

**Bright spots, physical activity investments that work:
parkrun; a global initiative striving for healthier and
happier communities**

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Bright Spots, Physical Activity Investments that Work:
parkrun; a global initiative striving for healthier and happier communities.

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Conflicts of Interest

Dr Lindsey Reece and Professor Steve Haake are members of the Global parkrun research board. Chrissie Wellington is also Head of health and wellbeing at parkrun.

Programme Card

Country:

Starting in the United Kingdom, parkrun is now in 20 countries worldwide, including Australia and South Africa.

Target population

parkrun is for everyone, anywhere. It is aimed at all ability levels and welcomes walkers, joggers, runners, and volunteers.

What modes/types/domains of physical activity does the programme promote?

Free, weekly 2 and 5 kilometre events in public spaces around the world promoting opportunities for everyone to walk, jog, run or volunteer.

Which of the seven best investments does the programme address?

Sport and active recreation, Health, community wide programme.

What sectors does it involve?

parkrun adopts a whole systems, collaborative approach.

Estimated reach

To date, over 230,000 parkrun events have taken place worldwide attracting over 3 million unique parkrunners with a network of over 375,000 volunteers.

What is special?

parkrun is the biggest running event in the world and is accessible to all. It is also one of the largest providers of volunteer opportunities in the sports and physical activity sector. parkrun breaks down barriers to participation and challenges what it looks and means to be physically active. It is the one of the best examples of an ever-growing global movement with the potential to improve population health and wellbeing.

Key details

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Parkrun website www.parkrun.com #parkrun

Background

The concept is simple; free, weekly, timed 5 kilometre running or walking events on Saturday or Sunday mornings in local parks and open spaces. Participants register online, receive a personal barcode, which they can then take to any parkrun event anywhere in the world. parkrun started in 2004 in Bushy park Teddington, United Kingdom (UK) with just 13 runners and 5 volunteers, and is now a rapidly growing, global community of walkers, joggers, runners and volunteers worldwide. In 2013 the junior parkrun series was launched in the UK. These are 2k events for 4-14 year olds and their families held every Sunday morning. The global parkrun philosophy is to enable everyone to be active and foster a community spirit to achieve a healthier, happier population.

Global engagement and reach

There are over 240,000 weekly events worldwide across 20 countries attracting over 3 million participants and a global network of over 375,000 volunteers, see table 1.0. parkrun strives on being an equitable and inclusive initiative that will remain free due to the large network of volunteers and partners who deliver the events. After 14 years, parkrun UK is well established with more than 135,000 events having been held at 541 different locations. In 2017, 117,000 different people volunteer at parkrun and junior parkrun events in the UK. The average parkrun completion times in the UK are getting longer each year indicating more walkers and individuals previously deemed as inactive, are joining in. In 2017, 64,888 instances of runners taking more than 50 minutes to complete a 5 kilometre parkrun occurred – an increase of 88% compared to the previous year. What started as a community time trial, is now a global movement encouraging mass participation in physical activity with excellent public health potential.

Country	Year of launch	Estimated Reach*
Australia	2011	461,470
Canada	2016	6536
Denmark	2009	13,088
Finland	2017	695
France	2013	6628
Germany	2017	4228
Ireland	2012	136,079
Italy	2015	5309
Malaysia	2018	486
Namibia	2017	1296
New Zealand	2012	35,406
Norway	2017	1171
Poland	2011	47010
Russia	2014	20122
Singapore	2014	5550
South Africa	2011	567631
Swaziland	2017	974
Sweden	2016	4450

United Kingdom	2004	1,755,741
USA	2012	26248

Table 1.0 – parkrun global locations and estimated population reach

**based upon number of runners only. Does not include parkrun junior events. Numbers accurate from parkrun.com on 02/09/2018.*

Innovative solutions for engaging all populations

parkrun recognise that inequities exist in physical activity participation and are committed to seeking creative solutions to tackle these. The integration of parkrun across multi-disciplinary sectors has been endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO), with parkrun highlighted as an exemplar initiative in the WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030¹ as an opportunity to *"implement regular mass-participation initiatives in public spaces, engaging whole communities, to provide free access to enjoyable and affordable, socially and culturally appropriate experiences of physical activity"*.

parkrun is inclusive, welcoming people from all backgrounds and abilities. The 'tail walker' volunteer has responsibility for being the final finisher which ensures everyone, no matter what their speed, is supported. parkruns are family-focused events that welcome people of all ages, and it is common to see people with strollers, children (and dogs!) in hand.

Social interaction lies at the heart of parkrun, and the organisation prides itself on facilitating meaningful human interaction, and providing the opportunity for mutual support and encouragement. parkrun is flexible, takes place in the same venue every week and allows participants to turn up on the day without pre-registration. Collectively, these features present opportunities of participation by removing the barriers of the traditional club-based membership as well as strengthening the connection of people with their local green space - a concept critical in creating active environments¹.

In the UK parkrun has been recognised by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) as a viable option for patients as an alternative to medication (referred to as '*social prescribing*'). This new partnership with RCGP involves GP practices developing closer links with their local event, becoming certified as '*parkrun practices*' with clinical champions referring their patients and carers to parkrun³.

Underpinned by research

parkrun's mission to create a healthier and happier planet is supported by its commitment to building a strong evidence base on the role of physical activity, and parkrun, have on positive health and wellbeing outcomes. parkrun undertakes internal research, working closely with the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre (AWRC) in Sheffield (UK), who also chair the Global research board – a multi-disciplinary team of practitioners and academics. In line with UK participation strategy⁴, parkrun promotes participation amongst the least active, launching events in prisons and expanding junior parkruns in disadvantaged areas. Projects are also underway that aim to increase engagement and accessibility to parkrun by those with long term conditions or disabilities.

Lessons learnt

Acknowledging that there is no single solution to get more people more active more often, collaboration is key. Engaging in a parkrun on a Saturday or Sunday morning is only part of the bigger picture, parkrun must continue to collaborate if we are to truly achieve population changes in physical activity and health. It is also critical to remember that the community is comprised of equals, with each individual playing a valuable part. Providing access to physical activity opportunities, doesn't just apply to walker and runners, it applies to volunteers too. parkrun must also continue to listen to the needs of individuals we are trying to engage and share the learning on how best to do this, if as a collective, we are to help more people become more active in a social way, that benefits their health and wellbeing.

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