



GymABLE Programme

**A Gymnastics Group Intervention for children
with
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity
Disorder (ADHD)**

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**Many thanks to Helen Corrigan (OT) and Sheryl John (SLT) from CAMHS
Wexford, as this project was adapted from their original concept
“Experiencing Success: A Gymnastics Group Partnership Programme for
children with
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity
Disorder (ADHD)”**

Programme Information

An occupational therapy colleague in Wexford CAMHS successfully piloted a gymnastics group for children with ADHD in 2017, in partnership with Gymnastics Ireland's GymABLE programme, Wexford Sports Partnership and a local gymnastics club. This award-winning programme proved to be successful and sustainable, and continues to be facilitated on a rolling basis in Wexford CAMHS. One of the recommendations from this original project was to collaborate with Speech and Language Therapy in future programmes. I was kindly granted permission to replicate this project in CAMHS Donegal.

- ✓ Our largest cohort of children in the CAMHS service is primary-school aged children diagnosed with ADHD.
- ✓ Heavy muscle work and proprioceptive sensory input have been proven as ways to calm and regulate a person.
- ✓ Engaging in regular physical activity is hugely beneficial to children diagnosed with ADHD, as it improves their sleep, increases their appetite, creates social opportunities, and provides them with feelings of success.
- ✓ Many children and parents in Donegal experience barriers to engagement in community-based physical activity, and require additional supports to engage in same.
- ✓ It was therefore important to explore and identify therapeutic occupations that enable children to engage more positively in their own wellbeing through the creation of an engaging, fun and accessible environment.
- ✓ In January 2019 I began meeting with Fiona Murphy (owner of Citadel Gymnastics Club in Letterkenny), regarding creating a similar initiative up here in Donegal, and we subsequently met with Therese Lavery from Donegal Sports Partnership to plan and approve funding for the programme.
- ✓ In collaboration with my Speech and Language Therapy colleague Jemma Colclough, we planned to trial an 8 week gymnastics group for 12 children aged 7-12 in our service, in conjunction with Citadel Gymnastics and Donegal Sports Partnership.

Programme Details	
Duration	8 weeks
Time	Mondays 7- 8p.m.
Commencing	Monday 6th May
Location	Citadel Gymnastics, Oldtown, Letterkenny
Age Range	7 – 12 years
Numbers	12 children in total
Staff : Child Ratio	2:1 (4 gymnastics coaches & 2-3 CAMHS clinicians)
Garda Clearance	Yes-all covered
Insurance included	Yes-all covered

- ✓ We planned to focus on a cohort of children diagnosed with ADHD who were perhaps unable to or required extra support to access community-based physical activity. Some children may struggle to access extra-curricular activities for a variety of reasons:
 - Socio-economic factors are prohibitive to families being able to afford classes, or invest in something which they are unsure will suit their child
 - Lack of transport for families in rural areas
 - Experiencing rejection from activities at earlier stages due to associated hyperactive behaviours, which leads to anxiety re: trying new activities
 - Lack of knowledge/understanding of ADHD in community-settings and subsequently lack of strategies to manage inattentive/hyperactive behaviours in a group activity context

- ✓ Myself and Jemma were very motivated to commence this programme, and identified our roles as: training and supporting the gymnastics staff re: ADHD, attending the classes in order to support staff and manage behaviours, support parents and carers to commit to the programme, monitor children's progress throughout the length of the programme, encourage and support ongoing investment in the mainstream classes for families whose children benefit and enjoy same, and look at ways of sustaining the project in a longer capacity if it proved to be successful.

