued as an individual. I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone seeking genuine transformation and growth in their mental health journey.

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HEAD IN THE GAME



ROSE OULAI

"Head In The Game is transforming lives"

“

What we learnt during the 12 weeks have been invaluable skills that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I have been taking steps to improve my mental and physical health. I have started drinking water first thing in the morning and made time in my day to keep fit as well as relax. I have taken the opportunity to make more friends which has grossly improved my social life. I have learned to manage my stress better as playing football taught me that things do not always go the way you want and you have to be able to adapt quickly.

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HEAD IN THE GAME



ANDY LECKIE

"HITG kick starts my week on a top note"

“

The HITG sessions have left me feeling refreshed, ironic when you're red in the face, panting, and dripping with sweat. But that's what they do, or at least the power of playing a bit of footy can do for you. A common factor we have shared as a group is the sense of 'focus', a clear head or forgetting outside stressors for an hour. When we step on the pitch, we're like kids in a candy shop, we have this desire to go straight to the ball and fire a shot on goal, or maybe just a casual pass and chat in a circle. It's been extra special to experience this programme under the dome of the Lions Centre at Millwall FC. It's become a routine for me, and it really does kick start my week on a top note.

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HEAD IN THE GAME



HOW FUNDING IS USED AND THE IMPACT IT CREATES

At Head In The Game, we are committed to ensuring that every pound invested into our work delivers meaningful, measurable impact within the communities we support. Transparency, accountability and real world outcomes sit at the heart of how we operate.

Our programmes are designed to provide accessible, community based mental fitness support through sport, creating safe environments where people can improve their mental health, build confidence and connect with others. Funding enables us to deliver these programmes consistently, safely and at a high standard.

The majority of funding we receive is directed straight into frontline delivery. This includes the costs required to run weekly sessions in communities where there is clear need and demand.

A significant proportion of funding is used for venue hire, ensuring that sessions take place in safe, accessible and appropriate environments. Alongside this, investment in qualified coaches and facilitators ensures that participants are supported by individuals who understand both the physical and mental health aspects of the programme, and who are trained to create inclusive and supportive spaces.

Funding also contributes towards equipment and kit, allowing participants to take part without financial barriers. This is particularly important in communities where access to sport and physical activity can be limited. By removing these barriers, we ensure that our programmes remain inclusive and open to everyone.

In addition to delivery costs, a proportion of funding supports the infrastructure required to run effective programmes. This includes programme coordination, safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, and partnership development. These elements are essential in ensuring that our work is safe, consistent and delivers measurable outcomes.

We are conscious of maintaining a lean and efficient structure, ensuring that administrative costs are proportionate and directly linked to improving delivery and impact.



VALUE FOR MONEY

We are committed to ensuring that every pound invested delivers meaningful, measurable impact, particularly in supporting our core mission of preventing suicide and improving mental health through early intervention.

For every **£1** invested into Head In The Game:

73p is spent directly on frontline programme delivery.

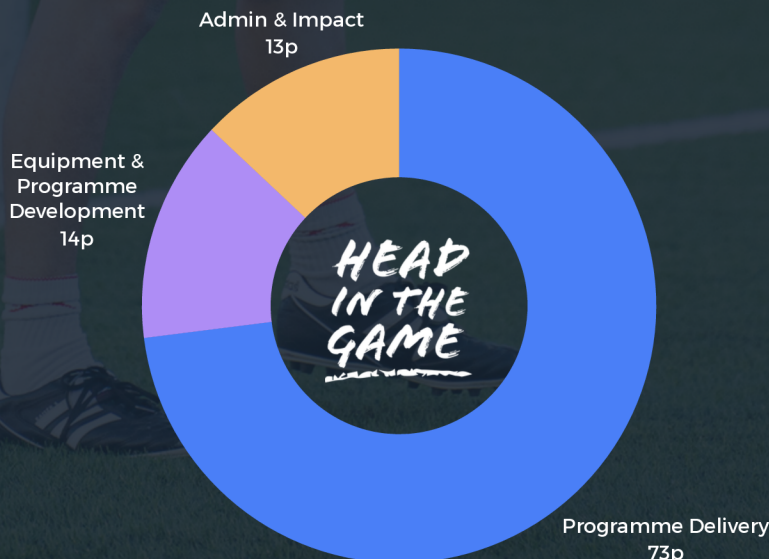
This includes venue hire, qualified coaches and facilitators, and the delivery of safe, structured mental fitness sessions within the community. This is where the real impact happens, providing spaces where individuals can open up, build connections and access support before reaching crisis point.

14p is invested into equipment and programme development.

This funding ensures our sessions remain accessible, inclusive and high quality. It allows us to provide essential equipment, remove financial barriers to participation and continue developing programmes that respond to the changing needs of the communities we support.

13p is allocated to administration, safeguarding and impact measurement.

This supports the safe and effective running of the charity. It includes safeguarding processes, programme coordination, monitoring outcomes and ensuring we can evidence the impact of our work to funders and partners.



LOOKING AHEAD

As demand for mental health support continues to grow, the need for strong, joined up partnerships between healthcare providers and community organisations has never been greater. Services across the NHS and primary care are facing sustained pressure, with increasing numbers of people seeking support, often at a point where their mental health has already significantly deteriorated.

What is clear is that clinical services alone cannot meet this demand. There is a growing need for preventative, community based solutions that can engage people earlier, before they reach crisis point, and support them in a way that is accessible, relatable and sustainable.

This is where Head In The Game plays a vital role.

We are committed to continuing to strengthen and expand our partnerships across primary care networks, local authorities and community organisations, ensuring that more people can access the right support at the right time.

Our approach is rooted in understanding that mental health is not just a clinical issue, it is a social one. Isolation, lack of purpose and limited opportunities for connection all play a significant role in declining mental health. By addressing these factors through sport and community, we are able to support people in a more holistic and preventative way.

We also recognise that many of the people we work with may never have engaged with traditional mental health services. By meeting people where they are, in familiar and non judgemental environments, we remove barriers to support and create opportunities for real, lasting change.

Looking ahead, our ambition is to further embed Head In The Game within local health systems, becoming a trusted and recognised partner in delivering community based mental fitness support.

We believe that by working together across sectors, we can build a more effective and sustainable model of mental health support, one that not only responds to crisis, but actively works to prevent it, helping individuals move forward with confidence, resilience and a stronger sense of belonging.

HEAD IN THE GAME



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