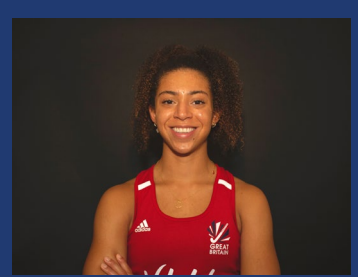


POWERED BY PURPOSE

Empowering athletes to make a difference



THE TRUE ATHLETE PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

Success on the world stage gives high-performance sport a unique platform from which to power positive, meaningful, and lasting change - to have a social impact.

Inspiring positive change is one of the three ambitions set out in our [strategic plan](#), through which we, UK Sport, want to contribute to a happier, prouder, and more connected society.

Through recent research, we found that 86% of funded athletes would like to use their platform to make a difference to society while they are still competing.¹ Plus, two in three UK adults believe athletes have a role to play in championing causes and raising awareness of social issues.²

Coupled with athletes' diverse range of passions, backgrounds and lived experiences, plus their connection to fans, means they are uniquely placed to harness the power and platform of Olympic and Paralympic sport to power positive change.

But what role can we play to help them do this?

Powered by Purpose, delivered in partnership with [The True Athlete Project](#), was a pilot learning and development programme to equip UK Sport funded athletes with the confidence, knowledge and skills to use their platform for social change.

This social change can materialise as either activism or advocacy. We define these as:

- **activism:** the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a desired outcome, usually a political or social one
- **advocacy:** to represent, promote and/or publicly support a particular cause.

¹ UK Sport athlete consultation for social impact strategy development

² [New research shows British public support athletes speaking out and driving social change](#) | UK Sport



FOREWORD

“ We are lucky to have a generation of athletes who are prepared to use the power and platform of Olympic and Paralympic sport to inspire positive change for people, communities and the planet.

I am truly proud of every athlete who took part in this pilot programme. I also feel incredibly proud that we, in partnership with The True Athlete Project, have been able to provide these individuals with a structured learning and development opportunity supported by experts from across the world.

Any athlete who uses their platform to advocate for social causes and action issues that are meaningful to them, should be recognised for balancing this impressive work with their rigorous training regimes and competition schedules. The Powered by Purpose athletes are a shining example of the ability of Olympic and Paralympic sport to make a difference.

I hope the work on this programme inspires and empowers other athletes to start their own social changemaker journey, and that it continues for years to come.”

Dame Katherine Grainger

Chair, UK Sport

“ At The True Athlete Project we believe in the power of sport to make a positive difference.

The Powered by Purpose athletes had a golden opportunity to learn from world experts, explore a new professional and personal path, connect with other athletes, engage in ethical conversations, and connect it all to a personal action plan.

There is much we can take from the evaluation of this pilot version of the programme, but the resounding takeaway is of a group of athletes energised by this experience of connection to each other, their own values and to something greater than themselves.

I will leave the final word to one of the athletes, whose testimonial points to the future for this new movement of empowering athletes to embrace their potential as social changemakers.

"Powered By Purpose is an incredible opportunity for athletes to learn how to channel and maximise their passions of creating positive social change inside and outside of sport in a community of inspiring, likeminded people. I absolutely loved the programme and am so grateful to be a part of this incredible community that I'm sure will continue to grow and flourish."

Laurence Halsted

Programme Lead, Powered by Purpose
Director of Mentoring, The True Athlete Project



POWERED BY PURPOSE AT A GLANCE

Over six months, 20 Olympic and Paralympic athletes from a range of backgrounds took part in **Powered by Purpose**. Designed to improve an athlete's knowledge, confidence, and skills to become effective social changemakers, the pilot programme included workshops, a buddy system, 1-2-1 mentoring, athlete action plans and a presentation day.

HOW ATHLETES FELT BEFORE THE PROGRAMME



PROGRAMME IMPACT

100%



of athletes have **INCREASED** confidence in making a difference on community or social issues.



of athletes believe they have strengths (aside from being elite athletes) that support their social impact.



of athletes view themselves as having the skills and resources to address social challenges.



of athletes confirmed that 'lack of purpose' is no longer a barrier.



ATHLETE FEEDBACK

100%

would recommend the Powered by Purpose Programme to a friend or teammate.