Programme Process

- ✓ Pre-programme measure using MOHOST and informal social interaction and participation questionnaire before programme commences
- ✓ Education for coaches on ADHD and individual children's needs
- ✓ Weekly warm up & stretches
- ✓ Demonstration of tasks
- ✓ Engagement & support with graded exercises
- ✓ Cool down
- ✓ Post-programme measure using MOHOST and informal social interaction and participation questionnaire at end of block
- ✓ Evaluation questionnaires for parents, children and coaches

Programme Goals

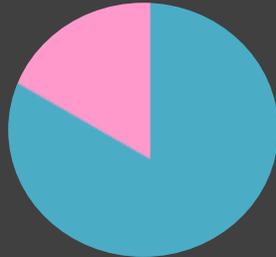
- 1 To trial an 8 week gymnastics programme for children aged between 7 and 12, who are diagnosed with ADHD and attend CAMHS Donegal.
- 2 To offer children a structured and fun activity in a community setting, where they will be supported to experience success through development of their motor, balance, sequencing, timing and listening skills.
- 3 To support children to socialise with peers in a natural and fun environment, where they can strengthen social skills and make friends.
- 4 To educate Citadel Gymnastics coaches on the presentation of ADHD, and ways to manage same, with support from our Consultant Psychiatrist.
- 5 To educate Citadel Gymnastics coaches re: sensory regulation, and to recognise the calming and organising impact that heavy muscle work and deep pressure has on the body and mind.
- 6 To support parents to commit to a community-based activity programme with their child for the 8 week duration.
- 7 To offer parents a space to potentially access peers support and talk to other parents who experience similar parenting challenges.
- 8 To ask parents to contribute a small amount of money towards each lesson (€2), in order to foster a sense of value in and commitment to the programme. This money will then be used to purchase medals or t-shirts for the children when they have successfully completed the programme.
- 9 To provide ongoing support to parents and children who wish to continue accessing gymnastics beyond the group duration, by offering support for transport costs ongoing in conjunction with Donegal Sports Partnership.
- 10 To create a sustainable, community-based programme to benefit and support our children with ADHD and their families on a rolling basis.

This report has been reproduced in parts based on Helen Corrigan's original report "Experiencing Success: A Gymnastics Group Partnership Programme for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)"

