



FAITH  
HOOPS  
CHARITY

And why weekly is the rhythm of life

## Faith, hoops and charity

When it comes to health and wellbeing, once a week works - this appears to be the rhythm of human life and we think it could form the basis of a new national preventative health service.

In this new paper, State of Life measured the health and wellbeing benefits of weekly religious attendance and physical activity alongside previous work on volunteering.

### Key findings:

- Attending church every week has the same wellbeing benefit as playing sport and physical activity.
- If you are both physically active and attend church in the same week, you get double the benefit.
- If you also volunteer, you have three times the wellbeing benefit. And volunteering is integral to the provision of both sport and church.
- The optimum way to invest your time to benefit your wellbeing is to go to church, play sport, and volunteer once a week - faith, hoops and charity.
- If an individual did all three of these activities, every week, it would be the equivalent in wellbeing terms of an unemployed person finding a job or self-employed work.

### **A national preventative health service - available, free, now, and to all**

The Covid-19 crisis laid bare health inequalities but showcased the positive role of volunteering and the enormous contribution of front line public service workers. It also helped reveal the invaluable work the church has done in providing mental health and community support for those in need.

Through the lens of the pandemic we are now experiencing an 'Overton window', a period when certain policies become more acceptable to the mainstream. Our work on Faith, Hoops and Charity offers government the hard data they need to support a system that is quietly yet effectively keeping Britain on an even keel and saving the NHS hundreds of millions each year.

**This is a National Preventative Health service that is already in place.**

More precisely, here's how church, sport, and volunteering hit the bullseye of key UK policy agendas:

- **Social cohesion and trust in an unequal and divided Britain** - church, playing sport and, volunteering help us mix with people from different backgrounds and ethnicities, engendering a sense of trust in one another - the OECD considers trust a cornerstone of a more efficient society<sup>1</sup>.
- **Asset-based** - another policy buzz word to describe the common sense approach of building around existing community assets in the shape of buildings, ready made networks like sports clubs, and churches. As UK Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden recently stated, 'Sports clubs are the beating hearts of their communities'.
- **Levelling Up** - the benefits of sport and physical activity and volunteering are greater for those from low socio economic groups. We believe Sport England investment should only be targeted based on evidence of need. This evidence is now very clear and relatively easy to establish<sup>2</sup>.

### Key weekly activities for key workers

The seven day week is deeply embedded in the human experience. It's been with us for 4,000 years, a creation of the Babylonian empire. It is a cycle that we all know and understand - work throughout the week and rest, worship and engage in recreational activity on the 7th day. It's therefore no surprise that modern wellbeing analysis shows weekly participation is the most productive frequency for a range of activities.

This new paper from State of Life compares participation in sport to church attendance and plots this alongside our 2019 work on volunteering. As can be seen in Table 8, an extract from the full paper, it is clear that **weekly participation in sport, worship and helping others yields by far the greatest benefits**. We also know from our previous work that only full time work, marriage or an improvement in health yield comparably high positive health and wellbeing impacts to the individual and wider society. The data is unequivocal: weekly faith, hoops and charity are the cornerstones of greater life satisfaction, and the 'place based' infrastructure around these activities has been there for centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/governance/oecd-guidelines-on-measuring-trust-9789264278219-en.htm>

<sup>2</sup> State of Life studies for Sports Charity Sported, FA, Swimming and on volunteering and diversity are all to be found here <https://www.stateoflife.org/our-work>

## The Halo Effect - individual wellbeing radiates out into wider society

State of Life's recent study on the social value of churches, 'House of Good'<sup>3</sup> showed that the enormous value of attendance, gathering together and doing good reaches far beyond the church grounds. We termed this the Halo Effect, whereby the benefits to the individual radiate outwards into the local community and wider society.

Underpinning this powerful Halo Effect is the activity of volunteering. This is as true for sport as it is for the church - social gatherings, choirs, food banks, youth clubs, junior football coaching etc. all depend heavily on volunteers. We know this generates wellbeing benefits for the volunteer but we have found that it also benefits those in receipt of the services and in turn, all of us.

