



# Sport for vulnerable people

Contribution of Life Goals to personal development of the participants



Wageningen University & Research

# **Sport for vulnerable people**

*Contribution of Life Goals to personal development of the vulnerable participants*

Master thesis - Aranka Windmeijer, 950210961050

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Supervisor: Dr. Ir. S. (Sabina) Super, WUR

Second Examiner: Dr. K.T. (Kirsten) Verkooijen, WUR

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Photograph on the cover page shows participants of Life Goals at a sports event:

<https://www.facebook.com/LifeGoalsNederland/>



## Abstract

**Introduction:** Life Goals is an organisation which started offering sport programs for vulnerable adult people in 2016. Up to now there remains a knowledge gap about the effect of sport participation on the personal development of adult vulnerable people. The aim of this study is to investigate how the sport program contributes to the personal development of the participants. This contribution will be measured by investigating the baseline characteristics of the participants of Life Goals and by investigating the participants experienced added value of participating in the program of Life Goals.

**Methods:** This research follows a mixed-method approach. For the quantitative research, data of a questionnaire about the background characteristics and personal development at baseline were analysed (N=100). For the qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed with participants of the sport program of Life Goals (N=28).

**Results:** The participants scored at baseline relatively high on all personal development domains compared to other samples in literature. The participants experienced five added values which facilitate personal development.

**Conclusion:** This study found that the participants experienced a positive contribution of the sport program on their personal development. Based on the interviews, the sport program of Life Goals has the potential to be successful in increasing personal development of vulnerable people. However, more research about the personal development of vulnerable people is needed to investigate the need of the program and whether it is targeting the right group.

**Keywords:** vulnerable people, sport participation, personal development, sport program, Life Goals.

## Preface

In front of you lies my master thesis. This thesis is written for the master Communication, Health & life Sciences. During the bachelor and master, I have always been interested in the influence of sport participation on people. This may explain why I consider myself very lucky to come across this research for Life Goals. During this thesis, my interest for this subject rose even more. Hearing the stories of the vulnerable people was really exciting to me. I experienced it very special that the participants were so open to me and were telling me their whole story how sport has helped them. Writing this thesis was a very educative process, with many ups as well as downs, but eventually I am proud of the result.

I want to thank my supervisor Sabina, for continuously providing me with feedback. I really appreciated the constructive way of providing feedback. The feedback sessions always provided me with new insights and new ideas to continue writing my thesis. Additionally, I want to thank for the sympathy and patience during the process of writing my thesis.

Next, I want to thank Dico, coordinator at Life Goals, for providing me with (contact) information. Thanks to his help, I was able to conduct interviews among the participants. I could attend and sometimes even join the training sessions of the sport program, which I enjoyed very much.

Last, I want to thank my friends, boyfriend and family for the social distractions and for listening and supporting me during fun and sometimes during less fun times.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis,

Aranka

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introducing topic .....	1
1.2 Aim and research questions .....	3
1.3 Structure of the report .....	4
<b>2 Context</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 Life Goals .....	5
2.2 Life Goals programs .....	5
<b>3 Theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>7</b>
3.1 Human Capital Model.....	7
3.2 Six domains of capital.....	8
<b>4 Methods</b> .....	<b>10</b>
4.1 Quantitative research.....	11
4.1.1 Procedure .....	11
4.1.2 Questionnaire .....	11
4.1.3 Data analysis.....	14
4.2 Qualitative research .....	14
4.2.1 Study design .....	14
4.2.2 Data collection.....	15
4.2.3 Data analysis.....	16
<b>5 Results</b> .....	<b>17</b>
5.1 Quantitative part.....	17
5.1.1 Background characteristics .....	17
5.1.2 Personal development domains.....	18
5.2 Qualitative part.....	21
5.2.1 Feeling of taking care of own health .....	21
5.2.2 Sport as a distraction.....	22
5.2.3 Sport as a fun activity .....	23
5.2.4 Sport as way to connect with people .....	25
5.2.5 Seeing own personal growth.....	26
<b>6 Discussion</b> .....	<b>27</b>
6.1 Main findings.....	27
6.2 Link to literature and theory .....	28

6.3 Strengths and limitations .....	32
6.4 Recommendations.....	33
<b>7 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Appendix I: Interview topic list.....	40
Appendix II: Informed consent.....	41

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introducing topic

Groups of vulnerable people in society are growing in number and magnitude (Aday, 1994). The term 'vulnerable people' is used frequently in this thesis. Papers from social sciences use the term 'vulnerable people' to refer to people who experience major crises or stressors in their life. This means that people are susceptible to health problems, harm or neglect (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007; Rogers, 1997). This definition is used throughout this thesis when referring to vulnerable people. The susceptibility of vulnerable people results from the interaction between available resources of the people and the challenges in life they face (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007). These vulnerable people are facing complex interactions within or between the following factors: developmental problems, personal incapacities, poor social status, shortcoming of interpersonal networks, and degraded neighbourhoods (Gelberg, Andersen, & Leake, 2000; Mechanic & Tanner, 2007). It is difficult to estimate the exact number of vulnerable people in a society, however societal trends indicate an increase in the number of vulnerable people (Rogers, 1997). According to Kwaliteitsinstituut Nederlandse Gemeenten [KING], approximately eight percent of the Dutch adult population is situated in a vulnerable situation as result of little participation in society and limited social capital. Moreover, a quarter of the Dutch population is at risk to not fully participate in society (Gremmen, 2015).

The increase of vulnerable people asks for attention, but helping vulnerable people is difficult. In this context, a way to help vulnerable groups of people could be helping them to participate in sport. The sport participation of vulnerable people lags behind the sport participation of the average Dutch population (ZonMw). Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, and Coalter (2012) investigated sport amongst vulnerable children and found a reduced chance of participating in sport activities. Vulnerable people do not have the knowledge and the economic resources to participate in sport by themselves (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008; Vandermeerschen & Scheerder, 2015). Vulnerable people experience barriers in sport participation, such as too little money, poor health or psychological problems.

Sport participation is known to have various favourable effects on people (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). First, frequent participation in physical activities is associated with a longer and better quality of life and health (Laforge et al., 1999; Trost, Owen, Bauman, Sallis, & Brown, 2002). Sport is associated with reduced risks of diseases and with multiple psychological and emotional benefits (Trost et al., 2002). Next, sport participation can

contribute to the development of individuals on life skills as communication, confidence, self-reliance, active citizenship (Coalter, 2007; Poiesz, Butselaar, & Blom, 2014). Skills learned through sport participation may be transferable to other life domains, outside of the sports field (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005). In addition, Skinner et al. (2008) found a positive relation between sport participation and increase in social capital. Sport participation can help people in creating social communities, in which they can build up social capital. The communities have the potential to make people more resilient to stressors of economic, social and cultural changes (Cairnduff, 2001). However, no consensus is reached yet about the relation between sport participation and social capital. Some conclusions about the relation between sport participation and societal problems are made without adequate empirical evidence (Coalter, 2007). Nevertheless, sport has the potential to have a wide range of benefits to people.

Sport participation can be beneficial for vulnerable people specifically, since vulnerable people experience more stressors in life than non-vulnerable people. In addition, vulnerable people have a greater shortage in social capital than non-vulnerable people (Wolf, 2015). Vulnerable people experience difficulties in social domain and needs more support in order to let them participate in society (Wolf, 2015). The need of vulnerable people for more support can be seen in the following numbers. In the Netherlands, approximately 60.000 Dutch citizens make use of a social support law (Wolf, 2015). This law has the objective to contribute to the social participation of each citizen (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2010). The Federation of Shelter indicates that this group of Dutch citizens who make use of social care is growing (Federatie Opvang, 2015). These numbers assume there is a group within the Dutch society which needs help to participate in society. Offering sport programs to the vulnerable people can increase the participation of these people into the society, since sport participation can increase life skills and social capital of people.

Various papers acknowledge the potential of sport participation in enhancing life skills (Papacharisis et al., 2005). Yet, there is little known about the influence of sport participation on vulnerable adult people specifically. Getting into touch with vulnerable people is difficult in research (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Because of that, there is a limited amount of papers with empirical data about the influence of a physical activity program on vulnerable people. Most papers about influence of sport participation are focussed on youth only. For example, Haudenhuyse et al. (2012) examined the effect of sport interventions on vulnerable youth in Belgium. They stated that sport interventions are a way to alleviate distorted social relations of youth. This is a hopeful outcome, since sport participation had a positive effect on the children. The relation between sport participation and personal development of vulnerable

people is important to know. Clear insight into this relation enables organisations to design sport programs for vulnerable people. Awareness for embedding vulnerable people in sport activities has been growing (Verwey-Jonker, 2013). Life Goals is an organisation which offers sport programs for vulnerable people. Life Goals aims to optimise their program and needs more research about the relation between sport participation and personal development of vulnerable people.

## 1.2 Aim and research questions

Life Goals started offering a sports program for vulnerable adult people in 2016. As such, Life Goals is interested to know the effects of the sport program. Up to now, there remains a knowledge gap about the effect of sport participation on the personal development of adult vulnerable people. Therefore, this study is going to investigate the contribution of the sport program on the personal development of adult vulnerable people.