"The workshops, incredible guest speakers and the other athletes on the course have really opened my eyes to how much we can actually use our platform to make worthwhile change and how powerful our voices can be, as well as giving me the tools I need to do so."

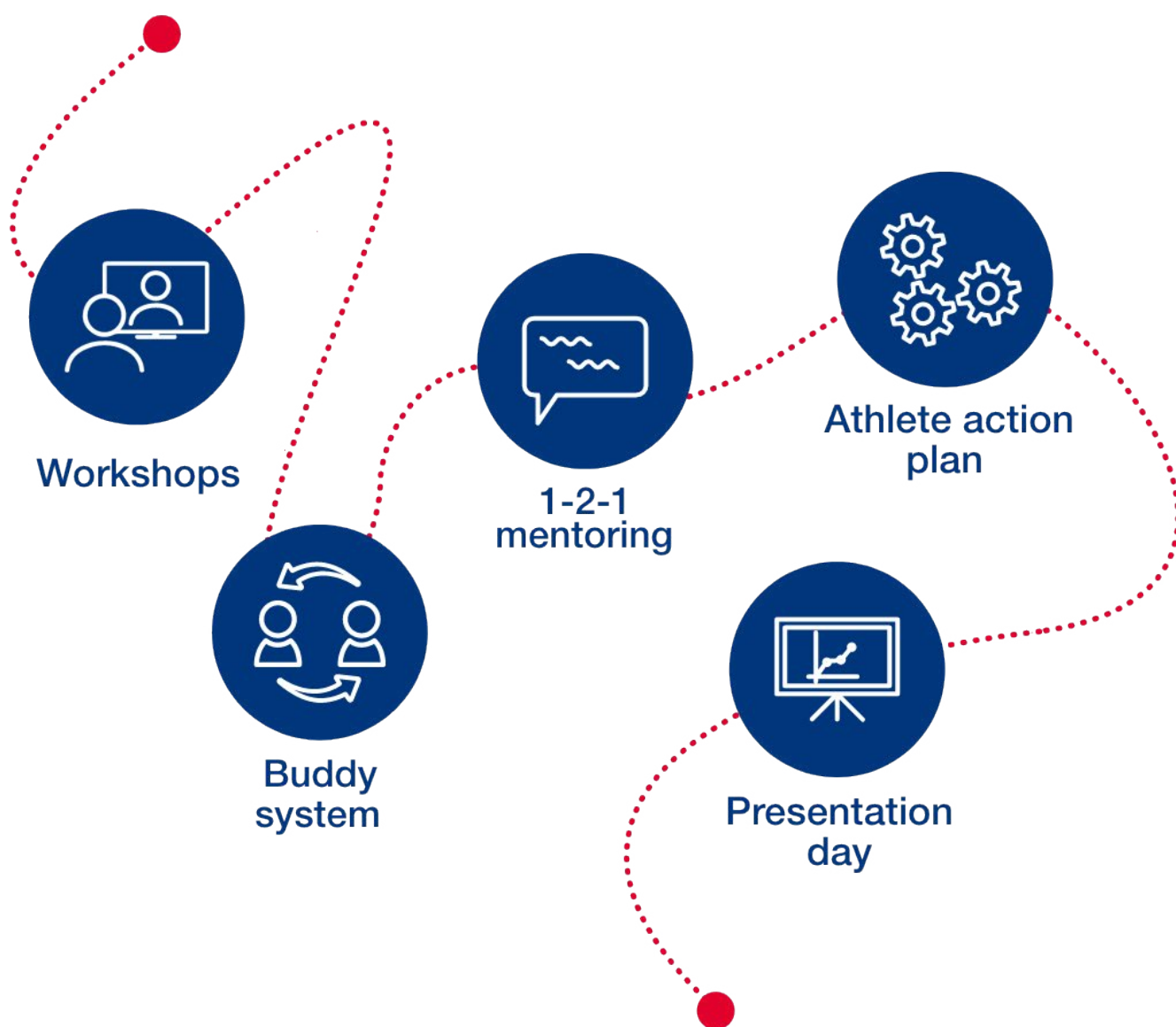
"It was the most positive inspiring team I've been part of, and it opened my eyes to how individually or together we can make a change and have an impact on our various causes."

