

CLUB GUIDE: BOWL FOR HEALTH SEPTEMBER 2023

The idea for Bowl for Health was developed and successfully piloted in 2017 by Formby Village Sports Club (formerly known as Holy Trinity Bowling Club) with support from MSP, and has been rolled out by more clubs across Merseyside thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and Liverpool City Council with support from our stakeholders.

MSP are no longer coordinating a Merseyside wide Bowl for Health programme, however if your club is based in Merseyside (Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens or Wirral) and is interested in hosting a Bowl for Health course then this guide is designed to help you understand the basics.

Who is Bowl for Health aimed at?

As an inclusive opportunity, Bowl for Health enables anybody to join in as they are advertised to the general public. Typically, as most courses are held by clubs during the daytime during the week, then mostly sessions are attended by older adults looking to improve their physical and/or mental health.

There are lots of benefits and motivations that participants might have to want to join in with Bowl for Health, including:

- To socialise, meet new people and make new friends
- To improve their physical health and physical activity levels
- To learn a new skill
- To pick-up the sport if they have played before, or to gain a better understanding of the basics or rules of bowls

Some clubs have previously run some 'targeted' closed Bowl for Health sessions for particular cohorts of people (such as people with dementia) as safe spaces for people with particular needs, rather than opening up to the general public.

Why should our club take part?

A lot of clubs have told us that their membership numbers and league teams have been declining over the past few decades, so the opportunity to attract new participants to the club is a big benefit of running a Bowl for Health course.

Whilst there are never any guarantees of attracting participants, generally most clubs are able to fill their allocation of places when they advertise for a Bowl for Health course, and clubs have found that typically 84% of Bowl for Health participants go on to join the club as a member.

In addition to attracting new participants, hosting a Bowl for Health course can boost a club's publicity and local profile, it's a positive initiative to include when applying for funding and it's a great thing to offer as part of your local community.



What does our club have to do?

Hosting a Bowl for Health course is relatively straightforward, and your club would just need to organise:

- Green availability – we would encourage clubs to run Bowl for Health courses for 6-8 weeks, hosting sessions on the same day/time each week e.g. on a Tuesday morning from 10.00am to 11.30am. Clubs need to ensure that this wouldn't clash with any other commitments (e.g. club social time or league matches), and that all other club players know to expect that the Bowl for Health course is running at this time
- Volunteers/coaches – making sure that there are enough volunteers to welcome and support Bowl for Health participants. Most clubs have a ratio of one volunteer/coach to every 4 participants, so if your club's green could accommodate 12 players then you should have at least 3 volunteers/coaches helping out each week; these don't have to be the same volunteers/coaches each week
- Equipment – with Bowl for Health attracting mostly participants who haven't played bowls before, they may prefer to use lighter bowls such as 2.4s or 2.6s. Most clubs are able to offer a bank of bowls for participants to use from existing players or spare sets, but if your club would like to borrow some additional bowls then please contact MSP via the details at the end of this document. Your club may also consider purchasing some 'grabbers' that support participants with poorer mobility to pick up their bowls
- Advertising – see below
- Insurance – please check with the [BCGBA](#) if your club's insurance would cover Bowl for Health participants as 'guests'
- Governance – ensure that you have a fully stocked first aid kit, and there is a point of contact and a policy for any safeguarding concerns
- Teas and coffees – participants have told us that one of the best parts about attending Bowl for Health is the opportunity to socialise after the session, so offering free teas and coffees plays a big part in making people feel welcome and part of your club

What should we offer as part of Bowl for Health sessions?

Different clubs run Bowl for Health in different ways – some decide to run the course quite informally and just have volunteers supporting groups of people by describing, demonstrating then shadowing players to improve.

Other clubs, often who have a trained club coach, might decide to structure the lessons each week to focus on a certain topic – the table below shows an example eight week programme.

