



Northeastern University  
*Center of Community Service*

Service-Learning at Northeastern

# Impact of Covid-19 on Boston movement and physical activity-focused nonprofits

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*HONR3310: The Science of Play*

# Existing Literature



Over 75 percent of non profits have lost a significant portion of their funding and revenue, according to WealthEngine

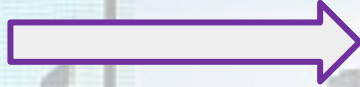
The National Library of Medicine reported a decrease in the quality of play the quantity of it available to children.

BMJ reported a decrease in mental health among children and teens across the world.



# What does this mean in our context?

Decreasing play quality



Nonprofits may have not been able to provide the same level of programming as they did pre-pandemic

Decreasing play quantity

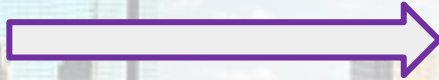


Nonprofits may have lost the ability to provide as much programming as pre-pandemic



# What does this mean in our context?

Many nonprofits have lost most of their revenue



Boston-based physical activity nonprofits have probably also lost similar funding

Decline in youth mental health



Our nonprofits may have been more needed than ever during the pandemic

# Our Research Process

Population: **movement and physical activity**-focused nonprofits in Boston

Sample: **staff and volunteers** at eight different nonprofits

Sent out a survey to focusing on **staff, volunteer and client experiences**

How do you think clients of your organization were impacted by COVID-19?

What resources would have been helpful for your organization as you navigated the pandemic?

How would you rate the level of government support...that your organization received as a result of the pandemic?

# Our Research Process

We received

**25 responses**

from staff members at

**4 organizations**



# Results: Participation

- Play-focused activities were greatly impacted by the virtual format
- Squashbusters incorporates an academic component and has close partnerships with local schools, so its tutoring operations maintained strong participation, although overall attendance dropped by over  $\frac{2}{3}$ .
- South End Soccer operations ceased completely, only reopening at 20% capacity in fall of 2021. Participation has since rebounded entirely.
- Family Gym switched to online programming, but access was impacted by the pandemic and live sessions reported low attendance as the effectiveness of physical exercises was diminished.





