



Club / Association / Group / Individual the application is for: Lagan Valley Orienteers (LVO)
Project or activity name (suitable for publicity purposes): ‘Welcoming Juniors and Families via their own Orienteering Officer’

Location: Northern Ireland

Start date: 1 September 2024

End date: 31 August 2026

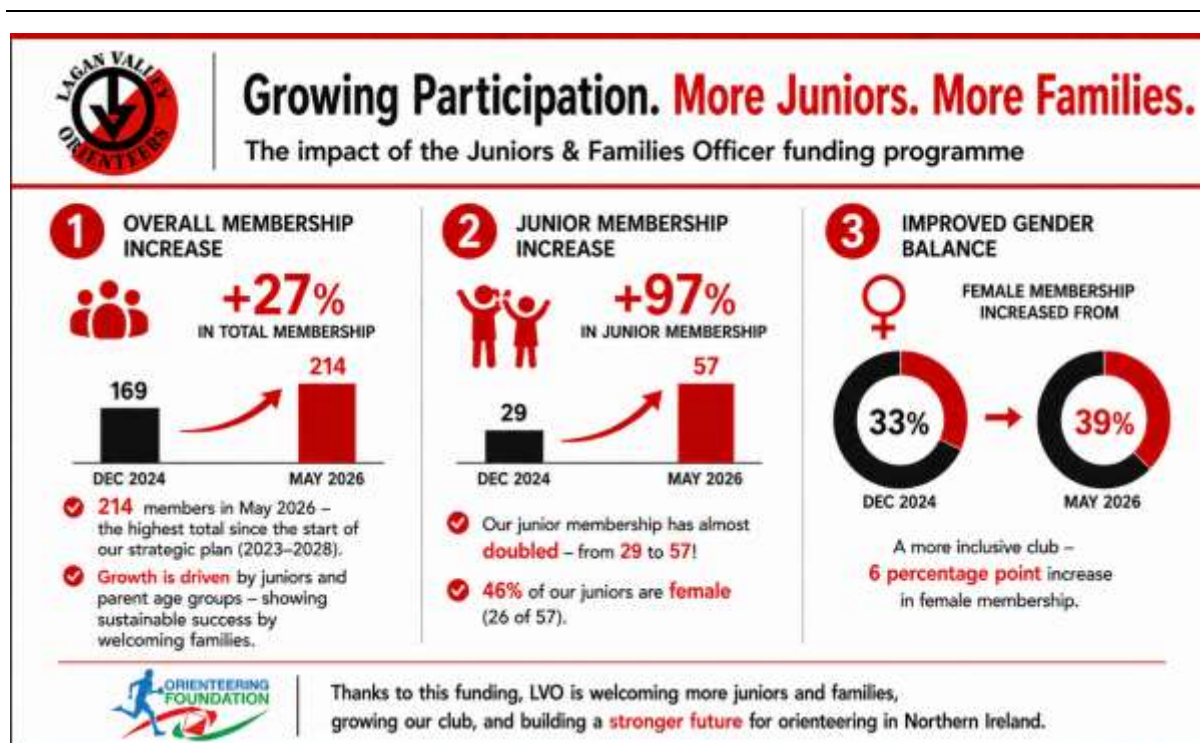
Report date: 22 May 2026

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Photos:

Running Wild and Teens & Tweens session: <https://ryanmcdonaldphotography.pic-time.com/-/lorunningwild/>

Newcastle Athletic Club session: <https://ryanmcdonaldphotography.pic-time.com/-/votakeoverday/gallery>



This report summarises the outcomes of the two-year project “Welcoming Juniors and Families via their own Orienteering Officer.” The project has been highly successful in increasing junior participation, family engagement, and competitive progression within Lagan Valley Orienteers (LVO), resulting in measurable growth in membership and junior activity at club, regional, and national levels.

The Orienteering Foundation grant enabled LVO to appoint a dedicated Juniors and Families Orienteering Officer who was the focal point for attracting juniors, coaching provision, parental engagement, and family-friendly opportunities within the club. This sustained and consistent support allowed LVO to trial different approaches to junior recruitment and retention that would have been difficult to achieve through volunteer capacity alone. As a result, the club has seen



substantial growth in junior membership, improved gender balance, and stronger participation at major competitions.

