

Sports to Impact Fund Report

2019-2022

Sailing into Wellness



ExWell Medical



Special Olympics Ireland



**RETHINK
IRELAND**

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Introduction to the Fund

The **Sports to Impact Fund** is a €2.49 million Fund created in 2019 by Rethink Ireland in partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund.

The Sports to Impact Fund recognises the important role that sports and physical activity can play in improving the lives of individuals and communities. Over the past three years, the Fund has supported ExWell Medical, Sailing into Wellness and Special Olympics Ireland in developing and delivering their innovative approaches to the needs of communities across the country. These organisations focused their activities on **improving physical and mental health and social inclusion** for children, adolescents and adults.

Our Fund Vision

At Rethink Ireland we believe that **sports can have the potential to be a great mechanism for social inclusion**, when designed and applied deliberately for change. The overarching aim of the Fund was to support Awardees to increase their **ability to deliver sustainable social impact at scale through the use of sports**.

The Rethink Ireland Package

Through the Sports to Impact Fund, Rethink Ireland supported three Awardees with cash grants and tailored business supports to suit the needs of each organisation.

→ Cash Grants

The overall cash grant investment amounts to €2,491,000 between June 2019 and June 2023. Cash grants are a combination of private philanthropic funding, self-raised by the three Awardees and Government via the Dormant Accounts Fund. The investment breakdown is as follows:

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4*	Total
Cash Grant	€889,500	€847,000	€567,000	€187,500	€2,491,000

* Special Olympics Ireland will stay active on the Fund until June 2023.

→ Business supports

Business supports are aimed at strengthening the capacity building of organisations through tailored consultancy support on key strategic areas and participation in our Accelerator Programme.



The Sports to Impact Fund backed **ExWell Medical, **Sailing into Wellness** and **Special Olympics Ireland**. These organisations came to the Fund at various levels of organisational maturity and development, but with a proven track record of enriching the lives of those they work with. While the Fund offered a range of supports, from cash grants to business supports, it had a unique impact for each of these organisations.**

This report aims to showcase these unique achievements for each organisation and provide an overview of the capacity building supports provided by Rethink Ireland which **enable these Awardees to grow and amplify their impact.**



A Venture Philanthropy Approach To Scale & Impact

At **Rethink Ireland**, we are committed to supporting the best social innovations to scale and maximise their impact. We do this by using a venture philanthropy model which is a funding method that uses the tools of venture capital investing, alongside grants to support long-term social and environmental impact. Cash grant payments are tied to a number of targets and goals associated with programme delivery as well as strategic areas of growth.

Programme Supports: A Three Year Approach to Scale and Impact

Our investment focuses on preparing our Awardees to grow and develop their programmes so that they can maximise their social impact. Through a series of business supports provided by consultants and our Accelerator Programme, we strengthen the organisational capacity of our Awardees in a number of strategic areas.

Strategic Planning, Impact Management and Storytelling were key areas of focus across the three years. The strategic planning supports came at a time of change due to the pandemic, and this afforded the opportunity to both revisit existing strategy, as well as tailoring it to a new and evolving context.

Preparing the Ground in Year 1

In Year 1 of the Fund, the investment supports focused on the following areas:

- **Impact Measurement** - A deeper understanding of social impact and the use of an impact management framework to capture and measure impact metrics in a consistent manner.
- **Strategic Planning** - A detailed strategy that sets out their journey to scale over the next few years.
- **Storytelling** - Powerful storytelling that ensured their true impact was communicated and translated into funding opportunities.



...implementing and measuring impact in Year 2

Once Awardees had clear strategic plans to scale and measure their impact, it was time to implement these plans in Year 2. Rethink Ireland's investment focused on the following areas:

- **Strategic Plan Implementation** - Through mentoring support and workshops, we supported Awardees to meet their implementation goals and objectives.
- **Policy and Indicator Mapping** - A robust evidence base to prove their impact and alignment with Government policy.
- **Change Management and Leadership** - A series of workshops and mentorship that supported Awardees to navigate the challenges and opportunities during their implementation journey.

