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NHS Salford

Re-energise Evaluation Interim Report

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Re-energise evaluation

Salford NHS commissioned Hall Aitken to evaluate three projects as part of its ongoing Tobacco Control Strategy. The three projects- Time Banking; Re energise; and Smoke Free Homes – have all been evaluated before and this study seeks to build upon this previous research and, through close working with project beneficiaries, explore:

- the impact of the services among target populations;
- how well the services have delivered their stated outputs and outcomes;
- the factors that have facilitated/hindered the delivery of the services;
- the potential longer-term value/limitations of the services to influence behaviour change;
- the ability (or not) of the services to deliver other well-being outcomes such as social cohesion;
- the identification of these additional outcomes; and
- The 'fit' of these approaches within a wider set of behaviour change programmes delivered at community level.

This interim report of the Re-energise project highlights a number of emerging issues from our work to date and assesses progress of the project towards target.

Our approach

Our evaluation collated information based on several complementary approaches including:

- Desk-based review of programme data
- Telephone interviews; and
- Focus groups.

Desk-based review

We have looked at the programme monitoring data in the periodic monitoring report and other data provided by the client.

Telephone interviews and focus group

We held 11 telephone interviews, which focused on the experiences of a cross-section of participants in relation to their engagement, activities, motivation, health and wider impacts and barriers to participation. We examined how Re-energise:

- Enabled people to adopt a healthier lifestyle, including more physical activity, better diet, stopping smoking and safer use of alcohol;
- Created opportunities for people to develop stronger social networks;
- Reduced levels of depression, anxiety and stress; and
- Following on from all the above, to support people to address their smoking behaviour by signposting them to local services (Smoke-Free Spaces) and community services (stop smoking/cut down to quit)

The Re-energise focus group involved six people – three men and three women – who had taken part in the telephone interviews. Having already covered personal background with them, we were able to explore some other issues in more depth.

Re-energise

The purpose of the Re-energise project is to promote healthier lifestyles by delivering support to increase well-being through physical activity and healthy eating. The project seeks to assess this as an approach to support people to address their smoking behaviour and increase their knowledge on safe and sensible drinking.

Aims and objectives

The aim is to enable people to lead more active, fulfilling and happier lives. The objectives are:

- to enable people to adopt a healthier lifestyle, including more physical activity, better diet, stopping smoking and safer use of alcohol;
- to create opportunities for people to develop stronger social networks;
- to reduce levels of depression, anxiety and stress; and
- following on from all the above, to support people to address their smoking behaviour by signposting them to local projects (smoke free spaces) and community services (stop smoking / cut down to quit)

Outcomes

The project has a range of health related and other outcomes, including improving prevention.

Organisational

1. Evidence of involvement in strategic planning and implementation via local public health / health and well-being partnerships.
2. Evidence of partnership working to deliver awareness raising and knowledge/skills and referral to relevant services.
3. Development of services delivering evidence based best practice.

Social

1. Number of people with improved knowledge relating to health and well-being issues, e.g. tobacco / alcohol / weight.
2. More people making positive 'life style' choices / healthier behaviour.
3. More priority groups involved in weight management/physical activity.
4. Increase in proportion of priority groups reporting positive well-being.

Smoking cessation

1. Increase in the delivery of brief advice and interventions to support people wanting to cut down to quit or to stop smoking.
2. Increase in partnership working to deliver awareness and referral to relevant services.
3. Increase in number of priority groups referred to full range of services.

Minimising harm from alcohol

1. More people understanding safe and sensible drinking message.
2. More people who drink within recommended daily limits.
3. Increase in number of people in priority groups in receipt of brief intervention and advice.
4. Evidence of increased range of targeted information in line with local research within the project and local partnerships.
5. Fewer reported incidents of drink related admissions to Accident and Emergency and/or crime.