To study the contribution of the sport program to personal development, it is important to investigate the characteristics of the target group. The baseline characteristics of the participants of Life Goals explain their personal development status at the start of the program. This provides insights into the need of the sport program and the way how the program can be used to increase personal development of the participants. In addition, investigating the participants' experiences of the sport program will provide insights into the added value of the program. The ultimate goal is the optimization of the sport program by providing scientific substantiation to Life Goals.

The following research question is formulated in this thesis:

“How does Life Goals contribute to the personal development of the participants?”

The research question is divided into the following research questions:

1. “What are the baseline characteristics of the participants of Life Goals?”
2. “What do the participants experience as the added value of participating in the program of Life Goals?”

### 1.3 Structure of the report

The topic of this thesis is introduced in this chapter. The following chapter will provide more in-depth information about the contextual background of this thesis. The organisation Life Goals will be explained and elaborated in the second chapter. Hereafter, the theoretical framework is presented. This chapter will explain the theory which forms the basis of this thesis. The methods follow after the theoretical framework. The methods will explain how the research is performed, divided into a quantitative and a qualitative section.

After the methods, the results are provided in the fifth chapter. The discussion follows after the results and will discuss the results and link the outcomes to existing literature and the theory. Strengths and limitations of the research and some recommendations will be given. Finishing, a short conclusion is provided.

## 2 Context

### 2.1 Life Goals

Life Goals is an organisation that gives vulnerable people a chance to participate in sport programs. Life Goals started offering sports program for vulnerable people in 2016. Life Goals believes that sport can offer a valuable contribution to enlarge the participation into society and the self-reliance of vulnerable people. Life Goals sets up local sport programs for vulnerable people above the age of 18 years (Life Goals, 2016). Target groups of Life Goals includes for example: homeless people, addicts, victims of domestic violence and multi-problem families. These groups fall within the chosen definition from social sciences of 'vulnerable people', since these people experience major crises or stressors in their life.

Life Goals works together with local sport service organisations, social support teams, health care institutions and municipalities to develop Life Goals Programs. Up to 2018, the organisation Life Goals grew until they were active in fifteen local municipalities (Life Goals, 2017). However, they want to continue growing and implementing Life Goals programs with more local sports services and municipalities. Life Goals' goal is to add eight municipalities per year to their network.

### 2.2 Life Goals programs

The concept 'Life Goals' is used to refer to the Life Goals sport programs, the sport and participation programs for vulnerable people. The sport program includes various kind of sports, for example: soccer, volleyball and kickboxing. The Life Goals sport program consists of Social Sport Coaches, Life Goals Sessions and Life Goals Festivals.

The sport coaches are coaching the participants during the sport program and are responsible for setting up and executing the sport program. The coaches are educated by the Life Goals Academy to become a Social Sport Coach. The coaches learn how to work with vulnerable people and how to focus on increasing their personal development. The sport coaches are important for the success of the Life Goals Programs, since they pay attention to barriers and growth of the participants. The coaches are not interested in winning competitions, but they are interested in the personal development of the participants. Within the sport program, Life Goals Sessions are used to let participants learn about core values in sport that also apply to their daily life. The sessions aim to help increase the self-reliance of the participants by focusing on teamwork, communication, respect, positivity and perseverance. Furthermore, sport festivals are organized in different cities in the Netherlands. At these festivals participants of different Life Goals sport programs can meet, exchange experiences and

motivate each other. The citizens of the city where the festival take place also meet participants of the sport program. In this way, Life Goals hopes to remove prejudices about the target group. For example, Life Goals sets up events like ‘Dutch Street Cup’ (Life Goals, 2016). In this Dutch Street Cup vulnerable people play soccer and compete with other teams and cities (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Participants of Dutch Street Cup (Life Goals, 2017)

### 3 Theoretical framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this thesis. The Human Capital Model of Physical Activity (Bailey, Hillman, Arent, & Petitpas, 2012) will be used to explore the potential contribution of the sport program of Life Goals on the personal development of the participants. The Human Capital Model will be explained and the six domains of the Human Capital Model will be elaborated and linked with the personal development domains.

#### 3.1 Human Capital Model

The Human Capital Model will be used to provide possible explanations how sport participation can contribute to personal development of vulnerable people. Sport participation is an major element contributing to physical activity (Bailey, Hillman, Arent, & Petitpas, 2013). The Human Capital Model represents a comprehensive evidence base on the extensive and the diverse benefits of physical activity (Bailey et al., 2013). According to this model, physical activity is an investment capable of producing valuable individual and social returns (Bailey et al., 2012). These valuable returns are categorized into six different domains of capital that lead to human development. Capital is a resource that contributes, either directly or indirectly, to future well-being (Bailey et al., 2013). The six different domains of capital are: physical capital, emotional capital, individual capital, social capital, intellectual capital and financial capital (Bailey et al., 2012). These six different domains of capital will be explained and linked with the context of this thesis, the concepts of personal development (Figure 2).

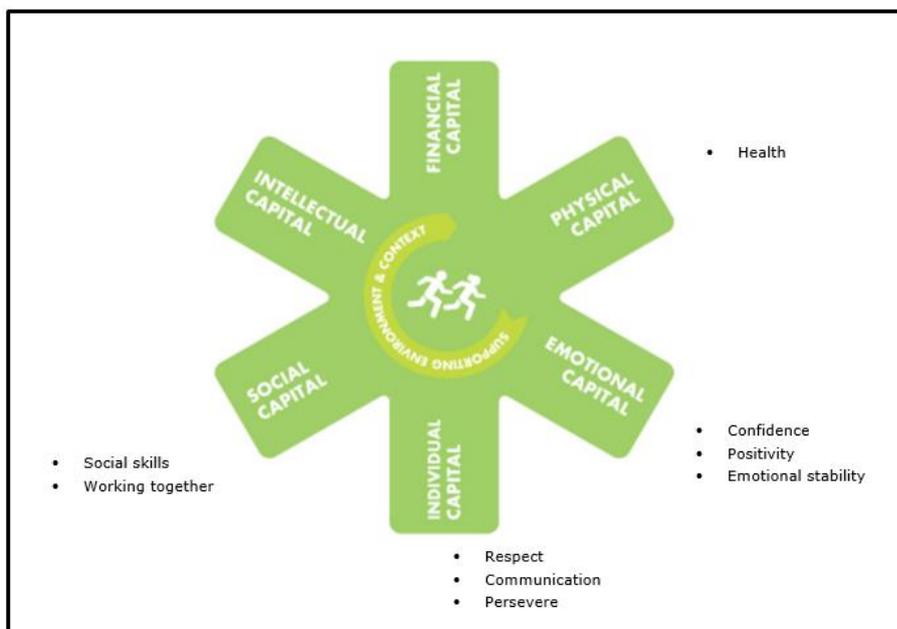


Figure 2. Human Capital Model linked with the concepts of the personal development (Bailey et al., 2012)

### 3.2 Six domains of capital

The first domain is physical capital. This capital includes the direct benefits of physical activity to physical health and the positive influences of physical activity on healthy behaviours of an individual. According to Bailey et al. (2013), the relation between physical activity and physical capital is strong. The personal development 'health' belongs to physical capital. Warburton et al. (2006) identified a linear relation between physical activity and health status. Next to the phenomenon that sport prevents unhealthy weight gain, sport reduces the risk of chronic diseases (Haskell et al., 2007). Sport uses the major muscle groups of the body, this improves the body composition, reduces blood pressure, and reduces the chance on chronic diseases and premature death (Nocon et al., 2008; Warburton et al., 2006).

The second domain is emotional capital. This entails the psychological and mental health benefits affiliated with physical activity. Associated constructs of personal development are positivity, confidence and emotional stability. Sport participation is associated with improved psychological health and emotional well-being (Dishman, 1995; Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013). Eime et al. (2013) found that individuals who participated in sport had higher rates of emotional regulation and a lower risk of emotional distress than the people who are involved with other activities. Individuals who participate in sport learn about positive and negative emotions and strategies to regulate them (Scanlan, Babkes, & Scanlan, 2005). Furthermore, sport is associated with increased levels of self-image and self-knowledge (Eime et al., 2013). Sport makes people feel positive about themselves, causing increased level of self-esteem (Leary, 1999). People who participate in structured activities have been associated with increased life satisfaction (Gilman, 2001).

The third domain is individual capital. In this domain belong respect, communication and perseverance. Individual capital considers the elements of a person's character that build up through participation in physical activity and sports, for example life skills, personal skills or values. Although there is no clear consensus yet about the relation between physical activity and individual capital, there are hopeful insights starting to appear. Research are addressing the capability of sport to promote life skills. For example, the interactions with individuals benefits to the communication and teamwork of the participants (Bailey et al., 2013). Also, skills like flexibility, problem-solving skills, personal responsibility and empathy are enhanced by participation in sports (Bailey et al., 2013).

Fourth, social capital covers the outcomes of strengthened networks between people, groups and civil society as a result of sport participation. The following personal development domains belongs to this domain: social skills and working together. Most sports involve social groups. Social relations between people may provide access to social support for health

(Nutbeam, Aar, & Catford, 1989). As already mentioned in the introduction, sport participation helps people in creating communities, in which they can build up social capital (Skinner et al., 2008).