...towards financial sustainability in Year 3

Year 3 was all about supporting Awardees to set the foundation to be successful in their journey towards achieving financial sustainability.

- **Financial Sustainability & Fundraising** - A well developed fundraising strategy to meet current funding needs and diversify income streams.
- **Communications & Pitching** - A communications plan that identified key audiences and communication channels as well as an opportunity to refine pitching skills.
- **Working with Public Sector & Proposal Writing** - An understanding of writing funding proposals targeting public sector bodies and how to navigate regulations and processes.

Based on Awardees' feedback, these business supports helped them to:

- * Sharpen Awardees' strategic thinking going forward and to put attention on strategic areas.
- * Apply an audience-focused approach when articulating and communicating their work and impact to different audiences.
- * Use storytelling and testimonial content as a powerful tool.
- * Approach new partnerships and funding opportunities in an effective way.
- * Explore funding models.

Cash Grant Investment

The cash grants provided to Awardees had a meaningful impact for their organisations. For example, ExWell Medical recognised that without Rethink Ireland's support, they would not have been suitably equipped to establish themselves as the standalone entity that they are now, with a vision and a drive to spread their work across the country.

Sailing into Wellness mentioned the following:

Having that longer term funding gives you the reassurance that you can keep the show on the road, but also that you can start preparing and looking at the strategy and vision for the future."

As a larger and more established organisation, the cash grant provided to Special Olympics Ireland allowed them to take their philanthropic donors on the journey with them as they were looking toward a sustainable roadmap for embedding their inclusive approach with their partner sporting bodies.



MEET

SPECIAL OLYMPICS IRELAND

Special Olympics Ireland creates an inclusive space for athletes with an intellectual disability to be part of sports in a way that they may not have had the opportunity to before. Through their Reach Out Programme, they have found innovative ways to enhance the opportunities and access to sport for their athletes by embedding this inclusive practice into the work of other sporting bodies who are now increasingly able to create a welcoming space for children and adults with intellectual disabilities.

[Play Video](#)



SPECIAL OLYMPICS IRELAND

Rethink Ireland's Investment

The overall cash grant investment for Special Olympics Ireland amounts to €1.87 million between June 2019 and June 2023. Cash grants are a combination of private philanthropic funding, self-raised by the three Awardees and Government funding via the Dormant Accounts Fund. Philanthropic funding was provided by Eir, Gala Retail, Kerry Group, Johnson and Johnson and the JP McManus Foundation.

Non-financial supports were focused on specialised business support in the areas of strategic planning, fundraising, impact management, policy mapping and communications. Two key areas of support were the development of a new five-year strategic plan for the whole organisation and the funding of a PhD research project on the Young Athlete programme.

A Culture of Impact Measurement

Through participation in sport, Special Olympics Ireland aims to support people with intellectual disabilities to reach their full potential and to build a more inclusive society. Outcomes for participants are focused on the following three main areas:

- **Physical:** improved health and wellness
- **Emotional:** improved self-image and confidence
- **Social:** participation, friendships, community and civic engagement and access to roles and opportunities.

Impact measurement was one of the key priority areas in Special Olympics Ireland's strategic plan. They decided to build a culture of impact measurement into the organisation and use the Young Athletes programme as a catalyst for their impact management journey.

Case study Young Athletes Programme

The aim of the Young Athletes programme is to establish a programme of play and sport activity for children with an Intellectual Disability focusing on fundamental movement skills which are the 'building blocks' required for lifelong participation in sports and physical activity. This programme has a high relevance since children with an Intellectual Disability are three times as likely to experience delays in developing these skills compared to children without an Intellectual Disability. In 2019 an impact survey was disseminated by Special Olympics Ireland to gather data and information from parents on the impact that the Young Athletes programme was having on their children. The qualitative results found from this survey were overall very positive and promising with parents indicating changes in children's fundamental movement skills and also their social behaviours e.g. waiting in line, taking turns, improved listening skills etc. This initial impact measurement stage indicated the need for more advanced quantitative evidence to see the true impact of the Young Athletes programme. Researchers from Dublin City University approached Special Olympics Ireland with a proposal to carry out this quantitative research to evaluate the Young Athletes programme, through a PhD project of four years in duration. The 'SO Fun' project was then launched

