



Evaluation of Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind's

'Get Set to Go'

Sport and Physical Activity Project

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Get Set to Go Evaluation: Executive Summary

Get Set to Go is a project run by the mental health charity National Mind (hereafter referred to as Mind). It is delivered in 8 different locations throughout England by 8 local Mind organisations. Each local Mind has developed its own unique way of delivering their work in terms of day to day delivery. They do this by building productive partnerships and relationships with local sports providers, sports infrastructure organisations, governing bodies and other stakeholders, such as local authorities. This evaluation is looking specifically at the work of Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind (hereafter referred to as MS Mind).

There is good evidence that physical activity and sport improve mental health and wellbeing through reducing stress, anxiety and depression, and improving confidence and self- esteem.

People already receiving MS Mind's services, or those referred to do so, are provided with information on the sports and other physical activities available via Get Set to Go. If they choose to go ahead, participants' needs are then assessed before they take part in an activity for the first time, and appropriate support is put in place to ensure that they feel comfortable. Thereafter, there is always someone there to facilitate the session and talk to people about any problems they might be having.

This research sought to understand the circumstances of interviewees prior to engaging with Get Set to Go, their experience of getting engaged, feelings about continued engagement and how they viewed the future. It also recorded the views of the volunteers who freely give of their time to support the project and sports providers and others who work closely with the project. The research undertook fourteen interviews with service users, four with Get Set to Go volunteers and five with partners/stakeholders.

Key findings were as follows:

- It was evident that those with mental health problems would not have undertaken sport or other physical activity without the project providing opportunities and support to do so.
- Improvements in the self- confidence and self-esteem of those taking part were clear, as were reductions in social isolation.

- For most service users interviewed, improved or improving physical well-being and fitness were also outcomes.
- Volunteers involved were enthusiastic about the project and reported gains to themselves. Benefits included help in getting paid employment, achieving better work-life balance, and improving their own mental health.
- Sports providers with a remit around social inclusion and facilitating better deployment of resources were keen to work with the project both to foster well-being and to improve the utilisation of their facilities.
- A partner referring in to the project appreciated the option of acquiring additional support to clients that was based on their personal interests rather than service-focused factors
- The one source of concern related to the costs and complexity of reaching venues via available public transport.

The research concludes that the project has been highly successful and offers a close fit between the offer from service providers and the needs of Mind's service users. Mind maintains a waiting list of those who want to get more active via Get Set to Go, and has the necessary partnerships in place. Unfortunately, however, the resources available for organisation and facilitation fall some way short of current demand, impeding opportunities for project growth and development.

The findings suggest that further resources could expand capacity to take full advantage of the willingness of service users and providers to engage with Get Set to Go. Were additional resource secured, the project could usefully develop robust systems for capturing routine data on service users and their participation to evidence gains more readily, and include assessing costs and benefits or estimating social value in any future evaluation. Finally, the research recommends communicating concerns about transport to relevant local agencies.

1. Background to the Project

In November 2014, Mind implemented a three-year initiative (Get Set to Go) to encourage individuals with mental health problems to become more physically active. There is good evidence that physical activity and sport improve mental health and wellbeing through reducing stress, anxiety and depression, and improving confidence and self-esteem. Sport England and the National Lottery have provided support for the initiative, which aims to help those with mental health problems overcome barriers to engaging in physical activity and sport.

Eight local Minds across four priority regions are delivering the initiative through peer support and face-to-face advice. In addition, four national communications campaigns have been created for the duration of the Get Set to Go programme through films, advertising, information resources, and social media. Motivational messages aim to increase the value of sport for wellbeing and mental health recovery and Mind have also created a 'digital delivery' strand to provide complimentary online 'sport peer support' to their existing online peer support community, Elefriends.

Within this programme of activity, MS Mind has targeted people over the age of eighteen who want to use physical activity and sport to improve their mental health and wellbeing. The target group is identified as people who 'find starting something new difficult; do not have the motivation or self-confidence to do so and may need someone to help them get started; and may not know what's available and how to access it' (MS Mind website). The project began in summer 2015.

2. Project Activity

People already receiving MS Mind's services, or those referred to do so, are provided with information on the sports and other physical activities available via Get Set to Go. If they choose to progress, participants' needs are then assessed before they take part in an activity for the first time and appropriate support is put in place to ensure that they feel comfortable. Thereafter, there is always someone there to facilitate the session and talk to people about any problems they might be having. A coach is present at some activities, particularly where competitive sport is involved.