The fifth domain is intellectual capital consisting of the cognitive and educational gains linked to participation in physical activity. Often, these gains are divided into two categories: the relation of physical activity on the academic performances and on the brain cognitive functioning (Hillman, Erickson, & Kramer, 2008). Theories suggest that due to increasing blood flow to the brain, the hormonal secretion changes (Strong et al., 2005). This stimulates brain development and has a positive effect on the mental alertness and memory (Bailey, 2005; Fischer, 2009; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008).

Last is the domain of financial capital. This domain involves gains linked to physical activity in terms of earning power, job performances, productivity and job attainment. Assumptions are made in literature regarding to this domain. An example of a theory is that people who participate in sport, have less duration of illness or absence, which leads to higher productivity (Burton, McCalister, Chen, & Edington, 2005). But there is still limited evidence about this theory (Proper, Staal, Hildebrandt, van der Beek, & van Mechelen, 2002).

The Human Capital Model is a useful model to use in this thesis, since it categorizes and structures the effects people experience of the sport participation. The experienced added values which will be investigated can be linked to this model. Possible mechanisms in the Human Capital Model explain the effect sport can have on the personal development of people. The potential benefits sound promising for the participants of Life Goals. However, according to Gould and Carson (2008), sport participation does not automatically have an effect on personal development. Since development in life skills is a complex process, the conditions under which people develop life skills in a sport setting is still unclear. Gould and Carson (2008) conclude that future research should focus on the conditions in the sport setting and the life experiences of the participants. Thus, more research is needed about how sport participation contributes to personal development of vulnerable people. Therefore, in this thesis the contribution of Life Goals' programs on the personal development of vulnerable people will be investigated. This contribution will be investigated by using the participants' own experiences of the program. In the next chapter the precise conducting of this research will be explained.

## 4 Methods

This chapter elaborates on the research methods of this thesis. This thesis is focussed on Life Goals and the personal development of the participants. The following research question was formulated in this thesis: “How does Life Goals contribute to the personal development of the participants?” This research follows a mixed-method approach, qualitative data as well as quantitative data was collected to analyse the association. Mixed-method design is research in which data is analysed and collected and findings are integrated using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Both ways of data collection have biases and limitations, but mixing multiple methods can strengthen a study (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). With the common idea that the use of qualitative data as well as quantitative data neutralises or cancels out the weaknesses of each form of data (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003).

The main question of this thesis was examined by use of two sub-questions, see Table 1. The first question was answered by using quantitative data. The last question was answered by analysing qualitative data. This methods section is divided into two parts, first the quantitative part will be discussed, and hereafter the qualitative part will be explained.

*Table 1* Overview of research questions and methods

Research questions	Quantitative/qualitative research
<b>1. What are the baseline characteristics of the participants of Life Goals?</b>	Quantitative
<b>2. What do the participants experience as the added value of participating in the program of Life Goals?</b>	Qualitative

## 4.1 Quantitative research

### 4.1.1 Procedure

The quantitative data consisted of data collected by a questionnaire of Life Goals. This data is analysed to provide an answer to the question: 'What are the baseline characteristics of the participants of Life Goals?'. The baseline characteristics consist of background characteristics as well as the personal development of the participants at baseline. Life Goals uses nine domains in the questionnaire to categorize the personal developments of the participants. In this thesis the same nine domains will be used: social skills, health, confidence, positivity, emotional stability, respect, working together, communication and perseverance. These characteristics of the participants were measured at the baseline. The baseline is the moment when the participants start participating at Life Goals.

All data outcomes of the questionnaire were received in an Excel-file from a coordinator of Life Goals. The questionnaire was conducted from September 2017 till July 2018. When Life Goals started to let participants fill in the questionnaire, Life Goals had 380 participants in total. The questionnaire consisted of three measuring moments. Only the first measuring moment was used in this research, since this first measurement covers the baseline. The sport coaches from Life Goals approached the participants during a training session. The sport coach explained the purpose of the questionnaire to the participants, which is mapping the development of the participants during the program. The coach asked the participants whether they wanted to fill in the questionnaire, hundred participants agreed. The participants spent about half an hour completing the questionnaire. The participants filled in the questionnaire in the sport canteen together with the sport coach, either individually or in a group. The coach answered questions when the questionnaire was unclear to the participant.

### 4.1.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire started with some general questions. The date as well as the measuring moment (1-3) were registered. Next, the position on the participation ladder was asked, ranging from 1 to 6 (1: isolated, 2: social contact outdoors, 3: participation in organized activities, 4: unpaid work, 5: paid work with support, 6: paid work). Hereafter, four questions were asked whether the respondents are working voluntary, having a paid job, following an education, or doing an internship (Yes=1; No=0).

After the general questions, the personal development was measured with nine domains. These nine domains were analysed in this thesis: social skills, health, confidence, positivity,

emotional stability, respect, working together, communication and perseverance. All questions in these nine domains were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (completely not applicable) to 5 (completely applicable). Outcomes of a domain were excluded when a respondent did leave an item open within the considering domain.

### *Health*

Health was measured by analysing whether respondents perform healthy behaviour. Participant's health was measured with the Life Skills Transfer Survey by Weiss, Bolter, and Kipp (2014). This questionnaire measured health as actions that promote one's physical, mental and social forms of wellness as well as being aware of behaviours that undermine a healthy lifestyle. In this study, the questions of the Life Skills Transfer Study were translated into Dutch. The items were adapted in a way that it suits the target group of this study, including removal of the sixth item. For example, items were asked about healthy behaviours like: 'I am going to bed on time' and 'I play sports or do physical activities every day'. This domain consists of five statements. This domain's reliability was adequate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ).

### *Confidence*

Confidence measures the attitude people have towards themselves. Confidence was measured with questions translated from the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) (Franck, De Raedt, Barbez, & Rosseel, 2008; Rosenberg, 1965). The ninth item, out of the ten items from the original questionnaire, was not included in the questionnaire by Life Goals. The participants were asked to score themselves at nine statements. For example, the participants were asked whether the following statements were applicable to the respondents: 'I have positive attitude towards myself' and 'Sometimes I feel like I am not good enough'. Four items (3, 5, 8 & 9) were re-coded in the dataset. The scores were re-coded in such a way that high scores reflect high confidence. The questions formed a highly reliable measure for health (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ).

### *Social skills*

The social skills were measured by asking the respondents how they grade themselves at statements like, 'I am good at making friends' and 'I help other people'. This domain consisted of six items. The questions were translated from Perceived Social Competence Scale by Anderson-Butcher, Iachini, and Amorose (2008). The reliability of this domain was moderate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .64$ ).

### *Positivity*

The questions to measure the positivity of the participants were translated from the personal optimism scale from Gavrilov-Jerkovic, Jovanovic, Zuljevic, and Brdaric (2014). The positivity measured the state of mind of the participants about the future. This domain consists of four statements. For example, the participants have to scale themselves whether they worry about the future. In this domain, items 2-4 were recoded. The scale demonstrated good reliability in this study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ).

### *Emotional stability*

Participant's emotional stability was measured with questions translated from the Life Skills Transfer Survey (Weiss et al., 2014). The nine items were rephrased to the target audience, so the items were no longer school-related. This questionnaire measured emotional stability by staying cool in challenging situations by controlling anger, calming down, staying focused, staying positive, and seeking help from others. For example, statements 'I can calm myself down when something unpleasant happens' and 'I remain positive when I am frustrated' were asked. The items formed a highly reliable measure for emotional stability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ).

### *Respect*

The items about respect were translated from the "Appreciating Diversity" from Life Skills Transfer Survey (Weiss et al., 2014). This domain consisted of five items, such as "I can learn things from people who are different from me". The items measured the respecting and appreciating of differences in individual characteristics and viewpoints, like gender, ethnicity or culture. This domain's reliability was acceptable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .78$ ).

### *Working together*

Working together was measured by five items, translated from the Youth Life Skills Inventory (Robinson & Zajicek, 2005). The items measure the skills of youth to work with groups, items were asked such as; "I can work with other people". The internal consistency of this domain was adequate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$ ).

### *Communication*

The four items from the domain communication were translated from the Youth Life Skills Inventory of Robinson and Zajicek (2005). This domain measures the communication skills of youth. "When I say something, people understand me" is an example of an item within this domain. The items formed a reliable measure for communication (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ).

### *Perseverance*

Perseverance measured the motivational variables of self-regulation of learning, the perseverance when working on a task. The items in the perseverance domain are translated from the domain "Effort" of the Self-Regulation of Learning Self-Report Scale from Toering,

Elferink-Gemser, Jonker, van Heuvelen, and Visscher (2012). Five out of the nine items that measure the “Effort” domain were used in this questionnaire (items 32-34, 38 & 40). The internal consistency of this domain was good (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .82$ ).

#### 4.1.3 Data analysis

The data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23. When a domain contained one or more missing value(s), the other answers of this respondent on the considering domain were excluded. The Cronbach’s Alpha was measured per domain to check the internal consistency of the domains. Descriptive analysis was calculated to create an overview of the data. The frequency was measured of the position of participants on the sport participation ladder and the education and work status of the respondents were measured.