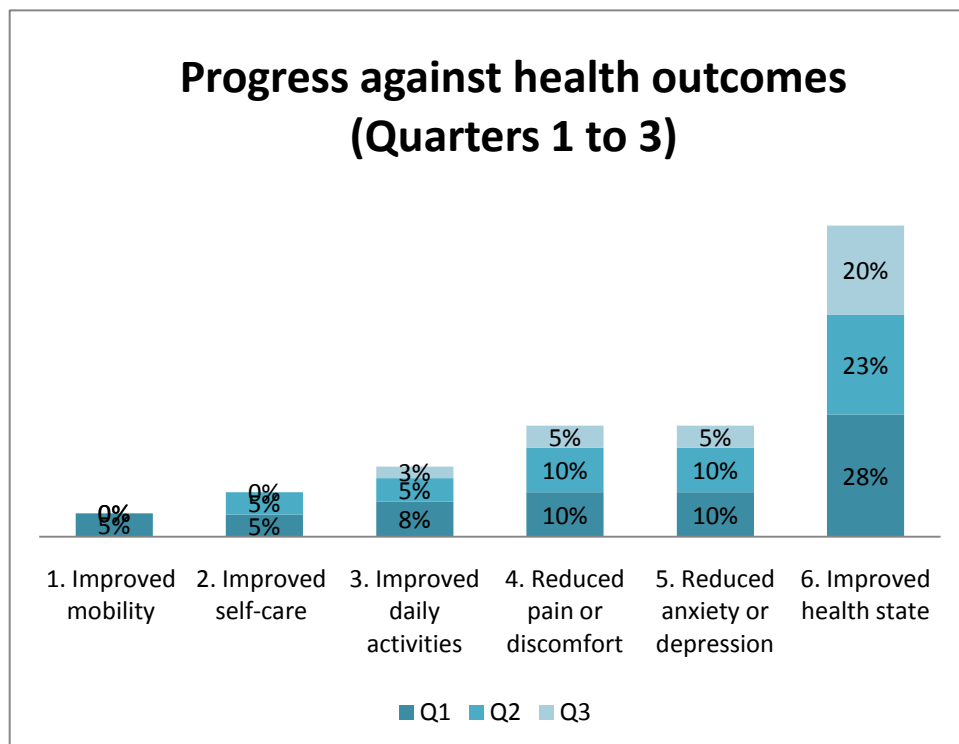
Project progress

This section looks at the progress made in achieving the outcomes identified for the Re-energise project. It is based on the periodic reporting data and on telephone interviews carried out with beneficiaries.

Health outcomes

The EQ5-D questionnaire is used to monitor health needs across the population. The project uses this questionnaire to monitor the health changes in participants at their final review. During the first three quarters, 37 participants were surveyed using this tool. As Figure 1 shows, there was some progress towards the annual targets made during the first two quarters, though fewer improvements were identified in the third quarter. The project has recorded most impact on improving the overall state of people's health, with almost three-quarters of the target reached. Overall the lowest number of reported improvements against those targeted were for improved mobility (5% of target met) and improved self-care (8%).

Figure 1 Progress towards annual outcome targets (Quarters 1 and 2)

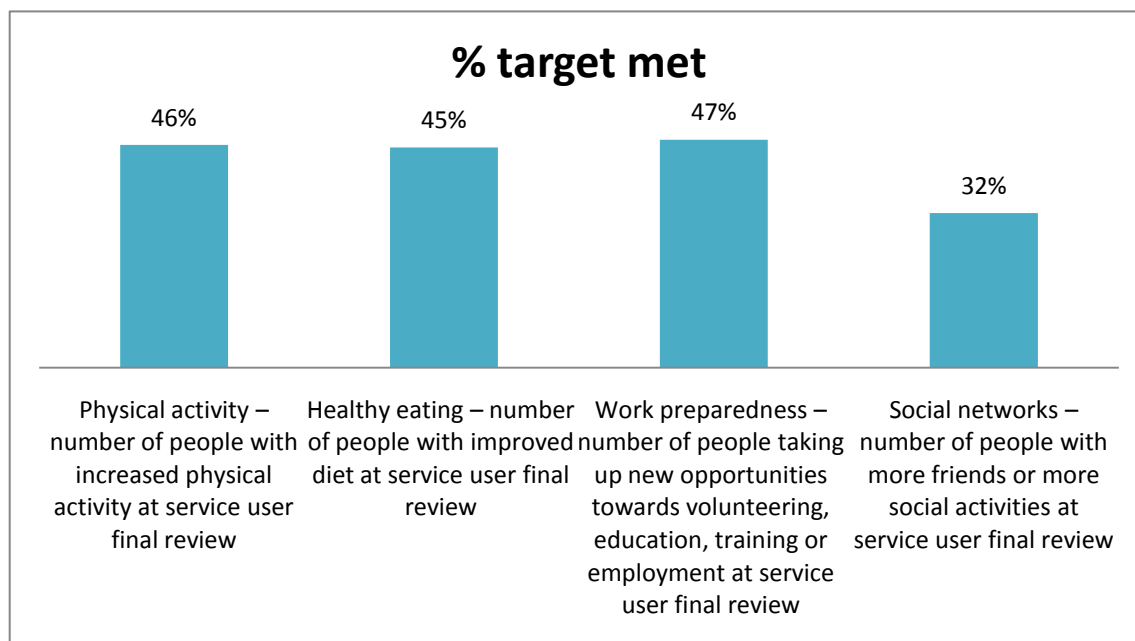


Source: Project Periodic Report

Key Performance Indicators

Data for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 was provided by Unlimited Potential project staff. As Figure 2 shows, just under half of the targeted improvements to physical activity levels and diet were identified over the first three quarters. A similar figure was achieved around work readiness and volunteering (47%). Only around a third of the targeted number of people have identified more friends or social activities (32%). However missing data has been an issue and has contributed to the shortfall identified against these KPIs.