Referral and engagement figures are presented in Figure 1. Registration indicates that the person has engaged with the project by drawing up a

personalised activity plan. Participation indicates that they have embarked upon activities.

Figure 1: Engagement in the Project to date		
Referrals	Registrations	Participants*
328	196	158

* Participants will have tried more than one activity.

Mind has put on a range of activities in conjunction with their partners, including Tees Active, Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation, British Canoeing and Natural Progression Boxing Academy. Many of these activities were made available on a taster basis in the first instance.

Reliable participation figures are only available for the three activities pursued most frequently; football (indoor and outdoor), badminton, and indoor bowls.

Figure 2: Activities in the Project to date					
Number of >	Individuals participating	Sessions they completed	Guided cycling	Hula-hooping	Gym
Football	61	764	Swimming	Tai Chi	Running
Indoor bowls	44	198	Aqua aerobics	Zumba	Kickboxing
Badminton	40	203	Canoeing	Yoga	Chair exercise

3. Evaluation Activity

Nationally, Mind commissioned the Institute of Health and Wellbeing (IoHW) at the University of Northampton, to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of all three delivery levels of the programme. Their evaluation captures data from a range of participant samples associated with the Get Set to Go Programme (service users, peer researchers, peer navigators, mainstream organisations and Sports Coordinators) using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Their interim report was made available by Mind last year (IoHW, 2016).

Locally, MS Mind commissioned the Social Futures Institute (SoFI) at Teesside University to independently assess the value of local activity by investigating the perspectives of those involved. This report presents the results of this exercise and is based on 23 interviews; 14 with service users, 4 with volunteers; and 5 with stakeholders from partner or stakeholder organisations.

Interviews were conducted during December 2016 and January 2017, and were recorded and transcribed prior to analysis.

4. Service User Perspectives

4.1 Interviewees' Characteristics

The service users interviewed came from a range of backgrounds. Depression and social isolation were common factors across the group stemming from a range of circumstances, including:

- Autism
- Recovering from alcoholism
- Learning disabilities
- Social isolation
- Anxiety and depression
- Full time carers
- Diagnosed severe or chronic mental health problem
- Physically disabled for example through a stroke

Most interviewees were aged between 20 and 50, with six in their early to mid-twenties. Eleven men and three women gave interviews. Some Interviewees had been engaging for only a couple of months whereas for a few it was 18 months or more. Thirteen of the interviewees had been receiving therapeutic or mental health support. Most were continuing to receive support, from Mind, social services, community psychiatric services or other agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous. For one person recovering from a stroke, the help was simply to get himself back to fitness: *'I know meself that makes me feel better and not so depressed and in a low mood'*.

The research sought to understand: the circumstances of interviewees prior to engaging with Get Set to Go; the experience of getting engaged; feelings about doing so at the time of the interview; and how they viewed the future.

Questions were grouped in relation to the following issues:

- Mental health and self-confidence
- Social isolation
- Physical fitness

4.2 Experiences of Engagement

Interviewees were asked about the process of engaging with Get Set to Go. Most had heard about the project through Mind although a couple had heard about the initiative from medical practitioners or family. People were also asked how they felt about going along to an activity for the first time and if they had any concerns about doing so. For many people, more than half the group, it was a fear of meeting new people especially in groups:

'I'm not very good in crowd, you know'

'It wasn't so much anxiety about the sport itself, it was anxiety about being with a group of people that I didn't know'

'Yes, I was really nervous about being in groups, meeting new people, getting there'

For others it was a fear of not being able to do the activity or of doing it badly as it had been a long time since they had undertaken any sport.

'Just not being very good (but) I knew they wouldn't whinge at me if I played crap'

'I just felt I wouldn't get on with it, I'm not going to like it'

For a small number the challenge was physically getting to the venue or the cost of doing so:

'Getting the buses was worse than actually going to the badminton... I was anxious about getting the buses'

'It's like £4.40 every time I go on the bus'

'Getting on the bus was a problem. I had to get on two buses but I've since passed my driving test so it's a lot easier now'

When asked to describe their feelings after their initial engagement in Get Set to Go's activities, interviewees' responses were entirely positive. For example:

'Two hours of football...I felt like I was back to me old self and I was having fun'

'Better! It improves my mood, it really does, sport and being around people'

'I felt good. I felt like I'd accomplished something. I felt a sense of achievement'

