



# YOUNG PEOPLE

## PROFILE

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# INTRODUCTION

Developing a love of play, active recreation and sport at an early age helps encourage life-long participation. That's why young people (those aged 5–18 years) are the primary focus of Sport New Zealand's (Sport NZ's) Community Sport Strategy.

The evidence is clear that participation in play, active recreation and sport offers many benefits for young people both in the immediate and long term. These include improved physical and mental health, an improved cognitive foundation and academic achievement, development of life skills and an increased likelihood of adult participation. You can read more about the evidence associated with this in our 2017 report *The Value of Sport*.<sup>1</sup>

We need to know more about young people in order to offer them quality support, experiences and opportunities so they can develop the skills, confidence and motivation to participate in sport and active recreation.

This resource is a starting point to help the sport and active recreation sector better understand what young people want. We've drawn on national and international evidence, and have included practical lessons from success stories.

**Success factors to support young people to develop a love of participation in play, active recreation and sport.**



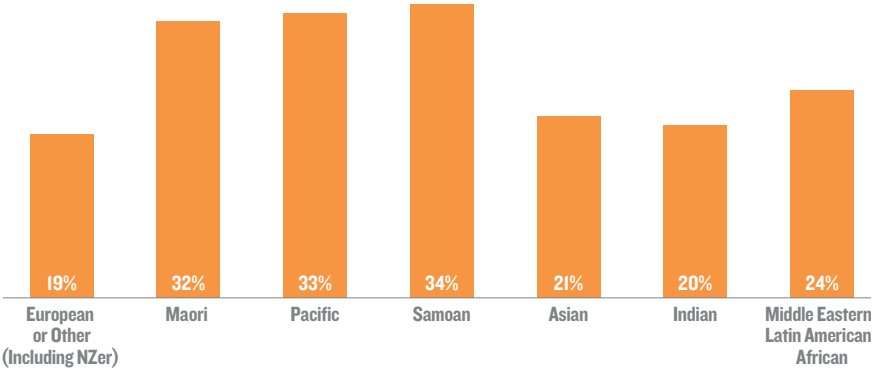
# YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEW ZEALAND

Young people (5-19yrs)\* currently make up 21% of those living in New Zealand, which is a significant proportion of the population.<sup>2</sup>

Young people in New Zealand are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse.<sup>2</sup>

- The number of young people varies by ethnic group. Māori and Pacific Peoples are the most youthful in New Zealand.
- An increasing number of young people are identifying with more than one ethnic group.
- Some ethnic groups are growing faster than others. The number of people identifying as Indian almost doubled between 2006 and 2013.<sup>2</sup>

PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE (5-19YRS) BY ETHNIC GROUP



Note 5-19yrs is used as an age range in this instance as it is the age range provided for Stats NZ data projections.



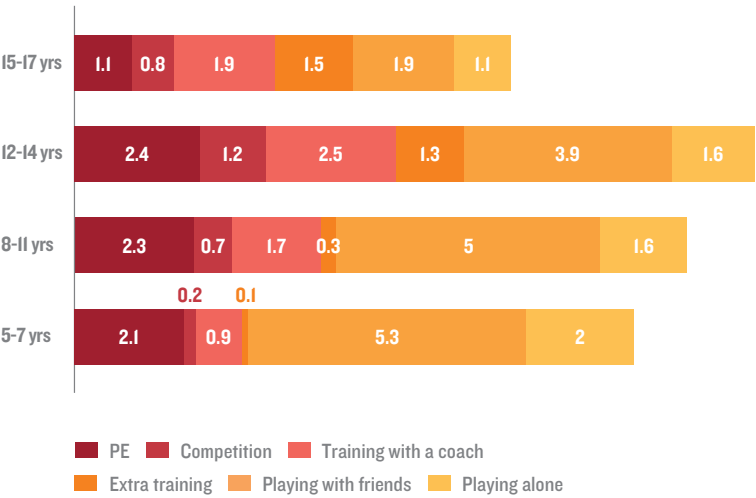
Note: \*5-19yrs is used as an age range in this instance as it is the age range provided for Stats NZ data projections.

# YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN PLAY, ACTIVE RECREATION

The Active NZ 2017 Participation Survey shows that:

- In any given week, 95% of young people aged 5–17 take part in sport and active recreation.
- Young people spend an average of 11 hours participating in 5.4 sports and activities.
- Informal activity (mostly play) makes up 59% of the time young people spend participating weekly.
- The remaining 41% of time is spent in organised participation – being physically active in class at school, through competition or training with a coach.
- The way young people participate in play, active recreation and sport changes as they age.<sup>3</sup>

AVERAGE TIME (HOURS) SPENT PER WEEK PARTICIPATING IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANISED AND INFORMAL SPORT AND ACTIVITIES BY AGE

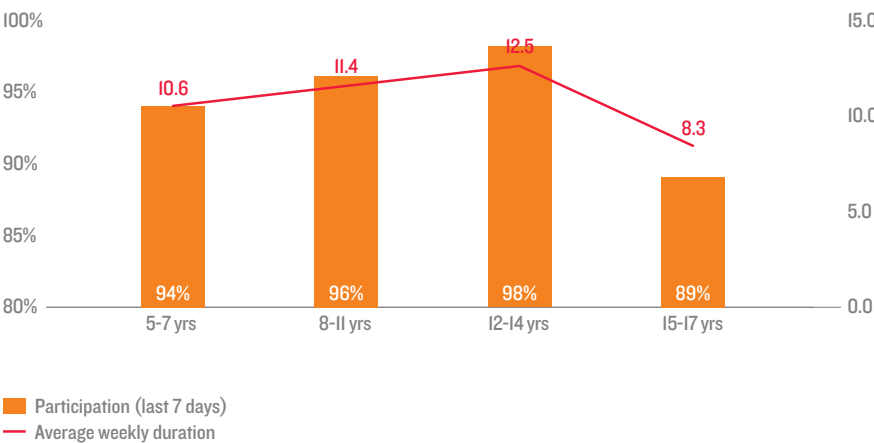


# HOW YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN PLAY, ACTIVE RECREATION AND SPORT VARIES

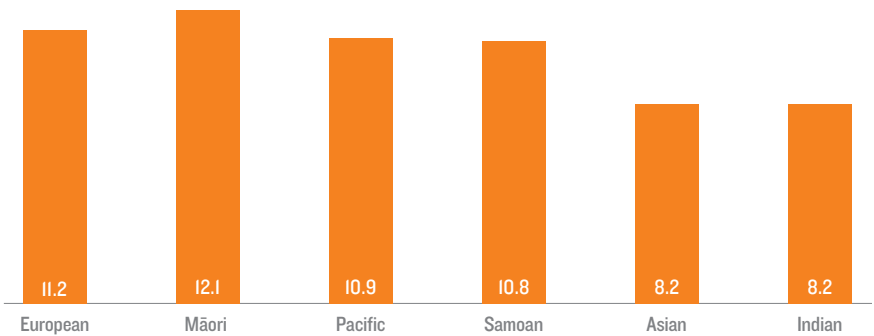
## The Active NZ 2017 Participation Survey shows that:

- A steep decline in participation occurs between the ages of 12–14 years and 15–17 years.
- Young females spend less time each week participating than young males (10.4 hours compared with 11.6 hours).
- Young males spend 1.3 hours more than young females in informal participation. This is attributed to higher levels of play.
- More young people living in areas of high deprivation are not participating.
- Participation rates vary between ethnic groups, with young people identifying as Asian significantly less likely to participate.
- On average, young people identify 2.6 barriers (things that get in the way) that stop them from doing more activity. Those aged 15–17 years have the greatest number of barriers, at 3.3. These are explored further in the following sections.
- 63% of young people want to do more sport or active recreation.<sup>3</sup>

WEEKLY PARTICIPATION (PERCENTAGE) AND AVERAGE DURATION (HOURS) BY AGE



AVERAGE DURATION (IN HOURS) OVER THE LAST 7 DAYS BY ETHNICITY





# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

We've reviewed information from various sources on young people's motivations, influencers and barriers to participation.

The result: eight themes that can be used as a starting point for understanding what quality opportunities, support and experiences might look like through the eyes of a young person. We've also included some questions within each section to help you consider how you might engage with young people.



# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT TO HAVE FUN



In primary and intermediate it was all for fun, you're just doing whatever you felt like doing, but when you get to high school it's like the school's so big ... all kids have like a really good ability at sport.”<sup>5</sup>

They could do more that involved physical activity for fun rather than just sports teams for going against other schools. Especially for those of us who didn't do sports at primary and didn't know how to play. More yoga and exercise that isn't a sport team.”<sup>8</sup>

Young people view play, active recreation and sport as ways to have fun and be with friends.

- 76% of young people state 'fun' as their main reason for taking part.<sup>3</sup>
- Young females, and young people who identify as Asian, are less likely to participate for fun.<sup>3</sup>

Many international and national studies have identified fun and enjoyment as the primary motivation for young people's participation.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>

What's considered 'fun' doesn't have a one-size-fits-all definition. It can be linked to achievement, increasing skills and techniques or being challenged; it is strongly influenced by friends and changes over time.

