WHY SPARK

Sport organisations around the world are investing in policies and programmes to prevent child sexual abuse, yet little is known about which of them truly work. Few have been rigorously evaluated, as research in sport raises ethical, legal and practical challenges. **SPARK** (Safeguarding and Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse through Applied Research and Knowledge Mobilisation in Sport) **is a three-year international initiative that funds and carries out research to close this gap in competitive sport.** It supports projects that map existing child sexual abuse prevention programmes and evaluate them at an early stage, and shares what it learns with sport organisations, policymakers and funders.


HOST INSTITUTION

Team Safeguarding Sport & Society
Thomas More University of Applied Sciences

PROJECT LEADS

Dr Tine Vertommen
Dr Cleo Schyvinck


PROJECT PERIOD

September 2026 to August 2029

## Four aims

**01 Fund projects that test prevention programmes**

**What changes:** better evidence on what helps prevent abuse.

**02 Learn what to test, how, and under which conditions**

**What changes:** programmes are tested more consistently.

**03 Develop a fair, open way of funding this research**

**What changes:** funders can build on an approach that has been tried in practice.

**04 Build research skills and connections**

**What changes:** researchers gain new skills and contacts.

## How SPARK works

- **Research through SPARK**
  Projects funded by SPARK that test how well existing prevention programmes work.
- **Research within SPARK**
  Our own research on trauma-informed research practices and on how ready organisations are to be studied.
- **Advice and support**
  Guidance on research ethics and methods, and links to experts.
- **Learning and networks**
  Events that build research skills and bring people together.
- **Sharing what we learn**
  Short reports and guidance for policy and practice.




## Advisory Board

SPARK's international Advisory Board brings together people from inside and outside sport, from research and practice, with lived experience as well as professional expertise. Their knowledge covers testing and evaluating programmes, preventing child sexual abuse in sport, research ethics, how sport is governed, children's rights and research funding. The Board guides SPARK's scientific and ethical choices. It helps decide what each call for research proposals should focus on and how projects are chosen, reviews study plans and advises when challenges arise. Members join by invitation, and the Board may grow as SPARK moves through its stages.

## Timeline

YEAR 1

**Scanning study**

A funded project that maps which prevention programmes exist and how ready they are to be tested

YEARS 2 AND 3

**Evaluation studies**

Funded projects that test how well selected programmes work, chosen using the same clear criteria. SPARK then brings the findings together, shares them and sets out how this research can be funded in future. Planned outputs: evidence reports, project findings, practical guides, learning events

**Throughout:** SPARK's own research, guidance from the Advisory Board, and regular review of what is working and what we are learning


SPARK is hosted by Thomas More University of Applied Sciences and funded by Oak Foundation.



**thomasmore.be/en/spark** **spark@thomasmore.be**