

2026

2026 REPORT

ALL ABOARD YOUTH ROWING





TABLE OF CONTENTS

2026



Introduction	03
Confidence	04
Healthy Lifestyle	05
Self Efficacy	06
Friendship	07
Belonging	08
Joy	09
Pupils' Comments	10
Summary	11
References	12

INTRODUCTION



“I’m making more friends, building my confidence and strengthening up”

All Aboard Youth Rowing works with 36 state schools across the North-West of England to deliver a year long rowing programme to 400 Young People of whom 90% are on the pupil premium register. The programme isn’t just about the rowing, it’s designed to improve the overall confidence, resilience and wellbeing of the scheme participants

This report presents the impact of AAYR on the development of life skills among pupils participating in its programme. Data was collected in person during the 2026 North West Indoor Rowing Competition and reflect the responses of 170 active AAYR participants, aged 13 to 15. The analysis focuses on six core areas of life skill development through sport: confidence, health, friendship, sense of belonging, wellbeing, and self-efficacy.

The survey was developed by a trainee sport psychologist and informed by contemporary research on adolescent life skill development through sport (see index for reference). It consisted of two demographic questions, asking participants to indicate their gender identity and the school they attend. This was followed by six questions relating to key areas of life skill development, each measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.



I feel my confidence has grown since I started rowing



I have made friends / strengthened my friendships through rowing together



Rowing has helped me feel more active and healthier



I feel like I belong in my rowing group



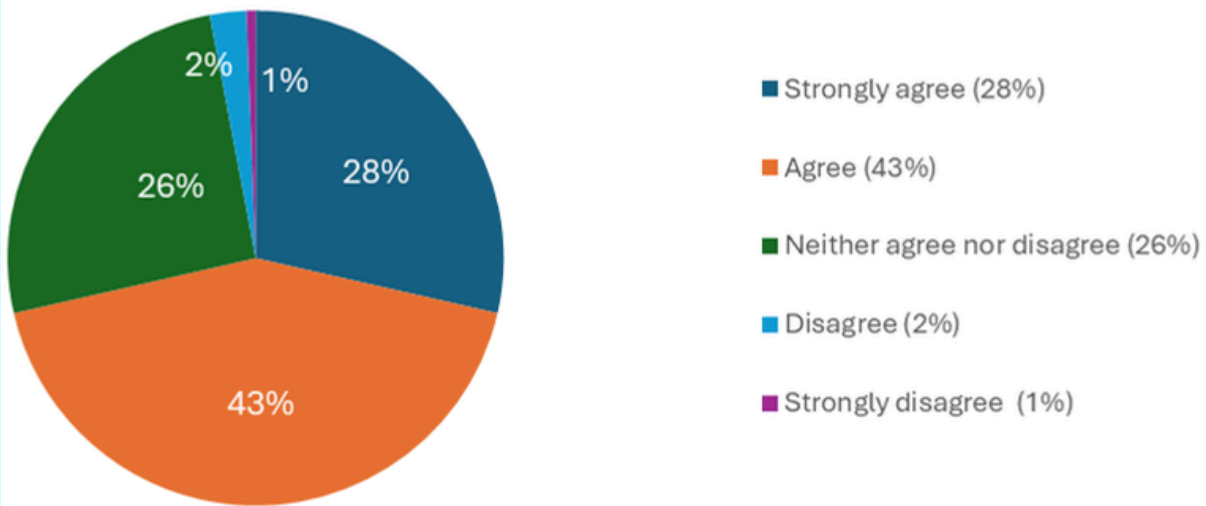
I am proud of what I have achieved in rowing



I feel happier on the days when I do rowing

CONFIDENCE

I feel my confidence has grown since I started rowing



Most participants reported increased confidence since joining the AAYR programme. Overall, 71% agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (28%) that their confidence had grown since starting rowing. A further 26% selected “neither agree nor disagree,” suggesting that confidence development may be gradual or not always consciously recognised. Negative responses were minimal, with only 2% disagreeing and 1% strongly disagreeing.

