



# **EXPERIENCING SUCCESS**

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

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## Johnny's Story:

*Johnny is a ten year old boy who loves running, jumping, playing with his friends and his pet dog. He is really good at climbing the monkey bars in the park. Johnny loves to move and his Mum says he has 'endless energy'! He finds it hard to sit still and listen in school because there is always so much going on around him. Johnny has a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD. Johnny sometimes finds it hard to join new activities because he can get into trouble for being a bit 'rough and tumble' with other kids. It can take him longer than other kids to understand the rules and he feels nervous about getting into trouble. Most people don't understand how hard it*

*can be for Johnny to try to learn new skills when he is so easily distracted. Sometimes he joins new clubs but leaves after one or two sessions.*

*Johnny attends the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) where he gets some help with the things he finds difficult. He sees a doctor, a nurse and sometimes other members of the team like the Occupational Therapist (OT). Johnny's OT suggested he join the CAMHS Gymnastics group. He was reluctant at first – gymnastics is for girls!! But Johnny liked the idea of the huge trampolines and the foam pit so he agreed to go along and give it a go...*

## Project information:

› **ADHD – approx. 5% to 10% of school age population have ADHD, higher prevalence in boys**

› **Studies have shown the positive effects of physical exercise in children with ADHD –**

- Improve cognitive functioning
- Enhance self-esteem
- Improve social skills

› **South Wexford Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)**

- Consultant Psychiatrist led Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)
- approx. 55% of children attending have ADHD

› **Limited resources - reduced staff and very limited clinical space**

› **How to maximise efficiency?**

- group intervention
- partnership approach
- community based intervention

› **Partners**

- HSE – South Wexford CAMHS
- Wexford Sports Active
- Gymnastics Ireland – Gymable Project – Wexford Gymnastics Club

› **Preparation**

- CAMHS Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) planning
- Planning meetings with partners
- Education for coaches – from CAMHS team and via Gymnastics Ireland Gymable Project

› **Occupational Therapy**

Occupational therapy (OT) is a client centred health care profession which focuses on promoting health and well-being through engagement in occupations

**Occupational Therapy goals for project:**

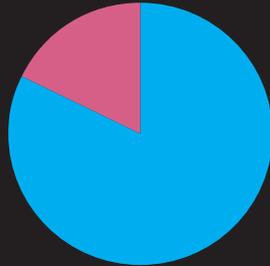
- Increase participation in valued purposeful leisure occupation
- Sensory seeking kids - appropriate sensory based occupation
- Increase integration – normalised community environment
- Increase social interaction – meet other kids with similar difficulties
- Skill acquisition – motor coordination skills
- Social communication skills – turn taking, following rules etc.
- Safe environment for appropriate risk taking

**Demographics:**

**17**

**Children  
Attended**

**(Aged 8 - 12 Yrs)**



**14**

**Boys**



**3**

**Girls**

**5**

**Coaches  
4:1 Ratio**

**3**

**CAMHS  
Staff**

- OT
- Clinical Nurse
- and another MDT Member

**8**

**Weeks**

**75**

**Minutes  
Weekly**

**170**

**Hours direct  
clinical intervention**



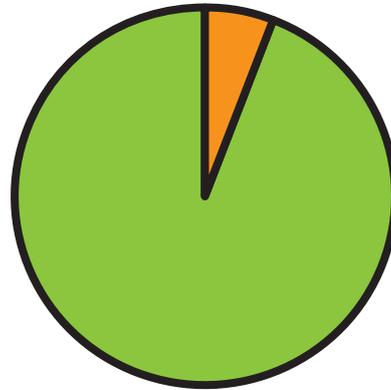
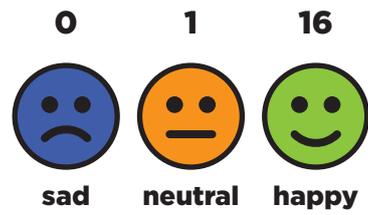
**95%**

