

C12. Physical Activity Hero Award Nominees

Adam Roberts – Healthy Communities Manager, 1Life Management Solutions Limited

Adam Roberts, Healthy Communities Manager, is a visionary leader who has redefined the scope of community wellness across 4 London & Southeast contracts: Lewisham, Brent, Uttlesford, & Bexley. Adam's journey is defined by his ability to navigate the unique socio-economic challenges of each local authority, from tackling urban-isolation in Brent to addressing rural-accessibility in Uttlesford.

Throughout 2025, Adam successfully secured £250,000+ community funding, refusing to let funding gaps dictate the health outcomes of local residents, instead building a robust network of partners to ensure long-term programme sustainability.

Adam's work is the embodiment of the ukactive mission. He doesn't just manage healthy communities; he creates "activity ecosystems." By leveraging the £250k+ funding, he launched hyper-local initiatives that met people where they were, be it community outreach in Lewisham or delivering chair based exercise interventions in a church in Brent.

Breadth of Impact: His initiatives specifically target "inactive" demographics, including SEN programmes, people with chronic health conditions & our older residents.

Transformation:

Under his guidance, physical activity has moved from a "luxury" to a "community staple." In Brent & Lewisham for example, his targeted interventions led to a measurable uptake in participation among hard-to-reach ethnic minority groups, transforming sedentary lifestyles into active, social habits that have reduced reported feelings of isolation among participants.

Feedback from Lewisham Council;

Adam has consistently delivered high-quality work that has had a clear & positive impact on local sport & physical activity provision. He has led the development & implementation of a range of programmes focused on increasing participation, strengthening partnerships with clubs & community organisations, & improving access to inclusive activity opportunities. The local community in Downham have directly benefitted from Adam's kind & personable nature, & we all feel that Adam is fully deserving of this award.

What makes Adam the "Physical Activity Hero" is his unprecedented scale & strategic grit. Managing one contract is a challenge; driving excellence across four diverse regions simultaneously is exceptional.

Most managers wait for a budget; Adam creates one. His ability to bring in a quarter of a million pounds in a single year has directly funded the health of thousands who would otherwise have been left behind. Adam bridges the gap between high-level strategic management & grassroots empathy. He is a catalyst for change who has proven that

with enough passion & resourcefulness, the barriers to physical activity can be dismantled, one community at a time.

Alex Corney – Active Health Coordinator, Plymouth Life Centre

Since joining Plymouth Active Leisure, Alex has demonstrated exceptional commitment, growth and impact as an Active Health Coordinator. Beginning his journey with PAL as a Fitness Motivator, Alex quickly distinguished himself through his work ethic, empathy and ability to connect with participants, progressing into his current role as Active Health Coordinator. Alongside this, his previous experience in a hospital setting has provided a strong foundation in clinical awareness, professionalism and patient centred care, which he brings into community delivery.

Since progressing into the role of Active Health Coordinator, Alex has taken on a broad and impactful remit, supporting the delivery of the Active Health Programme, weight management programme, and diabetes projects, while also contributing to the development of a strengthened and more effective exercise referral pathway. From day one, Alex embraced the challenge of supporting individuals facing the greatest barriers to physical activity, including long term health conditions, low confidence and complex personal circumstances. A key milestone in his journey has been the design and delivery of a Tier 3 Weight Management Programme, which he developed from the ground up. Drawing on his clinical understanding and evidence based practice, Alex has created a programme that is inclusive, supportive and aligned with best practice, while remaining accessible to participants with complex needs.

Alex's work with health referrals demonstrates real perseverance and personal growth. Many individuals require additional time, reassurance and trust building, particularly those transitioning from clinical care into community activity. Alex consistently goes above and beyond, adapting his approach to meet individuals where they are and supporting them to overcome anxiety and build confidence. He continues to invest in his own development and is actively progressing toward Level 4 qualifications, reflecting his commitment to delivering high quality, health focused support.

Alex fully embodies ukactive's mission to get more people, more active, more often by prioritising those least likely to engage. His work focuses on sustainable behaviour change, helping individuals move from inactivity into regular, meaningful activity that supports independence and long term health.

The impact of Alex's work is clear. Participants report improved confidence, healthier behaviours and renewed belief in their ability to be active. His Tier 3 programme is already showing promising early results, with strong engagement and measurable progress.

