



Sporting Wellness is a charity that provides free, private mental healthcare to any UK athlete aged 16 or over, in any sport. The charity was created in response to the inequality of access to professional mental healthcare for sportspeople in the UK. Now entering our sixth year, here are some stats:

Number of UK athletes provided with access to free private mental healthcare since launch: 2,829

Gender split: 51.4% male, 48.6% female.

Age group split: 16-20: 36.88%, 21-30: 54.00%, 31+: 9.12%

Total sports supported: 117

Top 10 sports:

1. Football
2. Rugby
3. Athletics
4. Boxing
5. Cricket
6. Rowing
7. Swimming
8. Netball
9. Basketball
10. Cycling

Highest Recurring Health Concerns:

1. Anxiety
2. Depression
3. Stress
4. Eating Disorders
5. Suicidal thoughts/ideation

Highest Recurring Sporting Concerns:

1. Performance Anxieties
2. Confidence
3. Injuries

While clinical data can fluctuate year-on-year for a small charity, the outcomes for 2025 were particularly strong. Our healthcare provider data shows that after completing structured therapy:



Depression (PHQ-9) Scores: 91.3% of athletes showed a significant improvement.

Anxiety (GAD-7) Scores: 82.6% of athletes showed a significant improvement.

Functional Recovery: Number of athletes reporting 'severe impairment' in their daily lives dropped from 30.4% at the start of therapy to just 8.7% at the end.

Clinical Remission: Over half of our athletes (52.2%) reached full clinical remission for depression by the end of their sessions.

Speed of Care & Accessibility:

Instant Availability: 96.8% of all helpline calls were answered within 20 seconds

Rapid Response: 100% of initial callbacks were completed within two hours of the request.

Efficiency: 100% of athletes were offered their first session within three working days of being matched with a therapist.

Matching: 91.7% of all counselling cases were matched to a professional within two working days. In addition, we provide a range of other high-quality services such as online cognitive behavioural therapy programmes, a 24/7/365 support line and live-chat facility, which compliment extensive on demand resources.

2025 has been another productive year. Here are the main updates:

- Decrease in referrals compared to 2024, attributable to reduced advertising spend.
- 15 x new signposting partnerships created, taking the number of organisations actively signposting their athletes to Sporting Wellness to over 20.
- 400% year-on-year improvement in lifetime value of monthly donors.
- New website launched with a much-improved user experience and streamlined referral system, reducing friction for beneficiaries.
- The expansion of our online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) offerings, thanks to our healthcare provider Health Assured, which now cover 27 topics including neurodiversity and chronic health issues.
- We hosted our 4th annual Charity Ball at Molineux Stadium with a record number of attendees, raising over £10,000.

Six years on and we are as motivated ever. When a young sportsperson is struggling with their mental health, for any reason, they can rely on receiving free support from Sporting Wellness. With every referral we receive, we are placing professional help in the hands of young athletes which can make a positive, tangible difference to their lives. Whether that difference is just knowing we're here, quelling a short-term emotional difficulty, or preventing

serious long-term illness or risk of harm, we view each referral not as a statistic to be counted but as an opportunity to repay the trust our beneficiary has placed in us.

As a very small charity with just two-part time employees, we have to be realistic about the limits of what we can achieve. With each year that goes by, we are shifting our focus towards quality and away from size and growth. As I will discuss later, size need not be equated with significance for a charity. Fundamentally, Sporting Wellness spends its time focusing on quality inputs, knowing that quality outputs may take time. We owe our success and ability to take this approach to the aggregate patience of our donor base, of which we are always incredibly grateful.

These inputs are:

- Monitoring the ongoing quality of service from our healthcare provider.
- Ensuring a frictionless as possible experience in accessing and receiving support.
- Communicating as clearly as possible what Sporting Wellness can and can't do for our beneficiaries.
- Working with and deserving the trust of teams, NGB's and sporting organisations alike so that they feel comfortable signposting their athletes to our services.
- Organically growing the awareness of our services within the UK athlete population, favouring sustainable methods (this is arguably the one we find the most challenging).

When writing our annual letter, I have in mind the 33 individuals who have trusted us with a regular donation. Many of these individuals are young athletes themselves, which is incredibly up-lifting. My hope is to write the sort of letter I would want to read if I was giving my money to another charity. Just like a company with their investors, we have a responsibility to inform our donors exactly how their money is being spent and how we intend to spend it in the future. This is standard practise in the for-profit world. Charities, however, are far too often insulated from criticism.