and received funding from Rethink Ireland as part of the non financial support package. To date, a Systematic Review and Meta-analysis comparing the motor skill proficiency levels of Children with Intellectual Disabilities compared to typically developing children from around the world has been submitted for publication. Assessment of Young Athletes fundamental movement skills was carried out from October 2021 until May 2022. During this time, 100 Young Athletes underwent fundamental movement skill assessments. Special Olympics Ireland also gathered data from parents of Young Athletes and coaches. Results will inform the Awardee on the Young Athletes coaches ability to assess and determine the fundamental movement skill levels of athletes in their club and develop Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for them to upskill in the area of fundamental movement skill assessment and to have a positive impact on athletes mastery of fundamental movement skills. This PhD research project will allow Special Olympics Ireland to critically evaluate their Young Athlete programme with academic rigour across the four years. They will then be able to make data-driven decisions based on the qualitative and quantitative results, to ensure they are offering the best programme possible to their young athletes.



SPECIAL OLYMPICS IRELAND

Scaling Special Olympics Ireland's Impact

Over the past three years, Special Olympics Ireland has undergone enormous efforts to achieve a more inclusive society where everyone can have access to sport. They proved that nothing was going to stop them, even the pandemic, as they found new innovative ways to stay connected with their athletes during lockdowns and social distancing measures.

Inclusive Club Membership

One of their big wins is the partnership with different national sporting bodies such as Gymnastics Ireland, British Gymnastics, Basketball Ireland and Canoeing Ireland. These partnerships will offer more opportunities to athletes in their local area into the Special Olympics pathway.

The Together At Home programme

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the way Special Olympics Ireland could deliver sport and health programmes. Knowing the challenges of isolation and disconnection their athletes were facing during the pandemic, Special Olympics Ireland launched their Together At Home programme to support athletes at home with information and resources to stay healthy and connected and to add routine and structure back to athlete's daily lives.

Online competitions

Due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic, all sports competitions pivoted to an online programme in 2021 that incorporated a series of competitions that could safely be done at home. A total of 1,059 athletes participated in the first and second series of virtual competitions. A special medal was designed and commissioned to celebrate the achievements of all athletes who participated in what was an extraordinary year for sport.



Strategic Improvements and new systems

As well as supporting the activities of the Young Athlete Programme, Special Olympics Ireland also identified a need to completely update and modernise their Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Rethink Ireland supported Special Olympics Ireland to hire a specialised business analyst to develop a CRM system which allows them to digitally project manage their fundraising streams, HR systems and athlete memberships. This has been a timely update with the move to a more fully digitally integrated world due to Covid-19.



Special Olympic Ireland's Impact Overview

5



new programmes launched

7,895

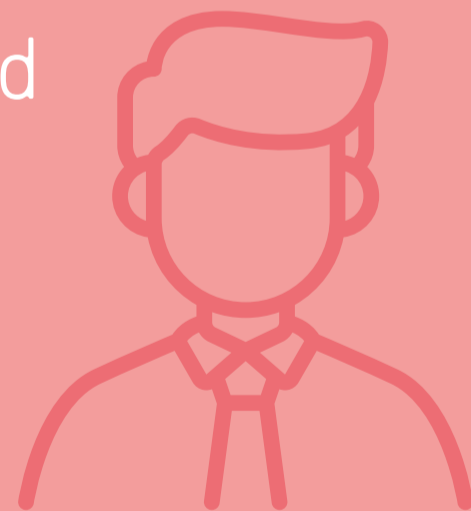
participants supported per year

2,401

new volunteers mobilised

Worked with

5



new funding partners

5



new inclusive clubs created

13

new locations added



*These numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the Awardee.