The move to secondary school is often associated with having an increased emphasis on competition, leading to a decline in fun. This can lead young people to drop out of sport at this age.<sup>5,6</sup>

### Questions to consider when developing your initiative:

- What does “fun” mean to your target audience? How could you engage with them to find out?
- Once you know what “fun” is, how might your opportunity include the chance to have fun?
- How could you create opportunities for participants to socially connect as part of your activity?





# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT TO BE WITH MY FRIENDS

“

I like having fun with my friends and meeting new people who are interested in the same sports as me.”<sup>8</sup>

Well, if they (a friend) joins a team you might want to join with them, you can both enter in a team, then you would know someone there; you might not want to join because you don't know anyone.”<sup>9</sup>

Friends play an integral role in influencing how young people participate.

The opportunity to make new friends, socialise and be part of a team are commonly identified as the main reasons why many young people take up and continue to participate in play, active recreation and sport. Conversely, a young person's peer group can have a negative influence on their participation, with many dropping out of sport and active recreation because their friends do.<sup>3,5,9,10</sup>

The number of young people who state “to hang out with family and friends” as their main reason for participating is significantly lower between the ages of 15 and 17 years (38%).<sup>3</sup> This indicates that, while being with family and friends may still be important, fewer young people are choosing to use play, active recreation and sport for this purpose in their teenage years.

- For those aged 10–15 years, 41.2% of boys and 53.9% of girls identified friends as the most influential aspect when asked who influences them the most when choosing what sports and active things they do.<sup>11</sup>
- 71% agree with the statement “I like to do the physical activity my friends do.”<sup>3</sup>

### Questions to consider:

- How could your activity reinforce friendship groups?  
What opportunities could you create for new friendships to develop?
- How could you get young people to take the lead and use word of mouth to encourage friends to take part?
- How could participants keep each other engaged and foster ongoing attendance?



# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT ACTIVITIES TO ALIGN TO MY FAMILY VALUES

“

Mum makes the time to exercise, I feel like I should too.”<sup>14</sup>

Maybe if my family was more active – they’re quite lazy.”<sup>14</sup>

A young person’s family has a strong influence on the way young people understand and prioritise play, active recreation and sport in their lives.

How young people prioritise sport and active recreation in relation to other activities (for example, church, family time, education) is influenced by the culture and values of the family.<sup>5,11,12,13</sup> Physical activities that don’t align with the priorities of a young person’s family can discourage participation.<sup>5,14</sup>

Encouragement on its own is just one factor influencing participation. Children whose parents are active are more likely to play sport and have higher activity levels.<sup>8,11,12,13</sup>

- 63% of young people agree with the statement “I like my parents and family to be involved in my sport and physical activities”.<sup>3</sup>
- 10% state that “can’t fit in with other family members’ activities” is a barrier to participation.<sup>3</sup>
- 7% state that “my parents want me to focus on my school work/other activities” is a barrier to participation; this is significantly higher for those aged 15–17 years and those young people who identify as Asian.<sup>3</sup>

### Questions to consider:

- How might you engage a young person’s parents and wider family in the activity?
- How could your messaging reflect the priorities of the family or community you are working with (for example, social connectedness, academic success, health)?
- How could your opportunities support and affirm the participants’ culture? Models such as Te Whetū Rēhua (Māori) and Fone Fale (Pacifica) can be a starting point.



# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT TO GET FIT AND BE HEALTHY

“

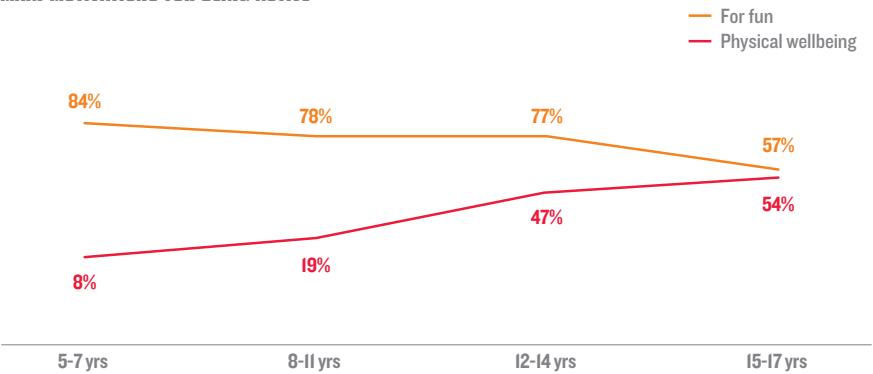
Keeps yourself looking good.”<sup>9</sup>

Because it makes me feel healthy and fit and I love being active.”<sup>8</sup>

Being active to get fit and be healthy increasingly becomes a motivating factor for young people during adolescence.

