Executive Summary
This report presents the findings of a 2010 survey of Go for Life Physical Activity Leaders (PALs) to determine how actively they are leading and promoting physical activity among their peers. The survey was carried out by Go for Life, the national programme for sport and physical activity for older people and involved contacting all of the 1,803 PALs on the Go for Life database with a response rate of 82%.

Key Findings

- 25% (374) PALs are leading physical activity with their groups on a regular basis
- 40% (590) PALs are organising physical activity for their groups on a regular basis
- 13% (187) PALs are leading and organising physical activity for their groups on a regular basis
- The more recently PALs have attended workshops, the more likely they are to be leading physical activity with their groups on a regular basis
- 91% (1356) of PALs are female and men are more likely to be inactive than women
- 57% of PALs are over 64 years of age and 32% are between 50 and 64 years of age
- 81% (1173) of PALs have led at least one activity session since completing the workshops
- 83% of PALs said that their own activity levels had increased since attending the workshops
- 72% of PALs are leading physical activity more than 4 times per month
- Over 80% of sessions led by PALs last for longer than 20 minutes and over 50% for longer than 30 minutes
- 90% of PALs are leading sessions with groups of greater than 10 people
- Lack of confidence is not a significant barrier to leading physical activity following workshops

Recommendations

- All partners should agree definition for active PALs
- Groups should be offered workshops regularly to allow for member/PAL turnover
- Further research is needed to determine the ideal number of workshops PALs should attend
- Further research is needed to determine why men are more likely to be inactive PALs
- All partners should agree reasonable retention rates of PALs
Introduction

Go for Life is an Age & Opportunity initiative funded by the Irish Sports Council that promotes physical activity amongst older adults. Central to the Go for Life programme is its leadership workshops which aim to give older adults who are members of a group the skills required to lead physical activity with their group or to encourage their group to be physically active.

Go for Life has been funded by the Irish Sports Council since 2001 and since then, thousands of people have taken part in the workshop part of the programme. The aim of this research is to gather an accurate picture of PALs’ activities throughout the country. The research questions are:

1. How many people who attended PALs workshops are actively leading or organising physical activity throughout Ireland?
2. Does the year and quantity of workshops attended influence the status of PALs?
3. What is the gender and age profile of people who benefit from Go for Life?
4. What effect do workshops have on people who attend them?
5. What effect do PALs have on their group and their community?
6. What percentage of people who attend workshops can Go for Life expect to retain as active PALs?
**Methodology**

A telephone survey of all workshop participants who are registered on the Go for Life database was conducted. A copy of the questionnaire used is available in Appendix 1. When someone attends a Go for Life workshop their details are entered on the Go for Life database. At time of research there were 1,803 PALs on the database. Each participant was phoned and asked to confirm the workshops they had attended and the year they attended them. They then completed the telephone questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted predominantly of closed questions which were analysed in Microsoft Excel. A thematic analysis was done of the open ended questions.

A “For Office Use Only” category was used to categorise each respondent. After conducting the telephone interview, the interviewer categorised each respondent as one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Leading</strong></td>
<td>Actively leading physical activity on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Organising</strong></td>
<td>Not leading physical activity but organising physical activity for their group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lapsed</strong></td>
<td>Currently not leading or organising physical activity but intending to in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inactive</strong></td>
<td>Not leading or organising and no intention of doing so for the foreseeable future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results
Of the 1,803 people registered as PALs with Go for Life, 1485 responded to the questionnaire giving a response rate of 82% of all PALs.

PALs
The total number of participants who gave enough data to be classified by status was 1,467.

Of those, 78% or 1151 were active PALs. 22% were lapsed or inactive.
A county by county breakdown of the PALs was conducted.

The highest response rates came from Dublin, Tipperary and Cork and the lowest came from Leitrim. The figures were not adjusted for the size of the population. Of the PALs that were trained, Cork, Tipperary and Dublin also had the highest number of active PALs and Leitrim had the lowest.
An analysis of the percentage of PALs that are active shows that although Leitrim has a very low number of PALs, all of them are active. Most of the counties had very high retention rates.
Workshops

PALs were asked to confirm what year they completed their PALs training.

Equal amounts of respondents had trained in 2010 as had trained before 2005. Before 2005 is defined as from when Go for Life started in 1994 to 2004, a period of eleven years.