Week 1	Explain rules of the game plus other basics: Crown of the Green, the characteristic of the bowl and holding the bowl.
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Week 2	Delivering the bowl
Week 3	Improving delivery technique
Week 4	The etiquette of the game
Week 5	Getting the “land”
Week 6	The techniques of measuring
Week 7	Playing a match
Week 8	Competition with other group

A basic understanding to the game could include the origins of bowls, how the bias of the ‘jack’ and ‘bowl’ work, and how this is counteracted by the ‘crown’ of the green. Specific skills include correct grip, stance, delivery rhythm and action, good alignment, correct position of the non-bowling arm for good balance, keeping the head still and in the correct position, picking a line when bowling/following the ‘jack’, distance control, how to score, correct measuring, green etiquette and awareness.

Later sessions would also include an introduction to different strategies for out-thinking opponents. Each session would start with a re-cap of the previous week and an opportunity to ask questions. As the weeks progress more pointers will be introduced to help participants improve their technique and understanding of the game.

This video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mamh05amN0k>) was put together with thanks to Formby Village Sports Club, which can be used by participants as a reminder to the basics of crown green bowling.

Clubs that have delivered Bowl for Health sessions in the past have told us that:

- It’s important to reinforce the basic messages and learning points through repetition
- Participants learn at different speeds, so be mindful of offering support at different levels for people
- To take time out from playing to discuss the game – this could be before, during or after playing
- The most important thing is participants need to have fun and enjoy the game – this is what keeps them coming back.

How to advertise

Once your club has all of the above things in place, advertising and promoting the Bowl for Health course is critical in order to attract participants.

We would recommend that you design a poster (you're welcome to use this [poster template](#)) and set a start date at least six weeks in advance to allow enough time for the promotion to spread e.g. if you're planning to start the course in June then it's best to start promotion in April.

On the poster you should include contact details for a point of contact who can field any questions and keep a log of participants due to attend – this point of contact should be available in the time coming up to the course date (e.g. won't be away for work or on holiday).

You can then send paper and electronic copies through:

- Local shops, community centres etc
- To your nearest [Link Worker](#) (contact MSP if you're not sure who this is)
- Local charities and voluntary groups (contact your nearest voluntary sector infrastructure body – [Halton and St Helens VCA](#), [One Knowsley](#), [Liverpool CVS](#), [Sefton CVS](#) or [Community Action Wirral](#))
- Your local papers, in particular any free publications
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, twitter/X)

Thinking about the participant journey

It's important to try to put yourself in the shoes of a potential participant coming along to a Bowl for Health session, who may never have played bowls before. They might for example:

- Be extremely nervous about coming along – think about providing them a friendly phone call before the course starts, or offer them the chance to come down to the club to watch. If your club is hard to spot or the post code doesn't quite work on a sat nav then explain to them how to get to the club and what to expect
- Have physical health problems, mild to moderate mental health problems (such as depression or anxiety) or might not be used to being active or being in a club environment – so be mindful about their confidence levels, and make sure that everyone at the club knows that the new players are coming down and are welcoming of them
- Be worried about their playing standard, especially around more established players

Other considerations

- Cost – we would encourage each club to offer Bowl for Health courses free of charge
- Participant information – make sure that participants know where to go, what to bring (clothes, footwear etc), who to ask for to help them reduce any nerves they might have about joining in. If your club is tricky to spot off the road then it could be a good idea to meet and greet people on the roadside or in the car park
- Integrating with other members – having a mix of club members coming down to help volunteer will help new participants get to be familiar with more people and so it will be less daunting to join the club at the end of the Bowl for Health course
- Transitioning from beginner to match ready – to help participants feel the buzz of a competitive game you could link up with another club and play a friendly against their Bowl for Health participants
- Photos – taking a group and individual photos of participants playing can help boost your promotion and publicity, but make sure that you have permission from all participants that you can take and use the photos

Further info

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact Danny Woodworth (Partnership Manager for Health) at MSP via d.woodworth@merseysidesport.com