*Statistics are from the post-programme survey which included 17 of the 20 participating athletes.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Using the findings from our research, we designed Powered by Purpose to address the barriers athletes face when engaging in activism or advocacy activities.

This six-month programme included:



PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

1

Athletes demonstrate increased knowledge of social issues and athlete activism.

2

Athletes have increased knowledge of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relation to selected social issues.

3

Athletes have increased confidence to use their platform to make a difference through advocacy and/or activism.

4

Athletes demonstrate increased knowledge and skills through completion of a personalised athlete action plan to tackle selected social issues.

5

Athletes demonstrate increased awareness of conflicting interests between sport and politics.

6

Evidence of support systems within the sport sector for athletes to thrive in their athlete activism activities.



PROGRAMME CO-CREATION

To ensure Powered by Purpose was tailored and authentic to the athletes participating, we involved them in the content creation and structuring of the programme from the start, including designing a theory of change.

This empowered the athletes, giving them a robust understanding of the theories of social intervention design, and how change is envisaged to happen.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING APPROACH

The programme used a mixed-method approach including:



Surveys

Conducted before and after the programme, the surveys gathered demographic data, attitudes towards activism and advocacy, interest in politics and confidence in local and national elected leaders, confidence in local, national and global governance structures and personality traits.



Focus group discussions

Acted as the main tool for qualitative data.



Workshop evaluation surveys

The athletes completed surveys after each workshop, including quantitative scoring and qualitative feedback.



Fieldnotes and observations

Compiled by the Powered by Purpose team.



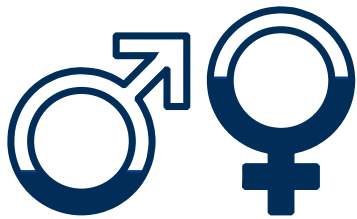
PROGRAMME IMPACT

Through the monitoring, evaluation and learning approach, we are pleased to share the programme results.

20

ATHLETES

TOOK PART IN POWERED
BY PURPOSE



35%
Male

65%
Female

20%
from diverse ethnic
backgrounds

80%
white

65%
Olympic Sport

35%
Paralympic Sport

AGE

18-25
35%

26-30
30%

31-35
20%

36-40
5%

40+
10%



Awareness of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and experience of sport for social change

Before Powered by Purpose, **only 20% of the athletes had knowledge of the United Nation SDGs** – after, awareness had increased to **88%**.

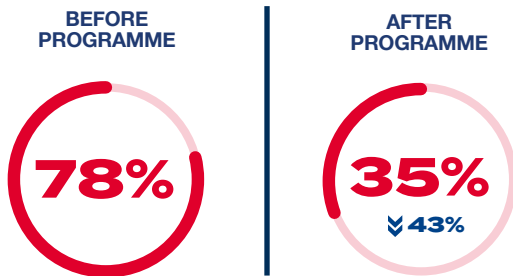
55% had experience of the use of sport for social change before being enrolled on the programme.

Engagement in advocacy and activism

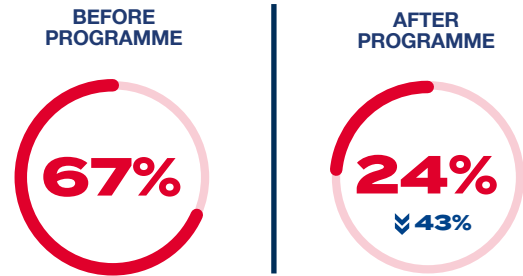
Before taking part in Powered by Purpose, the top four barriers to the athletes' engagement in activism or advocacy related activities were **lack of confidence, lack of knowledge, fear of being misunderstood and lack of clear purpose**.