*'When I got home I actually felt good! I couldn't believe that I'd done it'
'I felt great'*

For most people the motivation to keep going was not a problem after the first visit. For a few, however, it could sometimes be a struggle. One interviewee found herself faced with her original anxieties when returning following a spell in hospital but pushed herself and did re-engage. Two individuals needed encouragement, one from the project worker and another from family members. Others struggled occasionally:

'The hardest part was turning up. But after a few times I don't even think about that now'

'Sometimes with the gym I've got to force myself because of my illness and my mum's (illness)'

'Sometimes I feel down enough not to go and need to push myself'

'I suffer from OCD that somehow affects me going out of the house so I have to prepare myself for a few hours beforehand but once I'm there I love it'

4.3 Mental health and self-confidence

Interviewees reported how they were feeling about their mental health and self-confidence at the time of the interview. The majority reported improved feelings of confidence and enjoyed having more structure in their lives. There were no negative responses.

'I haven't had a panic attack for ages now'

'With regards to mental health it helps me because I need to have structure to my day'

'It has been very beneficial. It's given me something to focus on, something to get out of bed for'

'Really good for your mental health and well-being and massive for confidence'

'Everything is top notch. Everything is like before I wouldn't even go to a course, it was that bad'

'Well it's helped me a lot. I'm starting to get back to me old self'

Interviewees were also asked if they received the same support and medication as they had at the start of the Get Set to Go project. Six people who had in the past received support, counselling or been on a training course with Mind were no longer receiving or in need of formal support. Whilst it is not claimed that this is a direct result of the project, a few people mentioned that the project officer or a volunteer from Get Set to Go always asked them how they were (at activity sessions) and had a chat with them; they felt this was all they needed at this stage. For one person, there was a clear link with the fact that they no longer used the services of a support worker, whilst continuing to work with a care co-ordinator.

'When I'm well I'm a very active person and the Get Set to Go project has rekindled that. It's sort of reminded me of how I used to be and it's given me the confidence and the belief that I can get back to that person that I was before things deteriorated. Sport used to be my life really. So it has helped me build a life away from mental health services, it's helped me to have other goals and other things to focus on.'

Those who had been on medication for physical or mental health conditions were still doing so with one exception. A man prescribed medication for high blood pressure was no longer taking it though he kept it just in case he got into an anxious state. Again, there is no claim that this is directly linked to being more physically active.

4.4 Social Isolation

Interviewees were asked about their circumstances prior to getting involved in Get Set to Go. The overwhelming majority of people reported feelings of social isolation, a lack of motivation and struggles with depression, and suggested that getting involved with the project had proved a turning point for them. Most people had been very inactive and many, especially younger men, spent a lot of time looking at a computer or other electronic device or just sitting in their homes. Asked about activities on a typical day, interviewees responded:

'Nothing really, sit there like staring...watch the telly'

'Stay in and sit at the computer'

'I'd get up and go round my grandfathers and I'd sit there all day with him, go home, sit there all night'

'I'd stay in my bedroom playing on my consoles'

'I'd just sit in my flat all day and play x-box'

'A typical day would be staying in bed most of the time to be honest. I got up when I had to if I had an appointment'

Some tried to keep busy and expressed frustration at having little to do.

'I used to get up when the kids were going to school and see them off and then do the washing up and probably go down the allotment for an hour or two and that was about it. That was a decent day. If it was a bad day I wouldn't bother going anywhere'

'Nothing much really. I'd walk my dog, housework, courses with Mind. I was looking for things to fill my day. A good day was when I had things to do. If I didn't have things to do that's when I'd sit and ruminate...'

Two of the group were carers and needed some activity for themselves:

'My day was basically looking after my wife'

Many people reported that feelings of isolation and lack of confidence had improved since their involvement, as indicated by the quotes below.