An analysis was conducted to determine if the year PALs trained affected their status.
The more recently PALs had been trained, the more likely they were to be actively leading their group in physical activity.

Participants were asked to confirm how many workshops they attended.

71% of participants had attended five or more workshops while 18% attended four or less.
The number of workshops attended by participants by county is broken down below.

The vast majority of counties had participants who attended the recommended 8 workshops.
The majority of the respondents had attended eight workshops as illustrated by the chart above. It is possible to analyse the data to determine if attending a certain number of workshops has an effect on whether someone becomes an active leader and/or organiser of physical activity.

Although far less people were questioned who attended less than eight workshops, the data gathered would suggest that attendance at less than eight workshops makes a participant no less likely to become an active leader or organiser.

**Workbooks**

85% of PALs had used PALs workbooks to assist them in planning and delivering physical activity. Of the 170 people never used the workbooks, 72% were active PALs at the time of research.
Gender

An analysis of gender versus status was conducted to determine if women were more likely to be active leaders/organisers than men.

Women were slightly more likely to be active leading and/or organising than men and more likely to be active organising. Men were much more likely to be inactive than women.

Age

The age of participants in Go for Life workshops was as follows:
Participants were asked the ages of the members of their group.

The vast majority of PALs are in groups of all ages.
Effect of Go for Life Workshops on PALs

After attending Go for Life workshops, 81% of participants had led physical activity on at least one occasion. At time of research, the number of people leading physical activity was 40% and 38% were actively organising.

Of the 1173 people who led physical activity after attending workshops, 648 or 55% had never previously led physical activity.

Of the 1173 who led physical activity at least once after the workshops, 472 or 40% had never organised non physical activities.
Of those who hadn’t led even one session after attending the Go for Life workshops, the reasons cited were:

Of the 1173 people who led physical activity after attending workshops, 88% did so with their own group. 12-13% led physical activity with other groups.
Attending Go for Life workshops had an overwhelmingly positive effect on rates of physical activity amongst participants.

83% said it increased their own physical activity levels.
Effect of Go for Life Workshops on Group Members

The effect on their group members of the 38% of participants (561 people) who were regularly leading physical activity is analysed below.

Nearly 60% of the active PALs were leading physical activity 4 to 8 times per month, or once or twice a week. A quarter of them were leading less than four times a week.

Over 80% of the sessions that PALs are leading last for longer than 20 minutes, over 50% last for longer than 30 minutes and over a third of the sessions last for longer than 45 minutes.
Nearly half of all PALs are leading physical activity with groups of greater than 20 people. Only 10% are leading with groups of less than ten.
Discussion

Response Rate
The response rate of 82% of all PALs achieved by this study represents a very robust sample and means that the data taken from this study can be considered very reliable.

PALs Activity
There are over 1,100 active PALs in Ireland. The average retention rate of active PALs is 78%. In 2008, Go for Life conducted an online survey with its partners to determine their opinions on Go for Life in their area. Only 11% of Go for Life’s partners estimated a retention rate of between 71 and 80%. All other partners estimated lower or said they didn’t know what the retention rate in their area was. The difference in the estimates between the two pieces of research may be related to the definition of a PAL that was used for this report which incorporated active leading but also active organising.

Using the definition of a PAL as someone who leads physical activity, the retention rate is 38%. The online survey with Go for Life’s partners (REF) referred to those who were actively leading physical activity with their group as PALs and on average, partners estimated that 40% of trained PALs became active leaders. This number is much closer to the 38% found in this research.

Workshops
The more recently people had attended workshops, the more likely they were to be leading physical activity with their group. This suggests that it is important to continue to offer training, even to groups who have previously trained PALs. Older adults’ groups typically have members that come and go, and likewise they have PALs that come and go. A group that has previously trained a PAL and would like to train more PALs is likely to know and be supportive of the programme and should be encouraged to train different PALs over time in the group. Evaluations by the East Coast Area Health Board (2003), Gameplan Consultants (2004) and the HSE DML (2006) suggest the need for refresher workshops for PALs. Again, training of new PALs within a group may be a means of meeting this need by older PALs being supported by new ones.