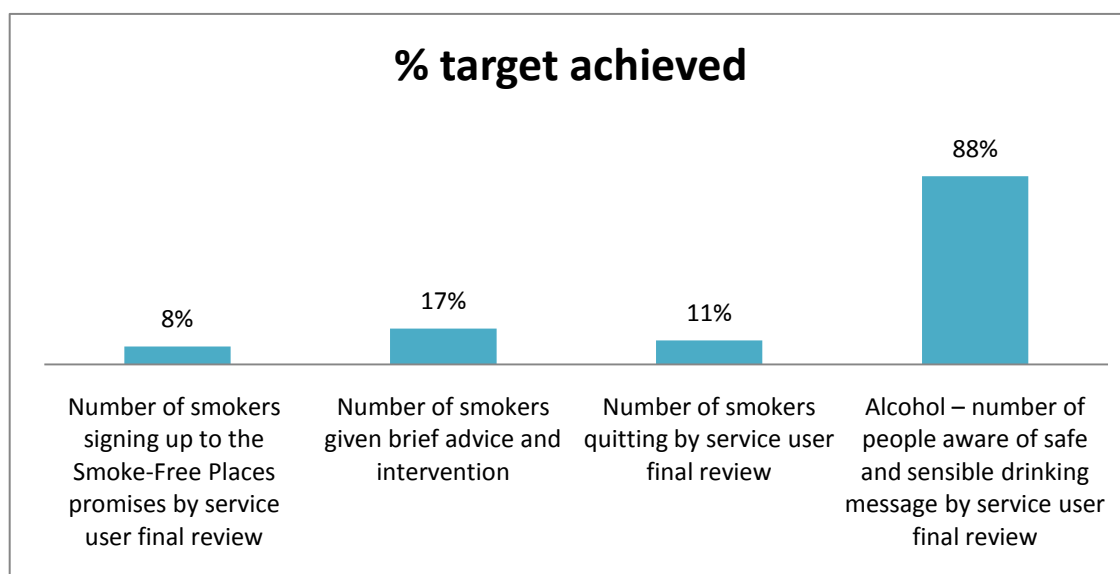
Figure 2 Physical activity, diet and social network KPIs



Source: Project data from Unlimited Potential

As Figure 3 shows there has been a variable range of progress against the smoking and alcohol KPIs. Only one of the participants had been identified as having given up smoking by the time of their final review. The quarterly target was three each quarter. And only two participants had signed up for the smoke-free places against a target of eight per quarter, meaning only 8% of the target had been met. The number of smokers given brief advice was slightly higher at four, but this still represents only 17% of the KPI target. The project has had a greater degree of success in achieving the alcohol-related KPI of making participants aware of the safe drinking limits. Some 21 out of the 24 targeted participants knew about the safe level of alcohol intake at their final review.

Figure 3 Progress against smoking and alcohol KPIs Source: Unlimited Potential



Impacts

The Re-energise project aims to achieve health impacts but also wellbeing impacts. The telephone interviews showed clearly that these were both being achieved. From a sample based on a cross-section of ages and genders, there was a consistent message of high impacts.

Health impacts

The project is having a positive impact on the health of participants surveyed. Here we examine the key health impacts reported to us by participants.

Healthier lifestyle overall

Everyone interviewed said coming to the project had made their lifestyle healthier – six by a lot and five a fair amount. Those who perceived greater changes talked about a deeper sense of being healthy, as well as better diets and physical activity levels.

“I was underweight, and now I have put on weight so I’m feeling better in myself.” – Young man in sheltered accommodation

“I laugh more, feel free, and enjoy life.” – Man who used to suffer from depression and flashbacks

“I do everything differently. Re-energise made me trust people. Eventually, I even went to the gym on my own.” – Woman with anxiety who had needed accompanying to activities

Our respondents report having more energy; they walk more, rarely sit around the house, and generally see themselves differently.

Those who said their overall lifestyle had improved a fair amount had remaining barriers or a different focus. They had almost all dealt with depression or anxiety and were moving a bit more slowly along their journey.

Physical activity

As might be hoped from a project that has physical activity as a core part of its identity and aims, this was the area witnessing the most dramatic improvements.

Eight of the eleven interviewees said their physical activity levels had increased “a lot”. Some of these were going to the gym or swimming regularly, but walking was the most common activity, which is more financially sustainable.

Two said that their physical activity had increased “a bit”. They walk more, one while recovering from surgery on her leg, and the other while dealing with depression. Both felt more energetic as a result of their walks.

The only respondent who said that his physical activity level had stayed the same was suffering from arthritis in his knees and had tried exercises that still made his knees hurt. However, he was planning to start swimming soon as a form of exercise that would put less pressure on his knees.