To check how the participants scored in the nine domains of personal development at baseline, descriptive statistics were calculated. Mean scores were measured, as well as the standard deviations for each domain. The findings were compared with outcomes in literature. Literature was obtained by searching articles that cited the article with the corresponding questionnaire. These articles were analysed if they used the corresponding questionnaire and presented the outcomes. The studies which fitted the requirements, were taken into account. These studies were selected to a maximum of three using the following criteria:

1. The studies which used the same Likert-scale were considered first for comparison.
2. The study population which showed the most similarities with the study population of this thesis were included next in the comparison. Study populations with vulnerable people, were taken into comparison first. Hereafter the mean age of the study population was considered.

## 4.2 Qualitative research

### 4.2.1 Study design

Qualitative data was collected in the form of interviews, to provide an answer to the following research question: “What do the participants experience as the added value of participating in the program of Life Goals?”. Interviews were conducted because of the interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the associated meaning of the lived experience (Seidman, 2006). This study has been approved by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Wageningen University. Meaning that this study deals with ethical issues in a

satisfactory way and that this study complies with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice. Date of Approval: 23 October 2018.

The network of Life Goals was used to obtain the study sample, because vulnerable people are hard to reach and getting into touch with them is difficult (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The interviewees were selected after consulting a coordinator of Life Goals. The coordinator provided contact information of five sport coaches among different cities and/or villages. All five sport coaches were contacted and asked for permission to let a researcher attend a training and to conduct interviews with the participants. The coaches informed the participants and asked who wanted to be interviewed. A total of 28 participants wanted to be interviewed. These 28 participants are sampled in this study, of which 6 women and 22 men. The participants were between 27 and 60 years old, with a mean age of 39.36. The participants were joining a sport program in five different villages or cities.

The interviews were conducted from October till half November. The interviews took place in the sports canteen or at picnic tables alongside the sport field. The mean duration of the interviews was about 10-15 minutes. Almost all interviews were performed in Dutch. Only one interview was performed in English, since this was the preference of the participant. The interviews were recorded, so all data could be listened back and the researcher could focus on the interview without worrying about taking notes (Boeije, 2010). The respondents received a water bottle at the end of the interview to thank them for participating.

#### 4.2.2 Data collection

As an instrument of data collection, a semi-structured interview was used. This type of interviewing is based on the use of an interview guide, a written set of topics and/or questions which are covered in a particular order (Bernard, 2011). A topic list was made beforehand (Appendix I: Interview topic list), to remind the researcher of the topics when losing track of the interview. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewees' answers determine the kind of information produced about the topics and the importance of them (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

Before the interview, the researcher introduced herself and the goal of the research. The researcher thanked the interviewee for participating and explained the interest in the story of the participant. The interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent for ethical purposes (Boeije, 2010). In the informed consent, the interviewees are informed that they will stay anonymous during this research. The interviewees are told that they can stop the interview at

any time if they want to. Last, permission to record the interview was asked (Appendix II: Informed consent).

The interview was performed with use of the interview topic list (Appendix I: Interview topic list). The interview started with registering the gender, age and city of sport program of the interviewee, to gain insight in some characteristics of the study sample. Hereafter, the interview was focussed on experiences of the interviewee about the sport program. There was no existing interview guide for vulnerable people, the questions are made up based on literature of effects of sport participation. The goal of the interviews was to let the interviewees talk about their experiences about Life Goals. During the interviews, the focus was on listening to the experiences of the interviewee. If necessary, follow-up questions were asked about how the interviewees feel about participating and sporting and why they feel a certain way.

#### 4.2.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for analysing, identifying and describing patterns within qualitative data. The six phases in the method of Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to analyse the interviews and to find patterns in the data. An inductive approach is used to form the themes. This means that themes derive during analysis into the content of the data by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The first phase of the analysis was getting familiar with the data. The data needs to be transcribed into written form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done by making a transcript of the recordings of the interviews into Word. The finished transcript was checked one more time with the audio recording. The second phase is generating initial codes. After getting familiar with the data, certain repeated patterns will come across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These patterns were written down in codes with use of computer program Atlas TI. The third phase is searching for overarching themes. All the codes, which were generated in lists, were analysed to search for potential underlying themes in the codes. In the fourth phase, the themes were reviewed. In this phase the link with the research questions and the themes was analysed. Themes with overlap were merged into one theme. The fifth phase defines and names themes. The essence of each theme was identified. Also, the aspects of the data were determined of each theme. The last phase considers producing the report. In this last phase, the final results were made and translated into English. The results are turned into a coherent narrative story in the thesis. Quotes were translated and used as illustration in the results.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Quantitative part

In this chapter, the following research question will be answered: “What are the baseline characteristics of the participants of Life Goals?” The baseline characteristics consist of the background characteristics of the respondent and the scores of the respondents on the nine domains of personal development.

#### 5.1.1 Background characteristics

An overview is provided of the background characteristics of the respondents, like the position on the participation ladder and the education and the work status (see Table 2).

Table 2 Background characteristics respondents (N=100)

	Percentage	(N)
Participation ladder <sup>a</sup>		
1. Isolated	1,0	(1)
2. Social contact outdoors	20,4	(20)
3. Participation in organized activities	46,9	(46)
4. Unpaid work	7,1	(7)
5. Paid work with support	8,2	(8)
6. Paid work	16,3	(16)
Education and work status <sup>b</sup>		
Volunteer work	39,3	(11)
Education	25,0	(7)
Internship/traineeship	32,1	(9)
Paid job	50,0	(14)

<sup>a</sup>n=98: data missing for 2 respondents

<sup>b</sup>n=28: data missing for 72 respondents

Most respondents are positioned on the third step of the participation ladder. Most respondents are participating in organized activities. The second largest group is the group with people who have social contact outdoors. This group is followed by the group of people who have paid work. Out of the 28 respondents, fifty percent have paid work. The number of respondents with paid work is the largest out of the four categories, followed by volunteer work.

### 5.1.2 Personal development domains

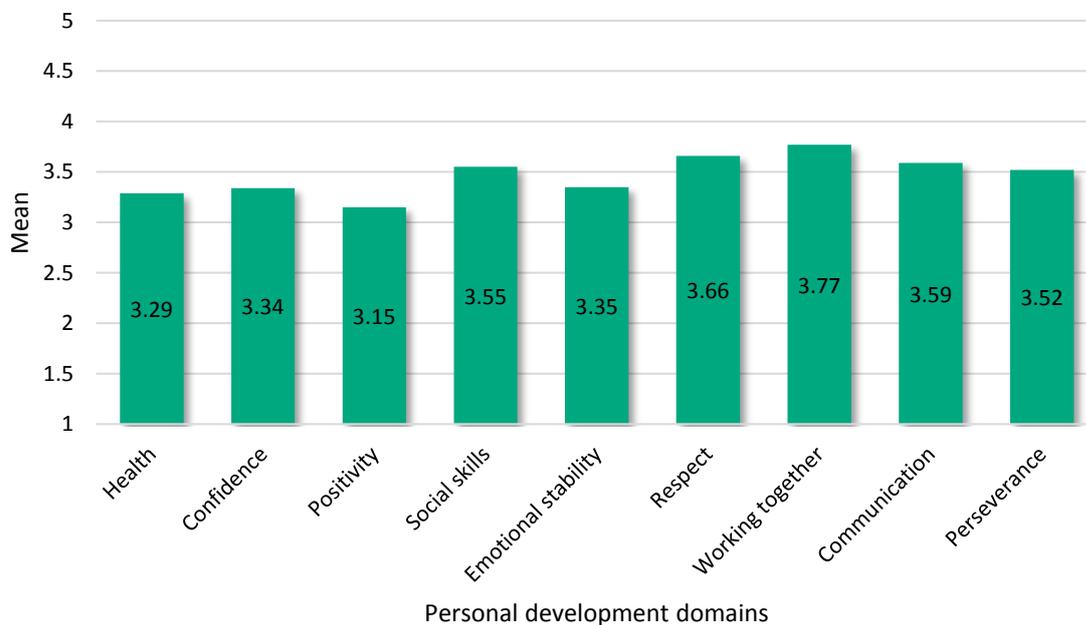
The results, the mean and standard deviation, of the nine personal development domains are given in Table 3. In

Figure 3 , an overview of the mean of the nine domains can be found.

Table 3 Descriptive analysis of all domains

Domain	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Health	100	3.29	.77
Confidence	99	3.34	.80
Positivity	97	3.15	1.02
Social skills	100	3.55	.59
Emotional stability	99	3.35	.73
Respect	97	3.66	.74
Working together	98	3.77	.65
Communication	100	3.59	.65
Perseverance	100	3.52	.79

Figure 3 Means of the personal development domains at baseline



The mean of the domain 'working together' (M=3.77) is highest. This means that the respondents scored on average highest in the personal development of working together. The means of respect (M=3.66) and communication (M=3.59) follows respectively.