Demographics

12

**Children
Attended
(Aged
7-12 years)**



10
Boys



2
Girls

4

**Coaches
2:1 Ratio**

3

**CAMHS
Staff**

- OT x 2
- SLT
- and another MDT member

8

Weeks

60

**Minutes
Weekly**

96

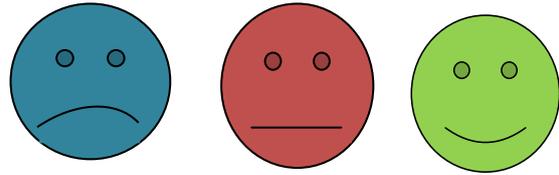
**Hours direct
clinical intervention**



82%

**Attendance
Rate**

Child Evaluations



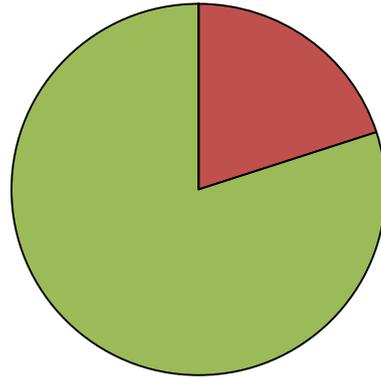
sad

neutral

happy

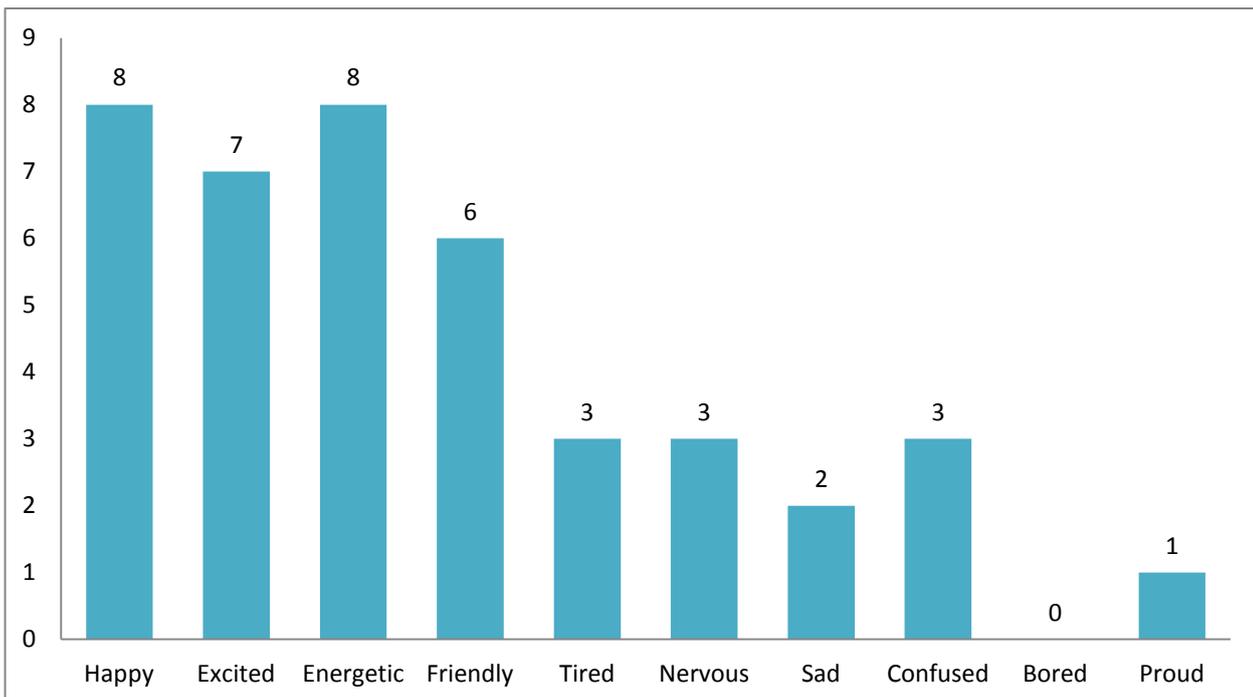
Q What did you think of the group?

Children asked to circle one of three faces:
sad, neutral or happy

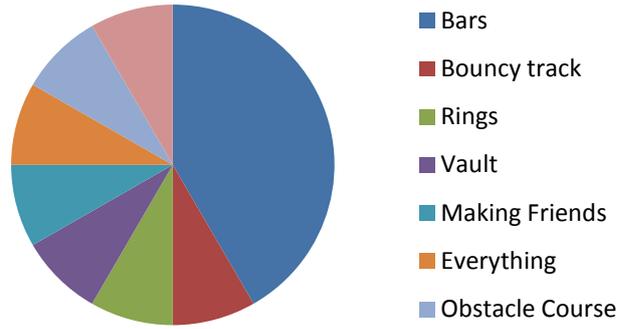


Q How did you feel at the group?

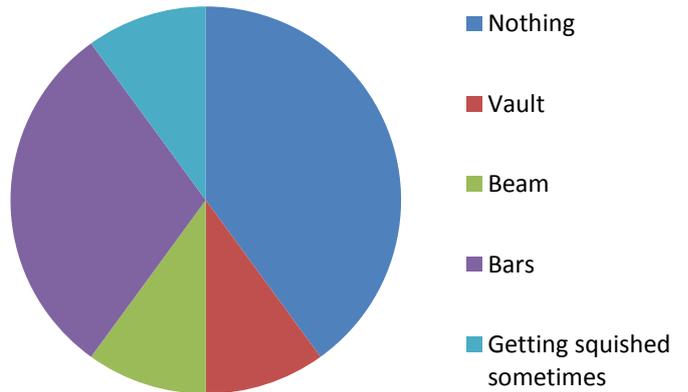
Children were given a selection of words and asked to circle as many as they wish
One child added the word 'proud'