Healthy diet

While healthy eating was less of a focus of participants' time at the project, the advice, tips and cooking classes had a lasting impact on them. All but three said their diet had improved since coming to Re-energise (6 a lot, 3 a bit). The remaining three said they already had had healthy diets.

The changes appeared to centre around a consciousness of how to make healthy choices. People knew how to choose healthier food and mentioned choosing brown bread, reducing their fat intake, eat five servings a day of fruit and vegetables, and avoiding junk food.

In line with the holistic approach to healthy lifestyles, participants often said they were interested in healthier food since they were more physically active and more confident. They see wellbeing as a whole package.

"I went to some of the cooking classes and we made jerk chicken one time. I tried it at home and couldn't do it... but I'm now sticking to a healthy diet with chicken and tuna, and fruit and vegetables. I used to just eat pizzas... Since I've been more active with the gym and swimming, I've been hungrier and that helps me eat more healthy food." – Young man

Reduced alcohol intake

From our surveys, there was only one person who said she had reduced her alcohol intake as a result of Re-energise – however this was for a mix of positive reasons:

- 3 already had given up or never drank anyway
- 5 only drank in moderation or occasionally anyway
- 3 said they drank the same amount, which was fairly regularly but not a huge amount.

Interestingly, one of those who said in the telephone interview that he drank the same amount, went on to say at the focus group that he used to just sit in the house all day and typically had 24 cans of beer a day. Now that he's at the gym, pool and generally being active, he only has time for 6 cans a night. While this is over the recommended alcohol limit it is a significant reduction.

Another man, who had been an alcoholic but who had already given up drinking credited Re-energise with helping him stay off drink.

"I had stopped before I came and that's why I was depressed, but Re-energise has helped me stay off alcohol."

The one person who said in the telephone interview that she had significantly cut down on her alcohol intake had made an overall personal transformation – with more confidence, peace of mind, much more socially active and healthier.

"A lot is thanks to Re-energise. I'd just been going to a course on dealing with alcohol, but groups aren't so good for me. Instead I cut down a lot thanks to wanting to make the most of my gym pass. There was support and a kick start, so it was easier to stop drinking."

Smoking reduction

Not smoking was part of the interviewees' healthy lifestyle. Over half (6 of 11) either never smoked or had already quit when they came to Re-energise, and the rest had either quit since coming to Re-energise or were making plans to, a major achievement.

"I stopped smoking when I started exercising." – Man who is now very active

“I smoke less now because I’m active and only smoke 10 a day when I’m relaxing, none when I’m being active.” – Man who overcame depression and volunteers often, as well as going swimming and using the gym

“I’ve talked to Amanda about it and I’m going to stop smoking after I move house and pass my driving license. I’ve always wanted to stop. I wish I’d never started smoking.” – Young man who is working

“My husband has cut down on smoking cigarettes. I encouraged him because we’re doing so many healthy things. Now he’s gone from two packs to one, sometimes less.” – Woman who took up walking with her husband

The doctors in the Energise Centre provided a handy referral point and two people had been to them for smoking cessation assistance with gum or patches.

“I stopped smoking as part of feeling good about myself. Amanda encouraged me and I’m getting patches from the doctor at the healthy living centre.” – Woman who overcame drinking, anxiety and depression through Re-energise

Wellbeing impacts

The project set out to improve people’s wellbeing in a variety of ways. In the telephone interviews, we explored key aspects of wellbeing including;

- confidence;
- happiness;
- relaxation;
- optimism;
- socialising; and
- Volunteering.

The first few of these had consistently positive impacts, some dramatic. The impact on socialising and volunteering depended to some extent on other commitments.

Confidence

All but two of the interviewees said that their confidence had increased since coming to Re-energise. The other two were women who said they had always been confident. Another man, who was taking his journey more slowly, said his confidence had improved but “there’s always something to work on and improve.”

Of those who were more confident, two women related their confidence to their physical activity at Re-energise.

“Swimming has pushed up my confidence. Before, I used to go flat all the time.”

“The gym instructor built up my confidence. Before, I missed out the treadmill. Now I run on it. I’m even confident when men are in the gym because I’m doing something about it.”

One man who suffers from occasional blackouts had been afraid to go swimming or to the gym in case he had an attack. Now he knows the people at the gym and that they will keep an eye on him, so he feels safe and confident to take part.

Two people explained their new confidence to meeting new people:

"I'm definitely more confident. I'm meeting new people and I've met a load of my mates in the gym." – Young man who was in sheltered accommodation

"I'm more confident, especially going out and meeting new people." – Young woman

A woman who is off work with depression, commented on how she feels more confident when meeting former colleagues:

"When I first came out of work, people would say, 'You're not working?' and I'd have to justify myself. Now I just cheerfully say, 'No!' It's simply about circumstance and people don't think I'm lazy."