People who attended workshops before 2005 were the most likely group to be actively organising physical activity with their group. Before 2005 represent a timeframe of approximately ten years and so cannot directly be compared with single years.

Encouragingly, well over half of the PALs questioned had attended the full eight workshops. It is important to note that far less people attended less than eight workshops than those who attended the full eight but the data gathered would suggest that attendance at less than eight workshops makes a participant no less likely to become an active leader or organiser. This conclusion directly contradicts previous research by the HSE DML (2004) which found that attending less workshops meant people were less likely to lead physical activity.

Gender
An overwhelming majority of people who attend Go for Life workshops are female. In light of research on physical activity rates amongst women and particularly amongst older women, this can be seen as a very positive element of the programme. For example, the Go for Life/Irish Sports Council (2009) research into participation in physical activity amongst older people found that 36% of women over 50
as opposed to 45% of men had participated in physical activity other than walking in the four weeks prior to the research. Go for Life is therefore accessing a group at a disadvantage for physical activity.

Nonetheless, Go for Life should aim to recruit more than one man per ten participants. It is not clear why such a low proportion of men participate in the programme. There is a selection bias because of the nature of older adults’ groups. For example, in 2008 an evaluation of the National Grant Scheme found that 1% of the 405 groups studied were all men’s group as opposed to 41% being all women’s groups. According to Active Retirement Ireland (2011), 80% of their group members are female and 20% are male. Other reasons for the lower number of men should be investigated to determine how the programme can work with more men. Furthermore, when men do attend workshops they are significantly more likely to become inactive than female participants. Again, it is not clear why this is the case.

Age
Workshops attendees are within the target population of people aged 50 at whom Go for Life is aimed and the people with whom PALs are leading physical activity are also in its target age range. Future evaluations could take more specific age information on the group members with whom PALs are leading physical activity.

Effect of Go for Life Workshops on PALs
An overwhelming 81% of participants lead physical activity on at least one occasion after attending workshops. The HSE Dublin Mid Leinster conducted a review of Go for Life in 2004 that found that 64% of people had gone on to lead physical activity. The 17% difference in this research and the HSE’s 2004 research may be attributable to changes in the Go for Life workshop format since then. For example, since 2004 participative learning has been increasingly used with workshop attendees being asked to lead activities during workshops each week. In 2005, the materials for the course were formalised into bound workbooks that, according to this research, 85% of PALs used to plan and deliver physical activity after the workshops.

Previous research has found that people didn’t lead physical activity after attending PALs workshops because they lacked confidence (HSE DML, 2003). This research found that only 5 of the 1485 respondents or close to 0% cited lack of confidence as a reason for not leading physical activity. The HSE DML in its 2004 evaluation of Go for Life noted a marked improvement in confidence after the introduction of a recommendation to attend a minimum of five workshops to increase confidence to lead. Although it is not clear from this research what the ideal number of workshops a PALs should attend, factors that are likely to have contributed to the increased confidence of participants are likely to include the combination of increased leadership opportunities during workshops, recruitment of appropriate participants, the introduction of the PALs Skills workshop and better workshop resources. These changes to the programme came about as a result of recommendations from previous evaluations.

Go for Life empowers people to lead physical activity and over half of all the PALs in this research had never lead physical activity before attending PALs workshops. Furthermore, 40% of PALs had never lead any type of activity, physical or otherwise before. The majority of PALs lead physical activity with their own group but 13% or 153 people lead physical activity with groups other than their own. Go for Life, is therefore predominantly a resource for groups but in some cases it’s contributing to the provision of a resource to the community. Unsurprisingly, attending Go for Life workshops encourages PALs themselves to be more physically active.
**Effect of Go for Life Workshops on Group Members**

The data on the effect of PALs on group members was only analysed for PALs who were actively leading physical activity with their group. It didn’t attempt to determine the benefits to groups of people actively organising physical activity for the group. The 38% of participants (561 people) who were regularly leading physical activity at the time of this research were doing so for different durations, at varying intervals and to groups of a mixture of sizes. PALs are regularly leading physical activity and over 50% of the sessions last for longer than the daily recommendation of 30 minutes (National Physical Activity Guidelines, 2010). PALs are also leading physical activity to large groups. Ninety percent of PALs lead to groups of larger than ten people.