After the programme, evaluation results showed that these barriers had significantly reduced:

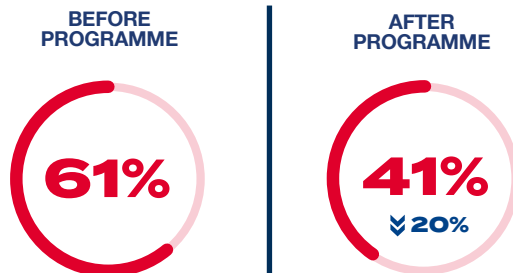
LACK OF CONFIDENCE



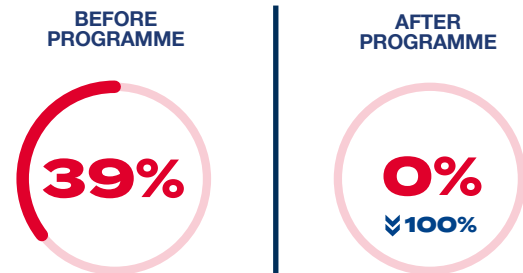
LACK OF KNOWLEDGE



FEAR OF BEING MISUNDERSTOOD



LACK OF CLEAR PURPOSE



However, 71% of athletes still cited 'lack of time' as a barrier to engagement, post programme.

"The course delved deep into lots of different areas that helped each of us with our focus topic. Not only did we learn from amazing guest speakers, but we were given the opportunity to share and listen to each other's experiences. Being part of this course has given me the confidence to venture into new areas of work, that now align closely to my core values."

Milly Kellyman, Skeleton



Self-identity as an activist or advocate

After Powered by Purpose:

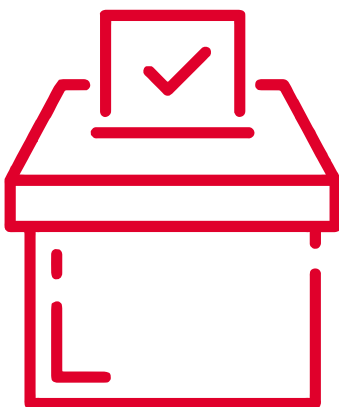


65%
**OF ATHLETES
IDENTIFY
THEMSELVES
AS ACTIVISTS**



71%
**OF ATHLETES
IDENTIFY
THEMSELVES
AS ADVOCATES**

Some athletes were uncomfortable with the term ‘activist’ as they deemed it had negative connotations. ‘Changemaker’ was seen as more aligned with the social impact activities they were engaged in or aspiring to undertake.



Interest in politics and confidence in elected officials

Understanding the implications of political decisions, ideologies and community development plans, and how people in positions of power can influence change are vital to help athletes shape their responses to social issues.

Before Powered by Purpose, **60% of athletes indicated having an interest in current affairs or politics**, with most having low confidence in political leaders both at local and national level.

After the programme, that figure **increased by 22%** with an increase in confidence in local elected officials to solve current societal challenges. Confidence in national elected officials to solve current challenges remains low.

Personal capabilities

Before starting Powered by Purpose, **85% of athletes expressed confidence in their strengths** (outside of elite sport) to support their social impact activities, this **increased to 100% post programme.**

"Before starting on the programme I thought I had some idea of how to use my platform, but the workshops and incredible guest speakers as well as the other athletes on the course have really opened my eyes to how much we can actually use our platform to make worthwhile change and how powerful our voices can be, as well as giving me the tools I need to do so."

