

# An Evaluation of Bodyfit Women's Physical Activity Programme

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Report summary –  
*An evaluative review of 'Bodyfit' a female focused physical activity programme in partnership with Lancashire Women's Centre's, Sport England and Lancashire Sport Partnership. (May 2017, to be revised Dec 2017)*

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## Report summary

This report provides an evaluative review of 'Bodyfit,' a female focused physical activity programme collaboratively developed by Lancashire Sport Partnership and Lancashire Women's Centres. It is hoped that key learnings identified within this review can be used to shape and improve the Bodyfit programme moving forward and additionally; support the design and implementation of similar physical activity projects in the future.

A mixed research methods approach was adopted for the purposes of the evaluation as it was believed that by; combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques a more complete account of the Bodyfit programme could be produced. In particular, the research approach involved gathering insights via; registration data, feedback forms and semi-structured interviews with participants, project coordinators and volunteers.

The review reveals that having engaged 244 females who regularly attend Lancashire Women's Centres, the Bodyfit programme has been somewhat of a success story. Feedback from over 50 participants demonstrates the positive impact that the programme has had upon different aspects of participants lives including; activity levels, overall health and wellbeing and developing new skills.

Courses subsidised through Bodyfit for new leaders and volunteers included; Exercise to Music, Boxercise Pound, Zumba Gold, Safeguarding, First Aid and First Steps into Coaching. Factors found to be particularly enjoyable for participants were revealed to be; having a supportive and helpful leader, socialising with other ladies and experiencing an improvement in overall health and wellbeing.

Attendance at sessions was good at Accrington and Burnley Women's Centres in contrast to Blackpool and Preston where uptake was low. The review suggests that a one-size fits all approach may be inappropriate due to the differing operational structures at each of the Women's Centres. An important recommendation to emerge is the requirement for a more bespoke offer to ensure that the programme meets the specific needs of each individual centres clientele (particularly those with more complex needs).

## Key Partners

**Lancashire Women's Centre:** a registered Charity (1100976) with a vision to ensure that "Women, and their families in the communities we serve are able to achieve their potential to develop their skills and live safe, healthy and prosperous lives." Centres currently situated in; Accrington, Blackburn, Blackpool, Burnley and Preston provide a safe, non-judgmental and professional environment, which is female only between the hours of 10am - 3pm.

✉ [enquiries@womenscentre.org](mailto:enquiries@womenscentre.org)

☎ **01254 583032**

📘 [@LancashireWomensCentres](#)    🐦 [@womensCentred](#)



**Head Office Address: 25 Wellington Street (St Johns) Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 8AF**

**Lancashire Sport Partnership:** a registered charity (1159832) with a vision to ensure that 'Lancashire is a place where everyone is inspired and supported to reach their full potential and live more healthy and active lives through physical activity.'

✉ [contact@lancashiresport.org.uk](mailto:contact@lancashiresport.org.uk)

☎ **01772 299830**

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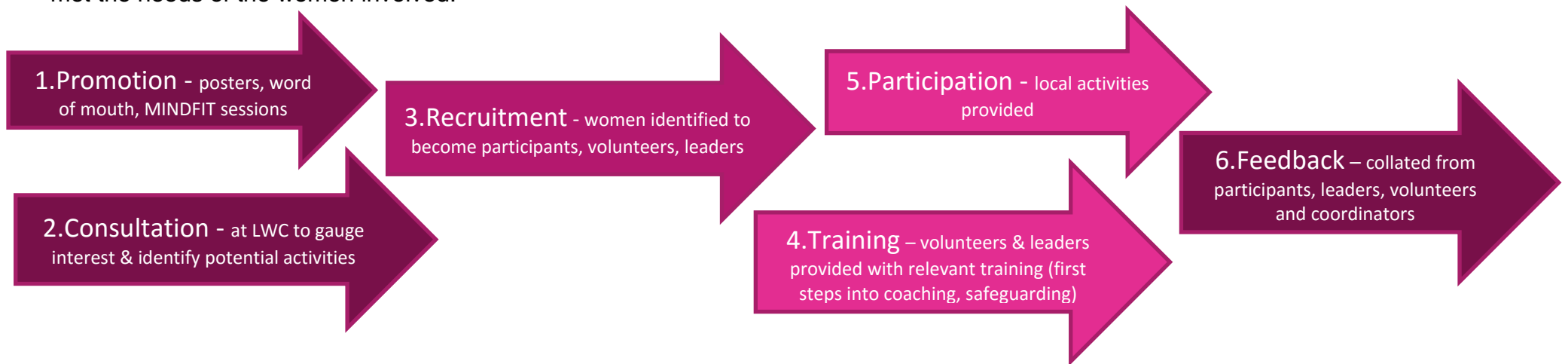
**Address: Office 3-4, Farington House, Lancashire Business Park, Leyland, PR26 6TW**