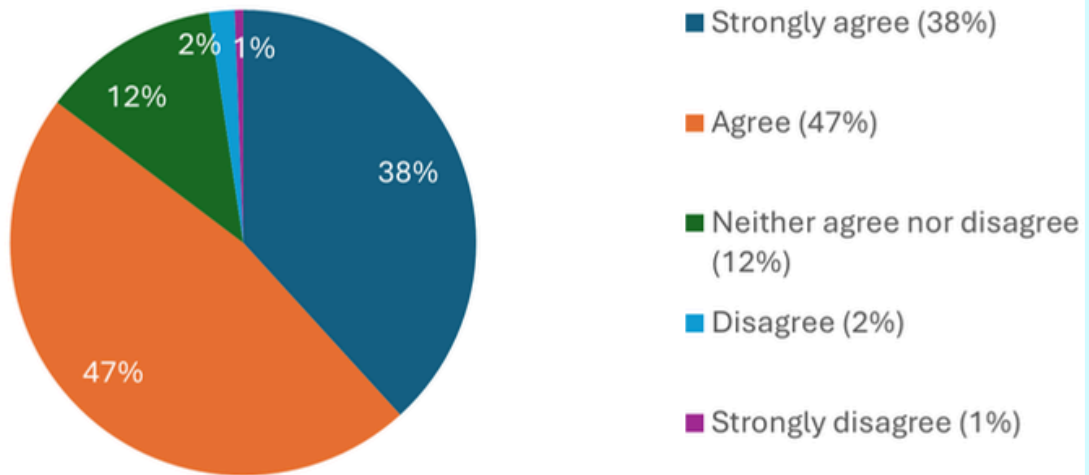
These findings align with established evidence that structured, team-based sport supports adolescent confidence, self-esteem, and psychological wellbeing. Sport-based interventions have been shown to significantly enhance confidence and resilience in young people (Rossi et al., 2023), with higher self-esteem reported among pupils engaged in regular extracurricular sport (Saar et al., 2023).

The significance of these outcomes is heightened by national data indicating a growing confidence crisis among UK adolescents. Hark’s Listen Up Report (2025) reports that 31% of young people have little or no confidence, with pronounced regional disparities (32% in the North of England vs. 87% in London) and a marked decline during mid-adolescence (71% at age 11 to 65% at age 16). Girls and young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are disproportionately affected.

Within this context, AAYR represents a timely and relevant intervention. Delivered in a region where youth confidence is typically lower, the programme provides a structured, inclusive, and team-based environment that supports confidence development, resilience, and belonging, particularly for girls and pupils from underrepresented backgrounds.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Rowing has helped me feel more active and healthier



The majority of participants reported improved health and activity levels since joining the AAYR programme. Overall, 85% agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (38%) that rowing helped them feel more active and healthier, indicating a meaningful positive impact on physical wellbeing and engagement with exercise. A further 12% selected “neither agree nor disagree,” suggesting that perceived health benefits may develop more gradually or be less immediately recognised by some participants.

These findings are particularly significant when set against national trends. The Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (2024–25) reports that only 49.1% of children and young people in England meet the Chief Medical Officers’ guideline of 60 minutes of daily activity, leaving more than half insufficiently active. By comparison, the overwhelmingly positive feedback from AAYR participants suggests the programme is promoting physical activity well above the national average.

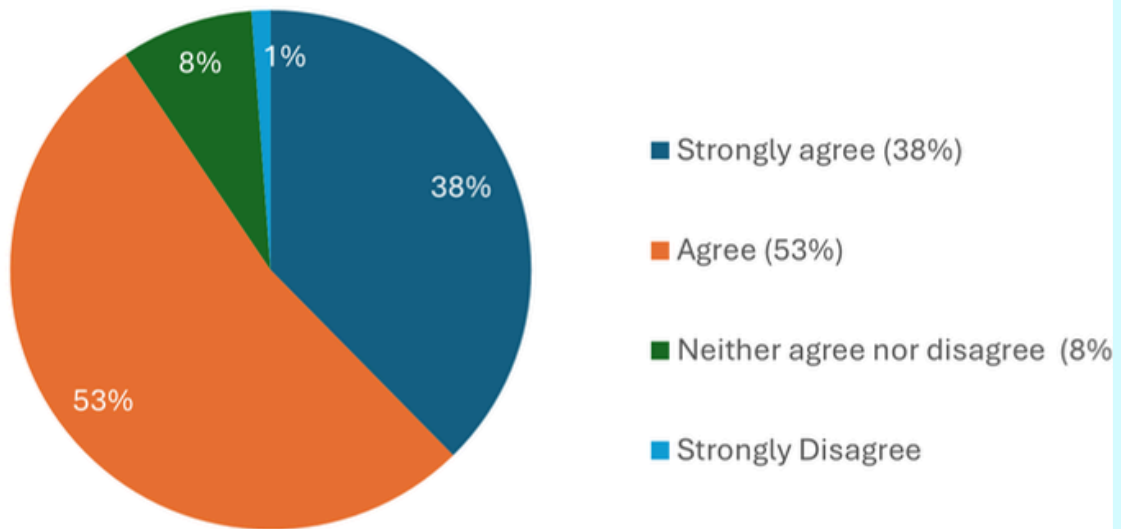
Sport England data also highlight that children from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds are least likely to meet activity guidelines. With its inclusive focus and delivery in areas of limited opportunity, AAYR may therefore play an important role in reducing participation gaps and health inequalities.