Figure 3: Feelings of Social Isolation	
Pre-involvement	Post-involvement
<i>'Unsure, not very confident'</i>	<i>'It's helped me get out of my flat and be around people'</i>
<i>'I was very isolated. I didn't really see people very often'</i>	<i>'Yeah, it's made me come out of my shell more and talk to people'</i>
<i>'Isolated. That's the best way I can describe it because I felt alone... I was on my own for too many hours a day. With time to think about things you know'</i>	<i>'Yes, I've made new friendships and I've been more sociable'</i>
<i>'I was just in a daydream all the time I couldn't think straight or anything'</i>	<i>'There's a lot of people there and I talk to all of them. Before I probably wouldn't have'</i>
<i>'I just felt a bit grumpy and that people don't like me'</i>	<i>'It gets me out and about and talking to people. I'm a very sociable person. I like to talk to people and I was spending too much time in the house on my own'</i>
<i>'I didn't want to live that life'</i>	

However, a few people continued to feel socially isolated:

'I wouldn't say I was being more sociable but I feel a lot better just getting up and doing something'

'No I'm still in my room all the time. I just keep myself to myself really. Even with the new lads (met through football), they live far away so I wouldn't be able to meet up till I've got more money'

4.5 Physical fitness

Many people had done a lot of sport at school or in their younger days, but had stopped as they simply got older, or as they had become affected by physical or mental health problems. A few people had been engaging in some activity such as going to an allotment or a gym, or had previously done an active job. One was trying to keep active by regular walking. Another had always disliked contact sport because of his experience at school.

Most people had tried more than one activity with Get Set to Go. Many had started with taster sessions and decided which they liked best and/or which best fit in to their life and existing commitments. Whilst some had opted to stick with one activity, mostly football or indoor bowls, some maintained two or three every week. Activities tried by the 14 interviewees are shown below.

Figure 4: Activities undertaken by interviewees

Activity	Number of people	Activity	Number of people
Carpet bowls	10	Boxing	2
Football	8	Tai Chi	1
Badminton	7	Guided cycling	1
Gym	4	Canoeing	1

Most people reported improved and improving physical health as a result of engagement with the project. For example:

'That's a clear improvement definitely. My stamina has increased. It means I'm hardly out of breath at badminton now, I can go on longer'

'I've lost over a stone because of the football and healthy eating'

'When I first started I was really tired afterwards. After the first couple of weeks I was ready to go to the next step and cycle a bit faster and a bit further'

'Getting fitter, I haven't been on the drink since I started the programme'

A few people did not notice any marked improvement in their physical fitness but still indicated that the project had been worthwhile:

'I feel about the same fitness wise because six other days of the week I'm not doing anything. But when I first started coming to bowls, I was aching after but I feel fine now when I leave there. That's a real improvement'

'I don't think it's making me any fitter but I definitely feel better about myself'

All interviewees expressed positive or very positive feelings about taking part in physical activity on an ongoing basis. For example:

'I can't wait for Tuesdays; I love it'

'I've got used to it. It's really good'

'I have my ups and downs but when I'm out with me football I tend to forget about that'

'I see the future alright for meself. I worry a bit about me wife's future but I'm going to keep going. I've bought some bowls now!'

4.6 Future Plans

As well as being committed to maintaining their current activity levels, some interviewees wanted to do more sports and physical exercise in the future:

'I'm going to the gym after xmas. I think I might try the football or the badminton. The badminton starts before the bowls so all I've got to do is get here and I can make a day out of it'

'I want to get back into my running, I used to compete so I'd love to get back into that. I know my illness can't be cured but it can be managed. I used to have no hope whatsoever that I would get to that stage but now I do. I have a lot more hope really now'

For others, future plans extended beyond physical activity, with some looking to take on a volunteering role or move into employment:

'I feel like doing a lot more stuff because of it [Get Set to Go]'

'I definitely want to do more'

'I've got plans to do a peer mentoring course with Mind'

'Physically I will become stronger every week. I'm trying to find a new career path to go down. I'm volunteering now'

For two interviewees, however, the future was very unsure:

'I'll probably still keep going as long as I can with Mind but I have a medical with ESA and they're striking people off the sick all the time so I could go back on jobseekers and I probably wouldn't be able to afford to play after that'

'I don't know, I honestly don't know'

All interviewees said they would recommend getting active to others in the same situation, be it that they were a person facing mental health issues or a carer. For example:

'Definitely. I think it can do wonders. I think people often don't realise the change that can come about from doing sport. I mean I've had times where I've had badminton to go to and I haven't really wanted to get out of bed but I have and I've gone. Even if I hadn't had the motivation beforehand, I've never regretted going ever. You always feel better afterwards to some extent. It's not a magic cure but it does wonders for you, it really does so I'd recommend it to anyone with mental health problems'

'100%. It definitely helps with mental health does exercise'

'Yes, you know it makes you fitter which makes you feel better about yourself, gives you confidence and it helps you meet new people'

4.7 Challenges and Scope for Improvement

Whilst interviewees generally reported no drawbacks to being involved in Get Set to Go, the issue of getting to venues and lack of funding to do so was mentioned by a few. Five people talked about the anxiety caused by the journey to the venue, especially as it meant two buses each way for some. Others referenced the cost of getting buses in the local area.