## Bodyfit Overview

Commissioned by Sport England in 2016, Bodyfit is a female focused project that aims to engage inactive women experiencing low-moderate mental health conditions in sport and physical activity. In particular, Bodyfit was developed with the three key aims; 1.) To increase activity levels of inactive women through a variety of physical activity sessions 2.) To improve confidence, self-esteem and employment prospects via a volunteer and leadership programme 3.) To improve the physical and mental wellbeing of the women who attend the Lancashire Women’s Centres.

The initial inclusion criteria for Bodyfit sessions was for women to have attended their local women’s centre. Once signed up, participants were then able to enjoy free activities, as well as being provided with the opportunity to become Bodyfit leaders and volunteers through a range of training sessions including; Zumba Gold, Exercise to Music, Boxercise Pound, First Steps into Coaching, Safeguarding and First Aid. All sessions were free until February 2017 when a £1.00 donation was introduced after 6 weeks of free activity (this donation was at the leader’s discretion as participants would not be turned away if unable pay). The flow chart below demonstrates the approach adopted to recruit; participants, volunteers and leaders and ensure that sessions met the needs of the women involved.



## Preston

31 Fishergate Hill, Preston, PR1 8DN  
t: 01772 259211 e: enquiries@womenscentre.org (open 10-3pm daily)

**Activities:** Walk Fit, Defence Fit, Zumba Fit

**Venue:** Continental Public House & Urban Exchange

**Leaders & Volunteers upskilled:** 0 upskilled, 3 qualified coaches used to deliver sessions.

**Registered Participants:** 8

**Marketing:** Poster's in Women's Centre, LWC Mind Fit sessions, Word of mouth, LWC One to One sessions, Victim Support Services, Preston City Council, Lancashire Sports CSI programme, LWC Website & Facebook page: LWC's Bodyfit Programme, Lancashire Sport Partnership Website & Twitter

**Delivery Period:** September 2016 to February 2017

**Overview:** Sessions at Preston Women's Centre ran for a period of 6 months but unfortunately had to be cancelled in February 2017 due to low uptake. Preston Women's Centre was only established in 2015 and differs from other areas as it does not offer a 'drop in' service and women are often referred directly into specifically funded projects. Clients accessing this centre often lead much more chaotic lifestyles and generally have a lot of multiple complex issues. It is believed that as the centre is not as well established as other centres within the local community and has a differing model of provision and client group; an alternative approach is required with regards to the introduction and promotion of physical activity sessions. One other issue faced within this area was a lack of appropriate and affordable venues within a 10-minute walking distance of the centre (only 2/10 venues approached were suitable due to; costs, availability, locality, appropriateness of space). Finally, a lack of leaders/ volunteers recruited from within meant a number of external coaches were used to deliver sessions, this lead to additional cost and a lack of rapport between leaders and participants.



## Burnley

4 Nicholas Street, Burnley, Lancashire, BB11 2EU  
t: 01282 429672 e: enquiries@womenscentre.org

**Activities:** Box Fit, Tone Fit & Swim Fit

**Venue:** Central Methodist Church & St Peters Leisure Centre

**Leaders & Volunteers upskilled:** 2 women's centre volunteers upskilled as Bodyfit leaders, both ladies had previous experience of delivering physical activity sessions.

**Registered Participants:** 68

**Marketing:** Poster's in Women's Centre & local library, LWC Mind Fit sessions, Up & Active Website, word of mouth, LWC Website & Facebook page: LWC's Bodyfit Programme, Lancashire Sport Partnership Website & Twitter

**Delivery Period:** September 2016 to December 2017

**Overview:** Burnley sessions have been successful with 68 women in total registering. Within this area however, it has been quite difficult to keep numbers up after the initial 10 week programme. Feedback from the sessions leaders revealed that participants don't have expendable income to pay £1.00 for sessions and often stop attending if asked to make a donation. Key to the success of this area has been the work of the Women's Centre Service Manager who has ensured the programme has been well promoted within the Women's Centre and throughout the local community. Building a good relationship with the Burnley Leisure Up & Active team has also improved numbers by increasing promotion and enabling weigh-in sessions alongside usual activities. The relationship with Up & Active has introduced more women to Lancashire Women's Centres and services on offer. In December 2016 Burnley hosted a Bodyfit Festive Fitness event which allowed the programme to be promoted and gave local women the opportunity to try out different activities.