The broader benefits of physical activity are well established, with Sport England reporting clear links between activity, mental wellbeing, happiness, and resilience. With 85% of AAYR participants recognising health benefits, the programme is likely contributing to these wider developmental outcomes at a time when youth wellbeing across the UK is under increasing pressure.

Overall, AAYR demonstrates the value of targeted, inclusive sport provision. By removing barriers and offering a structured, supportive environment, the programme not only increases physical activity but also encourages positive, lasting health behaviours, offering a strong model for future sport and health interventions.

SELF EFFICACY

I am proud of what I have achieved in rowing

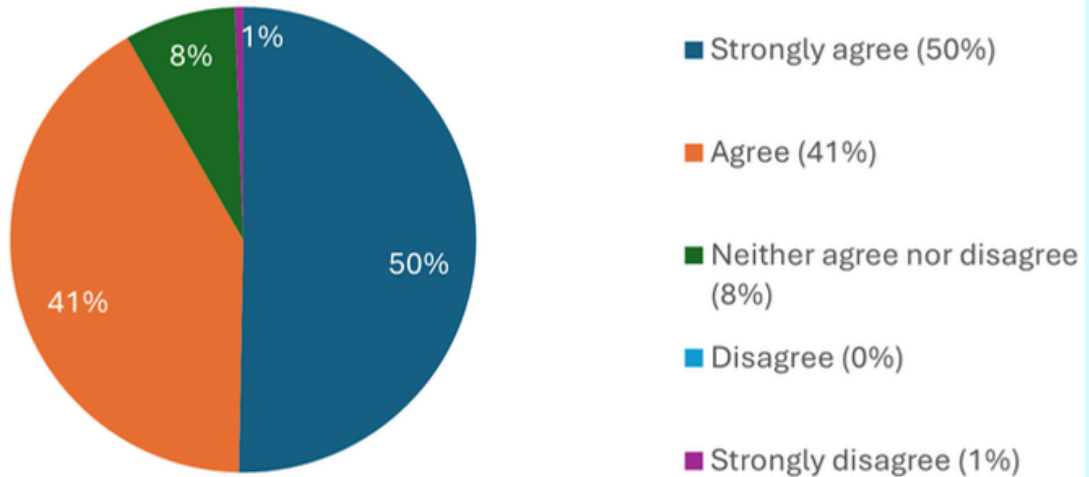


Findings from from the AAYR survey indicate high levels of self-efficacy and pride in achievement among participants. Overall, 91% of respondents agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (38%) with the statement, “I am proud of what I have achieved in rowing.” Neutral responses were low (8%), and only a very small minority (1%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that feelings of low achievement are rare within the programme.

These findings suggest that AAYR provides young people with meaningful opportunities to experience progress, mastery, and personal accomplishment. Developing a sense of achievement is a key component of self-efficacy, supporting young people’s belief in their own abilities and their confidence to take on new challenges. Within the context of rowing, this sense of pride may stem not only from technical skill development, but also from persistence, teamwork, and overcoming personal barriers. As such, AAYR appears to foster achievement in a way that is inclusive, attainable, and psychologically supportive.