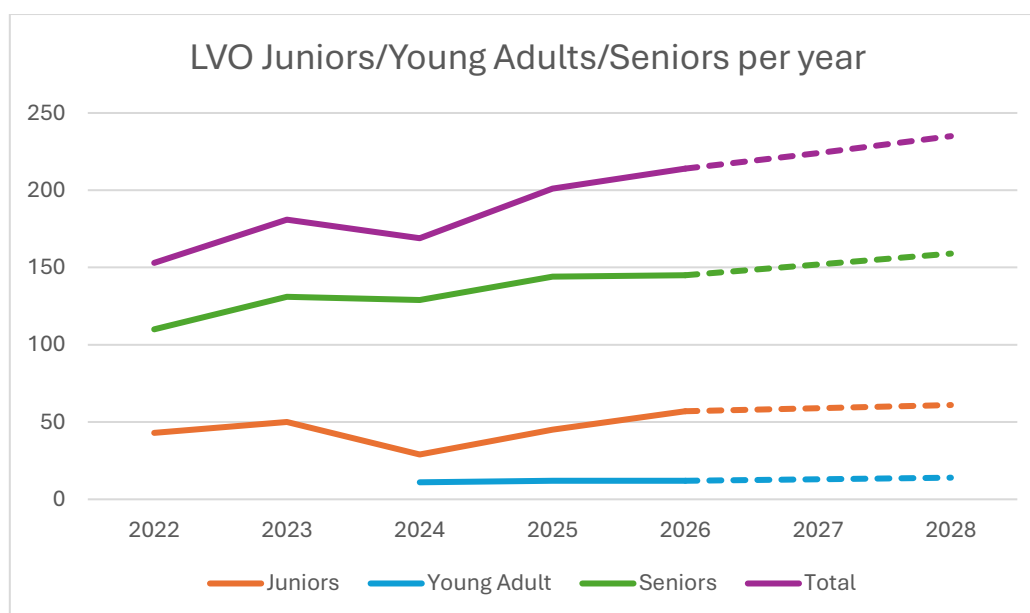
1. Membership Growth

Number of Members per Year – Junior and Senior

As of May 2026, LVO has 214 members, the highest membership total since the beginning of the club’s strategic plan (2023–2028). Of these, 57 are junior members, also the highest number recorded.

The growth in membership has been particularly encouraging among families and younger members, reflecting the impact of the project.

Measure	December 2024 Baseline	May 2026
Total Membership	169	214
Junior Membership	29	57
Female Membership	33%	39%