'The only thing I really wish is that things would be a lot closer to me but you've got to go where you can get the places available haven't you?'

'It's a brilliant organisation. They need more funding as there's a waiting list and I'd like to see them do something about transport for people'

When asked if there were any other activities required, most interviewees were either content or very happy with what they were already doing although two interviewees currently playing badminton wanted to play tennis, and one wanted to access a running group.

4.8 Section Summary

By definition, interviewees had a degree of commitment to the project, given that all engaged in it. Nevertheless, the views expressed were overwhelmingly positive, indicating a degree of appreciation that was above and beyond mere 'satisfaction'. Many felt fitter, and for an even greater majority, levels of self-confidence had improved. Above all, people felt better about themselves.

5. Volunteers' Perspectives

5.1 Background to Volunteering

The volunteers interviewed came from very different backgrounds and recounted various reasons for engaging in volunteering:

- A wanted practical experience to complement the degree she was working on in Health and Social Care. She had volunteered in various roles with Mind for six years.
- B decided to volunteer following redundancy. He had worked in two roles with Mind as well as volunteering for other agencies. When out of work he had found keeping physically fit helped his own mental well-being, not least because of the social side of sport.
- C had thought about volunteering for some time but had not got round to doing anything about it. Her company, a major national employer, circulated information about volunteering and made it possible for her to attend a training course with MS Mind. She was particularly attracted to Get Set to Go because of her love of physical exercise. The timing of the session she facilitates fits in well with her work and care responsibilities.
- D had been a service user with Get Set to Go, having previously worked in nursing, and likes to keep busy and work with people. His life changed when asked if he would like to do a qualification in football coaching.

5.2 Training and Support for Volunteers

All four volunteers were full of praise for the training they had received from MS Mind and the ongoing support they received. A, B and D had received training for the work originally volunteered for, roles of appropriate adult and mentoring. B explained how sessions were always followed by a debriefing, and praised the support and supervision he had received:

'There's an immediate structure in place that gives you a sense of security as a volunteer'

C received six full days training which she did one day a week. She commented:

'You learn a lot about the kind of person you are so you understand how you fit with other people'

The training also enabled the volunteers to understand the spectrum of mental health conditions. Amongst others, topics covered included sessions on confidentiality, safeguarding, group dynamics, reporting structures and sports supervision. Quite a few sessions were inclusive discussions with service users.

There was also ongoing support, especially important in the early days. As a newer volunteer, A felt well supported:

'I always get a lot of support, constant support, phone calls or I can just pop in, e-mails, they always get back to me. I've never felt as if I really don't know what I'm doing here; there's always been somebody there'

'Mind are excellent. They have very clear policies about what you're coming to and what assistance you can expect'

5.3 Views about effects of participation

When the volunteers were asked what they saw as the effects of participation in physical activity for service users, responses were highly affirmative:

'I think there are loads of benefits really, not only is it improving physical health but obviously mental health as well. Friendships are formed. People tend to open up and talk more'

'I think it's been a fantastic medication for the service users that come... confidence is boosted, you've made new friends'

A newer volunteer had pondered the question herself:

'We go for a coffee afterwards, people start to give you a little bit of feedback and say "do you know I wouldn't have come out of the house if I hadn't done this" or "after coming here I've had the confidence that I can do other activities without worrying about walking into a room".'

'Everybody is pleased to see each other... they get there regardless of the weather'

'One or two have gone on to be peer mentors and are actually becoming coaches and getting qualifications'

5.4 Benefits of volunteering

Two of the four volunteers had acquired paid work in a related field which they attributed in part to their experience of volunteering.

'doing the volunteering for that period of time actually showed potential employers that I was happy to work on that sort of role'

'I got so much training and you get to meet other people. Even though you're not a paid employee you get all the benefits as if you were'

One volunteer who was a home based worker realised that it could be quite a lonely job so she really looked forward to her volunteering role.

