

The Benefits of the Community Sport Initiative

An evaluation of a 6 month pilot programme to enhance recovery among problematic drug and alcohol users

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Executive Summary

The Community Sports Initiative (CSI) is a 6 month pilot programme. Managed by Lancashire Sports Partnership (LSP) (in partnership with Lancashire Probation Trust and Red Rose Recovery) it aims to enhance recovery among problematic drug and alcohol users by using sport as a means to:

- Promote physical activity;
- Promote productive (i.e. non-substance using) use of time;
- Increase non-drug and alcohol using social networks; and
- Enhance confidence and self-esteem.

The programme has been piloted in four geographical areas: Fleetwood, Hyndburn, Lancaster and Leyland. A part-time (10 hours per week) project support worker has been recruited to work in each area. They are accountable to one overall project coordinator who is based at LSP.

With limited resources, LSP commissioned the School of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire to conduct a small scale evaluation of the pilot. The objectives for the evaluation were:

- To establish what kind of activities work best for what kind of participant (for example, are some activities better at retaining people than others; do certain activities attract a certain kind of person, but not others?);
- To assess the individual benefits felt by individual participants; and
- To establish lessons for the future.

The programme has been successful at establishing a good number of events and activities across the four sites, and of attracting a large number of participants in a short period of time. 205 individuals took part in 892 sessions organised around twenty-one different activities across the four sites during the evaluation period. The programme is succeeding in attracting roughly equal numbers of men and women, although it is better at attracting slightly older participants. This may be reflective of the fact that the programme is recovery orientated however, and many younger substance misusers may be at relatively early points in their drug and/or alcohol taking careers and not yet ready to contemplate change. Large numbers of participants are engaging in more than one session and are maintaining contact across periods of twelve weeks or more. This suggests that the programme is not only good at attracting initial interest from participants, but also that it has the potential to sustain and maintain on-going engagement.

The number, nature and type of events organised in the different sites varied reflecting differences on the ground and the extent to which the support workers were able to link in to existing recovery communities (such as Red Rose Recovery) and/or other partner agencies for venues and/or potential referrals.

The CSI programme works as part of a wider programme of recovery. Over half of the participants talked about attending the CSI programme on top of other activities which they saw as equally important in their recovery. Both service users and project workers described how the programme often grew organically. This can mean that initial small numbers taking part in an activity can grow in to larger numbers over time or that individuals may start with just one activity but then begin taking up others.

Participants reported a number of benefits including:

- Meeting people and reducing isolation;
- Being clean;
- Improved confidence and self-esteem;
- Making recovery visible both to themselves and to others;
- Helping to fill time and provide structure;
- Keeping fit and contributing to a healthy lifestyle; and
- Providing opportunities for personal development.

A number of factors proved critical to the success of the programme. These included:

- Being introduced to the programme by someone they knew personally;
- The presence of an existing recovery community with whom links could be made;
- Running inclusive events that were open to children and families;
- Providing events at no-cost;
- Laying on transport to get people to events;
- Ensuring that activities were focussed on having fun; and
- Identifying and working with other partners who could provide venues, referrals, transport and encouragement.

The programme has faced a number of challenges, perhaps most notably the pressures of time in trying to get such an ambitious scheme of work off the ground in just six months, with such limited resources, and utilising the skills of recovering drug and alcohol users with limited work experience as project workers.

Despite this, the programme has achieved some very real and tangible successes, particularly when experienced as part of an overall package of support by its participants.

The support workers themselves have gained enormously from the experience with two of them having been successful in gaining full-time employment.

Ideas for improvement were generated from a number of sources including the project co-ordinator, the support workers, participants and members of staff/service user reps from other organisations.

They included:

- More time for preparation and to enable successful partnership working;
- More development time for staff;
- Wider range of activities provided over longer periods of time;
- Indoor venues to mitigate the adverse impact of bad weather ;
- Linking the different pilot sites together to benefit from a wider recovery community; and
- The formalisation of opportunities for personal develop, to include the opportunity to gain formal qualifications.

Background and introduction

The Community Sports Initiative

The Community Sports Initiative (CSI) is a 6 month pilot programme. Managed by Lancashire Sports Partnership (LSP) (in partnership with Lancashire Probation Trust and Red Rose Recovery) it aims to enhance recovery among problematic drug and alcohol users by using sport as a means to:

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The evaluation framework

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- To assess the individual benefits felt by individual participants; and
- To establish lessons for the future.