2. Demographic Changes in Membership

Membership by Age Group and Gender

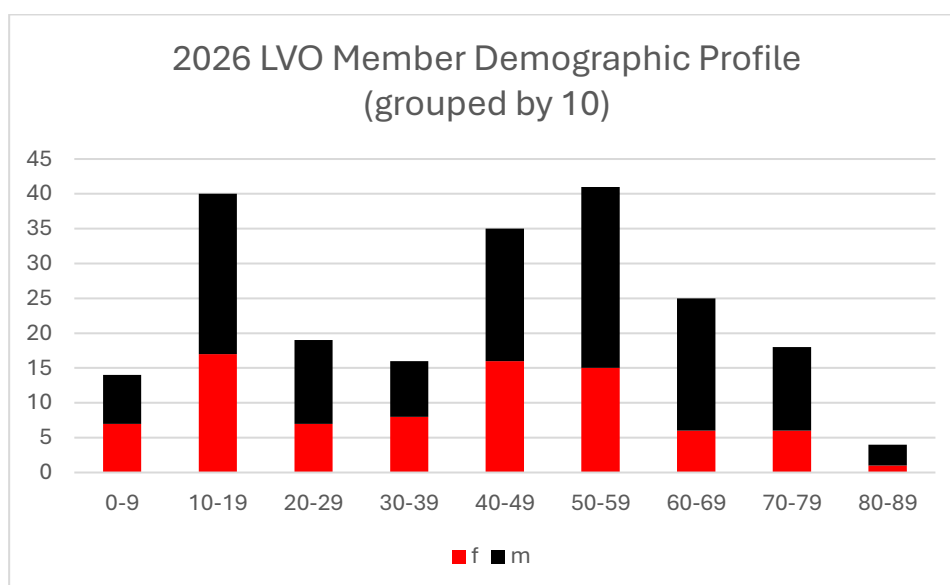
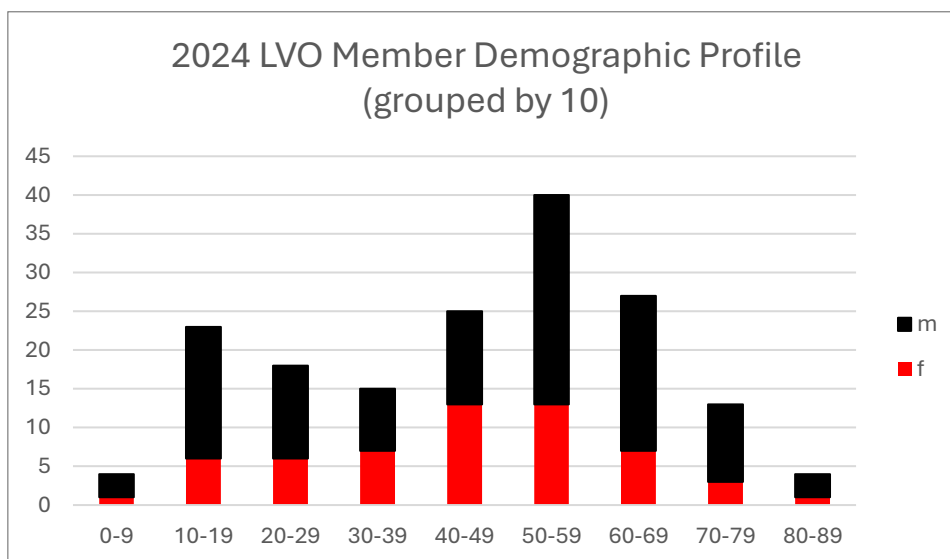
At the start of the project in 2024, the largest membership demographic was the 50–59 age group, with 40 members. The 10–19 age group numbered 23 members.

By the conclusion of the project, the 10–19 age group had almost doubled to 40 members, becoming the second-largest age group within the club. The 0–9 age group also increased significantly, growing from 4 to 14 members.

There has additionally been notable growth in the 40–49 age category, which appears to reflect increased family participation, with parents joining alongside their children.



The club's gender balance has also improved, with overall female membership increasing from 33% to 39%. 46% of our juniors are female.



These demographic shifts indicate that the project has been successful not only in attracting juniors, but also in welcoming families into the club and broadening participation across age groups.

3. Junior Participation and Competitive Progression

LVO Juniors Competing at Irish, Northern Irish, and UK-Level Events

The funded officer role enabled juniors to move beyond introductory participation into structured competitions. One of the clearest indicators of project success has been the progression of junior members into regional and national events.



At the 2026 Irish Orienteering Championships, Lagan Valley Orienteers fielded 35% of all competitors across the M/W10 to M/W16 categories and achieved seven podium places. This represents a significant increase in junior participation and performance at national level.