MEET EXWELL MEDICAL

ExWell Medical seeks to transform the lives of individuals and families living with chronic illnesses. They do this by providing community-based exercise rehabilitation programmes for people living with a long-term condition. Backed by a proven medical model that adapts to the individual capacity of each client, it both improves participants' fitness and wellbeing, and also creates a social space that allows for connection and the reduction of loneliness and isolation.

Play Video





EXWELL MEDICAL

Rethink Ireland's Investment

The overall cash grant investment for ExWell Medical amounts to €480,000 between June 2019 and June 2022. Cash grants are a combination of private philanthropic funding, self-raised by the three Awardees and Government via the Dormant Accounts Fund. Philanthropic funding was provided by Irish Life Health, Novartis, Trinity Community Care, Tower View, Astellas Pharma and one private donor.

Non-financial supports were focused on specialised business support in the areas of strategic planning, fundraising, impact management, policy mapping, communications and internal staff training on programme delivery.

Changing the Lives of People Living with Chronic Illnesses

ExWell Medical's programmes have proved to be effective in improving several important health-related outcomes for participants and their families. These programmes are based on medical referral, medical oversight, and a vitally important social interaction element. Through their programmes, ExWell Medical aims to achieve the following changes in participants' lives.

Physical	Clinical	Psychosocial	Health care utilization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ aerobic fitness ↑ increased strength ↑ core strength / balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ scores for range of clinical outcomes ↓ depression / anxiety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑ self-reported health status ↑ social interaction ↑ improved quality of life ↓ loneliness ↑ family and carer wellness ↑ resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ GP visits ↓ emergency dept. visits ↓ hospital stays ↓ hospital outpatient visits ↓ medication use ↓ time off work

An example of physical related outcomes is ExWell Medical's **CityWest programme**



Launched in February 2021, the CityWest programme was supported by the HSE to deliver weekly classes to 210 participant over 18 weeks. The programme immediately captured participants' interest and ended its first week with 310 participants, exceeding the original target. The ExWell Medical team captured key outcome measures at baseline and re-test during phases 1 and 2. Weekly visits exceeded initial expectations ranging between 450 and 500. The key findings were that:

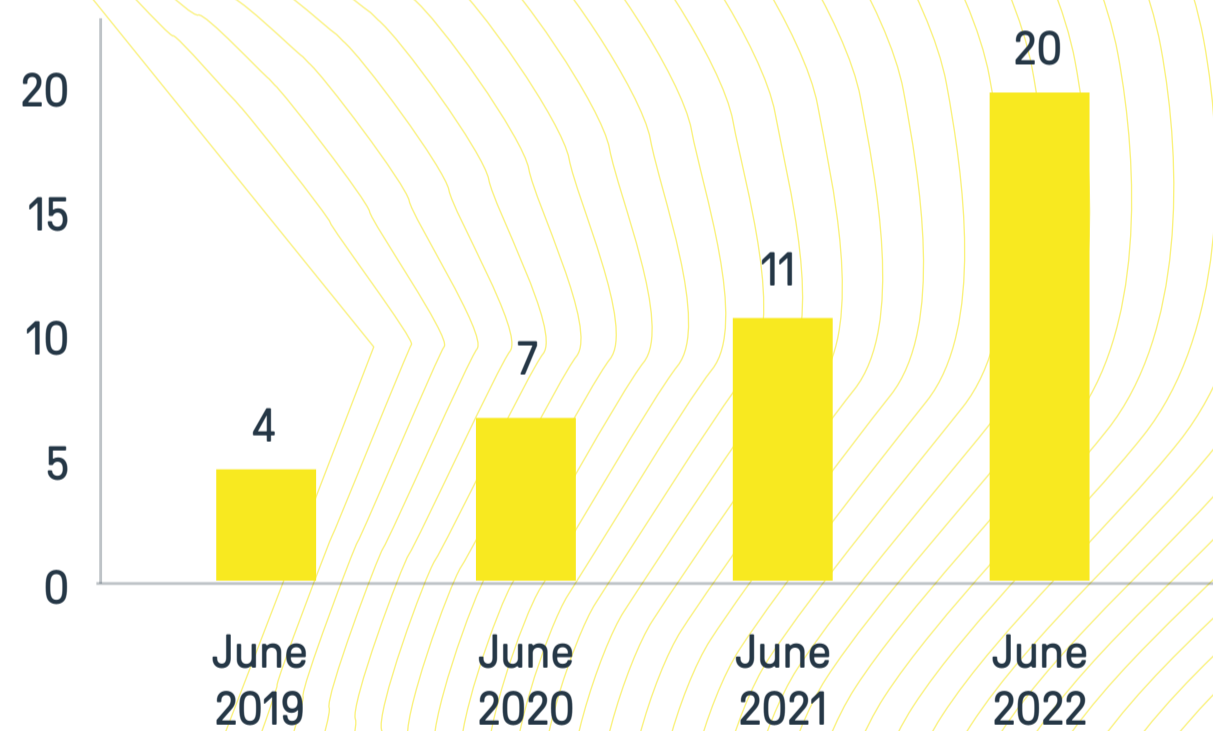
- Significant improvements were seen in all the outcome variables.
- The magnitude of the changes exceeded in some cases the minimal clinically important difference (MCID), meaning that they translated into practically meaningful impact.
- These improvements occurred quickly, after only 6 weeks.
- The greatest relative improvements occurred in those participants starting off the weakest.
- Pain was not a barrier to taking part and in 95% of people who started off with pain, it either improved or did not change.
- The feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive.