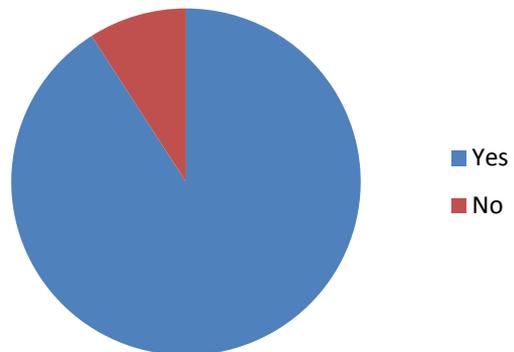
Q What was your favourite bit of the group? (Open question)



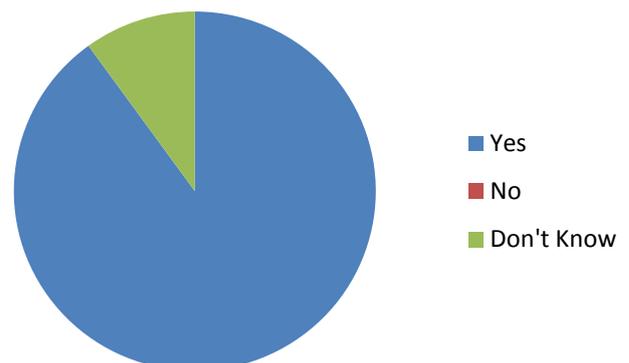
Q What was the worst bit of the group? (Open question)



Q Did you get on with other children in the group? (Yes or No)



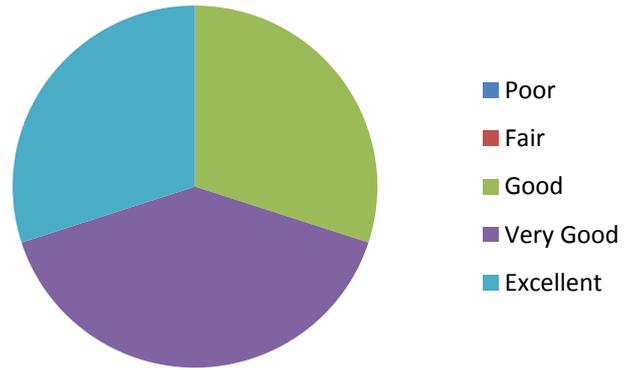
Q Would you tell other kids to go to this group? (Yes, No or Don't Know)



Parent Evaluations



How did you rate the group?

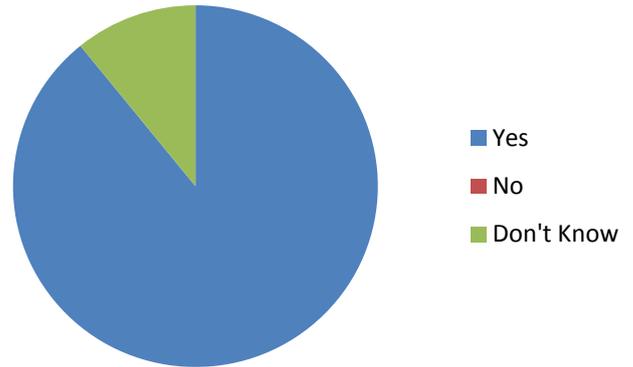


Did your child enjoy the group? (and why?)

"It's something she's good at, can go in and enjoy it, it puts her on a pedestal"

"Something to look forward to, his own time away from family and friends"

"He initially thought gymnastics was girly, but saw other boys at it and loved it"



Did your child give you any feedback about the group?

"He loved it, meeting other kids, doing something he wants to do"

"Only thing he's ever liked and stuck at"

"Excited about medal and took it to school"

"Spoke about another child he made friends with"



Did you notice any change in your child after the group?

