

Making a Difference Hall of Fame

Avon and Wiltshire 
Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust

Bristol Active Life

Engaging in exercise is good for physical and mental health and supports recovery



The Challenge

Long-term mental illness can impact negatively upon many aspects of an individual's life.

People with severe and enduring mental illness (SEMI) have increased risk of lifestyle diseases and reduced life expectancy compared with the general population (Closing the Gap report, 2006). Contributory factors to poor physical health include sedentary lifestyle and weight gain associated with prescribed medication.

Physical activity facilitates healthy lifestyles resulting in improved physical and mental health, wellbeing and improved quality of life. However, many barriers prevent people with SEMI from engaging in physical activity.

The Bristol Active Life Project was initiated to overcome these barriers.

What we do

The Bristol Active Life Project (BALP) promotes recovery by engaging individuals with SEMI in a range of community-based physical activities. Tailored support to quit smoking and improve diet is also provided.

BALP aims to:

- Promote physical and mental health and well-being
- Improve self esteem
- Promote social inclusion
- Develop sports and fitness related skills

BALP provides a wide range of activities in partnership with local leisure facilities, professional coaches and support by mental health staff. Physical activities are offered on a 1:1 basis, in small groups and in organised group settings.

Activities are provided for current and previous users of AWP

Key learning

- Expertise of Physiotherapists and Active Life Practitioners in developing the service
- Evidence-based service
- Specialist sports qualifications needed to run the service
- Essential to liaise with colleagues, partner organisations and service users to identify service required
- Executive sponsorship is important
- Keep goals small and achievable
- Measure outcomes
- Build on success, identify what is working and what isn't
- Good communication is crucial
- Develop research where evidence is lacking

enable and empower people to reach their potential and live fulfilling lives

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secondary care services who are unable to access mainstream activities on their own.

BALP supports individuals to gain sports coaching qualifications and creates both volunteering and paid employment opportunities. Acquiring new skills helps to build confidence as well as restore and sustain motivation.

Crucial to the success of BALP is partnership working between health professionals, professional sports coaches, Bristol City Council, community leisure service providers and service users to provide an effective high quality service with appropriate support.

BALP has been externally funded by the Football Foundation. Preferential rates for access to leisure facilities agreed by Bristol City Council.

Who was involved

AWP Physiotherapy and Exercise Service
Bristol City Council
Football Foundation

What difference does it make

BALP enables AWP to attend to physical health as well as mental health, promotes recovery and encourages social inclusion of vulnerable individuals.

Since 2009, BALP has

- Received >600 referrals
- >8000 attendances at 18 weekly physical activity sessions in community leisure facilities
- 3 Healthy Eating Workshops

- Supported 10 service users to gain a sports qualification
- Created 17 volunteering opportunities and employed 3 service users
- Mental health awareness workshops helped 57 sports staff, coaches and volunteers gain a better understanding and challenge stigma
- Recognised as good practice in 'Sport and Physical activity for Mental Health', Carless and Douglas, 2010

Mental Health Services aim to provide appropriate care to meet the physical, psychological and social needs of people with SEMI in order to improve quality of life and enable people to cope with their difficulties.

Research studies demonstrate that exercise interventions are cost effective and associated with significant savings to the NHS in the management of long term conditions, for example, the

prevention and management of type 2 diabetes for high risk groups.

Following the success of BALP the Active Life Programme is being adopted throughout AWP to ensure access for all service users.

New partnerships are being developed to replicate the successful BALP model and a research project is planned.

Contact

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