## Accrington

21-23 Blackburn Rd, Accrington, Lancashire, BB5 1HF  
T: 01254 871771 e: enquiries@womenscentre.org

**Activities: Tone Fit, Zumba Fit & Walk Fit**

**Venue: Hyndburn Voluntary and Community Resource Centre, Accrington Women's Centre**

**Leaders & volunteers upskilled: 2 leaders', 2 volunteers (1 leader & 2 volunteers had no previous experience of delivering physical activity sessions).**

**Registered participants:144**

**Marketing: Poster's in Women's Centre, LWC Mind Fit sessions, Up & Active Website, Word of mouth, LWC Website & Facebook page: LWC's Bodyfit Programme, Lancashire Sport Partnership Website & Twitter**

**Delivery Period: February 2016 to December 2017**

**Overview: Accrington has been the most successful Centre with; 144 participants, 2 Bodyfit leaders and 2 volunteers recruited it continues to go from strength to strength. Adele (Accrington Bodyfit leader) is a prime example of how the programme can support women with low self-esteem and no previous experience to become session. See case study:**

<https://www.lancshiresport.org.uk/assets/uploads/downloads/Zumba%20Fit%20Accrington.pdf>.

**Other factors thought to impact uptake include; the centre has been established since 2001 and offers a drop-in facility to all local women thus increasing reach within the community. Additionally, this area has had the support of the Women's Centre Service Manager to promote sessions and, initial Bodyfit leaders and volunteers have supported greatly in the recruitment process and been able to build a good rapport with new participants.**





## Blackpool

162 Church Street, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY1 3PS  
T: 01253 290007 e: [enquiries@womenscentre.org](mailto:enquiries@womenscentre.org)

**Activities:** Dance Fit, Walk Fit & Defence Fit

**Venue:** Health Reform Club, Blackpool Women's Centre

**Leaders & Volunteers upskilled:** 1 women's centre volunteer upskilled as Bodyfit leader. Hannah was already qualified dance teacher.

**Registered Participants:** 20

**Marketing:** Word of mouth, LWC Website & Facebook page: LWC's Bodyfit Programme, Lancashire Sport Partnership Website & Twitter

**Delivery Period:** February 2016 to July 2016

### Overview:

Uptake in Blackpool was moderate with 20 participants registered over a 6-month period. It is believed that a staff restructure at the Women's Centre in conjunction with Bodyfit delivery resulted in no member of staff taking ownership of the project. Such issues appear to have resulted in less promotion and failure to recruit the leaders and volunteers required to keep the sessions running. In addition, this centre does not provide a drop-in service and women who attend the centre are by referral only. As a result of this, the majority of clients accessing the centre lead much more chaotic lifestyles and generally have a lot of multiple complex issues. It is believed that as the centre has a differing model of provision and client group; an alternative approach is required with regards to the introduction of physical activity sessions.