Alex should win this award because he combines compassion with professionalism, innovation with delivery, and leadership with humility. His journey, impact and dedication make him a truly outstanding Physical Activity Hero.

Christine Percival – Volunteer

Christine “Chris” Percival is a volunteer who strengthens her community. Approachable, committed, and selfless, she is the person who knits everything together and puts others first. In the last 23 months she has logged 238 volunteering hours across 11 different opportunities with Everybody Health and Leisure. Based at Congleton Leisure Centre, she supports Walking Netball, Pickleball and Sport and Social sessions and is valued by staff and participants for her warmth and reliability.

Chris’s journey is shaped by service and resilience. She experienced loss after the death of her husband and then of her grandson Noah, who was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma at a young age. The Joshua Tree charity supported her family through treatment and bereavement with counselling, group support, therapies and activities. Chris and her daughter later volunteered on the DIY SOS Children in Need build at The Joshua Tree, helping expand facilities so more children and families can access support. In 2025 she has also faced serious health concerns, yet she continues to show up each week for her community.

Chris embodies UK Active’s mission by turning sessions into places people want to return to. Participation at Congleton sessions has increased by 17% over the past year alone. She helps at festivals and events across Walking Netball and Pickleball and is known for the ‘can you just’ moments, covering so sessions still run. As a Walking Netball Host, she puts inclusion and development first. At festivals and competitions, even when leading a successful team, she gives newer or less experienced players extended time on court. She will step back herself or rotate stronger players so everyone is involved.

What makes Chris stand out is the care she shows beyond the court. She notices when someone is absent or not themselves and follows up with a call and will visit people at their homes in her own time. She is confident to talk about issues players may be facing and to signpost support, helping people feel safe and connected.

Chris should win because her impact is consistent and sustainable. She keeps activity accessible by leading, hosting and covering, builds a culture that brings people back, and uses sport to reduce isolation. Over the next year she plans to strengthen a buddy system for new starters, keep her inclusive competition approach, and track return rates and festival participation so even more people keep moving, keep connecting and keep thriving.

Dora Smith – Falls Prevention Instructor, Brio

Dora Smith has dedicated over 20 years to improving lives through physical activity, joining Brio Leisure in June 2004. During her career, she has progressed through a range of roles including Healthy Communities Co-ordinator, Health Improvement Lifestyle Officer and, since 2019, Falls Prevention Instructor. Dora has supported thousands of individuals to improve their health, confidence and wellbeing, becoming a trusted and respected figure within her community.

Working with older and vulnerable individuals brings challenges including fear of falling, low confidence, social isolation and complex health conditions. Dora meets these with empathy, patience and perseverance, building trust and creating supportive environments where participants feel safe, valued and motivated to remain active and independent. Her passion for physical activity as a tool to improve lives underpins everything she does and inspires those around her to lead healthier, more connected lives.

Impact

Dora fully embodies the mission to get more people, more active, more often through her commitment to helping older adults improve strength, balance, mobility and confidence. Participants consistently report reduced fear of falling, increased activity levels and improved quality of life as a result of her Falls Prevention programmes. Beyond physical activity, Dora creates opportunities for connection and belonging. Her sessions become supportive communities where friendships flourish and loneliness is reduced. She regularly goes above and beyond for participants, including organising annual Christmas celebrations to bring people together. In February 2026, Dora celebrated participant Bill reaching his 100th birthday, reflecting the strong community she has helped build around those she supports and the positive impact she has on people's lives far beyond the sessions themselves.

Rationale for Winning

Dora deserves recognition for her exceptional dedication, longevity and impact on the lives of older adults across her community. Over more than two decades at Brio Leisure, she has consistently demonstrated passion and commitment to improving health and wellbeing through physical activity.

What makes Dora exceptional is the positivity, care and encouragement she brings to every session. Participants frequently comment on her “big smile,” infectious energy and ability to make everyone feel supported and included. For many, Dora is the reason they continue attending sessions and remain active. She does not simply deliver exercise classes; she restores confidence, independence, connection and joy, making her an inspirational role model, advocate for healthy ageing and a truly deserving winner.