The outcomes per domain are compared with different samples found in the literature. In Table 4, an overview per domain is provided with the means and the corresponding standard deviations of different samples. Some samples use a different Likert-scale. Remarkably, the participants of Life Goals score relatively high on all domains compared to literature.

Table 4 Comparison outcomes per domain with literature

Health					Confidence				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD		Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	100	3.29	.77	Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	99	3.34	.80
Children, aged 10-18 (Weiss et al., 2014)	5	533	2.91	.82	First year psychology students (Gray-Little, Williams, & Hancock, 1997)	5	1234	3.81	.67
Children, aged 10-17 (Weiss, Bolter, & Kipp, 2016)	5	159	3.15	.84	Social vulnerable youth, mean age: 16.5 (Nols, Haudenhuyse, & Theeboom, 2017)	4	288	2.18	.40
					Dutch adults, mean age 36 (Franck et al., 2008)	4	442	2.09	.44
Positivity					Social skills				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD		Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	97	3.15	1.02	Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	100	3.55	.59
Students, mean age 21.97 (Gavrilov-Jerkovic et al., 2014)	4	389	2.32	.59	Dutch unemployed people, mean age 46.6 (Koen, Klehe, & van Vianen, 2015)	5	643	3.73	.71
Students, mean age 19.05 (Yu, Wu, & Pesigan, 2016)	4	395	2.80	.50	Students, mean age 21.3 (Uysal, 2015)	5	259	2.55	.31
					Youth, mean age 11.9 (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2013)	5	350	3.73	.73

Emotional stability				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	99	3.35	.73
Children, aged 10-18 (Weiss et al., 2014)	5	533	3.17	.83
Children, aged 10-17 (Weiss et al., 2016)	5	159	2.94	.82

Respect				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	97	3.66	.74
Children, aged 10-18 (Weiss et al., 2014)	5	533	3.31	.87
Children, aged 10-17 (Weiss et al., 2016)	5	159	3.19	.90

Working together				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	98	3.77	.65
Teachers/students, modal age: 20 (Ruiz-Gallardo, López-Cirugeda, & Moreno-Rubio, 2012)	5	57	1.96	.26
3 <sup>rd</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> grade students, <i>age missing</i> (Robinson & Zajicek, 2005)	3	110	1.33	.17

Communication				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	100	3.59	.65
Teachers/students, modal age: 20 (Ruiz-Gallardo et al., 2012)	5	57	1.46	.23
3 <sup>rd</sup> – 5 <sup>th</sup> grade students, <i>age missing</i> (Robinson & Zajicek, 2005)	3	110	1.06	.16

Perseverance				
	Likert scale	N	M	SD
Participants Stichting Life Goals, aged 27-60	5	100	3.52	.79
Medical students, age missing <sup>m</sup>	5	84	3.99	.65
Children, mean age 13.9 (Toering et al., 2012)	4	1201	2.66	.52
Socially vulnerable youth, moderate sport participation, mean age: 14.7 (Super, Hermens, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2018)	4	274	2.67	.45

## 5.2 Qualitative part

In this qualitative part of the results, the following research question will be answered with use of the interviews: “What do the participants experience as the added value of participating in the program of Life Goals?”

During the interviews, most of the participants were very willing to be interviewed and to tell their story. On the other hand, some participants acted hastily and they answered timid. But overall, people were surprisingly open to talk about their experiences of participating in the sport program. All participants mentioned mainly positive aspects of the sport program. They were all happy that the sport program existed and that they can participate. Only a couple participants mentioned some minor negative aspects of the sport program. Also notable, many participants were very conscious about the reasons why they participate in sport and what sport benefits to their lives.

Five main themes were found to represent the added value of the program for its participants, namely: feeling of taking care of own health, sport as a distraction, sport as a fun activity, sport as way to connect with people, and seeing own personal growth. Each theme will be elaborated and will be illustrated using quotes.

### 5.2.1 Feeling of taking care of own health

When asked about the experiences of the participant about joining the sport program, almost all participants replied that sport was important for their health. Most participants mentioned that they were feeling physically active, participants mentioned this with “I am feeling more active” or “It is nice to feel your body being active”. Sport was considered as a healthy activity, because the participants stated that being physically active is good for your body. The participants mentioned to feel physically better because of sport participation, since they felt more fit and energetic.

*“I notice that I become more fit and healthy.” M-60*

The participants appreciated the sport program, since it gives them an opportunity to be active and to feel healthy. For example, a woman who participates in boxing every week pointed out:

*“I just like to be healthy and to feel well. This sport program certainly helps, I really recommend it to everyone.” F-34*

Five participants mentioned, that because they felt fitter, they have more energy to perform tasks outside the field. These participants remarked the effect sport has on their daily life. For example, a woman who participates in the sport program twice a week mentioned:

*“And because I am exercising again, I feel that I am a lot more energetic outside the field. If I cannot participate in sports, I am really dragging my feet at home.” F-29*

The participants also considered sport as a way to build up endurance. The participants mentioned that they felt their endurance is getting better because of the participation in sport. The participants felt good about themselves, since they noticed an increase in their endurance, which they consider as an added value of sport participation.

*“I am fitter now than four / five months ago. I think that's really cool.”  
M-42*

*“I notice that if I work on my endurance, I feel better. That is important for me.” M-30*

Some participants mentioned that after exercising, they have a feeling of satisfaction. They felt satisfied because they felt they have taken care of their own body. For some participants, for example participants with a drugs history, it felt good to be able to have control over their life again and doing something healthy. Three participants mentioned that it felt good to focus on doing something healthy in their lives. For example, one participant said that she felt happy every time she went to the sport program:

*“Yes, then you have done something healthy. You have been working on your body. Yes, that feels nice.” F-30*

### 5.2.2 Sport as a distraction

Another thing the participants mentioned as added value of the sport program, is that sport creates a moment to clear the mind. Almost all participants stated that during exercising, they are only focussed on the sport itself. Participants considered participation in sports as ‘relaxing’, since they do not have to think about their problems and pain. Sport is a way to escape from their everyday concerns. For example, a 52<sup>nd</sup> year old man was happy to have the opportunity to forget his everyday problems during sports:

*“You do not have to think about therapy for a moment. I do not have to think about my traumas, not about my pain, all those kinds of things. Just pure distraction.” M-52*

Sport creates a moment of distraction for the participants. One female participant, who is in therapy for a drugs addiction, said that she completely loses the desire for drugs after a soccer match because her mind is at that moment occupied with the game/sport activity. Sport gave her a lot of psychological benefits, since she was able to focus on something else than her

problems. She experiences the distraction of sport participation as a moment she is cheered up, which is like the moment she is using drugs. She considered sport as an alternative for drugs in order to be happy and to forget about her pain and problems. This female participant answered to the question what the sport program brings to her, as followed:

*“Yes psychologically, the program has brought me a lot. (...) Because sometimes, since we are in an addiction institution, I just wanted to get drugs. And then I thought: I'm going to play football first, if I still feel like it, then I'm just going to get it. However, I knew that after playing football this feeling was always gone. Thus, I could promise myself that. I could postpone the feeling for a few hours, to the point when it is no longer necessary. (...) In principle, sport makes dopamine, which creates kind of the same feeling. But also, I am completely in the game that I cannot think about stupid counselling or something. And when I come back, I'm still in the game. My mind is still occupied by the game and I'm cheered up at that moment.” F-27*

Generally, the participants indicated that they experienced a lot of stress in their lives. Many participants use sport as a stress outlet. They had the feeling that they can release stress by running/kicking/jumping/shooting during sports.

*“It is also a bit of stress that I can lose in it, say. So yes, it also cleans up stuff well in your head.” F-34*

Also, participants mentioned that they can release tension because of the sport program. Being too focussed and conscious about their problems would cause them more tension. During sports, the participants deal with their feelings in a different way, which make them better able to handle tension.

*“Sport helps me to deal with tension, to lose some tension in it. (...) Just physically and mentally. That you can handle the tension better. Yes, that is simply the most important reason to participate in sports.” M-40*

### 5.2.3 Sport as a fun activity

The sport program is a fun activity, according to all the participants. They like the sport activities in the sport program.

*“I like it. I am really looking forward to it, yes.” F-34*

A lot of the participants have only a few daytime activities. These participants sit home alone for the most part of the day. They are happy to have an activity to fill their day. The sport program, thus, creates a moment in the week to look forward to. For example, a 35-year-old participant is happy to have an activity to fill his morning or afternoon:

*“A time-consuming activity for the morning or afternoon” M-35*

In addition, the participants considered the program as a way to get motivated to leave the house. Some participants mentioned that it felt good to have a nice outdoor activity to spend their time. Sport gave them a reason to go outside and to undertake an activity. Also, some participants got more structure in their lives because of the fixed sport moment in the week. All these things make that the participants see sport as a fun activity. For example, to the question; “What did the sport program bring to you?”, one participant provided the following answer:

*“Just a fixed point in the week, that you can just go out of your house. Normally you would sit inside, you would be eating. I have just done that. But otherwise, you will not go outside with such a weather like this if you do not need to. (...) This creates moments that you really have to get out. Because you have football, for an hour.” M-56*

One female participant mentioned that she always had participated in sports before she had to quit due to personal circumstances. Now she can sport again, which she sees as a fun activity, and to continue participating in sport. This motivated her to also pick up other things she likes, which she previously had to quit due to her circumstances. This female participant answered to the question what she considered as benefits of sports, as follows:

*“That I am indeed exercising again every week, which I was always passionate about, but what I had to quit due to personal circumstances. That gives me confidence and I feel better. Also just motivates me to pick up other things.” F-34*

The participants mentioned that they liked that the sport program is easy approachable and informal. This makes the sport program not too obligatory. Almost all participants stated that they particularly enjoyed the fact that the program is non-compulsory. The participants felt comfortable to be able to join whenever they want.