While being active for fun remains important, other factors, such as health, fitness and looking and feeling good, increasingly become a driving force between the ages of 12 and 17 years.<sup>3,6,9</sup>

### MAIN MOTIVATIONS FOR BEING ACTIVE



Participating for fitness and to look and feel good is more of a priority for young females than young males, particularly between the ages of 15 and 17 years.<sup>3</sup>

For those young people who are motivated by health, fitness and feeling good, the traditional messages associated with sport are less likely to be relevant.

### Questions to consider:

- Do you know if feeling healthy and being fit are valued by your target audience?
- How might you tailor your opportunity to the motivators “getting fit and being healthy”?
- If your audience is motivated by being fit and healthy, what language could you use when promoting your activity?

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## IT NEEDS TO BE EASY TO PARTICIPATE



Exercise is time consuming. I wish it could be an easy-going thing but you need to plan for it and make time for it. It would be better if you didn't have to set time aside for it and have all things pushed back... I have so much work to do to get my credits in and so I have no time. Exams are coming and I need to focus on that.”<sup>14</sup>

Young people's lives are busy and other priorities often get in the way.

As young people get older, participation in play, active recreation and sport must compete with an increasing number of interests and priorities.

Not having enough time and having opportunities at unsuitable times are often highlighted as barriers to participation.

Developing a better understanding of the other commitments of your target audience will help you identify and structure opportunities that fit with the lives of young people.

- 42% of young people state that being too busy is a barrier to them being active.<sup>3</sup>
- Young females (45%), young people who identify as Asian (49%) and those aged 15–17 years (59%) are more likely to identify being “too busy” as a barrier to participation.<sup>3</sup>
- So what's making young people “too busy” to participate in sport and active recreation?
  - 72% say it's school work.
  - 42% say it's other hobbies.
  - 39% say it's physical activity they are already doing.<sup>3</sup>

### Questions to consider:

- How could you create an environment where young people feel they have the time, place and permission to play?
- How might you support young people to stay engaged during life transitions, for example, when moving to high school, taking exams or with the change of seasons?
- What flexibility could you build into your structure so young people can dip in and out as it suits?



# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT TO FEEL CONFIDENT

“

The way we do it (activities in PE class) is stupid because everyone watches you and then laughs.”<sup>9</sup>

Have classes for beginners who didn't learn the sport when they were younger but are interested in participating now.”<sup>9</sup>

Young people want a welcoming environment where they feel safe to try new things without judgement.

For some young people, a feeling of lack of confidence or competence may be linked to the risk of judgement from others, particularly their peers. Judgement by others has been identified by many young people as a barrier to participation. It is a factor shown to be particularly relevant to those in their teenage years and for young females.<sup>7,15,14</sup>

The Active NZ 2017 Participation Survey found that:

- Confidence to take part in a lot of different activities and self-rated physical competence decreases significantly between the ages of 15 and 24 years.
- Young women have significantly lower confidence and self-rated competence than young men, from the age of 15. This trend continues throughout adult life.
- Young people of Asian ethnicity are less likely to feel competent and confident when it comes to participation.<sup>3</sup>

The Active NZ 2017 Participation Survey found that young females and those aged 15–17 years were significantly more likely to identify “I’m not fit enough”, “I’m not confident enough”, “I don’t want to fail” and “I don’t like other people seeing me being physically active” as barriers to activity and significantly less likely to agree with the statement “I am good at sport”.<sup>3</sup>

A young person’s perceived competence, confidence and fear of embarrassment can therefore be fundamental to whether they start a new activity, sustain their participation or drop out.

### Questions to consider:

- How can sessions be structured to cater for multiple skill levels?
- Do you have entry level opportunities available for those who are genuinely beginners?
- How might you ensure individuals who are beginners are not singled out or “put on show”?

# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT TO IMPROVE MY SKILLS AND BE CHALLENGED



The fact I am being challenged both physically and mentally, while also having fun.”<sup>8</sup>

Have more social teams instead of just competitive teams because people feel like they aren't good enough if they play in a competitive team.”<sup>8</sup>

Young people want to be challenged and have the opportunity to improve their skills at a level that suits their abilities.