FRIENDSHIPS

I have made friends /strengthened my friendships through rowing together

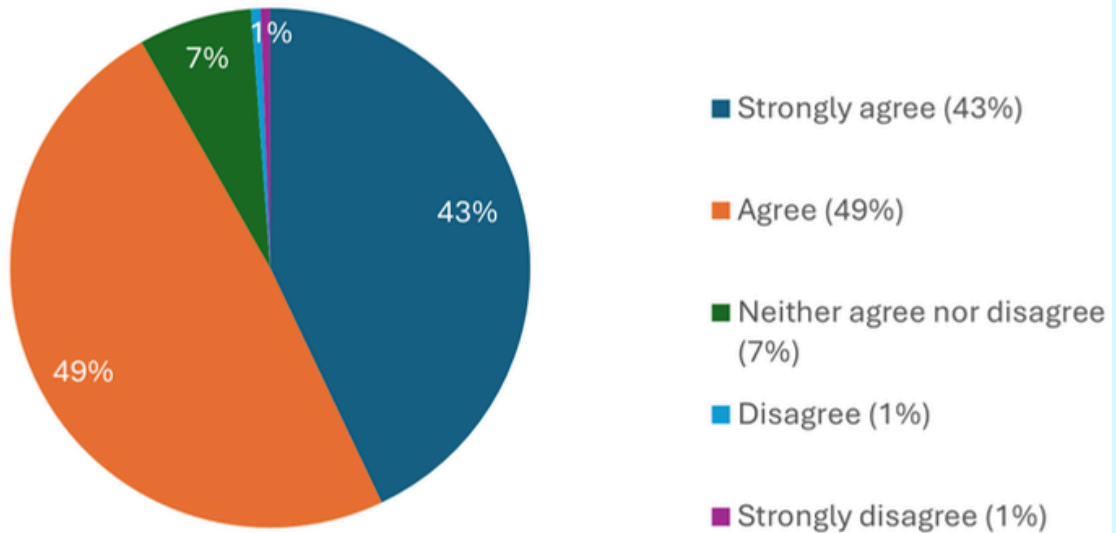


Survey findings show that participation in the AAYR programme strongly supports young people’s social connection. Overall, 91% of participants agreed (41%) or strongly agreed (50%) that they had made friends or strengthened existing friendships through rowing together. Neutral responses were low (8%), and disagreement was minimal (0%), indicating that experiences of social exclusion are rare within the programme.

These findings are particularly significant when considered alongside national policy evidence highlighting community and connection as a critical priority for young people. Youth Matters: State of the Nation 2025 identifies community as a “golden thread” underpinning young people’s skills development, mental health, and life opportunities, while also reporting that a third of young people aged 10–19 feel lonely some of the time. In this context, AAYR appears to offer a valuable community space where friendships are actively formed and sustained, supporting connection and belonging for young people who are often most at risk of isolation.

BELONGING

I feel like I belong in my rowing group

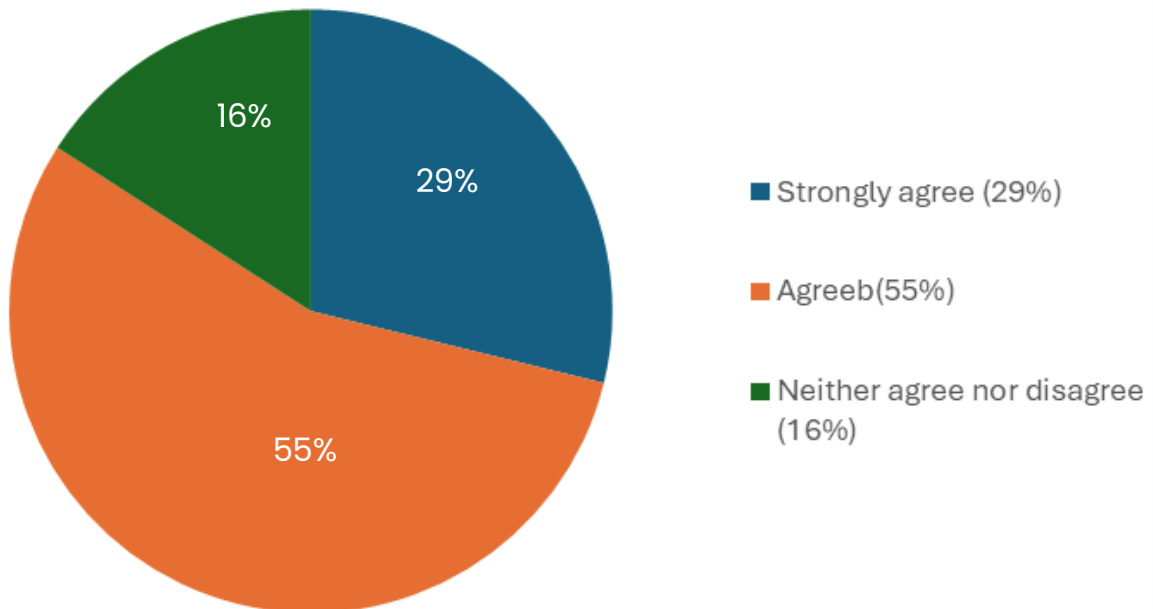


A strong sense of belonging was also evident among AAYR participants. Overall, 92% agreed (49%) or strongly agreed (43%) that they feel they belong in their rowing group. Neutral responses were low (8%), and disagreement was minimal (1%), suggesting that feelings of exclusion are uncommon.