For two people the transformation in their confidence was life-changing.

"It's been a huge transformation in my confidence." – Man who has come for two years and now volunteers with several groups.

"I'm LOADS more confident. I used to be 15% confident. Now it's 85-90%."
– Woman who overcame addictions and depression through Re-energise

Happiness

For two women who came to Re-energise with depression, there was overlap between confidence and happiness.

"Confidence produces happiness." – Woman prone to depression

"I didn't know what confidence was before. Now I can say I'm happy."

Another woman, and a man who suffered from depression and low confidence, had a slower journey to happiness.

"I've always been happy about my family, but it's a slow process inside me."
– Woman trying taster activities

"I'm getting there." – Man who has started CCBT, and completed college courses but taken things slowly with physical activity because of arthritis.

Two referred to healthy activities as a stimulus for happiness:

"I'm happier when I've been for a walk – I've done something productive and fun with my nephew." – Generally confident woman who came on a walk with no leader

"I'm happier because I'm healthier." – Man who has transformed his fitness and overcome emphysema.

Two related their increased happiness to social connections.

"I laugh a lot now. I was depressed before and my boozing partners were not cheerful." – Recovered alcoholic who now is keen volunteer

"I'm definitely happier now. I meet new friends at the gym now because I see the same people every week." – Young mum

One woman who has taken part in various activities, and is walking more considered the degree to which Re-energise was responsible for her increased happiness.

"I'm a lot happier now. I just got married too, but I'm in a better frame of mind for the marriage, thanks to Re-energise."

Relaxation

Fewer people were as conscious of being more relaxed as they were of being happier and more confident. They may have been less clear about what counts as relaxed.

"I'm probably more relaxed. I'm more tired from all the exercise and I'm definitely more relaxed." – Young man

"I was looking for something to do before. Life was dull and I wanted a challenge." – Older man who volunteers a lot now

Three related increased relaxation to activities at Re-energise.

"Yes, I feel more relaxed, especially after swimming." – Woman addressing depression

"I felt more relaxed while going to CCBT. Not so much now. I need to start it up again." – Man addressing social fears and negative outlook

"I've learned to relax, thanks to Qi Gong, breathing, making noises and forming a nice picture in my mind. This is all new since coming to Re-energise." – Retired woman who came to lose weight and meet new people

The others said they were about as relaxed as before, some saying that they were always fairly relaxed people. One, however, noticed benefits.

"I feel about the same, but I do sleep better with the exercise."

Optimism

Optimism was another less noticeable impact for some people. Three said they were already pretty optimistic people, and two saw more subtle improvements.

"I feel slightly more optimistic. It's a general feeling." – Woman taking things slowly

"I feel a little bit more optimistic. I know I'll continue and I know I'll carry on [with exercise and development]." – Young mum

However, several people were noticeably more confident

"I'm pretty hopeful for the future now. I have lots to look forward to and I look forward to getting up in the morning." – Woman who had been depressed and addicted to alcohol

"I'm a bit more optimistic because I didn't think I could go for walks so much and I have." – Woman who goes for walks by the water with her nephew

"Re-energise gave me a new way of looking at things. Before I didn't follow through, but now I have finished college and am on a new course. It's all part of the impetus of Re-energise and getting me out of my shell. I used to just sit on the sofa all day. Now I go out and do things." – Man who has used CCBT

"Yes, I'm lots more optimistic. When I was a prison guard I couldn't be myself with the inmates. Once I had a glass held against my throat and later three of my friends committed suicide." - Man who had spent many years trying to drown these memories before he came to Re-energise.

Increased socialising

Our survey highlighted a significant impact on people's ability to socialise, in many settings.

Socialising with colleagues

A young woman who works but had been shy said that she has started to socialise more with them thanks to her new confidence.

"I actually have socialised with my colleagues more because I have more confidence to start talking to them."

Three others who are not working flagged up their increased social contact with strangers and people in the gym and groups.

"I now talk to strangers on the river walks, which is nicer than sitting in." – Woman who goes for walks along the river

"I meet people in the gym and chat with them." – Man who comes to the gym every day and gained weight to a healthy size.

"I'm very involved in the carers group and go on trips with them. Recently we celebrated someone's birthday. We played bingo and had such fun that everyone thought we should have a regular bingo group, so I set one up and it's been very popular." – Man who volunteers actively now

Socialising with friends

Three people pointed to changes in their social life since they have come to Re-energise.