Tully Kearney, Para-Swimming

Community capabilities

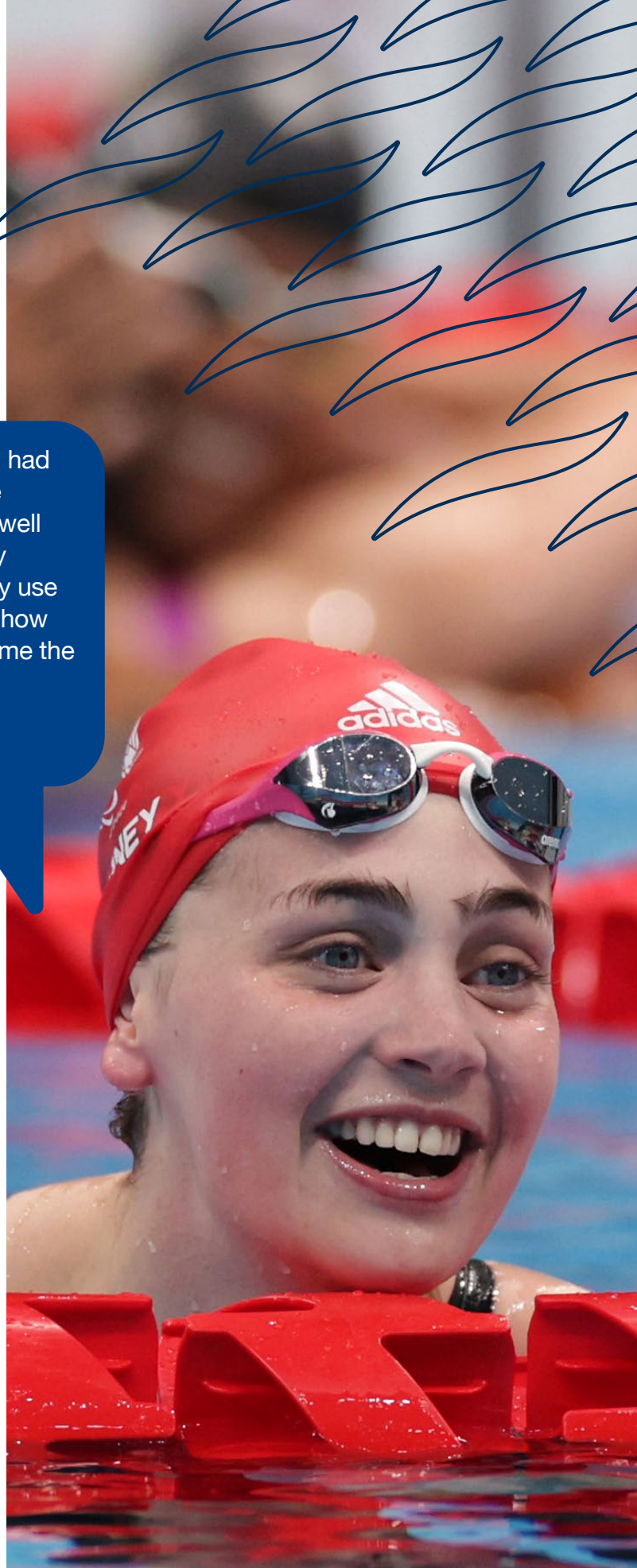
After Powered by Purpose, **88% of athletes felt confident about the capability of their community** to address current societal challenges – **an increase of 48%.**

They also expressed their confidence to access support from their local community.

Support structures

After the programme, **94% of athletes believe UK Sport is supportive** of their desire to be a social changemaker – **an increase of 14%.**

Most athletes expressed the desire for their respective National Governing Bodies (NGBs) to show interest in their involvement in the Powered by Purpose programme and support their subsequent development in the social impact arena.





ATHLETES' EVALUATION OF POWERED BY PURPOSE



Useful and enjoyable

59% and 65% of athletes said they found it extremely useful and extremely enjoyable, respectively.



Exceeding expectations

77% said that the programme exceeded their expectations, with 47% reporting that it far exceeded them.



Likelihood to recommend

100% fully endorse recommending the programme to fellow athletes.

Athlete ownership and understanding

Co-creating the programme with athletes created a feeling of ownership by giving them a voice. There was a notable increase in a comprehensive understanding of their personal values or beliefs, respecting others' values and how they relate to their identity as changemakers.