Data sources and evaluation methods

A range of data was collected by the evaluator between May and September 2014.

Objective 1: To establish what kind of activities work best for what kind of participant

The support workers in each locality were asked to collect attendance data in relation to the users who attend each session. This data was entered in to a database held centrally by LSP. Core data included:

- The type of activity that was organized (for example, ramble, 5-a-side football, cycle ride etc.)
- The date that the activity took place
- The number of people who attended
- The demographic profile of the people who attended (age, sex, ethnicity)
- Tracking data to assess whether individuals attended more than one session

Objective 2: To assess individual benefits felt by individual participants

Support workers in each locality were asked to identify participants in each area who were willing to be interviewed by the evaluator. The interviews were semi-structured and sought to establish how

participants experienced the programme and the benefits that they derived from it by asking them the following questions:

- Background information about themselves (e.g. age, gender, brief history of substance misuse, period in recovery)
- What motivated them to take part in the programme?
- What misgivings (if any) had they had?
- How were these overcome/addressed?
- What did they like about the programme?
- What did they not like about the programme?
- What had they hoped to gain from the programme?
- What did they feel they actually gained from the programme?
- What would they like to have gained, but were unable to?
- What single thing would they change in order to improve the programme?

Interviews took place at sites and in locations where CSI activities had been arranged and were taking place. Eighteen service users were interviewed across three of the four sites. In addition, five members of staff/service user reps were interviewed in two sites.

While it is acknowledged that this method may have been subject to bias (for example, participants were initially approached by the support workers and only included participants who were willing to take part) the evaluation only had limited resources and for this reason a pragmatic, time efficient and simple approach had to be adopted.

Individual interviews were recorded using digital audio equipment, fully transcribed and then analysed thematically.

Objective 3: To establish lessons for the future from the project coordinator and the project workers

The evaluator attended monthly staff team meetings. The evaluator was able to observe and make notes of the meetings and record information that shed light on how the programme was working.

A specific slot was set aside within the team meetings for the support workers to reflect on how they thought the project was working and the lessons learned. The support workers were asked to keep an anonymized (i.e. not recording information that may identify individual service users) reflective diary on a daily basis in order to assist this process. They were asked to share this with other members of the team and with the evaluator, who often used this as the basis for further questioning.

In addition, the evaluator arranged to have one to one telephone conversations with each of the support workers which gave them additional (and more confidential) time to reflect on the programme.

The evaluation context

The evaluation took place over a short period of time (May-September 2014) and was itself an evaluation of a short term pilot project. Turnover of staff (support workers) within the period was high (seven support workers were recruited to the four posts) and the four sites chosen for the pilot

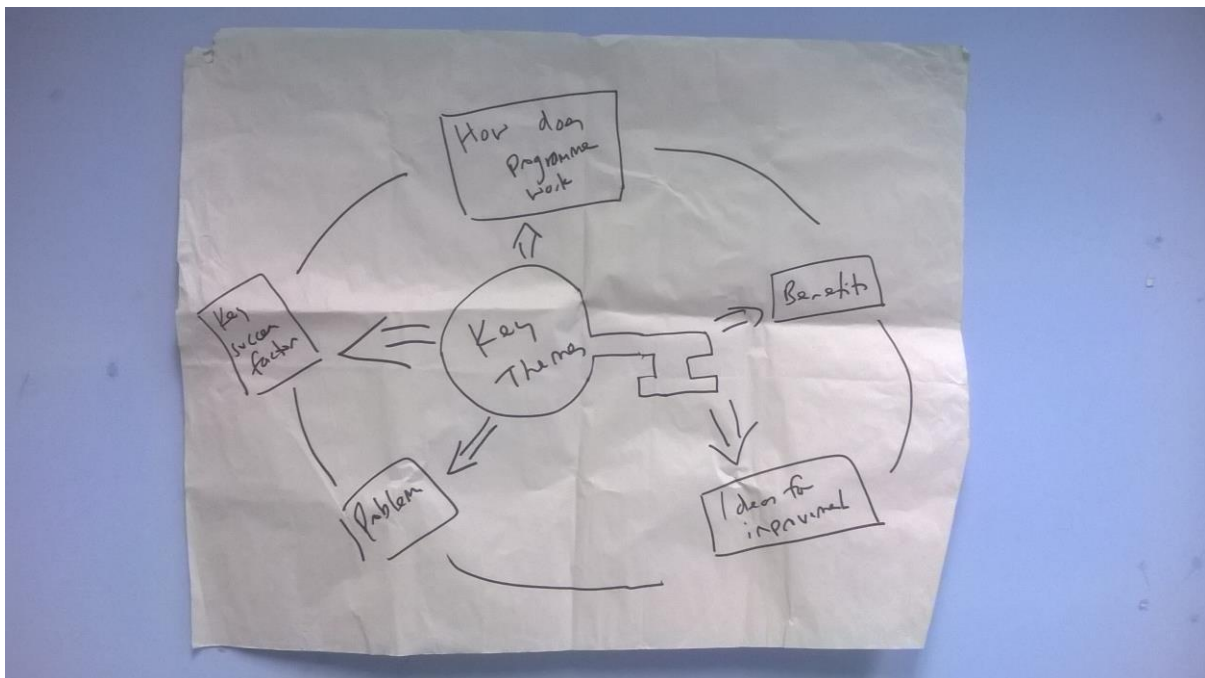
were very different from one another. Hyndburn, for example, has a very well developed recovery community with which the project worker was able to link up, and indeed had been a part of, whereas the project worker in Fleetwood, where the recovery community is less well-established and less visible, had a very different experience. Put another way, the support workers in some areas were pushing against already open doors or swimming with the tide as it were, whereas support workers in other areas had more of standing start.