"I definitely socialise with friends more. Now I actually have a social life." – Woman who has overcome depression and drinking

"I now go out to art galleries more with a friend who's also interested in art. Before I came to Re-energise, he used to ask me but I said no, even though I was very interested in art." – Man who has started CCBT and completed a BTEC course in art and design

"Now I see a few old friends in the pub and drink soft drinks" – Man who had stopped drinking and got depressed instead before he came to Re-energise

Additional outcomes

Many people felt their lives had changed significantly for the better. Further outcomes included:

- Having a full diary for the first time in 20 years and with pleasurable activities;
- A new way to look at life with a more positive mindset
- Helping to find courses to fit their interests – cooking, art and design, psychology for support workers, computer course, teachers' assistant training;
- Having the opportunity to help the local community through Timebanking activities; and
- Being fitter for his job as a joiner and thus getting more work done.

Volunteering

Most people are not volunteering, as they have other commitments or will take some time to be ready. However, a few people have taken up volunteering through Re-energise.

The man we met is very actively volunteering. He built up all his activities after coming to Re-energise. Previously he had been restless and life seemed dull without a challenge. Now he is enthusiastic; he has started a new group and joined a course on introduction to psychology, with a view to becoming an alcohol counsellor.

A woman who discovered Re-energise through a St John's Ambulance course at the Energise Centre has increased her volunteering there. She has done more training and gained more confidence with her volunteer work.

Two other women got the inspiration to volunteer through their time at Re-energise. They were interested but had also had encouragement and help.

"I've just finished a course on volunteering. Maybe I was inspired people commenting that I'd lost weight and someone suggested that I should volunteer too."

"I'm hoping to find volunteer work through Together Women, which I've just joined. Amanda researched volunteer opportunities for me and took me to the Volunteer Bureau."

Factors of success

This section looks at some of the findings from the telephone surveys and focus groups to identify key factors or aspects of the Re-energise services that have made a positive impact.

The Re-energise approach

The participants interviewed described a service that matches their personal needs and interests with opportunities and support to reach their own identified goals. Physical activity and wider wellbeing are closely intertwined, and coaching and encouragement provide the glue and momentum to help people along their path.

Engaging people through trusted routes to meet their own needs

The importance of initial contact is clear - people came to Re-energise because of personal referrals from people they trusted. These included health trainers, occupational therapists, GPs, social workers, neighbours, carers' group, Children's centre, supported accommodation. The message was always that the service could help them meet their own needs and support them to become healthier, mentally and/or physically.

"I needed to lose weight and also to meet new people as I was retiring, so my doctor suggested Re-energise." – Woman at retirement age

"I really needed some positive help, but I had a problem around people, so my occupational therapist suggested the Computer Cognitive Behavioural Therapy available at Re-energise." – Man in about his 40s

"I was on a course at the Children's Centre and we visited Re-energise. I needed to get out more and to lose weight, so when I heard about the free gym pass I got in touch." – Young mum

Around half the people interviewed had heard about the centre and gone to visit, while others had other reasons to be in the Energise centre – doctors based in the building or a visit as part of a course through another organisation. These responses were mixed for age and gender, but those with the lowest confidence were already engaged with public services.

A flexible path with many opportunities

While participants generally had a particular activity in mind when they went this was only a starting point. Some people went to the gym and made it their hobby with visits several times a week. Others came to the gym and then found other activities that suited them better, such as walking, swimming or exercises at home.

The coaching at the core provided an opportunity to review personal goals and suggest new opportunities and activities. Where people did not take up opportunities, it was most often because they had other priorities and were clear about them, but they were still improving their wellbeing.

"I haven't taken up the other activities because of childcare, but I love going to the gym and swimming." – Young mum

"I go to the gym and swimming several nights a week after work, but I haven't taken up other activities because it's time for bed not long after I get home from the gym." – Young man

“I’ve focused on my studies just now because that’s the part of my life I want to develop. Re-energise and the CCBT got me through my college course and pointed me to other courses I’m now pursuing. It’s re-energised my attitude to how I look at life. Though things may seem bad, you can always salvage good things.” – Middle-aged man

It was evident from our discussions that people had tried other activities once they had joined in, from t’ai chi to confidence building to cooking classes. Most had also had healthy eating tips from the project’s key worker. Those with fewer commitments were keen to try several activities and move at their own pace. Some settled into groups or activities such as Knit and Natter or Community Reporting.

The importance of the coaching and support

When asked what they particularly enjoyed about Re-energise, five of the eleven identified the staff and the support they received.

“[The key worker] took time to come to my house and even involved my daughter. I really enjoyed knowing that someone cared enough about me to take time to ensure I got involved. She gave me confidence, praise, and encouragement. She gave me a positive perspective and that’s stuck with me.” – Woman in her 30s overcoming depression and other problems

“I liked that Claire came on a few sessions with me to the gym and she streamlined what I had to do... Setting my own goals with Amanda was really useful too, especially with three month reviews. I’ve reached most of my goals now.” – Young mum

“The way they work. They’re very approachable people and into doing things, but they don’t push you. It’s your commitment matched by theirs. I didn’t put in as much commitment as I could have done before, but now I would like to.” – Man in 40s

“Having Amanda to help me get back on my feet when I’m feeling low.” – Middle aged woman dealing with depression

Combining social links with activities

For those who go to the gym or swim regularly, the physical activity comes with a platform to meet people regularly who have similar goals. Four people reported the positive impact of meeting new people and the accompanying change in their own personality. They have become more sociable, more confident and more likely to go out instead of being stuck in the house.