If you donated £10 to Sporting Wellness in 2025, here's how it was spent:

£2.18 - Healthcare fees

£0.99 - Clinical case management - processing referrals, signposting, and triage.

£2.48 - Personnel

£0.43 - Operations (including athlete contact, travel, insurance, accountancy)

£2.17 - Fundraising costs

£1.30 - IT costs (including cybersecurity, our new website, operating system management, software subscriptions)

£0.44 - Marketing costs (predominantly advertising spend).

Although personnel costs appear relatively high at first glance, this is perfectly normal - and healthy - for several reasons:

1. Smaller charities naturally have higher staff-cost ratios

Charities under £100k turnover inevitably rely on people. Without economies of scale, personnel will always form the backbone of operations.

2. We've reduced healthcare costs without reducing service capacity

Over the last few years, we have lowered therapy costs whilst maintaining the exact same level of support.

This means healthcare becomes a smaller percentage of total expenditure and we need less funding to deliver the *same amount* of care. This can only be a good thing. As a result, personnel costs appear proportionally higher - but only *as a percentage*, not in absolute cost.

3. Marketing costs dropped sharply in 2025

In 2024, paid advertising was a larger expense. In 2025, we have shifted to organic brand building and creating a network of referral partnerships.

This reduction in marketing spend naturally causes personnel costs to represent a larger share of total expenditure - despite personnel spending remaining flat year-on-year.

The bottom line for our donors, from a costs point of view, is that Sporting Wellness is:

- Delivering the same level of mental health support at a lower cost
- Reducing ongoing overheads where we can (advertising, IT, systems)
- Maintaining low staff costs while improving service efficiency

So, although 'personnel' appears as a larger share, that's because other costs have come down - not because staffing costs have increased. However, I think if expenditure *does* increase for Sporting Wellness, it's natural to expect this to be directed towards ensuring either more athletes are aware of our existing support or introducing new services that can be of value to beneficiaries. As I'll come onto, we don't intend to throw money at these ideas without having a high level of confidence we will get a return on this spend that will be of net benefit. This may be a mistake, and it would be very fair to argue this attitude could result in us being on the wrong side of the explore/exploit trade-off. However, public fundraising for small charities in the UK is just too difficult and we are still very reliant on it. And so, ideas in these areas are few, but not zero.

It's worth reiterating our commitment to the long-term. I mentioned earlier that we owe our success to the patience of our donor base. This can't be overstated and it is a huge advantage for us. Our donors are allowing us to maximise the long-term effect of their donations. Our beneficiaries are very lucky to have them.



Our donors may ask, 'if our healthcare costs have been lowered: why not spend those savings on more advertising to try and support more individuals?'

Our answer is that we want to avoid renting the attention of athletes (off Meta and Google) only to have that attention reset to zero the next year. Instead, we want to build a compounding asset that we own (organic brand building and a referral partnership network) which will have a far greater long-term payoff. Creating a dependency on paid advertising that has diseconomies of scale cannot be a good approach for a small charity.

But this was a question we wrestled with in 2025, and I've quite rightly had to defend my reasoning several times to our trustee board.

While it may appear that we are spending very little on marketing today, we are actually doing the heavy lifting required for what we hope will be a much higher quality Sporting Wellness in the future. If we do this correctly and can attract more like-minded people to help spread awareness of our free services, then in ten years' time we stand a far better chance of supporting many more athletes without any incremental cost. It's these incremental costs that are to be avoided.

Fundraising has been difficult over the past six years, and we are not planning for it to get any easier. The key line above is '*if we do this correctly.*' We have a hunch that this is the best direction to go in but only time will tell. There's no perfect blueprint to follow. Regular donors should be aware of this.

My hope is in a few years' time I can report back that marketing costs have stayed flat, advertising spend is at (or near) zero, but that we've created substantially more signposting relationships, strengthened our brand organically and supported many more athletes. And that the services have been strengthened and continued to be of high effectiveness. Time will tell. Ideas are the easy bit, getting it done is much harder!

My thoughts More Generally On Charities

I started Sporting Wellness when I was 19 but having my own charity was never a career plan. I wanted to be a cricketer and that's why Sporting Wellness came to be. There's an incredible amount of advice out there on how to start and run a company, but virtually nothing on running your own charity. For better or worse, it's a minority sport. Having now done it for six years, I feel more qualified to share my insights and address some fundamental questions rarely asked.