IOC Middle Championships Results, Caher Mountain, Cork, May 2026

M10 Course 9 8 controls				M14 Course 6 2.600km 55m 9 controls				M16 Course 4 3.500km 80m 11 controls			
Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time
1 Daithi Russell	M10	Bishopstown	07:50 Fix	1 Corin Russell	M14	Bishopstown	26:34 Fix	1 James Ewart	M16	Lagan Valley	36:31 Fix
2 Pierce Chandler	M10	Cork	14:10 Fix	2 Cillian Lynch	M14	Lagan Valley	35:11 Fix	2 Eoin Simpson	M16	Cork	40:10 Fix
3 Fionn O'Hare	M10	Cork	20:25 Fix	3 Ruaidhri O'Brien	M14	Cork	42:31 Fix	3 Fiachra Morrish Wheeler	M16	Cork	50:34 Fix
W10 Course 9 8 controls				M14 Course 6 2.600km 55m 9 controls				M16 Course 4 3.500km 80m 11 controls			
Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time
1 Charlotte Kerr	W10	Lagan Valley	13:12 Fix	4 Flonn Hassett	M14	Setanta	48:52 Fix	4 Alec O'Brien	M16	Cork	58:48 Fix
2 Aoibhin O'Boyle	W10	Curragh-Naas	16:17	5 Adam Clear	M14	Curragh-Naas	53:57 Fix	5 Marcus Richardson	M16	Curragh-Naas	65:16 Fix
M12 Course 7 9 controls				M14 Course 6 2.600km 55m 9 controls				M16 Course 4 3.500km 80m 11 controls			
Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time
1 Ryan Clear	M12	Curragh-Naas	13:43 Fix	1 Laurel O'Connor	W14	Setanta	44:44 Fix	1 Eimear Casey	W16	South East	40:53 Fix
2 Oisín O'Hare	M12	Cork	19:45 Fix	2 Emily Kerr	W14	Lagan Valley	59:09 Fix	2 Deirbhile Hassett	W16	Setanta	59:52 Fix
3 Dylan Kennedy	M12	Lagan Valley	20:13 Fix	3 Chloé Campbell	W14	Lagan Valley	08:16	3 Beth Joyce	W16	Curragh-Naas	65:22 Fix
W12 Course 7 9 controls				M14 Course 6 2.600km 55m 9 controls				M16 Course 4 3.500km 80m 11 controls			
Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time	Name	Class	Club	Time
1 Sophie Kerr	W12	Lagan Valley	26:37 Fix	Albi Morrish Wheeler	W14	Cork	DNF Fix	4 Kathleen O'Donnell	W16	Fingal	69:56 Fix
				Laiose O'Mahony	W14	Cork	DNF Fix	5 Aoife Masterson	W16	Curragh-Naas	75:14 Fix
								6 Aisling O'Mahony	W16	Cork	92:41 Fix
								7 Mary-Ann O'Brien	W16	Cork	117:05 Fix

Equally encouraging was the number of LVO juniors who travelled to Perthshire, Scotland, to participate in the JK Festival of Orienteering over the 2026 Easter weekend. For many participants, this represented a substantial step forward, with some having participated in orienteering for less than one year. Newcomer juniors were encouraged to enter M/W12B and M/W14B categories and performed strongly. LVO was also the only club from Ireland to field complete junior relay teams, entering two teams in the M/W40– relay and one team in the M48– relay.

Participation in Northern Ireland Colour Series (NICS) events has developed more gradually, largely due to travel distances and logistical challenges associated with reaching events within a single day. However, 2026 has shown promising progress, with newer juniors now competing at Blue, Green, and Light Green levels.

Attendance by juniors at Wednesday Evening Events (WEEs) in Belfast and surrounding areas has also increased during May and June, providing further evidence of sustained engagement beyond introductory sessions.

4. Family-Friendly Coaching and Skills Development

Participation in Coaching Sessions

The *Running Wild* family-friendly sessions initially achieved strong participation, regularly attracting between 20 and 30 junior participants.

However, after the first year it became clear that juniors aged approximately 9–13 required more structured and frequent technical coaching than monthly family sessions could provide. This was particularly evident in the progression from TD3 to TD4, which represents a significant increase in technical skill within a relatively short two-year period. In response, LVO introduced a weekly *Teens and Tweens* programme in autumn 2025 to provide more focused skills



development. Note that this programme grew out of Running Wild but was financed by club funds.

Approximately 12 juniors participated across nine coached sessions, progressing from Yellow to Light Green standard. Many have subsequently “graduated” to regular participation in club, regional, and national competitions during 2026.

While *Running Wild* successfully introduced families to orienteering, it proved less effective at maintaining participation once older juniors progressed. Numbers declined to around six children per session, many of whom were approximately six years old and not yet ready to compete independently. As a result, the programme was paused from March 2026 onwards.

This represented an important learning point within the project: broad introductory family sessions are valuable for recruitment, but structured weekly coaching is more effective for retaining and progressing older juniors. LVO continues to explore more consistent ways of reaching new families, as recruitment pathways into the sport can often be unpredictable.

In April 2026, LVO volunteer coaches delivered an introductory session with the local mountain running club, Newcastle AC, involving approximately 40 juniors in simple orienteering activities during a regular training evening.

Following this session, a second six-week *Teens and Tweens* coaching programme was established for athletes interested in learning more about orienteering. Eighteen juniors enrolled, and the programme is currently ongoing, with the final session taking place immediately before the annual Tollymore Festival of Orienteering, where participants are hoped to compete.