In total there are 562 PALs who are leading physical activity. On average, each PAL delivers six sessions per month or 1.5 sessions per week with each session lasting an average of 36 minutes and being led with an average of 21 participants. By multiplying the average number of sessions and the average length of each session, it was possible to calculate the total minutes per month of physical activity that each PAL leads. On average, PALs lead physical activity for 1,970 hours or 82 days per month. They lead physical activity with a total of 11,135 older adults. Although there are generally at least two PALs per group, for the purpose of this research we’ve assumed that in most groups, one PAL organises activities and one PAL leads so this total accounts for one PAL leading physical activity per group. Nonetheless, to achieve a conservative estimate, we have assumed that a quarter of groups have two PALs who lead physical activity. The total therefore has been reduced by a quarter. A conservative estimate of PALs’ activity concludes that they lead physical activity 62 days per month with a total of 8,351 participants.
Conclusions & Recommendations

A response rate of 82% of all PALs was achieved by this research and as such it offers a very robust picture of the activities of PALs throughout Ireland. Many of the findings of the research are consistent with other evaluations of Go for Life although it also raises issues that require further investigation. Overall, it offers a very positive picture of the Go for Life programme which is meeting its aims of getting more older people, more active, more often.

Specifically, this research answered the questions below:

1. How many people who attended PALs workshops are actively leading or organising physical activity throughout Ireland?
   ~ There are over 1,100 active PALs in Ireland who are regularly delivering on average 30 minutes of physical activity to their group per week. For this research PALs are defined as people who actively lead or organise physical activity within their group. Using this definition, Go for Life achieves a retention rate of 78%.
   ~ This research uses a different definition of PALs than other Go for Life research. Previous research defines PALs as people who lead physical activity but do not organise it. Go for Life has a retention rate of 38% for PALs who lead physical activity. This is consistent with estimates made by Go for Life partners on retention rates.
   ~ There may be some disparity between how Go for Life defines a PAL and how its partners do so. Go for Life should work with its partners to agree a definition of the term PAL.

2. Does the year and quantity of workshops attended influence the status of PALs?
   ~ The more recently someone attends workshops, the more likely they are to be active PALs. Groups should regularly be offered PALs workshops and to allow for member turnover, should be allowed to send new people to workshops even if they’ve trained other people in the past.
   ~ Most PALs had attended the full eight workshops which is encouraging as Go for Life recommends people attend a minimum of six.
   ~ It is not clear what the ideal number of workshops someone should attend is to make them most likely to become active PALs. Further research on this question is required.

3. What is the gender and age profile of people who benefit from Go for Life?
   ~ Workshops and PALs’ physical activity are being delivered to people in Go for Life’s target group of aged 50 and over.
   ~ Go for Life is very successful at promoting physical activity with women. Women are at a disadvantage for physical activity so Go for Life’s ability to encourage them to be more active is very positive.
   ~ Although Go for Life is meeting the needs of some men, it is not clear why more men don’t participate in the programme or why once they attend the programme they are less likely to be active PALs. Further research into how Go for Life can reach and engage with men is required.
4. **What effect do workshops have on people who attend them?**
   ~ 81% of participants led physical activity at least once after attending Go for Life workshops. This result is higher than other research done on Go for Life. The increase may be attributable to changes in the programme such as the use of participative learning, better selection of participants and better workbooks.
   ~ Confidence to lead physical activity after workshops has been a problem in the past for people who’ve attended Go for Life workshops. This is not the case amongst participants in this research. The improved confidence of participants may again be attributed to changes and improvements to the workshop format.
   ~ Empowerment is central tenet of the Go for Life programme and a large proportion of active PALs had never lead physical or general activities before they attended workshops. Go for Life therefore, is not “preaching to the converted”.
   ~ Workshop participants are more likely to be physically active themselves after attending Go for Life workshops.

5. **What effect do PALs have on their group and their community?**
   ~ PALs are an excellent resource for physical activity amongst older adults in the community. In total there are 562 PALs who actively lead physical activity with their group. On average they deliver six sessions per month or 1.5 sessions per week lasting an average of 36 minutes with approximately 21 people. In total, they lead 62 days of physical activity per month with 8,351 older people.
   ~ Some PALs lead physical activity with their own group but also with other groups in the community.