EXWELL MEDICAL

Scaling Ex Well Medical's Impact

One of ExWell Medical's areas of focus was scaling their operations. ExWell Medical developed a strategic plan through Rethink Ireland's programme of support. They then successfully refined the programme offering, the operational structure and the financial model. By the end of 2019, they opened four new centres only six months after the Fund started. ExWell Medical's expansion didn't finish there as they opened a total of sixteen centres in the following years.

Growth in Ex Well Centres



New Centres

June 2019: Sportslink, Tallaght, Loughlinstown, Sligo

June 2020: Waterford, Kilkenny, Abbotstown

June 2021: Athlone, Bartra, NEIC, CityWest*

June 2022: Fatima, Thomas Davis GAA Club, Balbriggan, Clondalkin, Tallaght Leisure Centre LC, Tullamore, Portlaoise, Wexford, Carlow.

*The CityWest centre closed in 2022.

ExWell Medical also showed an exponential growth in the number of new programmes delivered and an impressive resilience during the pandemic. Continued support was offered to participants by adjusting to social distancing rules and pivoting to pop-up outdoor and online sessions. During this challenging time, the HSE gave permission to ExWell Medical to continue delivering what was regarded as an important clinical service. This was a huge validation of ExWell Medical's work. In addition to its core business of offering group exercise classes to chronic illness cohorts in community settings, ExWell Medical has also developed pathways into other vulnerable chronic illness groups including the following:

- **The Home Care sector:** ExWell Medical has partnered with Trinity Community Care in Ballymun to bring the ExWell Medical programme into the homes of TCC's service users. A pilot programme is underway with 50 participants.
- **Inner City residents and marginalised groups (including immigrants and homeless):** A pilot programme was run in collaboration with the North East Inner City (NEIC) programme, offering outdoor classes for 35 participants. The pilot was completed successfully with 41 participants registered.
- **Step-Down Facilities:** Bartra Healthcare engaged ExWell Medical in 2021 to develop a reablement service for its patients, working alongside its resident physiotherapist and occupational therapists. This programme was very successful, has shown strong impact and has led to successfully negotiating two similar programmes which will start later in 2022. The project ran from September to November 2021.
- **Cancer Programmes:** ExWell Medical collaborated with The Mater Hospital and Novartis Oncology in developing an exercise programme for breast cancer patients. The initial target was 50 participants and over 300 patients were referred to the project.



Ex Well Medical's Impact Overview



20
new programmes
launched

Over
1000
weekly
participant
visits



10
new volunteers
mobilised



Over
2,250
participants
supported



Worked
with
12
new professional
partners




11
new staff
were hired



8 new partner
sites
established



Over
30
interns on
placements



*These numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the Awardee.