'It's just going through life with people really isn't it? It's been lovely for me as well'

The former service user wanted to give others the support he had received when he had been *'in a real bad place'*. Although not well enough to take on paid work yet he was optimistic about the prospect of doing so:

'All the experience that I'm gathering now can only strengthen my case for a job in the future'

When asked if the experience had changed the way they felt about themselves and their future, the volunteers were positive in their responses. For the former service user *'It's letting me see a different side of me I suppose'*. For the volunteer who had been motivated to give something back *"Actually it's helped me as well'*. For one of the two who had gone into paid work it had proved a huge confidence boost *'After years of volunteering I've proved to myself that I do have skills and abilities'*.

5.5 Section Summary

All volunteers interviewed were very positive about the project, about its impact on service users, about the support they had received in carrying out their role, and about the difference involvement brought to their own lives.

6. Stakeholders' Perspectives

Five interviews were with individuals whose organisations were working in partnership with Mind; four of these represented sports providers engaged in the project, one had referred into the project from mental health services.

6.1 Reasons for engagement

All five partners stressed that the objective of their engagement was primarily about tackling social isolation and building confidence in individuals. Any increased physical fitness amongst participants was generally seen as a bonus.

For the interviewee from adult mental health services, Get Set to Go offered a positive referral opportunity, with the potential to re-engage someone in something they had previously enjoyed. The interviewee had referred into the project at least 4 times and recounted the personal journey of a young man who had previously sat in his flat all day. She had persuaded him to try the football and although not initially keen, he was now very committed and never missed a session. He had also begun to engage in other activities with Get Set to Go, adding up to a big change in lifestyle within 18 months. Another client had unfortunately had to give up boxing for physical health reasons but nevertheless, the process of engagement had built her self-confidence.

'She's now engaging with another agency for one to one work. It's something she would never have done in the past'

Partners who were sports providers all had a remit from their funding bodies to extend engagement to those who would not normally participate.

'We have very clear social objectives that we want to achieve; to engage with the hard to reach and basically get people physically active'

The Football Club Foundation, now funded by Premier League Inclusion, has a remit around social inclusion, health, education and sports participation and has many programmes working with young people, adults from all types of backgrounds and needs. For them working with MS Mind *'fits in perfectly'*.

The facilities of the local sports centre partner, Tees Active, were underused during the day, hence they wanted to bring new people in. Having set up 'Club 55' (an initiative for older adults) they had established a relationship with MS Mind and were keen to offer facilities to younger users as well (Sporta, 2016).

British canoeing had targets from Sport England to get more disabled people involved and worked with several organisations including MS Mind.

6.2 Experience of working with Get Set to Go

All partners were extremely enthusiastic about their relationship with MS Mind, although the canoeing clubs were disappointed that people had not continued beyond the six-week introductory course.

The football sessions were open to anyone with a mental health issue and the club could refer individuals who needed more support into Mind. Their experience of working with Get Set to Go clients was very good, and they were able to maintain people's interest:

'They're all great and all really different but they're all passionate about football and so are we so we've got a common ground'

Although there was no formal monitoring by the providers, anecdotal feedback suggested the project was helping. For example:

'X tried to commit suicide a few years ago but actually now they feel part of a team in an environment that they're comfortable in'.

The club had also put some people through their coaching training and could see their leadership skills developing. For those attending regularly the benefits identified by the club were confidence and social skills - *'You can just tell from week to week'*. One of the MS Mind football teams had competed in several tournaments including an international event. They also had a team for those who just wanted to play for fun and was less competitive.

MFC Foundation club spoke about breaking down barriers for people, to get them in:

'That first visit is a cause of anxiety for some people. We say you don't have to take part in the activity; just sit down and watch the session and feel free to have a little go. They can come and sit down whenever they want, it's relaxed, flexible'.

Staff from the centre indicated a keenness to create a sense of belonging, regarding creating opportunities for social interaction as their goal. The centre offers a range of facilities: indoor bowls, badminton, indoor football, Tai Chi, Zumba, indoor archery, and boxing taster sessions. An example of them removing barriers to participation is their provision of over-shoes for indoor bowls, thus saving participants spending on specific footwear. The number of Get Set to Go participants has increased, and they now play in 2 league teams.

'I was surprised at how much commitment they've actually put into it. They've turned up every week and played all of their league games'

Similarly, whilst the Centre had originally allocated two badminton courts to Get Set to Go clients, this has now been increased to four. Participants also used the cafe afterwards where they receive a discount.

