

## 5. Representation across communities as a prerequisite for integration

This represents beliefs and experiences related to the need for all backgrounds to be represented in Sanctuary Runners to achieve community integration. Cases of under representation, particularly on the part of Irish residents, weakens the initiative's ability to achieve integration.

## 6. The transformative impact of time spent together

Participants described how being part of Sanctuary Runners helped them get to know people from many different backgrounds – not only from other countries and cultures, but also people of different ages and life experiences.

What stood out was how this changed the way they saw others. By exercising together, they developed new understandings and formed fresh relationships with groups they might not otherwise have connected with.

## Initial thoughts and next steps

The project has helped identify possible next steps for further fostering health and wellbeing, supporting members of Sanctuary Runners, and encouraging positive connections between host communities and people who arrived in Ireland as asylum seekers, refugees, or migrants.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank everyone who volunteered their time to share their stories with us. It was a privilege to hear about the different journeys people have made to Sanctuary Runners and their commitment to its mission. We also wish to thank all of the volunteers who helped organise each of the discussions that took place across the branches we worked with.

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## Community Connection and Wellbeing Among Sanctuary Runners: A Focus Group Study



### What is this research about?

A 2024 survey of Sanctuary Runners members highlighted a number of positive impacts:

- 74% of all members said they felt more connected to their community.
- 78% of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants reported better physical wellbeing.
- 67% of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants experienced improved mental wellbeing.

These numbers offer a helpful snapshot of Sanctuary Runners' impact. But to understand why the initiative makes such a difference, we need to listen more closely to members' stories.

Hearing directly from people about their experiences gives us a deeper understanding of how Sanctuary Runners supports wellbeing and builds connection. This insight is essential for planning how the initiative can grow as an inclusive, health-promoting community. With this in mind, this research explored how and why Sanctuary Runners influences members' health, wellbeing, and connection to the community.

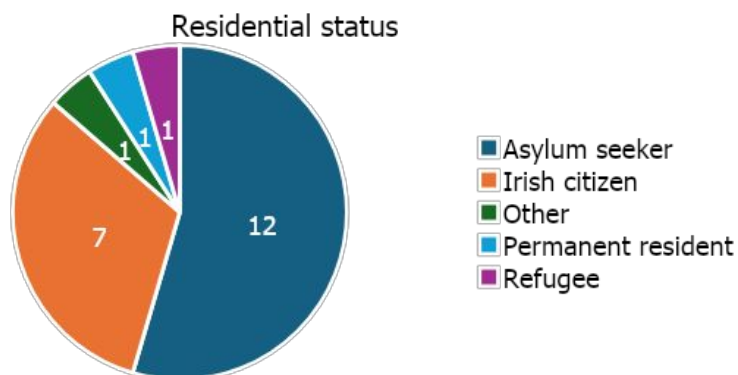
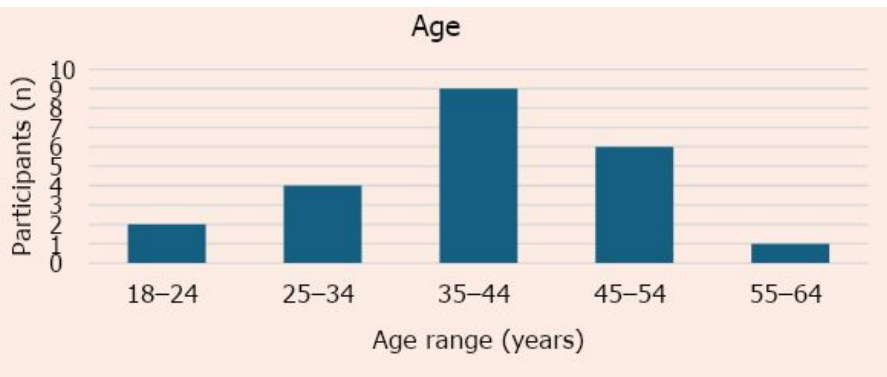
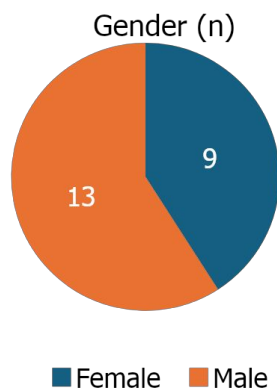
### Who carried out and supported this research?

The team included two (former) staff members of Sanctuary Runners, Jennifer O'Brien and Ellen O'Connor, two current Sanctuary Runners members, Éile Quinn and Olaoluwa Sunday Adeegbe, and a researcher from the School of Psychology at the University of Galway, Dr David Healy. The research was funded by University of Galway PPI Ignite.



## How was this research conducted and who took part?

- We travelled to different branches around Ireland to hear what members had to say about the impact Sanctuary Runners has had on their health and wellbeing, and their connection to the community.
- To collect members' experiences, we audio-recorded individual and group discussions so that we could later go back and analyse what they shared.
- A summarised description of the 22 members who took part is shown in the graphs.



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## Preliminary Findings

### 1. The effectiveness of open participation

Participants repeatedly emphasised the simplicity of joining Sanctuary Runners, owing to minimal admin and a warm, unconditional welcome.

### 2. Sanctuary Runners as a safe haven

Many participants said they felt safe and sheltered from the ongoing challenges in their lives when they were taking part Sanctuary Runners activities. This was especially true for people going through the asylum process or who had refugee backgrounds, though others also described feeling a strong sense of safety as part of the group.

### 3. The role of Sanctuary Runners in fostering health and wellbeing

This captures events and practices within Sanctuary Runners that enable members to maintain and improve their physical, mental and emotional health. For example, Sanctuary Runners events provide a routine to commit to each week. It also alleviates stress experienced in other parts of members' lives.

### 4. The t-shirt as a powerful visual symbol

This represents stories about how members perceive the Sanctuary Runners t-shirt when they see it. It encapsulates the Sanctuary Runners ethos for those who know it and enables members to identify each other anywhere.



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