**Attendance  
Rate**

## Child Evaluations:

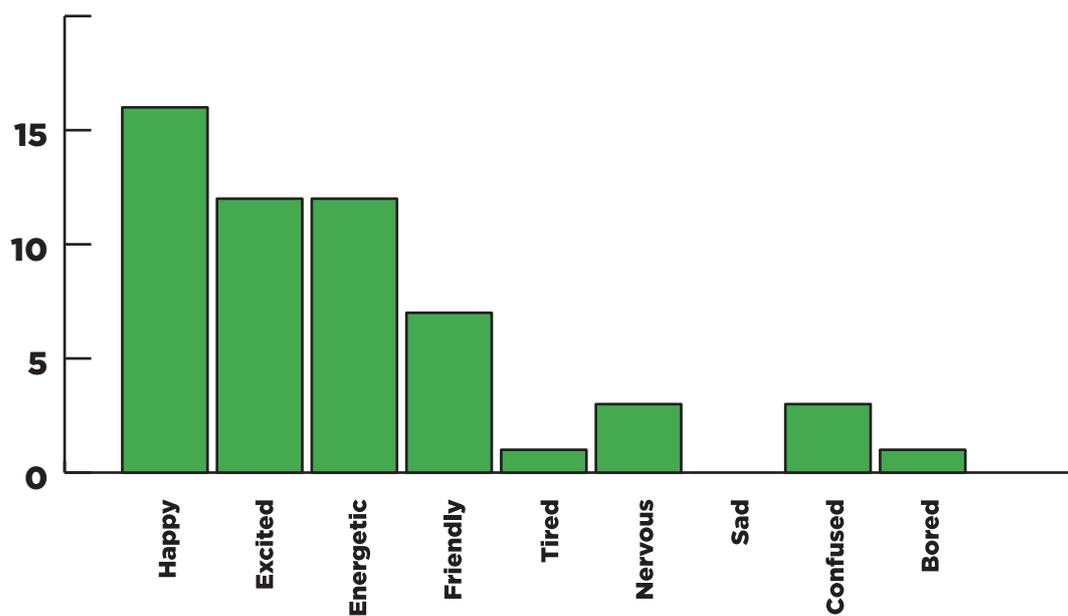
### Q What did you think of the group?

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



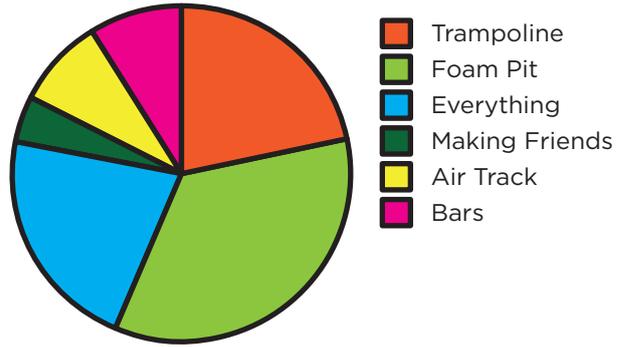
### Q How did you feel at the group?

Children were given a selection of words and asked to circle as many as they wish



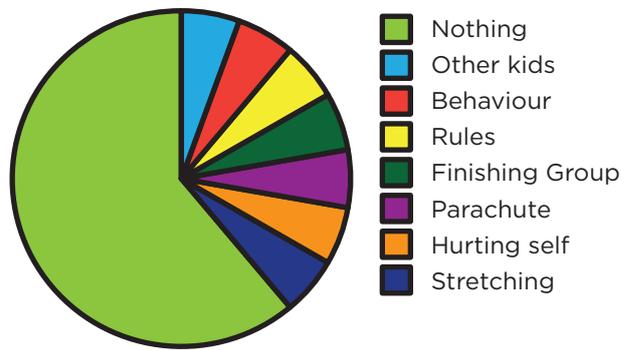
**Q What was your favourite bit of the group?**

This was an open question



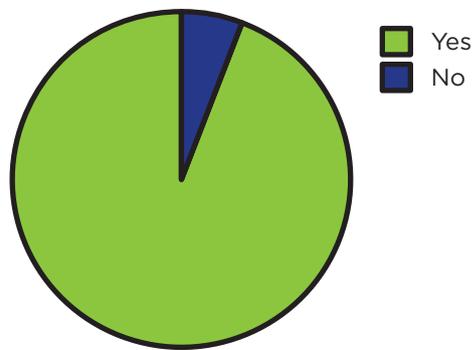
**Q What was the worst bit of the group?**