*“It is of course without obligation and that is nice. It does not impose many obligations. You can easily stay away, if you do not have time or do not feel like it. It is very easy approachable.” M-56*

#### 5.2.4 Sport as way to connect with people

Most of the participants considered social contact as a valuable aspect of the sport program. They mentioned the sport program creates an opportunity to get in touch easily with people, since they all sport in groups.

*“I would normally not know what to say to people, or how to approach them. Sports is an easy way to make contact.” F-27*

Often, among the participants, people have little number of friends and/or other social contacts. With exception of one participant, all participants indicated that it is good for them to have more social contact.

*“Social contact is good for me. I had no social contacts at all before I came here. Maybe one or two friends. Also, here you get to know more people. Also, during exercise, you will also be asked to join in a sport. It is really a social event. I think that's nice.” M-32*

Participants mentioned that they like to feel part of a group. The participants feel connected again. Six participants mentioned that exercising in a group felt comfortable, they felt respected by the others.

*“I feel comfortable during sports, because the relationship between the other people who are playing football is very good. Like I said, like friends. So, I feel free to say or do whatever I need, whatever I feel. Yes, I'm comfortable.” M-27*

Some participants felt more comfortable since the people in the group all have the same background. This composition of the group was not considered as extra added value by all participants. However, a couple of participants did bring the background of people forward as promoting factor to connect to people. For example, one participant mentioned that being in the same point in life, in this example recovering from drug addiction, creates a special bond:

*“All of the participants are at the same point in their lives. They have to have a little start up and start doing more social activities. This creates a nice bond with the rest of the boys, yes.” M-40*

One of the participants, a refugee, said that the sport program created confidence to trust other people again. He responded on the question; “What did the sport program bring you?”:

*“Trust in other people. Yes, it is interaction and teamwork in sports, but still, you do things together. With a lot of people.” M-34*

### 5.2.5 Seeing own personal growth

One added value of participating in sport that was frequently mentioned, is the personal growth of the participants. Participants mentioned to have gained confidence because of the sport program and to be more confident about themselves. It makes them feel good when they notice an improvement in things they do. For example, a forty-year-old male participant noticed that he was able to do things within the sport, which he thought he was not able to do before. This made the participant more conscious of the improvements he made, which he felt really good about.

*“You shift your boundaries a little bit in a physical way. Things of which you initially thought: I am not going to be able to do that. Nevertheless, you are able to do these things. You are pushed to shift your boundaries.” M-40*

Participants also indicated to feel more resilient because of the sport program. Especially the female participants felt more resilient as result of participating the sport program. The female participants mentioned they felt really vulnerable before they started to participate the sport program. They learned through sport to indicate their boundaries. Almost all female participants felt more able to stand up for themselves. For example, the following female participant felt more resilient due to kickboxing:

*“And I participate kickboxing to process my trauma. And resilience, that I increase my resilience. That's why I do kickboxing.” F-28*

In addition, some participants mentioned to get more perseverance by participating in sports. For example, participants mentioned things like: “I get perseverance from it”. During the interviews, it turned out that the participants felt good by experiencing growth. The participants felt good by seeing they are getting better or by knowing they try to get better by doing something which is good for them. Seeing personal growth provide them with confidence. For example, one participant got confidence by seeing she became able to stand up for herself:

*“And at every lesson, I try more and more. Next time I will kick harder or kick the emotions away from me. For me it is the form of processing, like; see, I can do it. To stand up for myself, so that I become better in terms of knowing my limits. If something is unacceptable for me, I can now indicate that very easily, thanks to the kickboxing lessons.” F-28*

## 6 Discussion

In this chapter the main findings are presented. Also this discussion elaborates on the link between the findings and the theoretical framework. The strengths and limitations of this study are discussed next, followed by recommendations and the conclusion.

### 6.1 Main findings

The aim of this study was to investigate how sport participation contributes to the personal development of vulnerable people. Based on this aim, two research questions were identified. (1) What are the background characteristics of the participants of Life Goals? (2) What do the participants experience as the added value of participating in the program of Life Goals?

*“What are the background characteristics of the participants of Life Goals?”*

According to the results of the characteristics from the questionnaire, most of the respondents of Life Goals are positioned on the third step of the participation ladder. Indicating that respondents participate in organized activities, like community services and programs. Life Goals is an example of such an organized program. Thus, this sport program attracts mainly people on that step of the participation ladder, which explains the high score of the participants on the third step of the ladder. However, the results of the personal development domains (health, emotional stability, confidence, positivity, respect, communication, perseverance, social skills and working together) did show remarkable high outcomes. The participants scored relatively high on all domains at the beginning of the program, compared to other samples in literature.

*“What do the participants experience as the added value of participating in the program of Life Goals?”*

The interviewed participants were in general very positive about the sport program. The participants mentioned various experienced benefits of sport participation to emphasize why they believed sport was good for them. They experienced the following benefits as added values of the sport program: feeling of taking care of own health, sport as a distraction, sport as fun activity, sport as way to connect to people and seeing own personal growth. Within all five added values there was a positive personal improvement noticeable. By taking care of their own health, the participants noticed improved endurance. Within the value ‘sport as distraction’, the participants noticed to be able to deal with tension. Next, participants noticed by doing something fun that they gained more perseverance. Participants mentioned their improvement to connect to people. Last, the participants gained confidence to see their personal growth and by noticing they gained more resilience.

Thus, taking together the results of the two questions, the participants scored high at baseline at nine personal development domains. Furthermore, the participants experienced five added values of the sport program in which they noticed personal development. An overview of the main results of the questions is shown in Figure 3.

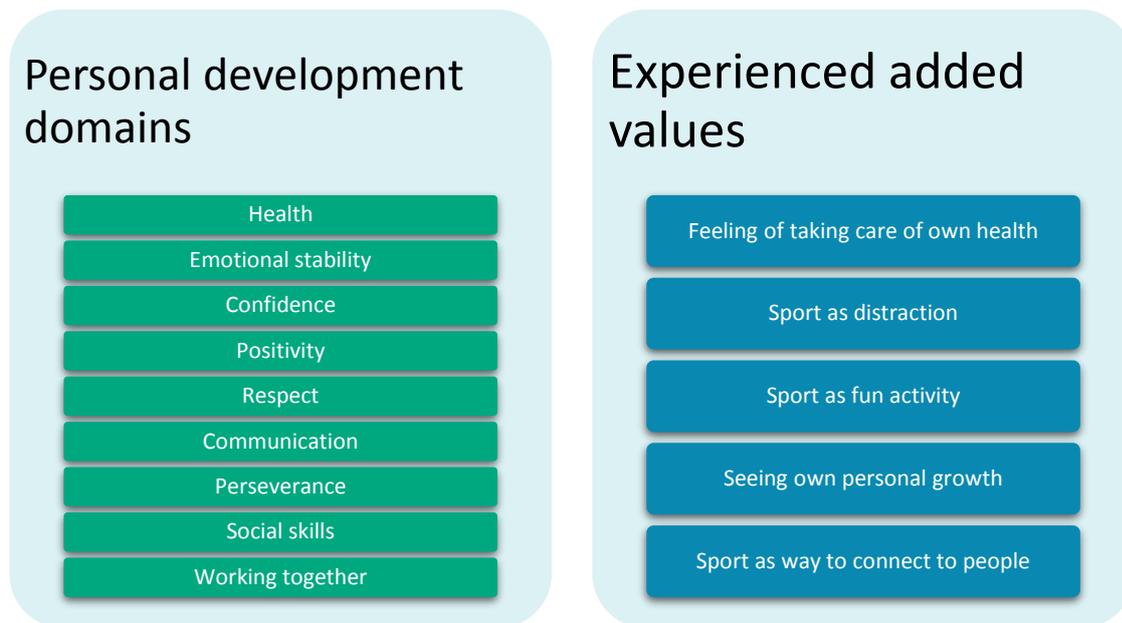


Figure 3 Overview personal development domains and experienced added values

## 6.2 Link to literature and theory

The high outcomes on all personal development domains of the participant at baseline is in contrast with the expectation that vulnerable people have more problems in development and personal incapacities than non-vulnerable people (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007). Therefore, a low personal development is expected among vulnerable people. However, participants of Life Goals have a relatively high personal development at baseline. Possible explanations are found that might explain the high outcomes of the participants at baseline.