MEET SAILING INTO WELLNESS

Sailing into Wellness recognises the power of the unique setting of the sea to offer educational and therapeutic programmes for at-risk youths and people affected by substance abuse or poor mental health to help them in their recovery. Through sailing and the natural environment, they achieve lasting outcomes for their participants, inspiring and empowering them and creating an atmosphere of collaboration and self-discovery.

Play Video





SAILING INTO WELLNESS

Rethink Ireland's Investment

The overall cash grant investment for Sailing into Wellness amounts to €137,250 between June 2019 and June 2022. Cash grants are a combination of private philanthropic funding, self-raised by the three Awardees and Government funding via the Dormant Accounts Fund. Philanthropic funding was provided by Doyle Shipping Group, Jaguar Landrover Ireland, Alexander Road Services, Brian Craig and McPeake Auctioneers.

Non-financial supports were focused on specialised business support in the areas of strategic planning, fundraising, policy mapping, impact management and communications.

The Power of Sailing

Sailing into Wellness aids participants in managing their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Through sailing, participants experience new ways of interacting with themselves, others and their environment. This is used as a catalyst for change in their everyday lives. Their programmes increase coping mechanisms and encourage prosocial behaviours through four key areas:

- **Personal development:** building confidence, resilience, decision making and positive coping mechanisms.
- **Social/community development:** engaging in teamwork, leadership, positive communication, pro-social activity, trust building and inclusion.
- **Physical wellness:** engaging in physical activity and experiencing physical regulation from the natural environment.
- **Education:** experiential learning, certification, future study and employment opportunities.





SAILING INTO WELLNESS

Scaling Sailing into Wellness' Impact

Over the past three years, Sailing into Wellness have scaled their programmes to new locations reaching a higher number of participants, partnering with different organisations, and remaining open as a highly regarded essential service during lockdown. Some of their big successes include the launch of the Voyages of Recovery and Autism Spectrum Disorder programmes and scaling to other locations.

Voyages of Recovery programme

The addition of the historic sailing vessel the Ilen allowed them to launch the Voyages of Recovery programme, a four day liveaboard expedition where participants develop and test their teamwork, communication, leadership and resilience skills.



New locations

They scaled their programmes, starting with two locations in 2019 in Dublin and Cork and expanding their operations to three new locations in 2020, planning to end 2022 with seven locations.



Programme for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder

They developed and implemented a funded programme for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder which ran from May to December 2021. The success of this programme led to successfully developing a 2022 fully funded ASD program running 12 months of the year.



Sailing into Wellness' Impact Overview

84

Programmes launched



1,739

participation days



268

days on the water



949

participants supported



Worked with

38

partner organisations



8 new staff were hired

5 new locations added



*These numbers are based on self-reported data shared by the Awardee.



Each of the Sports to Impact Fund Awardees have achieved significant growth in their programmes over the course of their participation on the Fund. Although they work with different cohorts and apply different approaches to achieve impact, all of them have been successful in improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people across Ireland and have effectively used sports as a mechanism for achieving greater social inclusion.

ExWell Medical, Sailing into Wellness and Special Olympics Ireland have increased their ability to deliver sustainable social impact at scale through the use of sports and have greatly benefited from the financial and business supports provided by Rethink Ireland, as this report has shown.



Thank You to Our Donors



“

We know that sports and exercise has the potential to be a great equaliser in society. The Sports to Impact Fund (2019 - 2022) was developed before Covid-19, but its Awardees played a critical role during Covid-19, some being designated a “critical service”. They have helped to drive positive transformation in our communities through sports and exercise. All three of the Awardees, Sailing into Wellness, ExWell Medical and Special Olympics Ireland, have shown how exercise and sport have led to inclusion during the Covid-19 pandemic. I would like to thank the Department of Rural and Community Development and to all of the philanthropic donors who have supported this Fund. The Sports to Impact Fund Awardees have achieved incredible impact over the past three years, and I look forward to watching them scale further in the coming years.”

Deirdre Mortell, CEO, Rethink Ireland

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