This was an open question



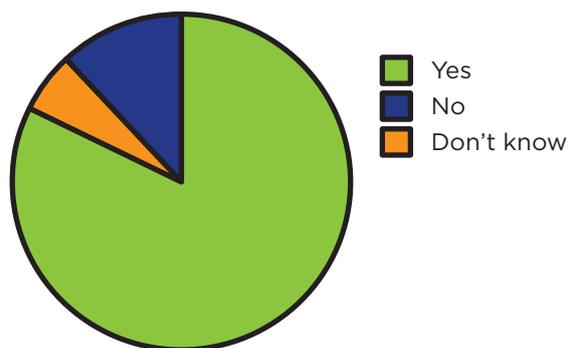
**Q Did you get on with other children in the group?**

Yes or No



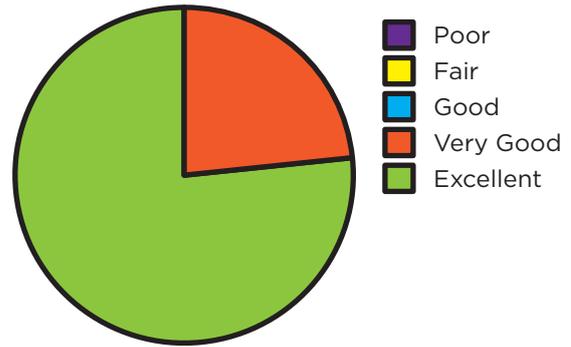
**Q Would you tell other kids to go to this group?**

Yes, No or Don't know



## Parent Evaluations:

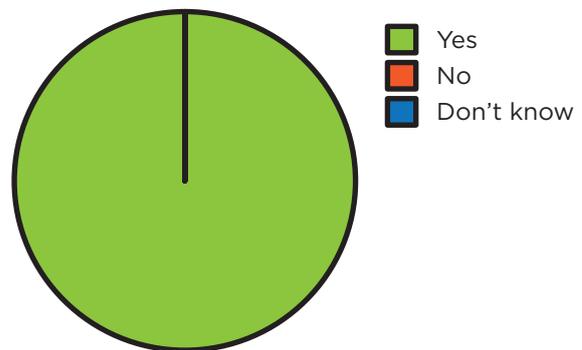
**Q** How did you rate the group?



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

“It made her happy. She enjoyed it and looked forward to it every week.”

“My child loved the group. She felt relaxed and made friends. I think it’s great for the kids.”



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

“Ate better, slept better and was calmer”

“Teacher in school noticed the difference – said she would smile all day”

“He was a lot more tired and hungry”

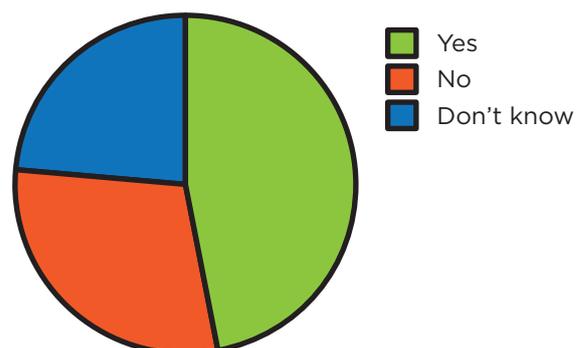
**Q** Did your child give you any feedback about the group?

“Yes would tell me and his resource teacher all about it”

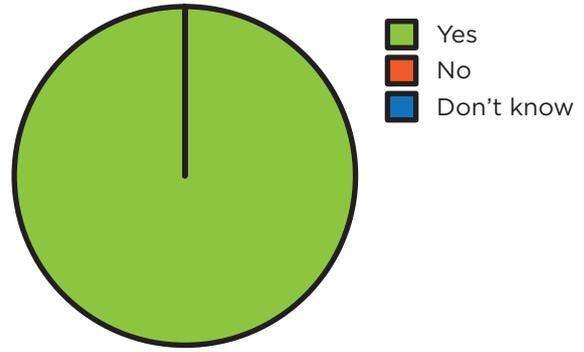
“Yes we got a run down on what he did every week and even showed us some weeks”

**Q** Have you noticed any change in your child’s motor skills – balance coordination etc?

“Yes and definite better ability with balance and confidence to try new things that involved balance or coordination”