## Participant Statistics



ACCRINGTON: 144

BLACKPOOL: 20

BURNLEY: 68

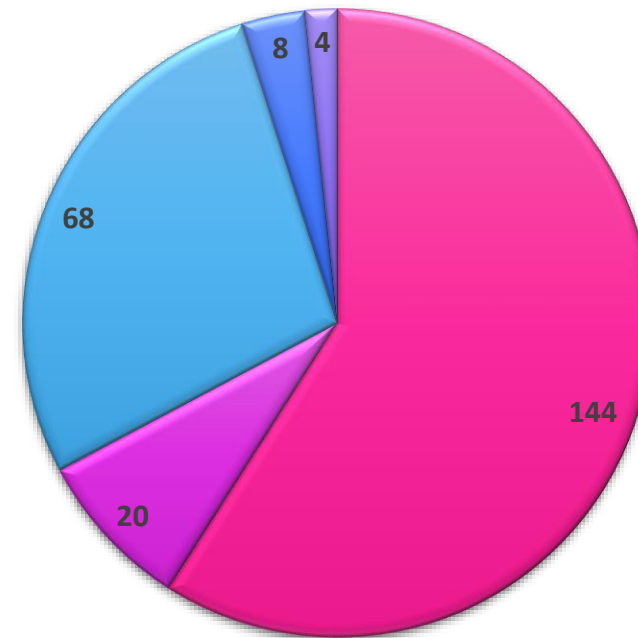
PRESTON: 8

OUTREACH ROSSENDALE: 4

**244 REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS**

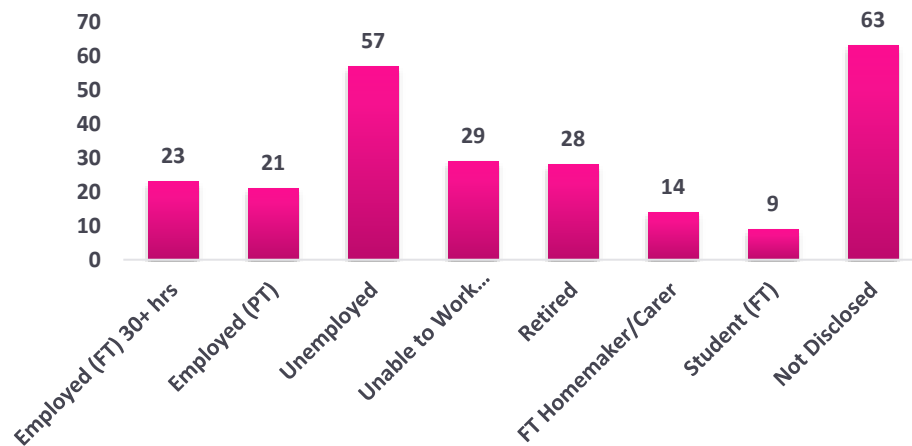


### Registered Participants by Area



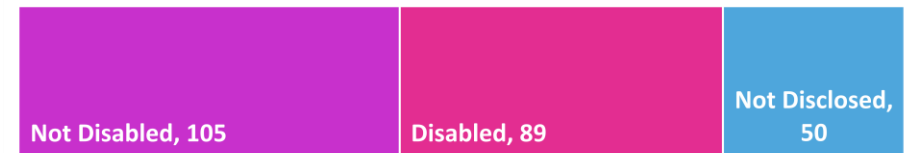
■ Accrington ■ Blackpool ■ Burnley ■ Preston ■ Outreach

## 23% of participants unemployed



## 82% engaged had a disability or mental health condition

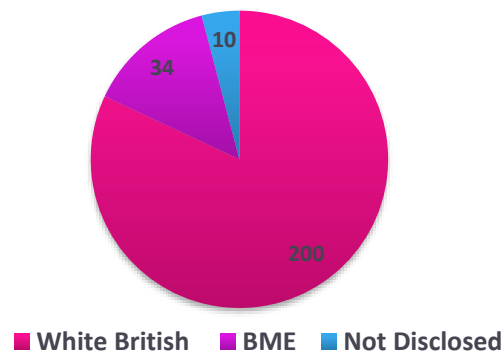
### 37% of participants disabled



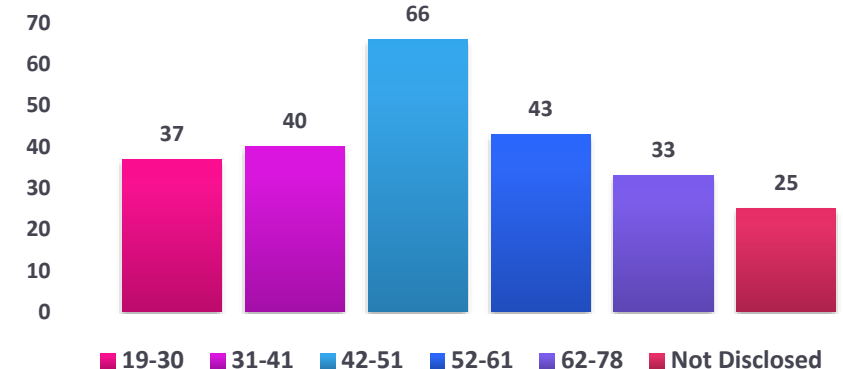
### 44% with mental health conditions



## 82% of participants white British



## Most common age range 42-51 years





## Participant Feedback (50 respondents)

### Top 3 reasons why participants enjoy sessions:

1. Positive/ Helpful Tutors
2. Social Aspect
3. Improved Health & Wellbeing

What did Enjoy most about sessions?