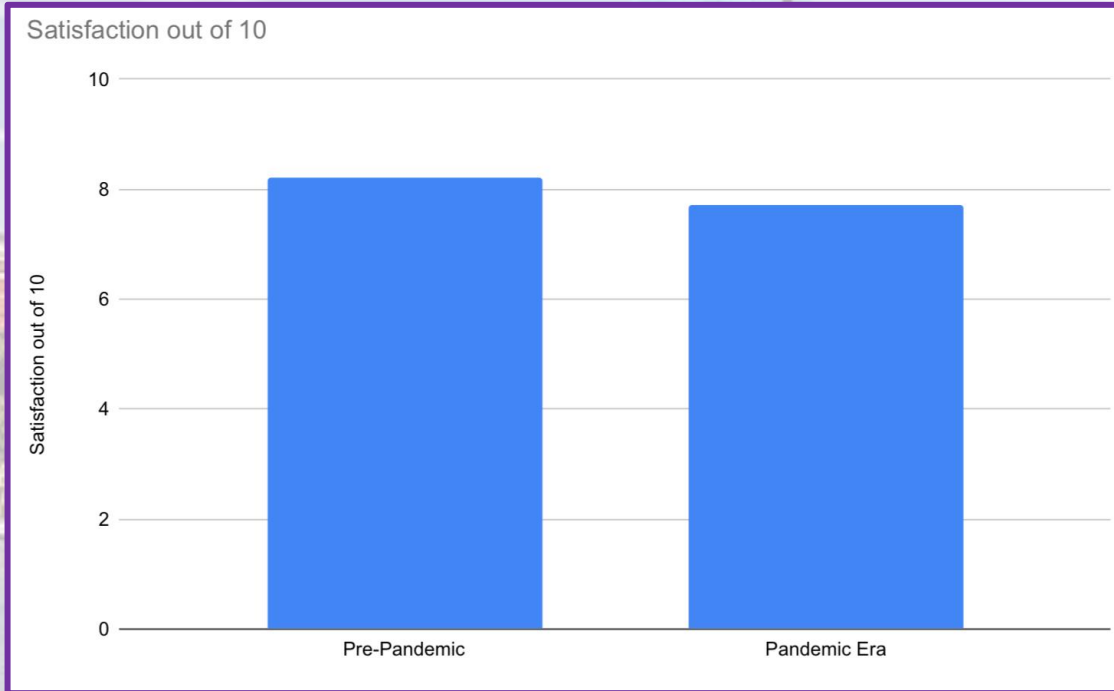
# Results: Staffing

- Organizations that draw from service-learning programs at Northeastern such as Family Gym had few staffing issues, but had difficulty using them for anything beyond creating educational materials or little-viewed videos.
- Squashbusters had no staffing issues, but suffered when switching back to in-person programming due to staff with “little context of programming outside of the pandemic.”
- South End Soccer suffered a drop in volunteers, although its core coaching staff remained sound.



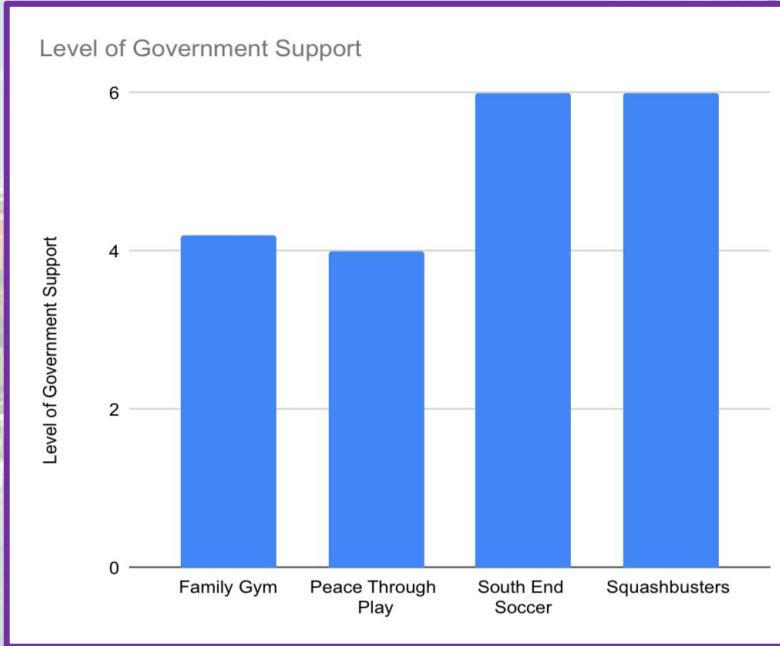


# Data & Takeaways



- Pandemic era staff and volunteers were less satisfied, which could explain retention issues.
- Pandemic era workers were more likely to be Family Gym volunteers, who were involved via service-learning.
- This points to a difficulty in recruiting outside institutional pathways.
- Many pre-pandemic workers are paid staff, rather than the large volume of volunteers during the pandemic.

# Data & Takeaways



- Belief in the effectiveness of government aid during the pandemic was low across all organizations.
- Family Gym noted that their partnership with BCYF limited their web presence, which made reaching new families difficult during the pandemic.
- South End Soccer, which received pandemic grants, rated effectiveness higher, along with Squashbusters which was less dependent on outside funding

# Results: Finances

- Family Gym is primarily funded by a grant from MGH, although the nutrition and health centered focus of this grant is distinct from the play activities that draw families.
- Squashbusters noted how steadfast its donors and partner schools were during the pandemic and how this allowed them to continue to offer effective programming.
- Peace through Play largely ceased operations and is entirely a volunteer organization, though the SGA supported advertising and recruitment efforts.
- South End Soccer would not have been able to survive without “grant funding directed at COVID responses including the increase of funding for outdoor and physical activity.”



# Recommendations

<b>Advertising</b>	<b>Government</b>	<b>Logistics</b>
Stronger presence on social media outlets like Facebook, Instagram, etc.	Policies that promote physical activity and participation in health-related programs	Returning to community centers to reconnect with the program's previous participants
Advertising through flyers, newspapers, email, etc.	Improved communication between city and nonprofits	More engaging virtual activities and use of outdoor locations





# References

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