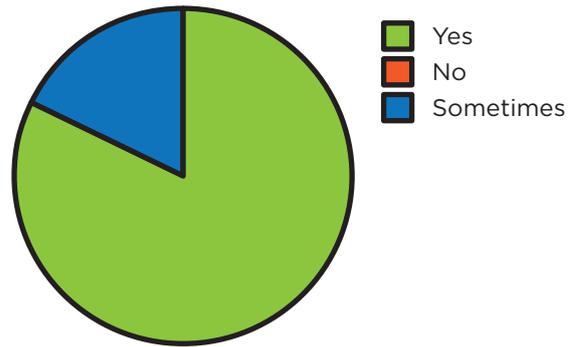
**Q** Would you recommend the group to other parents of children with ADHD?



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

“Jumped out of bed every Friday to go”

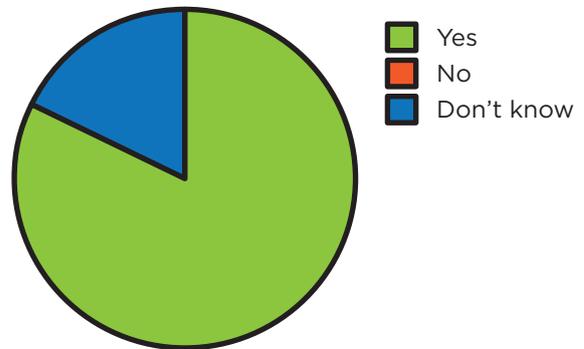
“Sometimes needed encouragement because it was out of routine. But with the OT there he was happy. Once she was there he was comfortable because he knows her”



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

“He realised he is not alone with ADHD and this in itself is very empowering”

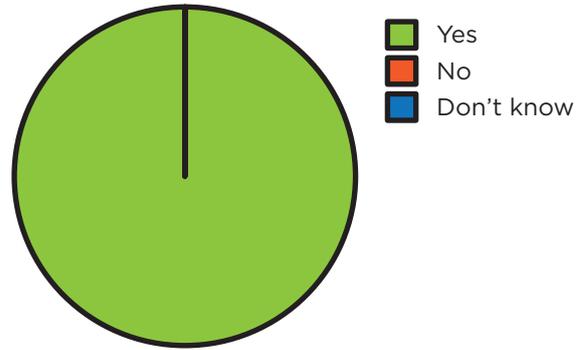
“Sticks to himself generally but this time he took part in group things”



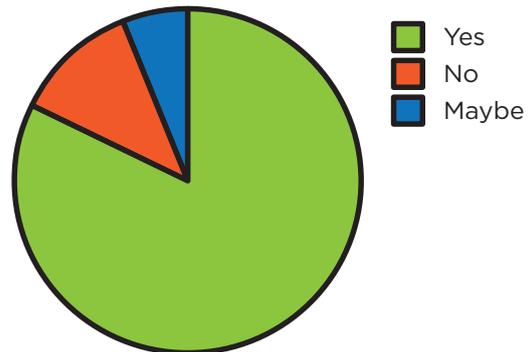
**Q** Was there anything you did not like about the group?