*“I like the variety of enjoyable exercises, the professionalism and friendliness of the tutor and other participants”*

*“I absolutely Enjoyed everything!”*

*“Enjoyed everything, feeling a lot more positive! ”*

*“I enjoyed the social element, comfortable surroundings and exercising at right pace”*

*The company and being active again”*

*“I enjoyed the music and dance and we have a very good teacher who cares a lot for the ladies”*

*“Getting out in the fresh air and chatting”*

*“Having company to walk with and chat to”*

*“Doing something with others with same goal”*

*“The class had made me feel more relaxed and helped me not to feel as stressed”*

*“I have felt so much better since I started the classes and feel like I have more energy”*

*“The feeling of relaxing gradually during the exercises”*

## Participant Feedback (50 respondents)

### Top 3 reasons how being involved has helped participants:

1. Improving Activity Levels
2. Improving Health & Wellbeing
3. Developing/ Improving Skills

*“Being involved has increased my fitness levels and muscle strength and boosted my confidence”*

*“The sessions have been good for my mental wellbeing”*

*“I live on my own and so I really look forward to the classes and meeting the other ladies it stops me being on my own”*

*“That there was a course that would help me in my all round personal development”*

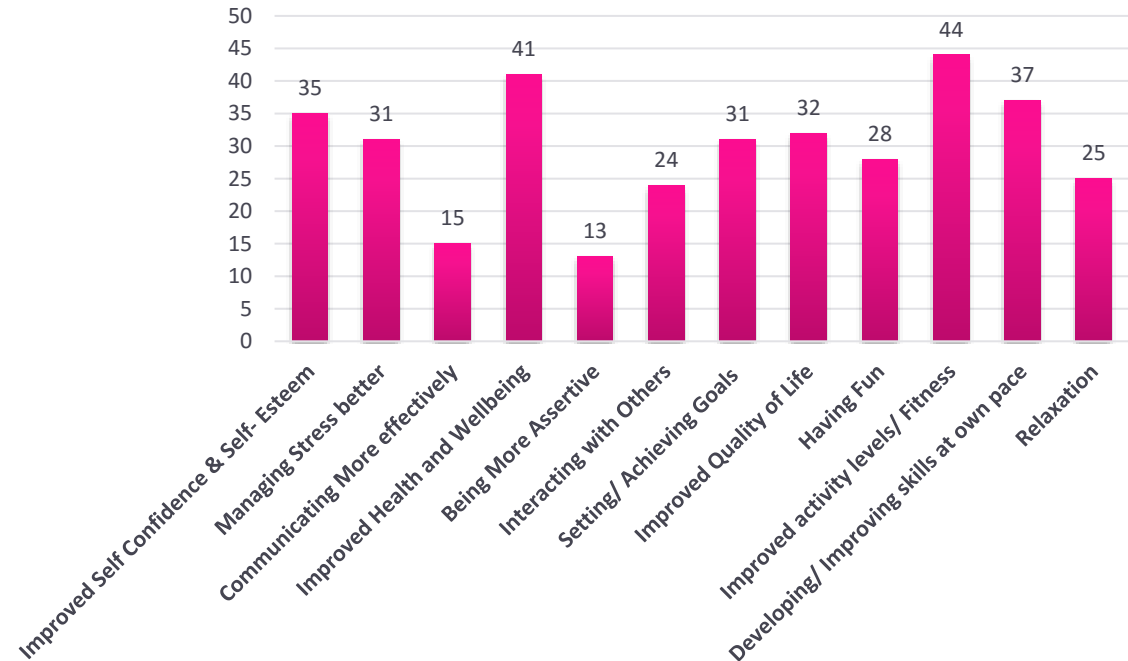
*“Useful because these are exercises I can do despite my health issues”*

*“Great fun, good experience, feel fit and happy”*

*“It has helped me to sleep better and feel more relaxed”*

*“After having chemo, it has helped me to balance and walk better”*

How have sessions helped?



## Conclusion

Our review indicates that the Bodyfit delivery model can be effective, although this is dependent upon various factors if successful outcomes are to be achieved. It acknowledges the difficulties of engaging with ladies who regularly attend Lancashire Women's Centres and in particular; creating a sport and physical activity offer that can be perceived as attractive at a time when they may be at their most vulnerable.

It further suggests that a one-size fits all approach may be inappropriate due to the differing operational structures at each of the Women's Centres. An important recommendation to emerge from this review is the requirement for a more bespoke offer to ensure that the programme meets the specific needs of each individual centres clientele.