To work alongside Vikki in building an organisation that's had a tangible, positive impact on so many young people's lives is something I'm deeply proud of. However, because of the charity model, it can be an uphill battle. After six years, I have learned that charities can inherently suffer from a structure that invites, and at times even warrants, short-term thinking.

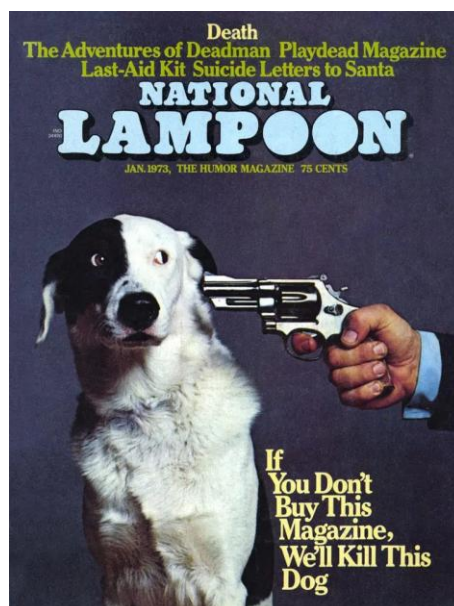
A for profit business will always have a structural advantage over a charity. That advantage is that it just has to look after one constituency, the customer. If a business nurtures the relationship with its customer, the customer can reward them by purchasing more goods or services. The business can then reinvest in better goods and services resulting in a stronger customer relationship. A self-reinforcing flywheel is created. (Granted - it's not that easy!).

A charity cannot follow this model. Beneficiaries (who are the charity's equivalent to a customer) can't afford (and shouldn't have to pay for) the services we provide. So, to support them we are registered as a charity so that like-minded donors can make up the funding shortfall. What this leaves is not one group to grow and look after, but two. Beneficiaries *and* donors.

Donations breathe life into charities. This means that to grow the charity, more time must be spent on fundraising and less on the beneficiary. Worse still, and as mentioned, fundraising is incredibly difficult. Incentives nearly always win and very few people wake up thinking about donating their hard-earned money, no matter how worthwhile the cause. Multi-year grant funding is also very hard to come by and the foundations that provide such funding quite rightly have to be very selective.

And so small charities, like us, can be tempted to start deploying all sorts of sales tactics just to get the next £1,000 into the bank account. This can result in the focus shifting almost entirely to short term sales and away from solving real beneficiary problems and fostering long-term relationships.

A fantastic illustration of this comes from the 1973 cover of the National Lampoon Magazine 'If You Don't Buy This Magazine, We'll Kill This Dog'.



Those donating to avoid social embarrassment may give you £10 in year one, but what do you say in year two?!



Relating back to Sporting Wellness, it's for this reason we are inclined to stay ruthlessly small and prioritise quality over growth. In the long-term, we will be a higher quality organisation for spending more time on our beneficiaries and less time on fundraising. A secondary benefit may be those working within Sporting Wellness (who are either volunteers or receive modest part-time pay) will avoid the disconnect from working too much on fundraising instead of the original cause. Therefore, they may gain greater satisfaction working within the charity, for longer. Again, leading to higher quality long term results. At least that's the theory!

Of course, this is not to say fundraising is unimportant to Sporting Wellness. It's quite literally our lifeblood. We've been incredibly fortunate over the past few years to foster relationships with a relatively small number of donors who share our philosophy. As I mentioned earlier, their patience and understanding of our thinking allows us to stay on course. We know such donors are rare and so are happy to be patient in waiting for any more of them before going for size and growth, whilst we communicate with those we have and focus on the quality of support we give to our beneficiaries.

Many charities appear far too willing to accept this trade-off between quality and size, in favour of the latter. I will let you think why that may be. The tipping point between these two things is low in the charity sector. In the long term, choosing size over quality is a mistake, and the long term is all that matters.

It's perhaps taken me too long to realise this. However, we've had an amazing impact so far and I'm very optimistic about the future. To steal a line from Jeff Bezos "*we aren't so bold as to claim that it's the "right" philosophy, but it's ours.*"

No career or ambition in sport should be affected by mental health issues and a lack of access to support. If you're an athlete struggling, or just need someone to talk to, we'll be here in 2026 and beyond.

Thank you to all those who have supported Sporting Wellness to date.

Callum Lea

Founder.