Gillian Lister – Exercise to Music Instructor, The Louisa Centre, Durham County Council

Gillian Lister, 64, is a true Physical Activity Hero whose passion and dedication have transformed lives at the Louisa Centre, County Durham for more than 30 years. Since beginning as an Exercise to Music instructor in 1990, Gillian has become a cornerstone of the Centre's programme, delivering gentle exercise, gentle circuits, and aqua jog classes that support health, mobility, confidence, and wellbeing for people of all abilities.

Her classes regularly attract up to 60 participants per session, demonstrating the trust, enjoyment, and sense of community she has built through decades of consistent, high-quality delivery. Participants describe her sessions as inclusive, motivating, and uplifting. Gillian Patterson, a participant, said: "I absolutely love Gillian's classes. I am 60 and have been to lots of classes over the years but I've never enjoyed any as much as Gillian's." Carol Ashburn added: "I always enjoy Gillian's classes. She makes working out fun and includes everyone. She puts a smile on everyone's faces with her love of exercise and changes her routine to keep it interesting."

Throughout her career, Gillian has supported participants living with ageing-related challenges, long-term health conditions, reduced mobility, and low confidence in physical activity. Her patience, empathy, and adaptability ensure everyone feels welcome and able to participate at their own level. Participant L. Thompson said: "She goes out of her way to help people with different abilities."

Gillian fully embodies ukactive's mission to get more people, more active, more often. Her classes provide essential opportunities for individuals who may never access traditional fitness environments, helping participants improve mobility, balance, mental wellbeing, and social connection. For many, her sessions are not simply exercise classes but a vital lifeline that supports independence, routine, and belonging. According to participant Christine Bolton, she "Treats everyone as if a friend."

Kirsty Jones – Regional Contract Health, Activity and Wellbeing Manager, Everyone Active

Kirsty is a true Physical Activity Hero, not just because of what she does, but because of who she is. Her passion, resilience and generosity have transformed lives through her professional work and by placing herself at the very heart of her local community. With nearly 20 years' experience in the sport and leisure sector, she has always believed that being active should feel welcoming, flexible and achievable for everyone, meeting people where they are and helping them move in ways that suit them.

The past two years have shown Kirsty at her most extraordinary. While continuing to lead partnerships across four councils, support her Health, Activity and Wellbeing teams and grow inclusive community programmes, she has also undergone intensive treatment for aggressive triple-negative breast cancer. Through chemotherapy, radiotherapy, major surgery and ongoing recovery with lymphoedema, she never stepped back from her passion for helping others be active. Even as physical activity became vital to her own recovery — rebuilding strength, managing long-term effects and supporting her mental resilience — her focus remained firmly on creating opportunities for others to move, connect and thrive. Unsurprisingly, she continued supporting her team and community even while hospitalised, working from her hospital bed following major surgery.

Kirsty lives and breathes ukactive's mission to get more people, more active, more often. She is the coach and manager of a girls-only under-8s football team, created so her six-year-old daughter and many other girls could thrive in a fun, inclusive and confidence-building environment. Training nights, match days and tournaments are filled with laughter, encouragement and belonging. She also volunteers at Junior Parkrun, cheering children home with infectious enthusiasm.

Seeing a lack of opportunities for women, Kirsty founded Great Denham Valkyries Netball Club. What began with just 10 members grew into three thriving teams, helping mums and inactive women rediscover sport, confidence and community. She supported members to become umpires and coaches and continues to mentor the club today. More recently, she is fighting the closure of her local Great Denham Golf Course — not because she plays golf herself, but because she passionately believes everyone deserves the right to take part in a sport they love and that community activity spaces must be protected.

Her impact reaches even further through disability-inclusive work as a trustee and secretary of a Hertfordshire inclusive sports charity, leadership of Special Olympics St Albans and Passport to Leisure (supporting over 600 attendances monthly), and pioneering Parkinson's Pickleball sessions across multiple locations. Widely known as a trailblazer for pickleball in Hertfordshire, she helped establish four clubs long before the sport became mainstream engaging over 500 participants.

Kirsty should win this award because she doesn't just deliver activity, she changes cultures. She removes barriers, lifts others up and reminds people that movement

belongs to everyone. Her energy is infectious; anyone who meets her leaves sprinkled with a little Kirsty magic - a rare mix of kindness, belief and motivation that gets people moving and keeps them smiling.

