

People Active for Change and Equality

Summary report: baseline survey, People's Panels and focus group



Introduction

This short paper summarises the key learning from:

- An electronic survey which ran between Sept-Oct 2016, generating 329 responses from across 27 local authority areas across Scotland.
- 3 'People's Panel' local consultation events which took place in Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire
- Focus group activity in one of the events (North Ayrshire)

To reflect the dual focus of the PACE project, the surveys and People's Panels enquired about people's *participation* in physical activity and their *involvement* in services (e.g. planning, consultation). The report explores both of these topics separately below, concluding with practical suggestions as to how the barriers to each can be removed.

Participation in physical activity

- More than half of the people with mental health problems surveyed do less than four hours physical activity a week (101 out of 190, 53%).
- When they exercise, they tend to exercise alone.
- Active travel and using leisure centres were the most common examples of activity.

The 'invisibility' of mental health, and the stigma that arises, were identified as the biggest obstacles to participation.

'There are barriers to participation are real and as difficult to overcome as a set of stairs for a wheelchair user - they are mostly invisible and poorly understood though.'

In People's Panels, professionals and people with lived experience also identified *confidence* and *motivation* as major barriers¹. However professionals were likely to underestimate the impact of mental ill health on *energy* and *leaving the house*. Similarly, professionals were more likely to focus on *service* barriers, such as people's awareness of opportunities, lack of appropriate opportunities, or staff awareness of mental health. However, they were less likely than people with lived experience to identify *costs* as a barrier.

The need for training and awareness raising for physical activity staff, front of house colleagues and managers was identified in several parts of the survey and People's Panels.

Involvement in services

87% of survey respondents indicated that people with mental health problems are either excluded (10%) or not well included and represented (77%) within the sports or physical activity community.

¹ The survey asked about *perceived* barriers to participation, and which they had actually *experienced* first-hand. Answers were generally consistent in each area, but with some interesting differences. See the full report for more information.

64 out of 88 physical activity professionals (73%) reported that their organisations are 'very' or 'quite' committed to involving people with mental health problems in physical activity. However there was less commitment to involving people in planning, with only 45% indicating that their organisation was 'very' or 'quite' strategically committed to this.

From involvement to participation

Respondents believe that supporting *involvement* (for example as peer mentors or 'buddies') would help to increase *participation*. Likewise, real life stories, images and role models could help to remove barriers. Celebrity role models can also play a role in helping to reduce stigma.

'I've heard of "sports stars" discussing their mental health however generally I think Joe Bloggs is underrepresented in planning of services etc. Usually consulted once plans are made, if it all, rather than in the development stages.'

'Images of people like me. People who've been through it, peer people to relate to. And elite athletes as role models.'

What can services do?

To increase participation, services can

- Involve and listen to people with lived experience
- Provide practical support and encouragement
- Develop partnerships with other agencies
- Promote the links between physical and mental health
- Look at creative ways to offer reduced costs

What else can be done?

Developing branding for 'mental health aware' services could reassure people they will be understood and not judged. PACE may be able to facilitate the creation of such branding, for example through the proposed Mental Health Charter.

There is a place for targeted or discrete provision that provides peer support and helps overcome barriers arising from fear (e.g. of new situations, being judged). However discrete groups should also be used to support progression onto other activities, groups or levels of involvement where appropriate.

Professionals and people with lived experience gave a number of very clear messages about the benefits of getting physically active, summarised this quote:

'Do it. It helps'.