First possible explanation is the influence of priming among the participants. Priming means that the participant can give an increased weight to something, when receiving stimulus of the corresponding concept in memory (Wauters & Brengman, 2013). In that way, priming affects the opinion the participants expressed when filling in the questionnaire. Priming can be caused by the expectations of the participants about the sport program. The sport program is often recommended to the participants, this could be done by using arguments about why the sport program is good for them and by telling them that the program will bring a lot of benefits. In addition, all participants indicated in the interviews to be very happy that the sport program exists. They might have filled in the questionnaire very

positive, in order to show their positive opinion about the sport program. Questionnaire outcomes are not reliable when priming has occurred. Second explanation is that the participants might have given socially desirable answers. Since the coach was helping the participants to fill in the questionnaire, this might have increased the provided socially desirable answers by the participants. Last explanation with possible explanation why the participants scored high might be that the sport program does not reach the right people. Literature states that vulnerable people have lower personal development than non-vulnerable people (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007). Nevertheless, no evidence is found in this thesis that vulnerable people score lower at personal development than non-vulnerable people. For this reason, we can question if the sport program of Life Goals does reach the group of vulnerable people they want to reach. Are the participants of Life Goals already one step in the right direction by participating in the program which make them less vulnerable? As seen in the results of background characteristics of the participants, most of the respondents of Life Goals are positioned on the third step of the participation ladder. Start participating at organizes activities is a higher step on the participation ladder and maybe acquires more personal development.

These explanations explain that the outcomes might be a little too high than they really are. This might explain the difference with the expected lower personal development of vulnerable people based on literature. Consequence of the high outcomes at baseline is that measuring the personal development of vulnerable people over longer period can be difficult. More personal development among the participants might be expected over time based on literature (Coalter, 2007). However, these high baseline scores might bump into a ceiling and cannot get any higher. This is called the ceiling effect, a clustering of scores at the high end of the measurement scale, allowing little or no possibility of increases (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). Therefore, a questionnaire might not be a reliable method to indicate the personal development among vulnerable people. According to the outcomes of the questionnaire, little personal development among vulnerable people is expected over time by participating in the sport program.

However, the interviews did indicate personal growth of the vulnerable people, which is similar to existing literature. Previous studies investigated the relation between sport participation and personal development only among youth. Nevertheless, involvement in sports among youth often has been associated with positive personal development (Papacharisis et al., 2005). In addition, a study of Super et al. (2018) shows positive relationships between sports participation and several youth developmental outcomes. Also, Haudenhuyse et al. (2012) found a positive effect of sport interventions on vulnerable youth in Belgium. They stated that sport alleviates distorted social relations of youth. This thesis

shows positive relation between sport participation and the experiences on the personal development of adult participants. The participants experienced personal improvements in the added values. Besides, the experienced personal development, the participants emphasized they liked to participate in sports. This is also similar to literature, MacDonald, Côté, Eys, and Deakin (2011) found that positive experiences in sports are most strongly predicted by for example connection with peers and self-experienced competency. Thus, creating an opportunity to connect with other people on the field, might cause positive experiences of sport. Also, Adachi and Willoughby (2014) found a two-way relation between enjoyment of sport and personal development. Greater enjoyment of sports predicted higher personal development over time, and higher personal development predicted greater enjoyment of sports over time. Thus, noticing improvements in personal development makes sport participation more fun which can explain why the participants enjoyed the sport program and keep participating. Participating in sports has the potential to increase the personal growth among vulnerable people.

The personal development of the participants can be linked to the domains of capital of the Human Capital Model of Physical Activity (Bailey et al., 2012). The Human Capital Model is adopted since this is in line with the idea that sport has many benefits which leads to personal development. The Human Capital Model categorized individual and social returns of sport participation into six different domains of capital. This model improved understanding in which domains sport can have benefits for the participants of Life Goals. Also, the use of the Human Capital Model provided a structure to divide the benefits of sport participation. The findings of this study can be linked to four domains of the Human Capital Model, see Figure 4.

Physical capital is linked to the personal development domain of 'health' and the added value 'feeling of taking care of own health'. It considers the physical benefits of sport participation. Emotional capital is reflected in the domains: emotional stability, confidence and positivity. Also, the added values: sport as distraction, sport as fun activity and seeing own personal growth are covered in this domain of capital. This domain considers the psychological benefits and mental benefits of sport participation. Third, individual capital considers the elements of a person's character that build up by sport participation. This domain of capital is reflected in the domains: respect, communication and perseverance. Also, the added value 'seeing own personal growth' is covered by the individual capital. Last, the social capital covers outcomes of strengthened networks between people as result of sport participation. This domain is linked to: social skills, working together and the added value 'sport as way to connect to people'.

The following two domains of the Human Capital Model cannot be linked with the results of the participants of Life Goals: the financial capital and the intellectual capital. These

two domains might be considered as the next goal in the sport program after contributing to the other domains of capital. The financial and intellectual domain also indicate the ultimate goal of the foundation, that participants can follow an education or can work again. There are couple of organizational models which incorporates arguments that other kind of capitals, for example social capital, facilitates the development of intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). According to the Human Capital model, financial capital is influenced by the other five capital domains. The Human Capital Model highlights the ways in which sport participation can act as an asset that builds up career and financial success (Bailey et al., 2013). Thus, the participants might first experience growth in the physical, emotional, individual and social capitals, before this growth influences their intellectual and financial capital. After measuring effect of sport participation on personal development over a longer period, intellectual and financial capital might become more relevant. Thus, the intellectual and financial capital of the Human Capital Model might be involved later as a result of personal development of the participants within the other four domains of capital.

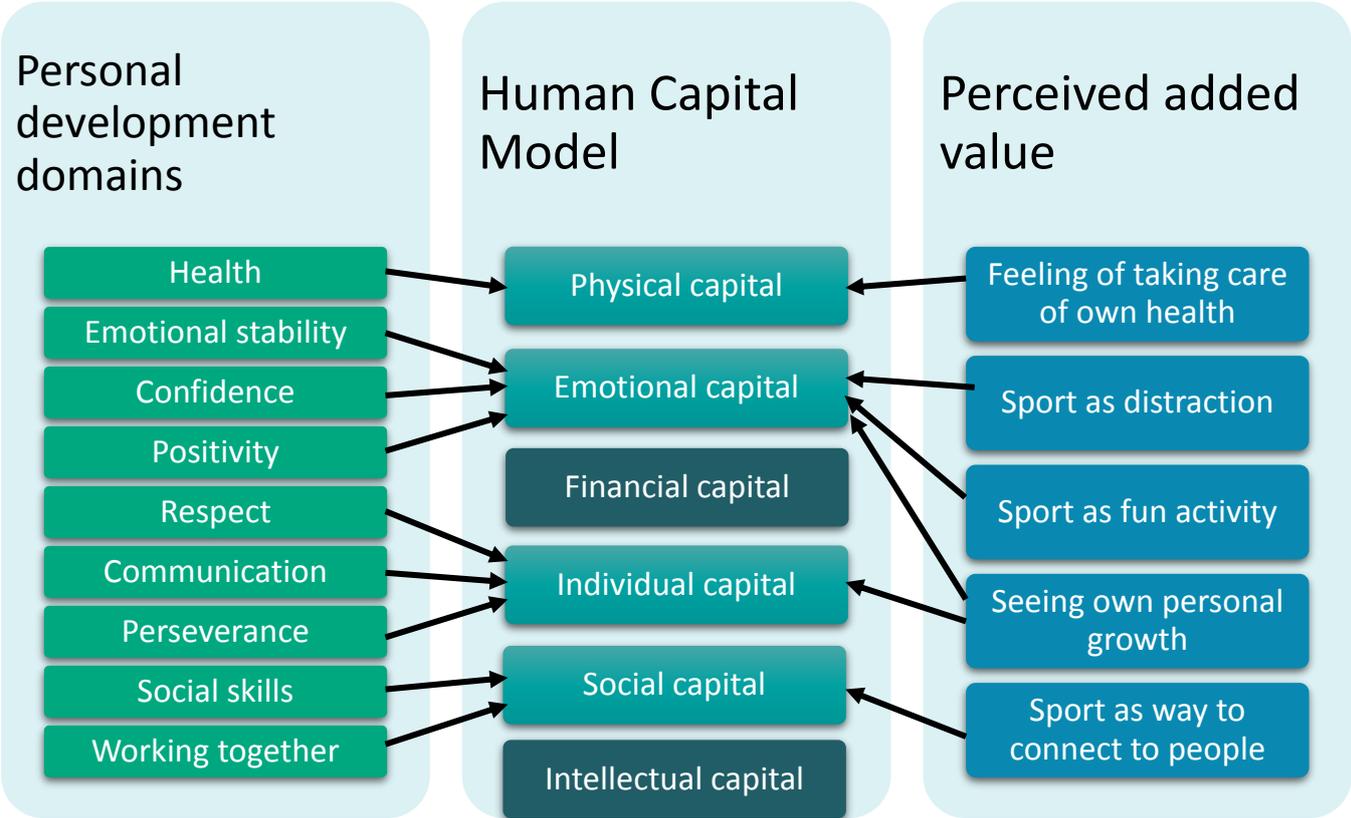


Figure 4 Linkage of the findings with the six domains of capital of the Human Capital Model

## 6.3 Strengths and limitations

### *Strengths*

The mixed-method design of this study enables to provide insight in the investigation what sport participation contributes to the personal development of the participants. Mixing multiple methods can strengthen a study (Greene & Caracelli, 1997).