## So what? Four suggestions for evidence-based policy and practise.

*"Economic appraisal is based on the principles of welfare economics – that is, how the government can improve social welfare or wellbeing, referred to in the Green Book as social value."* **HM Treasury Green Book on policy evaluation.**

Our work aims to inform and influence policy through evidence-based analysis. In a complex and complicated landscape we see some very simple answers. Here are our top four policy priorities:

### 1. A new interpretation of the relationship between Church, community and the state

In 'House of Good' we describe churches as a ready made network of distribution for social good and care in the community. Constantly responding to and meeting the needs of the local community, helping to level-up. To continue and to improve, **Churches need investment.**

### 2. Sport as a preventative health service

Professional sport is a market and can pay itself. The recent round of government support saw Rugby Union receive state funding 30 times greater than basketball, while boxing got nothing. This was wrong. **State money must only be spent on reaching those who are inactive and/or from lower socio economic areas.**

### 3. Social prescription

The evidence is clear, weekly purposeful endeavour with other people is good for us and good for our communities. To paraphrase Sir Simon Stevens of the NHS, if Big Pharma had invented a pill with these health benefits every doctor in the country would prescribe it.

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<sup>3</sup> State of Life's study on churches, and our other work on volunteering and diversity, is be found here <https://www.stateoflife.org/our-work>

So let's do more of this. **Run nationwide awareness and participation campaigns on Faith, Hoops and Charity.**

#### 4. Open, easily accessible information

More people need access to volunteering opportunities, ways to get fit and involved, and information on where and how they can be prescribed these 'wonder drugs'. **Strategic funding of digital technology is essential to make it easier for people to take part.**

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## The detail

The full technical document can be found on the [State Of Life website](#) and is currently being considered by a number of academic journals.

The below table 8 is an extract from this paper. In it we compare participation in sport to church attendance alongside our 2019 work on volunteering. What we can see is that weekly participation yields by far the greatest benefits. Weekly is the rhythm of life.

In the paper we use three methods of measuring wellbeing with our favoured being the new method benchmarked to the Green Book-endorsed willingness to pay for the NHS measure of a Quality-Adjusted Life Year (QALY), which is in the right hand column. What we see is that playing sport or attending church have a wellbeing value of over £2,000 a year and volunteering over £1,500. And if you do all three they are additive.

**To put it into context this scale of wellbeing benefit for all three is equivalent to moving from unemployment to employment** (and here we mean just the psychological uplift, not considering the earnings increase) or moving from fair to good health or from very good to excellent health.

*Table 8. Wellbeing valuation*

Category	Fixed effects LS coefficient	Fujiwara CS value	Frijters NHS cost prod	DfT QALY	WTP
<b>Frequency of attendance at religious services</b>					
Never or almost never		<b>0 - ref. group</b>			
Only at weddings, funerals etc.	0.026	£699	£108		<b>£433</b>
At least once a year	0.042	£1,121	£175		<b>£700</b>
At least once a month	0.047	£1,251	£196		<b>£783</b>
Once a week or more	0.134	£3,432	£558		<b>£2,233</b>
<b>Frequency of exercise and playing sport</b>					

Never/almost never	<b>0 - ref. group</b>			
Once a year or less	0.014	£378	£58	<b>£233</b>
Several times a year	0.086	£2,250	£358	<b>£1,433</b>
At least once a month	0.094	£2,451	£392	<b>£1,567</b>
At least once a week	0.135	£3,456	£563	<b>£2,250</b>
<b>Frequency of volunteering</b>				
Never/almost never	<b>0 - ref. group</b>			
Once a year or less	-0.042	-£1,164	-£175	<b>-£700</b>
Several times a year	0.038	£1,016	£158	<b>£633</b>
At least once a month	0.078	£2,048	£325	<b>£1,300</b>
At least once a week	0.095	£2,476	£396	<b>£1,583</b>

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