"He was tired thank god"

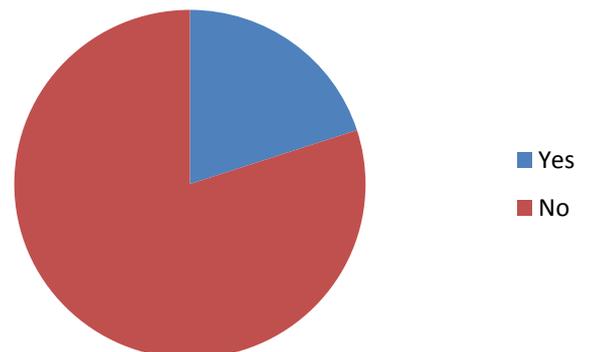
"Shattered...a good thing"



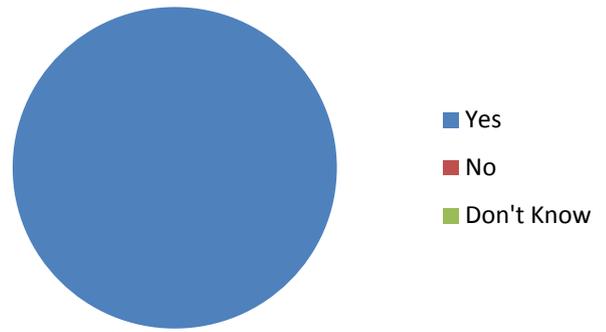
Have you noticed any change in your child's motor skills- balance, coordination etc?

"Not as clumsy"

"Stronger arms"



Q Would you recommend the group to other parents of children with ADHD?



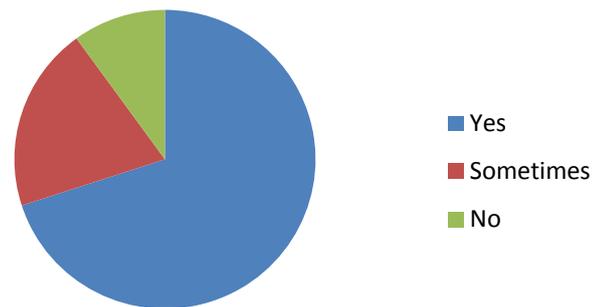
Q Did your child want to go to the group every week or did they need encouragement to attend?

“Always whined before class and didn't want to go, but 2 minutes in he was glad he went”

“He may have stuck it out if it was only kids his own age”

“Always wanted to go-first time he's ever been like that!”

“One week he was tired but I got him out door and it was best week he had!”



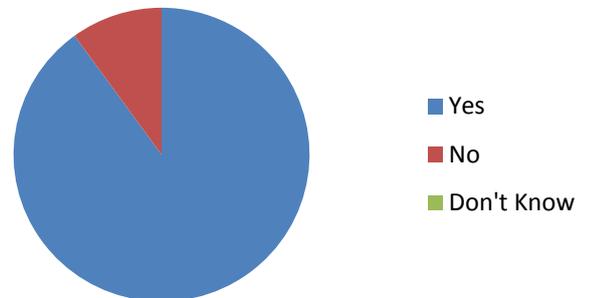
Q Did your child get on with other children in the group?

“After Jemma made introductions, his confidence grew every week!”

“Plans to meet peers after group”

“Bit of tension at start with more competitive kids”

“Got on better with the older kids and girls”



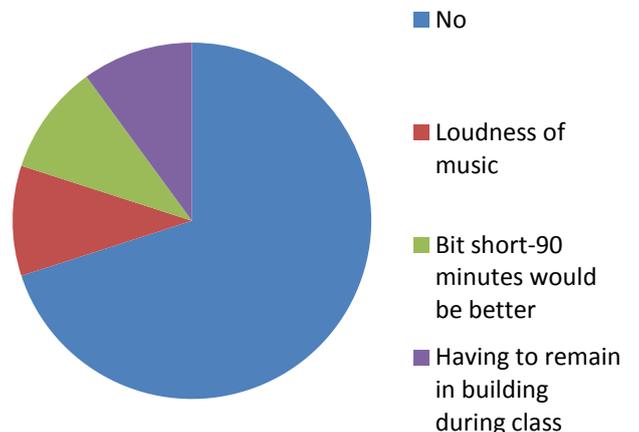
Q Was there anything you did not like about the group?

“Best thing that ever happened!”