6. **What percentage of people who attend workshops should Go for Life aim to retain?**
   ~ This research offers a very robust picture of PALs activity in Ireland and can therefore be used to guide Go for Life on appropriate retention rates of PALs.
   ~ Go for Life and its partners should aim for
     - 80% of those who attend all workshops to lead physical activity on at least one occasion.
     - 40% of those who attend all workshops to be leading physical activity one year after workshops
     - 40% of those who attend all workshops and who are not leading physical activity to be organising activities one year after workshops
     - 66% of those who attend all workshops to be leading or organising physical activity three years after workshops
References


# GO FOR LIFE PALS QUESTIONNAIRE 2010

## 1. General Information

Go for Life will be celebrating 10 years as a national programme in 2011. We would like to have a big event with as many PALs as possible attending and we are updating our database and trying to gather some information about our PALs. We would be grateful if you could answer some questions – it will take about 5 – 10 minutes.

## 1. Database Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 2. When did you do the workshops?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Before 2005</td>
<td>Don’t remember</td>
<td>Did not do workshops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 3. How many workshops did you complete?

| 8 | 5-7 | 3-5 | >3 | Don’t Remember |

## 4. Gender

| Male | Female |
5. Age

18-24  25-34  35-49  50-64  65+

6. How did you hear about the PALs workshops? (e.g. HSE, a friend, local club, Local Sports Partnership, etc.)

7. Were you involved with an organisation or group before you participated in the PALs workshops?

Older People’s Group  Community Organisation  Day care centre  Residential Care setting

Not involved with any group  Other

8. What was your main reason for participating in the PALs workshops? (e.g. volunteer as a leader, personal development, career development)

9. Had you previously organised or led physical activities for a group before participating in the PALs workshops? (e.g. in a sports club, helping a PAL already in your group)

Yes  No

If Yes, please specify

10. Had you previously organised non-physical activities for a group before participating in the PALs workshops?

Yes  No

If Yes, please specify
2. The Course

These questions will now ask about your experience of the PALs workshops.

11. Did you enjoy participating in the PALs workshops?

Yes  No  Don’t know/no opinion

Comment

12. Did the PALs workshops prepare you sufficiently to deliver an activity session with your group?

Yes  No  Don’t know/no opinion

Comment
### 3. After the Course

The following questions will now ask you about your experiences since completing the PALs workshops.

#### 13. Have you led an activity session since completing the PALs workshops?

| Yes (Please go to question 17) | No |

#### 14. Why not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Lack of opportunity</th>
<th>Lack of confidence</th>
<th>Lack of motivation</th>
<th>Lack of facility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other (please specify)

#### 15. Do you feel any changes or additions to the course would help you to become an activity leader?

| Yes | No |

If Yes, please specify

#### 16. Have you promoted physical activity in your group in other ways eg. Apply for GFL grant, organise physical activity classes, borrow or source equipment etc.

| Yes | No |

If yes, please specify

*If no to Question 13 now go to question 21*
17. If yes to Question 13, where have you led or co-led an activity session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your own group</th>
<th>Another group</th>
<th>Day Care</th>
<th>Residential Care</th>
<th>Your community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. What is the age range of the participants in your session?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>50-64</th>
<th>65-69</th>
<th>70-74</th>
<th>75-80</th>
<th>81+</th>
<th>All Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. In a typical month, how often do you lead activity sessions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many sessions per month?</th>
<th>&lt; 4 times</th>
<th>4-8 times</th>
<th>8-12 times</th>
<th>&gt;12times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long does a session generally last?</td>
<td>&lt; 20 mins</td>
<td>20-30 mins</td>
<td>30-45 mins</td>
<td>&gt;45mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many people would generally take part?</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>&gt; 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. Have you used the PALs workbooks to assist you in delivering your session?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Activity Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. Would you be interested in further training leading to a FETAC qualification in leading physical activity for older people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*If no, why not?*
22. Would you recommend the PALs workshops to a friend in a similar position to you? 
Yes  
No

23. In terms of your own physical activity levels, do you feel your own activity levels have increased since completing the PALs workshops?
Yes  
No  
Don’t know/no opinion

Comment

24. Any further comments

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Active Leading  
Active Organising  
Lapsed  
Inactive  
Deceased