5. Lessons Learned

The project enabled LVO to experiment with different approaches to junior recruitment and retention. Several important lessons emerged:

- **Monthly family sessions were effective for introducing families to orienteering**, but proved less successful in sustaining engagement among older juniors who required more structured opportunities to develop technical skills and confidence.
- **Juniors aged 9–13 benefited most from regular, structured weekly coaching**, with clear progression pathways helping participants move from introductory standards to independent competition.
- **Family engagement was a key factor in both recruitment and retention.** Parents frequently joined the club alongside their children, progressed to competing on their own courses, and became increasingly involved in club activities.
- **The dedicated, funded officer role proved highly valuable.** The consistency, coordination, and time required to attract and retain juniors and families, while developing coaching pathways, would have been difficult to sustain through volunteer capacity alone. Club members increasingly recognise the benefits of maintaining a dedicated role focused on junior and family participation.
- **Volunteer parents were instrumental to programme delivery and sustainability.** Parents with direct involvement in the junior programme were often the most willing to support coaching sessions, recruit new participants, and help other families integrate into the club.



- **Strong club culture contributed significantly to retention.** Juniors and families were warmly welcomed into club life, particularly as junior members became more visible and increasingly contributed through volunteering at events.

These lessons will help shape future junior development within the club.

6. Sustainability and Legacy

The structures established during the grant period are becoming embedded within the club and provide a strong foundation for continued junior development.

The *Teens and Tweens* coaching model has proven successful and is expected to continue as a core element of LVO's junior programme. Increased parental involvement, stronger junior peer groups, and growing attendance at regional competitions have also helped establish a more sustainable junior culture within the club.

Importantly, the grant has supported the early development of a junior pathway that moves participants from introductory experiences to competitive participation. Continued development of this pathway will require ongoing support and collaboration with the Northern Ireland Orienteering Association (NIOA), particularly in creating a visible progression route from TD2 to TD5.

LVO hopes to work more closely with NIOA to clarify responsibilities within this pathway, with clubs potentially focusing on recruitment and progression to TD4, and NIOA, supported by clubs, helping juniors progress to TD5 level and associated regional and national competitions.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the Orienteering Foundation grant has enabled LVO to experiment with and evaluate different approaches to attracting juniors and families into both the club and the sport.

By emphasising community, connection, and progression alongside sporting development, LVO has successfully increased membership, particularly among younger age groups, while strengthening participation at regional and national competitions.

The most successful element of the programme was the transition from broad introductory sessions to targeted weekly coaching for juniors ready to progress. We are already seeing the benefits through increased participation at major events, stronger performances, and a growing number of juniors competing confidently at higher levels.

Looking ahead, LVO expects to contribute to a stronger Northern Ireland team for JIRCs selections, particularly in the M/W14 categories, and hopes to increase representation within Irish junior squads for the Junior Home International (JHI).

Most importantly, the project has helped establish a stronger and more sustainable junior and family culture within the club, creating a foundation for continued growth beyond the lifetime of the grant.



8. Future Funding

Looking ahead, LVO would welcome the opportunity to reapply to the Orienteering Foundation for support for a potential third year of the initiative. A proposed future submission would seek a **one-year extension of funding** to consolidate the success of this recruitment initiative by improving the **retention and progression** of newly recruited junior members and their families within both the club and the wider sport.

LVO proposes to fund a **Families and Juniors Development Officer** who will focus specifically on creating a **structured, replicable progression pathway** to support juniors transitioning from **M/W12 to M/W14 and beyond (TD3 to TD4/5)**. The aim is to reduce dropout at a known transition point and improve confidence, competence and retention amongst newly recruited juniors. This would align with the Orienteering Foundation's goals in the following ways:

Enhancement

- Build directly upon a demonstrably successful recruitment project funded by the Orienteering Foundation.
- Create a sustainable progression pathway addressing a known dropout point (M/W12 to M/W14 transition).
- Strengthen club and regional coaching infrastructure.

Hardship / Access

- Support newcomer families without prior orienteering experience who do not have access to informal coaching networks traditionally available in the sport.
- Reduce barriers to participation by providing structured support, technical feedback and mentoring for both juniors and parents.

Innovation

- Develop a replicable TD3–TD4/5 progression model adapted to local terrain and club delivery, which could be shared with other clubs facing similar retention challenges.
- Increase use of MapRun and Livelox for independent practice and post-race learning.