6.3 Future Plans

Interviewees were asked how they would like to see their relationship with Get Set to Go progressing in the future. Partners were keen to maintain and expand their relationship with MS Mind:

'It's been a really productive relationship that we've started and I think we've just scratched the surface so far'

Tees Active were keen to extend the activities they could put on for Get Set to Go clients, ideally offering something every day, both mornings and afternoons. They want people to use the centre as a hub where even on a day where they're not coming in to take part in sport they could come in and use the cafe and meet people.

Similarly, the football club want to be able to provide more sessions during the week and extend what offered to include other activities.

'Growing really and getting service users into casual employment with us and getting them to run the sessions; that we would support'

British canoeing want to do more but for them, funding is a problem. Had more resource been available

'They could be doing some canoeing with Tees Active in a swimming pool situation, in a group which could potentially lead to activity with clubs'

6.4 Section Summary

The stakeholders were unanimously positive about the project, and about the partnerships forged with Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind. Whilst there was a degree of disappointment amongst those who had been unable to retain participants, there was a sense of 'future potential' amongst those whose sessions had proved more popular. The impression given was that the 'win-win-win' scenario (service user/sports provider/enabling agency) was not yet achieving its full potential.

7. Conclusions

Get Set to Go has enabled those who participate to build or begin to build more constructive, active lives. It is difficult for some people especially those suffering with a mental health problem, who lack self-confidence and who have become isolated to take the first step towards a healthier life. Get Set to

Go addresses this difficulty directly by offering opportunities and support to get active and reduce social isolation.

This research has shown high levels of inactivity and social isolation amongst service users prior to engagement with the project. Many younger people were interacting with a computer screen all day rather than with other people. Others were kicking their heels but felt unable to do anything about this. All suffered from some form of mental health problem with anxiety and social isolation at the lower end of need and chronic mental illness at the higher end. A few also had physically limiting conditions.

Get Set to Go has provided them with an opportunity they have embraced enthusiastically although getting engaged for the first time was very daunting for many. The key improvements interviewees reported are increased self-confidence and self-esteem and reduced social isolation. Some were simply glad to have something to look forward to (especially true of carers) while others were enthused and keen to do more. Most reported improved or improving physical fitness. The only negative recounted about the project related to the difficulties some experienced getting to sessions because of the cost and complexity of public transport.

The role of Sports Co-ordinator has been key to getting people started. Many interviewees mentioned how much it had helped to have someone they had already met to greet them at the venue, introduce them to people and help them to engage whilst also being aware of what their mental health issues are. The sports providers also appreciated this role and were very happy with the working relationship with the Sports Co-ordinator and the volunteers. In particular, sports providers praised the workshops MS Mind had delivered to their organisations. These had enabled them to have a better understanding of mental ill health, and facilitated removing associated stigma.

Get Set to Go has also improved the circumstances of those who volunteer to help the project. In two instances, the project has assisted volunteers into paid work; in one case, it has helped and continues to help with recovery from mental illness; and in another, it has helped to build a better work/life balance.

The project is also a close fit with the objectives of the sports providers who endeavour to engage with people with mental health problems primarily as a way of tackling social isolation and building self-confidence. Increased physical fitness is a by-product of tackling these issues. The two biggest providers have

facilities that are under-used in the daytime from Monday to Friday. Several service users want to increase their engagement in sport and physical activity and seek more opportunities to do so. Demand for the project is indicated by the waiting list of people wanting to try Get Set to Go.

The main providers would like to offer more opportunities to facilitate increased activity and already have, or are developing, plans to do so. The interviews with service users strongly suggest that their increased activity would not have happened without the support of Get Set to Go enablement but the capacity of the project is constrained. More volunteers would help but since the Sports Co-ordinator also has responsibility for supporting them and their input, this itself puts a further pressure on this role.

The research concludes that the project has been highly successful and offers a close fit between the offer from service providers and the needs of MS Mind's service users. MS Mind maintains a waiting list of those who want to get more active via Get Set to Go, and has the necessary partnerships in place. Unfortunately, however, the resources available for organisation and facilitation fall some way short of current demand, impeding opportunities for project growth and development.

These findings suggest that further funding could expand capacity to take full advantage of the willingness of service users and providers to engage with Get Set to Go. An increase in resource would enable more people to benefit from the project and in turn facilitate greater use of sports facilities in the locality. Were this to be secured, the project could usefully develop more robust systems for capturing routine data on service users and their participation in order to evidence gains more readily. Any future local evaluation could also usefully include assessing costs and benefits, or estimating social value. Finally, the research recommends communicating concerns about transport to relevant local agencies.

References

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