

Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation

SPORT+
RECREATION
ALLIANCE

PPF
Professional
Players Federation

mind
for better mental health

Active Oxfordshire – Active Body, Healthy Mind

Project at a glance

- Active Oxfordshire worked with a wide variety of physical activity and mental health partners to get people with mental health problems involved in physical activity.
- They focused on removing the barriers people with mental health problems face accessing physical activity by sharing expertise across both sectors.
- Local mental health organisations now recognise the benefits of physical activity, with two employing full-time physical activity managers. Sports organisations are also more aware of mental health.

The challenge

Physical activity boosts mental health. Yet people with mental health problems are 19.7% less likely to take part in it than the rest of the population.

Low confidence, or fears about getting involved, can all be barriers. Plus, sports and mental health organisations often don't work together to create services that could help.



The response

“We knew that people with mental health issues were much less active,” explains Lucy Tappin, Physical Activity Manager at Active Oxfordshire.

“So we got our partners in the room together to highlight this fact. Physical activity and mental health organisations often hadn’t worked with each other. So it was a chance to work together.”

This co-design process enabled organisations from both sectors to share resources and information to ensure more people with mental health problems were able to get active.

Small groups, big impact

The project piloted a new approach that focused on the needs of the person living with mental health problems. This meant creating supportive activity sessions that felt friendly, welcoming and mental health-aware.

“The participants could self-refer, or get involved through existing support services such as Oxfordshire Mind or local mental health units” says Lucy.

“We focused on small groups of six to eight people that didn’t feel overwhelming. It was encouraging small steps: building people’s confidence one step at a time. We consulted with participants and offered 35 different tailored activities, everything from boxercise to sea fishing to yoga.”

A key part of the project was offering mental health training, including mental health first aid, to physical activity specialists. This included staff at local leisure centres.

“We offered a scheme where mental health workers could apply for a leisure pass for their clients at local leisure centres,” says Lucy.

“But we didn’t want the stigma of a specialist ‘mental health pass’. So our partners worked closely with staff at the leisure centres on ensuring an inclusive and welcoming experience that supported the individual needs of people coming through the programme.”



Active Body, Healthy Mind

Improving our mental wellbeing through sport and exercise

Sessions on offer include:

- Badminton
- Canoeing
- Cricket
- Cycling
- Exercise classes
- Gym
- Rambling
- Running
- Squash
- Swimming
- Table Tennis
- Tennis



The results

The project has been a resounding success, engaging an impressive 2,155 participants over three and a half years (47.7% above target).

In addition, the partners found the activities so beneficial and essential for their clients that they now cover the costs of the activities and paid roles. As a result, the programme is sustainable as external funding is not required.

It's had other benefits too – around areas like employment.

Over fifty participants have gone on to gain paid employment – fifteen of those in the physical activity sector.

“After people had been to a few sessions, and socialised with others, they felt more confident,” says Lucy.

“So it was easier to get them involved in programmes like CV-writing which helped them get jobs.”

Lucy says that the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation has helped support what they've achieved.

“We felt that the Charter really encapsulates what we do and have used it as a framework. We used it a lot in our comms, tweeting about it and encouraging our partners to get involved,” she says.

What they learned

Lucy says that successful co-design, that meets the needs and working processes of partners, was an essential part of making the project successful.

“Be flexible and adapt as needed,” she advises.

“Stop doing things if elements are clearly not working. Also, don’t be precious about who gets the credit!”

Fighting back: Kieran’s story

“Before I started the boxing classes I was drinking, taking drugs and my mental health was at an all-time low. [Once I started going to classes] I began to feel physically stronger and I was getting a routine in my weeks. I was making friends and I found myself spending my time with these people rather than on the streets taking drugs and drinking.

My self-confidence grew so much that just after Christmas I got myself a full time job. My parents are now proud of me, I’m happy and enjoying life.”

For more information, visit...

www.activeoxfordshire.org/active-body-healthy-mind