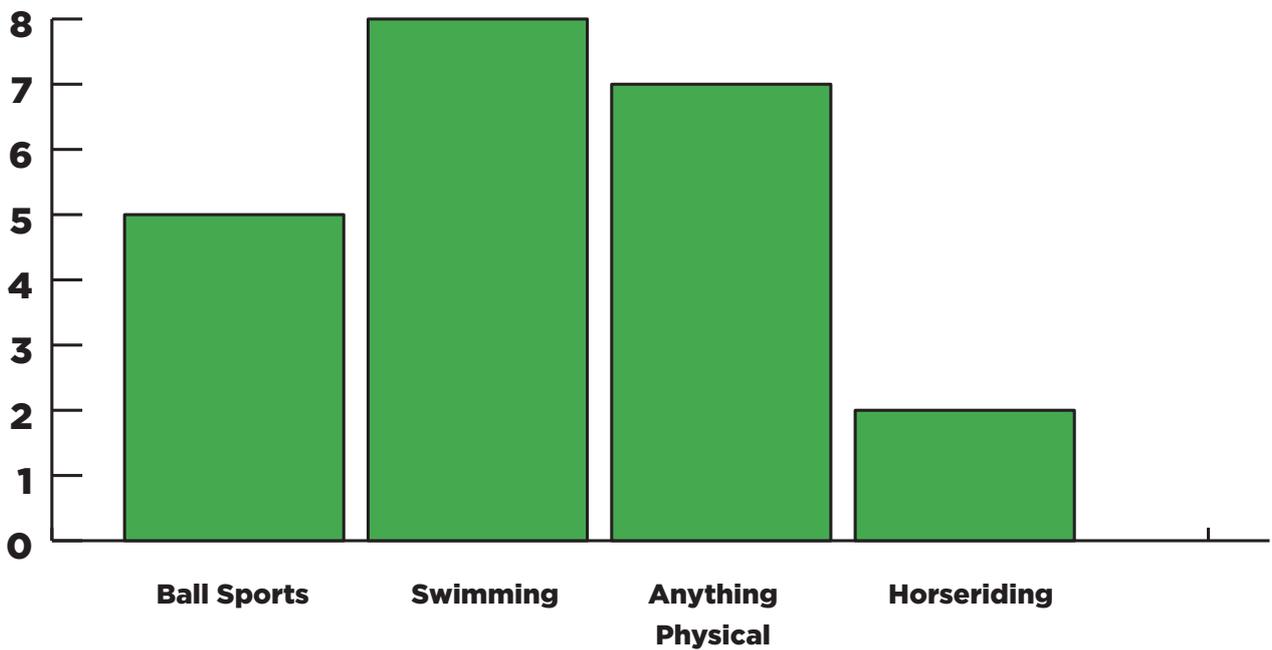
**Q** Would you send your child to a similar group?



**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 Evaluation

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

“Great learning experience for all involved from the planning to implementation and evaluation”

“We were challenged in taking on this large group but with good organisation and planning it was very worthwhile for all involved”

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

“With reinforcement of the safety rules plus the want to achieve something, this not a lot different to a normal class

“Dealing with their difficulty in their understanding of consequences was hard at the start but learned to work around it”

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

“On all pieces there was a huge improvement – this is measurable by the amount of skills the kids achieved”

“Their balance skills improved with good concentration, their motor skills improved with motivation”

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

“Reduce the group size for more focused learning”

“Not knowing the children was difficult, knowing who to put together in groups”

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

“They were great and anything, any questions we had, 100% answered and supported throughout”

“Support was great and appreciated the support when dealing with behaviour issues and how to deal with them”

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

“I would like to think that many of the children would have the confidence to join in to the mainstream group classes and have an enjoyable experience and fun”

“I would definitely do it again”

## Outcomes:

### › Experience of success!

Children achieving positive outcomes in new mainstream activity

### › Partnership –

New learning for staff and coaches

### › Occupational Therapy Outcomes

- Willingness to try new things – Increased confidence and self esteem
- Sensory benefits of occupation – proprioceptive and vestibular input through gymnastic activity
- Social interaction – secondary benefit of group, contact with similar kids
- Skill acquisition – improved motor coordination, balance, learned new skills
- Increased concentration – required for following rules, listening to direction, turn taking etc.

### › Efficiency –

The use of optimum resources to yield maximal benefits or results.

### › Acceptability –

The degree to which a service provides a positive experience for service users.

### › Sustainability –

Approx 1/4 of the children who attended are attending or wait listed to attend mainstream gymnastics with club

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## Future Directions?

**Sustainability:** Build on this pilot project – run the group again!

### Measure outcomes –

1. Impact of exercise on executive functioning
2. Improvements in motor skills
3. Sensory benefits of gymnastic exercise
4. Increased social interaction
5. Impact on self-esteem and confidence

## Johnny's Experience:

*Johnny attended every session of the 8 week gymnastics group. He was nervous on the first week but couldn't wait for it to start every other week. His favourite activity was the ball pit! The coaches were very clear on what the safety rules were and reminded the group at the start of every session. This helped Johnny to remember what he should not do in the gym. Johnny was tired every week after the group and loved to go home, eat and chill out. He loved being able to try new things and almost learned to complete a full summersault on the trampoline. He's going back for classes after school now. He's happier joining them now that he understands the rules of the club and because he has already had some practice learning the new skills he feels more confident joining in. Johnny is already thinking about what other activities he might like to try next.....*