The ‘opting-in’ aspect of group activities is particularly welcomed by participants. For instance, some people who were less comfortable around other people took part in Qi Gong or T’ai Chi taster sessions, or other one-off activities, to help them build up their confidence. Several of those who said in the telephone interviews that they were shy around people then went on to take part in the focus group, which suggests they have overcome some of their barriers.

Connecting physical activity with other aspects of wellbeing

Because the project offers a relatively holistic approach, participants can create goals at the beginning that focus on several areas of their life and then build each of those up as opportunities arise.

- One woman suffering from depression and anxiety was very conscious of the positive impact of swimming on her peace of mind.
- Being out volunteering or doing a course provided several people, particularly men, with more physical activity than sitting at home.
- Achieving any goal, such as losing weight, provided participants with more confidence and momentum to achieve more.
- For one young man, having the gym to go to gave him a hobby, which helped him feel his life was more rounded and pleasurable.

By having all these opportunities and the key worker under one roof, there is more scope to follow up interests, find out about opportunities and stay encouraged.

Engagement and retention

A step by step approach to overcoming barriers is a key characteristic of the Salford approach and one that is welcomed by participants. The project has been particularly successful in overcoming barriers to participation.

Initial barriers to taking part

The most common barriers centred on expectations of what it would be like, and lack of confidence.

"I expected there to be only skinny people at the gym and that I would feel uncomfortable."

"I was worried about what people would think of me."

"I had some initial perceptions about how people would find me and what I would think."

Initial contact

Initial contact was crucial. This worked best when it was through a trusted source and outside of the centre.

"There was a meeting at the Sports Village for a group of us doing a 10-week course there and they took us all to the gym. That made it easier."

"Sue Hinder had told me about Re-energise and since she'd already been so friendly and helpful to me, I thought I should try it."

"Amanda met me and talked through my goals, and made sure they were achievable, so I decided to show her that I could do all of them."

Taking the first step...

The combination of removing barriers, in a person-specific way, and encouraging people was powerful for participants.

Removing practical barriers

The free gym pass was essential to everyone who was using the gym. They would not have been able to afford to come otherwise, and the time-limited pass both made it possible and gave them an incentive. Several people mentioned how Amanda had organised passes for other people or for them quickly.

“Gym Buddies helps you bring a friend, which is an incentive for me and for them. Knowing you can get a gym pass and you have company makes a big difference.”

Practical, motivating ethos

Getting the right balance between motivation and gentle progress was also important to people.

“There’s no pressure here. It’s a nice place to come.”

And to keep coming...

The spirit of mutual support is a key factor to keep people’s momentum going. Moral support and sharing experience kicks in and provides confidence.

“A friendly welcome gets you started feeling secure and then you get introduced to more people. Being in the same boat allows you to talk about each other’s problems and help each other – ‘T-shirts on sale as you go out!’”

Encouraging staff

Moral support from staff was also very important to many people. Checking in with goals and progress, phoning to see how people are, keeping them laughing and motivated.

“Sue can just start a conversation out of nowhere. I thought she was just a dead-nice neighbour who kept popping up when I needed help. When my mum died Sue kept dropping by to see how I was doing and giving me practical tips.”

Sustaining the impacts

One of the most impressive aspects of this project is how everyone has carried on with whatever benefited them. If they tried something that wasn't the best fit for them, they tried something else that did suit. If the time wasn't right, they wanted to go back later (for example, to the gym or CCBT course). Because all the changes were based on participants' own goals, interests and readiness, they gained a sense of achievement from each change and want to sustain it. Even where people no longer had a gym pass, they started walking more.

Two women noted how they incorporated their new habits into their recent holidays.

"After the Healthwise course, I've carried on losing weight, even on a two-week cruise. I walked and got a couple ladies to join in the walks, and I swam and ate the right things."

"After we started walking along the river in Salford, we ended up walking on our holiday. We took public transport and went for walks along the beach every day. I even wanted to walk to the next town but my husband spotted

Case study – From drinking and depression to rediscovering happiness

Two years ago, Sarah¹ had been drinking too much, felt depressed and anxious and had also become overweight. She didn't remember how to be happy and she had very little trust in people. Then one day she was talking to her mother's neighbour in the garden and heard about Re-energise. "I was overweight then so she gave me a leaflet to get a free gym pass," she explains.