This study has a couple of strengths within the quantitative research methods. In the questionnaire scales of different standardized existing questionnaires were used. Next, the questionnaire was executed among hundred vulnerable participants. Vulnerable people are hard to reach and getting them to fill in a questionnaire is difficult (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Thus, it is a strength of this study that it includes hundred vulnerable participants.

In addition, within the qualitative research methods a few strengths can be identified as well. One of the strengths of this study was a sample of 28 vulnerable people were willing to be interviewed. The face-to-face and semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share their perspectives and opinions about the sport program. This facilitated collection of their opinions and most important information, which might not have been retrieved in a structured interview. The interview guide helped to make sure important topics were covered.

### *Limitations*

Some limitations considering the quantitative part of this study can be noticed. In the questionnaire there were no questions about gender and age included. This makes it difficult to make assumptions on the results of the participants. The questionnaire exists of standardized scales of existing questionnaires. However, some questions were removed to fit the population. This adaptation and shortening of the original questionnaire, could increase the chance of inconsistent results. Moreover, since different standardised scales were used in this study, the comprehensibility of the questions can differ. Items could be understood different by the participants than intended. This may also increase the inconsistency among the results. Another limitation might be the social desirability bias (Boeije, 2010). The participants might have responded in a socially desirable way. Also, the comparison of the outcomes with literature forms a limitation. The Likert-scale differs among the domains, which makes it very difficult to compare the different outcomes. Therefore, the conclusions based on the comparison can be seen as a rough assumption.

In the qualitative part also some limitations can be noticed. Only participants of five different sport programs were interviewed and no random sampling was used. This makes the data of the interviews difficult to generalize to the whole population (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

Participation of the interviewees was voluntary and is thus subject to self-selection bias. Also, this study was executed by one researcher, which may have created a researcher bias (Boeije, 2010). Another limitation is that the interviewees might forgot details or remembered only the things they find most important. Participants might have forgotten some experiences and only emphasized a couple experiences of sport participation. This is called the recall bias and may have influenced the provided answers. In addition, it is possible that participants would have given different answers at another moment. Their mood can influence their answers. For example, when participants have injuries, they may focus on the negative part of sport participation. All these factors may have influenced the provided answers of the participants. Drawing conclusions need to be done carefully considering these limitations.

## 6.4 Recommendations

### *Future research*

The current study is important, because the results of this study may be used to provide Life Goals more insights into the personal development of the participants by sport participation. However, a more extensive research should be helpful to gain more scientific outcomes about the personal development vulnerable people. The quantitative research method should be adjusted, so it becomes a more valid tool to provide insights into how a sport program can be used to increase personal development of vulnerable people. Research with another tool than a questionnaire might be more reliable to measure personal development of the participants. For example, focus groups can be used to monitor the personal development (over time).

In addition, taking a control group of non-vulnerable people next to the sample with vulnerable people might be interesting to compare results. Future research can consider taking two samples, one sample of non-vulnerable people who are starting to participate in sport and the second sample with vulnerable people who start sport participation. Comparing the results of personal development among the two samples might be interesting to show the difference in scores of vulnerable people. This can be useful to find evidence that vulnerable people score different at personal development than non-vulnerable people. Finding this difference can be used to investigate whether the sport program reach the right groups of vulnerable people and to show whether vulnerable people need more help of municipality services and programs.

## *Life Goals*

First of all, the participants were very happy about the sport program and conscious about the benefits of sport participation. They indicated that they like to sport in a group. I would recommend keeping offering sport programs with groups of people. Maybe you can use this thesis and more (future) scientific studies to show stakeholders the experienced benefits of sport participation for vulnerable people. This might help to continue growing and implementing Life Goals programs with more local sports services and municipalities.

You can consider taking interviews or focus group to provide insights into the personal development of the participants. During focus groups you can ask participants for their personal development and for examples about how they notice this. Taking the same focus group on multiple moments per year, it is possible to show the participants' personal development over time. For example, you can take focus groups every quarter of a year. Nevertheless, if you want to keep measuring the personal development with a questionnaire it is better to use the same likert-scale as the standardised questionnaire. This will make comparison with outcomes in literature easier. In addition, you can let the participants fill in the questionnaire by themselves without help of the coach. This may reduce the amount of socially desirable answers.

Next, I would recommend thinking about whether the people you are attracting is the target group you want to attract to your sport program. Maybe there is a group of vulnerable people that you do not reach yet? A dialogue with involved parties which also deal with vulnerable people would help to think about different groups of vulnerable people which might be harder to reach. Also, interviewing vulnerable people which are not participating in the sport program or who are stopped participating might be interesting. Asking about why they do not participate in the sport program can provide insights about potential barriers to start participating. These insights can be used to target more groups of vulnerable people with the sport program.

## 7 Conclusion

Despite the fact that research has been done on sport developmental outcomes among youth, this research focussed on the vulnerable adult people who participated in the sport program of Life Goals. Based on the interviews, the sport program of Life Goals has the potential to be successful in increasing personal development of vulnerable people. The participants mentioned several added values of the sport program, these added values seemed to facilitate personal development. The Human Capital Model provided insights into which domains of capital were involved in the personal development of the participants. However, it is questionable if the sport program is targeting the right groups of vulnerable people, since the participants scored remarkably high at baseline on personal development. More research about the personal development of vulnerable people is needed to investigate the need of the program and whether it is targeting the right group. Nevertheless, this study found that the participants experienced a positive contribution of the sport program on their personal development.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Interview topic list

Table 5 Topic list

	Interview topics	Questions/topics	Follow up questions
<b>Part 1.</b>	Introduction and explanation	- Informed consent	- Do you have any questions before we start the interview?
	General questions participant	- Male/female - Age - City of participated program	
<b>Part 2.</b>	Participating Life Goals	- When did you start participating at Life Goals? - How did you come to join Life Goals? - How did you feel about joining Life Goals? - Which trainings/sports are you joining?	
	Experiences sport program	- Do you remember the first time you participated a training? How was that? - Which activities do you like? - Can you give an example of a moment at the sport program that meant something for you? - Did you meet new people at the sport program? - How do you feel about the coach of the sport program?	- Why do you like this? - How did you feel at that moment?
	Sport experiences	- Can you describe what a regular training looks like? - Can you describe what happens when you play a match against other teams? - How often do you sport? - What do you think about sport? - What do you think is most challenging of the sport program?	- How do you feel during sporting? - How do you feel after sporting? - Why do you like this? - How do you feel about this?
	Contribution program to participant's life	- What did the sport program bring to you?	
<b>Ending interview</b>	Thanking participant	- Do you have anything to add? - Do you have any questions? - How did you experience this interview?	

## Appendix II: Informed consent

[English]

### Consent form

Hello,

Thanks for your time. My name is Aranka Windmeijer and I am currently working on a research for Life Goals. The experiences of participants at Life Goals are part of this research. That is why we approached you. We are interested in your experiences about participation at Life Goals, so that Life Goals can improve their programs.

The interview will last about 15 – 30 minutes, but can be stopped by you at any time, without you having to inform us the reason for stopping the interview. The interview is recorded so that it can be listened back for further elaboration of the interview. The recordings will only be accessible to the researchers of the project and will be destroyed after a maximum of 10 years. The interview will be about your experiences of participating at Life Goals. Your answers will be treated confidentially and your name will not be mentioned in the publications that result from this interview. If you have objection afterwards, you may always withdraw from the research and the recordings will be immediately removed.

Would you like to participate in this interview? And do you give permission for recording this interview?

*Name:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

[Dutch]

## Toestemmingsformulier

Hallo,

Bedankt voor uw tijd. Mijn naam is Aranka Windmeijer en ik ben momenteel bezig met een onderzoek naar Life Goals. De ervaringen van deelnemers aan de programma van Life Goals is onderdeel van dit onderzoek. Daarom bent u benaderd. Wij zijn geïnteresseerd in uw ervaringen over deelname bij Life Goals, zodat Life Goals de programma's kan verbeteren.

Het interview zal ongeveer 15-30 minuten duren, maar kan door u op elk gewenst moment gestopt worden zonder dat u ons de reden voor het stoppen van het interview hoeft te melden. Het interview wordt opgenomen zodat het terug kan worden geluisterd bij de verdere uitwerking van het interview. De opnames zullen alleen toegankelijk zijn voor de onderzoekers van het project en vernietigd worden na maximaal 10 jaar. Het interview zal gaan over uw ervaringen van deelname bij Life Goals. Uw antwoorden zullen vertrouwelijk behandeld worden en uw naam zal niet genoemd worden in de publicaties die voortkomen uit dit interview. Mocht u na afloop bezwaar hebben dan mag u zich later altijd nog terug trekken uit het onderzoek. De opnames zullen dan onmiddellijk verwijderd worden.

Wilt u meedoen aan dit interview? En geeft uw toestemming voor opname van dit interview?

*Naam:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Handtekening:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Datum:* \_\_\_\_\_