Value of sharing lived experiences

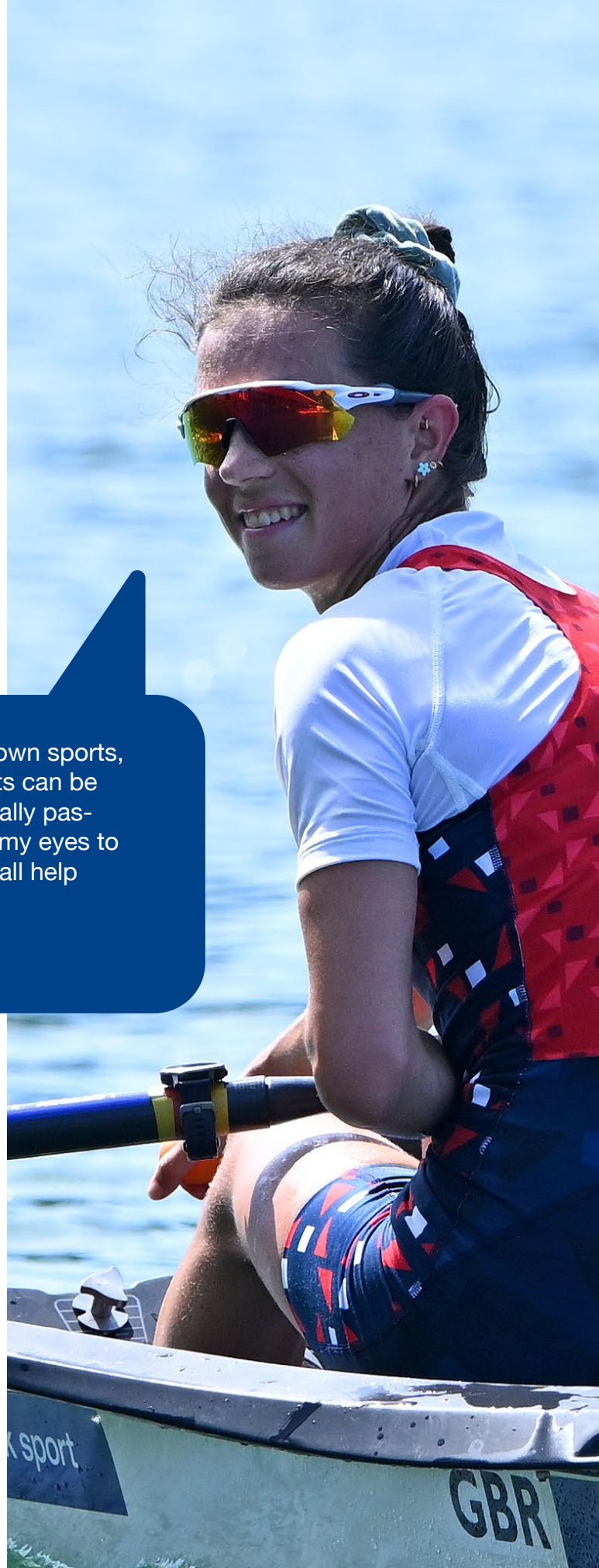
The breakout sessions provided the athletes with rare opportunities to connect with athletes from other sports, leaving them feeling inspired and validated by their peers' lived experiences.

"We all have amazing communities within our own sports, but what I hadn't realised is how isolated sports can be from each other. Talking to others who are equally passionate about sport and other causes opened my eyes to how much we all care, and how much we can all help each other achieve."

Imogen Grant, Rowing

Influencing capability

The workshops helped clarify the athletes' purpose, and they realised that, when it comes to being a changemaker, the size of their platform doesn't matter, but it's their capability to influence social change, even among a few people, that counts.



Athletes' social impact plans

Athletes started Powered by Purpose at varying stages of their social impact journey, however, all those who gave live presentations of their experience on the programme were able to point to concrete steps for how they want to move forward with their chosen cause.

The causes and issues athletes have decided to focus on as a result of the programme span a broad spectrum:

- creating after school clubs that integrate mental health education and tackle holiday hunger
- advocating for their own National Governing Body (NGB) to provide period products in their national venues
- working with **Surfers Against Sewage** to engage the sailing community to advocate for cleaner waterways and oceans
- creating a community of extreme sports enthusiasts who are activists for social causes
- establishing a frame running club
- lobbying a university for enhanced disability gym access and equipment
- training hospital physiotherapists in how to introduce disability sport to people with recent spinal injuries.



"Powered by Purpose is an incredible opportunity for athletes to learn how to channel and maximise their passions of creating positive social change inside and outside of sport in a community of inspiring, likeminded people. I absolutely loved the programme and am so grateful to be a part of this incredible community that i'm sure will continue to grow and flourish!"

Darcy Bourne, Hockey



POWERED BY PURPOSE 2023-2025

Due to the success of this pilot, we are renewing our partnership with The True Athlete Project, which will see Powered by Purpose continue until the end of the Paris Cycle (March 2025).

For further information please contact:
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Social Impact Manager, UK Sport.



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Tully Kearney



THE TRUE ATHLETE PROJECT