"I went along and met Amanda on several occasions then got my gym pass, and she came along with me. She also gave me advice on kids and life and helped me eat better. I kept a diary of what I was eating and went to the gym and eventually I lost two stone.

"From there, I went on to take part in several other activities including a confidence building course and CCBT. Amanda always came with me when I started a new activity. Otherwise I wouldn't have come. I was nervous around people.

"I really appreciated the support and having everything together. Amanda took the time to come to the house and involved my daughter. I enjoyed knowing that someone cared enough to take time to ensure I got involved. She gave me the confidence, praise and encouragement too. She has such a positive perspective to share. That's stuck with me."

Sarah's life has changed significantly. "I do everything differently. It's made me trust people more." She is much more active and walks much more as well as going to the gym sometimes. Although she was nervous around other people she eventually went to the gym on her own. Having the gym pass made her want to cut down on drinking to make use of the pass. Having Amanda's support helped too.

As she was feeling so much better about herself, she decided to quit smoking too. Amanda encouraged her to get nicotine patches from the doctor in the Energise Centre, and she stopped smoking.

Now she is much more confident – "from 15% to 85-90%" – and she has rediscovered happiness. She is able to relax without alcohol and is content in herself. Two years ago she couldn't talk on the phone, but now she was pleased to

¹ Not her real name

do a telephone interview. The changes in Sarah have meant that her children have got their mother back. “No one had hope for me, but now they have a mum.”

While Amanda played a key role in helping Sarah to transform her life, Sarah’s new life is not dependent on Re-energise. She goes for walks, socialises with friends, sees family and enjoys her children. She doesn’t go to the gym anymore but she says, “I have more things in my life and less time, but I walk more and drink less.” With Amanda’s help and encouragement, she has joined Together Women to improve her confidence further and is looking for volunteer work. “I’ve now got my radar looking for anything to build confidence.”

“Everyone has noticed a big change in me. They don’t know why but it’s thanks to having a gym for a year and Amanda.” The benefits don’t stop with Sarah and her children. She says she has told several people about Re-energise though and they have gone along.

Life changes as a result of coming to Re-energise

Most people had very inactive lifestyles – several talking about sitting on the sofa all day without moving or even getting dressed. For various reasons ranging from weight to alcohol problems, they had low self-confidence, but this had changed dramatically.

The consensus was that starting to chat to people with similar experiences, put them more at ease. Achieving their goals also boosted their confidence and gave them momentum to try more things. Changing one area of their lives often led to changing others.

“I’ve gained the two stone I needed, stopped smoking, stopped coughing, swim 40 lengths instead of struggling with two like I started out. I’m so much healthier. I’m even active when I’m home instead of just sitting around all day.”

“I’ve been to college courses and am starting new ones. I’m out a lot more, see the world more positively and have more aspirations. Before I just sat on the sofa all day and my wife would bring me meals and drinks when she was home.”

“I’m now involved in loads of activities and giving back to the community. I’m looking into training to be an alcohol support worker to help others as a job, and started an introductory course this week.”

“I’m much more confident socialising now and my daughter gets out much more too. I feel much better about myself.”

Scope for improvements

Access and support have been identified as areas for potential improvement.

Improving access

Access related to both opening up the project to a wider audience and providing more facilities or expenses:

- Opening it up to other postcodes so they could be involved too;
- Could publicise the walks better, playgroups could enjoy it; and
- “They could do with more computers and more access to them. When I missed classes on the CCBT course, I couldn’t get access to the computers to make them up because the computers were always booked up – except Fridays after lunch.”

Increasing support

Two people asked for additional counselling services – one out of hours, and the other more generally “someone to talk to regularly.” The person who suggested the latter had commented elsewhere that the support she received from Amanda had helped her to get on her feet again. Another person said that massage would be very welcome as she has knots all through her from stress, while another person said they had had a massage, though perhaps that was a one-off offering.

Overlapping factors

While most people praised the support they had received, some said that they had more initiative than other people they knew and that more effort would be required to entice other people to take part. Suggestions included bus passes to get to the gym for people who live further away; outreach to other community groups or even people’s homes to work through the paperwork to sign up for a gym pass; and a monthly newsletter with upcoming events and activities.

Spreading the value of the project more widely

Participants in the focus group generally suggested that there is much more scope for Re-energise to reach more people through marketing and proactive outreach. They perceived the marketing of the centre to be mostly through referrals and word of mouth and felt that many people who could benefit were unaware of what was available to help them. One even cited a local GP who was unaware of the centre.

They suggested:

- Posting notices in the shop next door which attracts parents of local children in the right postcode area
- open days that focused on different activities and life changes.
- Better signage from the road would also help local people realise the opportunities on their doorstep

Opportunities to get involved in other activities at the centre (inc St Sebastian’s), for instance with older people.

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