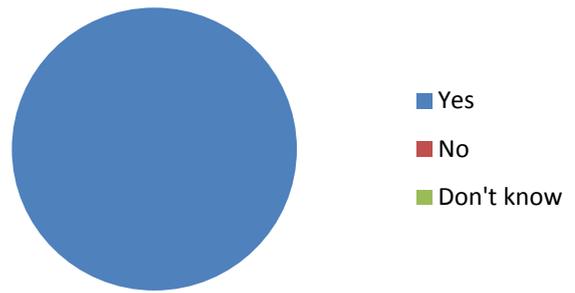
“It suited me really well”

“Would love at least two a week”

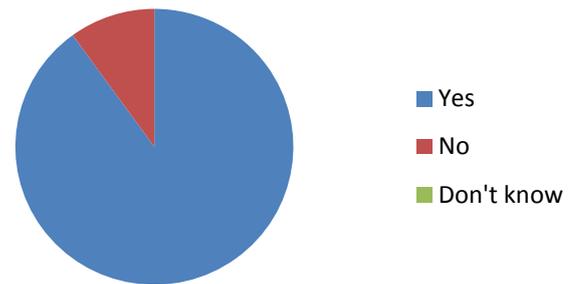
“Was good to talk to other parents going through what you are”



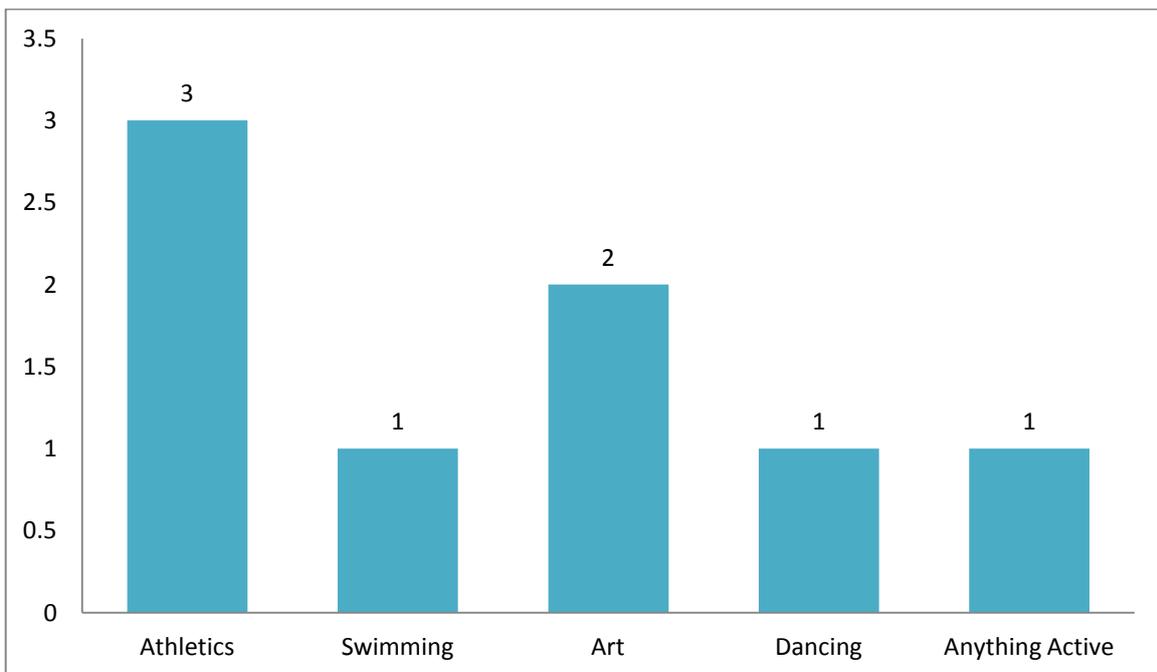
Q Would you send your child to a similar group?



Q Are you interested in your child continuing in gymnastics?



Q Is there any other activity you think would benefit your child and others with ADHD?



Coaches Evaluations

Q What were your overall thoughts on running the CAMHS Gymnastics Group?