Matt Clarke – Swim Manager, Everyone Active

Matt Clarke is our Swim Co-ordinator and Activities Manager at Farnham Leisure Centre. Matt was diagnosed with Asperger's aged 7, which was later adapted to an Autism diagnosis. We believe that Matt is a true physical activity hero, championing Autistic children and adults everyday by ensuring that there are always inclusive and safe spaces for them to be physically active.

He joined our leisure centre in 2006 and started as a part time lifeguard. He then went full time as a lifeguard in 2010 and took on managing our parties/activity sessions in the centre. From there, he gained his swimming teacher qualifications in 2012 and has since been a staple of our Swim Team. Matt has become a key member of our team and everyone in the local community knows Matt either because he taught them to swim, or they have family/friends who have been taught by him. Often the loudest on poolside, you know exactly when Matt is teaching!

Matt is the powerhouse behind our inclusive swim program from creating inclusive swimming classes to taking on complex 1:1 swimmers to ensure no child is left without vital life skills in the water. In 2022 Matt became our Swim Manager and is a true physical activity hero, championing Autistic children and adults everyday by ensuring that there are always inclusive and safe spaces for them to be physically active. He has created an inclusive swim program and ensured that all teachers are prepared to teach any SEN child whilst offering practical support both in and out of the water.

He has created inclusive activity sessions within our program to ensure that all children can experience what we have to offer from Inclusive Active Antz sessions to Inclusive Aqua Run sessions. He is present and invested in those activities, taking care of the children to allow parents a bit of respite while they know their children are in safe hands. Feedback from parents is always positive regarding the work Matt has done, with thanks to providing a safe place for SEN children where they can run around and play without judgement.

When Matt was diagnosed with Autism, he was told that he would never hold down a full-time job, but here he is managing an exemplary swim school and using his unique perception of SEN to champion inclusivity in leisure spaces.

**Paula Watson – Healthy Communities Manager (Gloucester & The Cotswolds),
Freedom Leisure**

Paula Watson's journey is a powerful example of resilience, leadership and the transformative impact of physical activity.

As Healthy Communities Manager for Freedom Leisure across Gloucester and the Cotswolds, Paula has dedicated her life to improving the health and wellbeing of others despite overcoming extraordinary personal challenges herself.

A talented county athlete as a child, Paula's sporting future was threatened by severe asthma and chronic illness, leading doctors to advise her to stop exercising at just 16 years old. Over the years, Paula has faced multiple serious health conditions including cervical cancer, melanoma, osteoarthritis, endometriosis and long-term mental health challenges, alongside caring responsibilities for both her mother, who had multiple sclerosis, and later her husband following a brain haemorrhage.

Despite repeated setbacks, physical activity became the tool that helped Paula rebuild her health, resilience and sense of purpose.

Determined to help others experience the same benefits, Paula qualified as a group exercise instructor and now teaches 15 classes every week while leading Freedom Leisure's Healthy Communities programme in Gloucester and the Cotswolds. Her lived experience gives her a unique ability to connect with people facing barriers to activity, whether through illness, disability, isolation, mental health struggles or financial hardship.

Paula embodies ukactive's mission to get more people, more active, more often through inclusive, community-centred programmes that improve lives through movement. Under her leadership, Healthy Communities supports approximately 2,000–2,500 participations every month across Gloucester and the Cotswolds, alongside 1,000 monthly health attendances, referrals and memberships.

Paula has built partnerships with 98 organisations including the NHS, charities, housing providers and community groups to create joined-up wellbeing support that reaches those most in need.

Her impact is seen daily in people regaining confidence after illness, isolated residents finding connection through activity and young people developing healthier habits through targeted programmes. Paula has also helped secure around £56,000 annually in funding to expand community outreach and inclusive opportunities.

What makes Paula exceptional is not only her professional impact, but the authenticity and compassion she brings to every interaction. She leads with empathy because she has lived through many of the same struggles faced by the people she supports.



AWARDS

Paula is living proof that physical activity can transform lives, restore hope and strengthen communities. Her unwavering determination, inspirational leadership and commitment to helping others make her an outstanding and deserving recipient of this award.