Key demographics of participants engaged include; 23% unemployed, 82% disabled (including mental health conditions), 82% white British and the most common age range is 42-51 years. One factor believed to affect the accurateness of these figures is the number of women not willing to disclose such information. When reviewing registration forms; 42% of women were not willing to disclose whether they had any disabilities or mental health conditions and 26% were unwilling to disclose their employment status. It therefore believed these could be higher than currently recorded.

The BodyFit programme was found to be particularly popular in Burnley and Accrington Centres where participation rates were high and feedback extremely positive. Key factors that appeared to lead to more effective delivery in these areas included; the LWC Service Manager actively overseeing the project across East Lancashire, venues close to the Women's Centres being available at low cost or free of charge, existing volunteers and clients at the women's centre being keen to get involved and both centres operating as a 'drop in' service thus widening the reach of women who attend the centre.



In terms of marketing sessions, the Bodyfit project Facebook page (216 likes) supported by Lancashire Women Centre's main Facebook page (2083 likes) were found to be really useful resources in advertising sessions. Building a good relationship with the Burnley Leisure Up & Active team has also improved numbers at sessions across East Lancashire by increasing the reach through their website and being able to offer weigh-in sessions alongside usual activities. This relationship has also enabled the project to introduce more women to Lancashire Women's Centres and the services offered.

Direct feedback from participants revealed the top 3 factors that resulted in the enjoyment of sessions were; having a helpful and supportive Bodyfit leader, being able to socialise with others at sessions and, experiencing an improvement in overall health and wellbeing. With regards to the session leaders, many women stressed the importance of having a familiar face and someone who they could relate to delivering sessions. In addition, areas of support found to have made the greatest impact upon participants included helping them to; get active, become healthier and develop new skills/ try new activities.

Centres found to have less uptake were Blackpool and Preston, various factors were found to contribute to low numbers at sessions. Firstly, both centres were found to operate via a referral system meaning that the majority of clients are referred directly into specifically funded projects. Clients accessing these centres often lead much more chaotic lifestyles and generally have a lot of multiple complex issues. In addition, this referral approach means that the centres do not operate as a 'drop in' service thus lessening the reach to local women and opportunities to promote Bodyfit. A recommendation is for further consultation to be carried out with the centre employees and clients to gain a more in-depth understanding of how the Bodyfit approach can be adapted to fit with the needs of the women with more complex needs.

One final factor was that Blackpool and Preston did not appear to have a consistent approach to the management of Bodyfit, unlike East Lancashire where a service manager was consistently overseeing the project, it is believed that this could have made a significant contribution to a lack of promotion and in turn recruitment onto the programme.

## Recommendations

- To consult with clients referred into Lancashire Women's Centres; specifically, those identified as leading chaotic lifestyles and having more complex issues. This is to create a greater understanding of the requirements of such women with regards to physical activity sessions.
- To further consult with Women's Centre's who are referral only, this is to create a greater understanding of how Bodyfit can be delivered in more impactful way, whilst complimenting current service provision.
- To ensure that any Women's Centre offering Bodyfit sessions has one person overseeing the project i.e. a manager/ activator/ volunteer/ existing Bodyfit leader. This person will be responsible for championing the project within the centre and cascading Bodyfit information across the whole team. Should they be absent, there is always someone around who knows the basics.
- To investigate any other physical activity/ health providers who could potentially support the promotion of Bodyfit (adopt similar model to Up & Active, Burnley).
- Donation of £1.00 to be retracted or at least reviewed and other ways of sustaining activities investigated.
- In areas where no suitable venues have been found, look into the potential of utilising local outdoor community/ green spaces particularly through the summer months.
- Continue to use social media particularly Facebook and Twitter to push existing sessions to new & existing members.
- Utilise existing leaders and volunteers to promote Bodyfit opportunities, this includes sharing case studies to demonstrate the impact of Bodyfit upon individuals lives.

- To ensure that the Bodyfit offer is bespoke to each Women's Centre and each approach is determined by feedback from staff and clients at that particular centre.
- Ensure Bodyfit volunteers & leaders are registered onto the Lancashire sports Hub (<http://thesportshub-lancs.com/>) to increase coaching & volunteering opportunities.
- Attendances at Mind-fit workshops by LSP staff to be reviewed and effectiveness of this in promoting Bodyfit sessions investigated.

For further information on this report please contact:

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