Many young people want to be involved in sport and active recreation. The competitive nature of some opportunities, however, has been found to demotivate some participants. This has been reported as becoming particularly relevant in the secondary school years where competition and ability are seen as being a more integral part of the experience. For many, this can be a reason for dropping out.<sup>5</sup>

When you break this down further, however, most young people do want competition but at a level that suits their abilities.

- 32% of young people stated their main reason for being active was to learn or practise new skills.<sup>3</sup>
- 32% of young people aged 5–17 years participate in competitive sport and activities (compared with 12% of adults).
- 81% of respondents aged 12–17 years agree with the statement “I love challenging myself and trying to win”.
- 28% of young people identified “to physically challenge myself and win” as their main reason for being active, this was significantly higher between the ages of 12 and 17 years.<sup>3</sup>

The 2016/17 Sport NZ Voice of the Participant Survey reported that 39% of young people belong to a sports club to play competitively. Members who responded this way, however, described “competition” as having the organisation, competition structures and people in place that allow players to challenge themselves.<sup>10</sup>

### Questions to consider:

- How might you create a session that provides opportunities for participants at different levels to be challenged and learn and practise new skills?
- Have you considered how you might challenge participants beyond the physical (for example, mental, tactical and soft skills)?
- For those interested in traditional competitive sport, have you considered how you might provide opportunities for them to compete?



# WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT

## I WANT TO HAVE A CHOICE

“

The range of different sports should be larger at schools. Everyone is different and they may not want to play the most common sports... they might prefer other sports which are fun, exciting and different to the mainstream sports such as dodgeball, table tennis etc.”<sup>4</sup>

I think kids should be able to choose what we want to play or try.”<sup>17</sup>

Young people live in a world of rapid change and individualisation and they expect play, active recreation and sport opportunities to keep up.

Through technology, young people are more and more engaging with experiences that are interactive, social, individualised and at a time and place that suits them, with immediate rewards and no geographical limitations.

These experiences have an influence on the expectations young people have in terms of leisure time and participation, which in some cases are not aligned with a traditional sport delivery model.<sup>16,17</sup>

- 47% of respondents aged 15–17 years agree with the statement “I prefer to do physical activity that is more flexible and less structured”.
- 61% of respondents aged 15–17 years agree with the statement “I prefer physical activities that allow me to follow my own schedule rather than someone else’s”.<sup>3</sup>

Young people want variety and choice when it comes to how and what they participate in. Having a choice about whether to participate at different levels (informal or organised), the activities they want to do, and how the experience is structured is extremely important.

- Just over 53% of girls and just over 44% of boys say they would play sport more often than they do now, if they could try different sports before deciding what to play.”

### Questions to consider:

- How might you empower young people to design and deliver experiences themselves, to help keep up with changing needs?
- How might you offer more choice as part of your initiative?
- How could you create opportunities to hear the voice of young people, to ensure the activity remains relevant?



# APPLYING THESE INSIGHTS IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

## WE DON'T ALL WANT THE SAME THING

While the themes outlined here present trends in terms of what young people want from a play, active recreation and sport experience, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution.

What young people want from an experience varies, and the relevance of the themes will be different from one individual to the next and will change over time for each young person.

Therefore, these themes should be considered as a starting point for consultation when developing play, active recreation and sport initiatives to engage young people.

Organisations should seek to establish an understanding of young people within their specific context.

Our three approaches (Insights, Locally Led and Physical Literacy), when used together, provide guidance on how to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of different target populations and the environments in which they live. The approaches can also help guide development of truly participant-centred initiatives. You can find out more about the Three Approaches, how they work together and how to use them in this guide – [Three Approaches](#).



# CASE STUDIES

## INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITY

You can find the case studies here –  
[sportnz.org.nz/casestudies](https://sportnz.org.nz/casestudies)

You might also be interested in some of  
 our other young people resources:

Let's Get Fun

[https://sportnz.org.nz/media/4299/  
 sportnz-letsgetfun-v01.pdf](https://sportnz.org.nz/media/4299/sportnz-letsgetfun-v01.pdf)

Balance is Better

[https://sportnz.org.nz/media/5253/  
 about-balance-is-better-2\\_4.pdf](https://sportnz.org.nz/media/5253/about-balance-is-better-2_4.pdf)

The Importance of Play

[https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1654/  
 sport-new-zealand-play-principles-  
 nov-2017.pdf](https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1654/sport-new-zealand-play-principles-nov-2017.pdf)

A number of New Zealand organisations use insights to develop and offer relevant and quality opportunities that encourage more young people into play, active recreation and sport. We're sharing these organisations' stories through case studies that provide detailed information about the creation and implementation of these initiatives, and the key factors that led to their success.



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