"I loved it, I saw every single kid get more confident every single class and would love to do it all over again"

"I found the quieter setting a better fit for an introduction in to a sport that most/all of the kids had not encountered before. It had a great support network from many branches and a wonderful outcome for all the kids"

Q How did you find coaching kids with ADHD was different to coaching kids without identified special needs? E.g. behaviour management

"The children with ADHD appeared to be more enthusiastic and more energetic. On the other hand, it was harder to get and maintain their attention"

"I was more aware of my surroundings and made sure you don't leave things out that could start a confrontation (chalk near the chalk board for example). I found they preferred having more technical feedback and they had more 'headspace' to be able to process it better"

Q Did you notice any change in the children's motor skills (balance, coordination etc.) while attending the group?

"It was possible to identify small improvements in motor skill levels as each class progressed"

"Stamina...The very first day they were all sweating by the end of the class, by week 8 there was not one kid sweating"

Q What changes would you make if you were to be involved in a group like this again?

"Keep the same coach with the same group to allow for better planning, better mutual understanding between the gymnasts and the coach and, thus, better skill progression"

"Designated charts to show them what's coming up next at what time etc. and what coach they have"

Q How did you feel about the contact/support from CAMHS staff throughout the group – too little/enough/too much?

"the support from CAMHS staff members was great! They intervened only where appropriate and I felt greatly supported in my interaction with the young gymnasts"

"Exactly the right amount. They were close by to see that all kids were alright and any tell-tale signs appearing and a great ear for when we had questions or concerns"

Q How did you find coaching the kids? Any further comments?

"I loved coaching them even through the challenges. I made bonds with them. Also seeing their faces light up over the simplest things was the best thing"

"All gymnasts are unique individuals and each present unique challenges. In general, I found coaching these children a little more challenging than coaching children without identified special needs, but just as rewarding"

"I would very much look forward to running this again in future"

Our Learning and Future Considerations

- ✓ **Sustainability:** Both children and their parents valued an intervention which promoted engagement in a community-based activity, which had the scope for continuation beyond the life of the CAMHS programme. 8 of the 12 children continued or planned to continue gymnastics beyond the life of the programme.
- ✓ **Individual Goal Setting:** Upon reflection, CAMHS clinicians involved in the programme identified the importance of supporting future participants to set individualised goals at the screening stage of the process, as we discovered that MOHOST and Social Participation & Communication Questionnaires were not sensitive enough tools to use as clear outcome measures.
- ✓ **Visual Aides:** Some participants may benefit from the use of visual aides in future groups to facilitate seamless transitions and changes within the group setting.
- ✓ **Strengthening Connections:** Children identified their desire to have us facilitate more formalised introductions with their peers, so it may be useful to focus on learning names and enhancing introductions in warm-up activities.
- ✓ **Goal attainment:** In this trial programme, it took time to identify suitable boundaries between the roles of coaches and CAMHS staff. In future groups, an increased CAMHS involvement in warm-ups and cool-downs would be beneficial in order to introduce and attain individual OT and SLT goals.
- ✓ **Communication is Vital:** Future groups would benefit from increased reflective check-ins between programme partners each week or fortnight, to ensure the programme continues to evolve to meet the needs of the participants.
- ✓ **Emphasize Education:** It is important to collate the shared learning between all partners involved, so that potential future groups continue to meet the specific needs of children with ADHD. Ideally a CAMHS Psychiatrist or Psychologist would provide psycho-education to gymnastics coaches prior to the facilitation of future groups.
- ✓ **Cease Financial Contribution:** While the majority of parents contributed towards to the cost of t-shirts and medals, we discovered that these items can be acquired in bulk at low cost. As the group was a CAMHS intervention, we have decided not to request a financial contribution from families in future, as this did not appear to influence their commitment to the programme.
- ✓ **Pathways:** Following the programme, some children progressed to mainstream classes, some remained in the original ADHD cohort, and some moved on to other community-based activities. Clear identification of pathways available to children beyond the scope of the programme will be helpful for CAMHS staff, parents and coaches to consider for each child nearing programme completion in future.