National data underline the importance of these findings. The Good Childhood Report (2025) reports that almost one in ten (9%) young people aged 10–17 experience low life satisfaction, with low wellbeing linked to factors such as having no friends, bullying, and a lack of safe community spaces to socialise. Young people and professionals also describe increasing isolation and reliance on digital interaction for connection and belonging.

Within this context, AAYR functions as a meaningful community space, providing a safe, inclusive environment where young people feel accepted and part of a group. At a time of declining national wellbeing, the programme appears well placed to foster belonging and social connection, both of which are central to young people’s wellbeing and sustained engagement in positive activities.

I feel happier on the days when I do rowing



Findings from the AAYR survey indicate that participation in rowing is associated with increased day-to-day happiness for many young people. Overall, 84% of participants agreed (55%) or strongly agreed (29%) with the statement, “I feel happier on the days when I do rowing.” A further 16% selected “neither agree nor disagree,” and notably, no respondents reported feeling less happy on rowing days. This suggests that rowing sessions are consistently experienced as positive emotional moments within participants’ weeks.

These findings are particularly significant when considered alongside national trends in children and young people’s happiness. The Good Childhood Report (2025), drawing on Understanding Society data, reports a sustained decline in children’s subjective wellbeing. Children’s average happiness with life as a whole has fallen from a mean score of 8.17 in 2009/10 to 7.43 in 2022/23, the lowest level recorded to date, with significant declines observed across all six life domains, including family, friends, school, and schoolwork.

Within this broader decline, happiness with friends, school, and schoolwork has decreased significantly compared to the previous survey wave, with happiness with schoolwork now the lowest-rated domain (mean score 6.56). While females report lower happiness than males across several domains, declining happiness with friends is experienced broadly across genders, and recent data show that males’ happiness has also fallen significantly over time.

Against this national data, the AAYR findings are particularly striking. While national evidence points to widespread reductions in children’s happiness, participation in rowing appears to offer young people a regular source of positive emotion and enjoyment. Through structured activity, social connection, and a supportive environment, AAYR may help counterbalance wider wellbeing declines by providing moments of happiness and emotional relief within an increasingly challenging national context.



WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY FROM ROWING WITH THE GROUP SO FAR ?

"Making new friends and meeting all the lovely coaches."

"Being able to gain more friends"

"The rowing club accepting me"

"Noticing improvements in how many meters I get."

"When I reached my highest personal best score."

"Making new friends"

"Meeting my mates and always having fun!"

"When we were working together"

Personal best

My first time rowing

Competitions

Strength

Making

The Summer Regatta

Improvements

new Friends

Confidence

Being able to gain more friends

Meeting all the lovely coaches.

ALL ABOARD YOUTH ROWING 2026



PROJECT SUMMARY



AAYR supports young people to move more, feel better, and belong, during a key stage of adolescence. Compared with national trends, participants consistently report higher levels of physical activity, stronger friendships and sense of belonging, increased confidence, and more positive day to day wellbeing. Together, these outcomes highlight the value of AAYR as a safe, inclusive programme that helps young people thrive both in and beyond sport.





REFERENCES

2026

Delphine , C., Fédia, B., & O'Neill, J. (2025). The Good Childhood Report 2025.

Department for Culture, Media & Sport. (2025). Policy paper Youth Matters: State of the Nation.

Erdilanita, U., & Ma'mun, A. (2025). The role of sports participation on social skill development in early childhood and adolescence. International Seminar of Sport and Exercise Science.

Holt , N., Tink , L., Mandigo, J., & K. (2008). Do youth learn life skills through their involvement in high school sport? Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de L'éducation, 31(2).

Hark. (2025). Hark's Listen Up Report .

Holt, N. L., Tamminen, K. A., Tink, L. N., & Black, D. E. (2009). An interpretive analysis of life skills associated with sport participation. Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise, 1(2), 160–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19398440902909017>

Keel, A. L., & Tran, A. T. K. (2023). Increasing small nonprofits' influence through strategic storytelling. Business Horizons, 66(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2023.01.004>

Sport England . (2025). Active Lives Children and Young People Survey.

Sport England . (2021). Uniting the movement .



**THANK
YOU**

MARCH 2026

**SOPHIE
UNSWORTH**