Organisation of data

Quantitative data, drawn from the registration and attendance sheets that the support workers were asked to collect at each session is presented first. This is broken down to show the number and type of events organised in each locality; the total number of participants; the age of participants; the gender of participants; the number of sessions that each participant attended; and the number of participants who had had on-going engagement within the last twelve weeks.

The qualitative data is presented later and organised around the following key themes:

- How the programme works
- Benefits
- Key success factors
- Problems and challenges



Finally there is a section on recommendations and ideas for improvement that was drawn largely from suggestions made by the support workers themselves, the project co-ordinator, workers and service user reps from other organisation and project participants during the qualitative interviews.

The evaluator reported to a steering group, which included representatives from Lancashire Sport, Lancashire Probation Trust and Red Rose Recovery, who helped to guide the process and provided useful feedback and comments on an initial draft report.

Data presentation and findings

Quantitative data

A total of twenty-one different activities were organised across the four sites during the evaluation period. The nature of the different events is set out in the table 1 below. The number, nature and type of events organised in the different sites varied considerably. For example, there were more activities in Lancaster and Hyndburn than there were in Fleetwood and Leyland. Furthermore, activities in Fleetwood tended to be more generic with the group often just going off to the park to play rounders, that reflects the difficulty that the support worker had in finding venues for more specific activities. As will be discussed later, this reflects differences on the ground and the extent to which the support workers were able to link in to existing recovery communities (such as Red Rose Recovery) and/or other partner agencies for venues and/or potential referrals.

Table 1: events and activities organised in different sites

Hyndburn	Fleetwood	Lancaster	Leyland
Circuit training Recovery ramble Tuesday gym Thursday gym Leisure centre use	Friday group Thursday group Monday group	Women’s fit club Walking group Football group Thursday Cycling group Sunday Cycling group STAR group Fitness club Football league Golf	Badminton Friday football Friday netball

* in addition there was a recovery hunt, but it is not clear where this activity took place.

205 individuals took part in at least one activity during the evaluation period, attending a total of 892 sessions.

There was a good split across gender, with roughly even numbers of each taking part. 97 (47%) were female and 108 (53%) were male.

The programme was generally better at attracting slightly older participants, with 113 (59%) falling in the 31-50 ages brackets (table 2).

Table 2: Age of participants

Age of participants	Number of participants	Percentage of participants (rounded)
<18	27	14%
18-25	23	12%
26-30	15	8%
31-40	53	28%
41-50	60	32%
>50	12	6%
Unknown	15	

144 (70%) participants attended *at least* two sessions during the monitoring period; 50 (24%) attended *at least* six sessions; and 16 (8%) attended more than ten sessions (table 3). The (mean) average number of sessions attended by each participant was 4.35.

Table 3: Number of sessions attended by participants

Number of sessions attended	Number of participants	Percentage of participants (rounded)
One	61	30%
Two to five	94	46%
Six to ten	34	17%
More than ten	16	8%

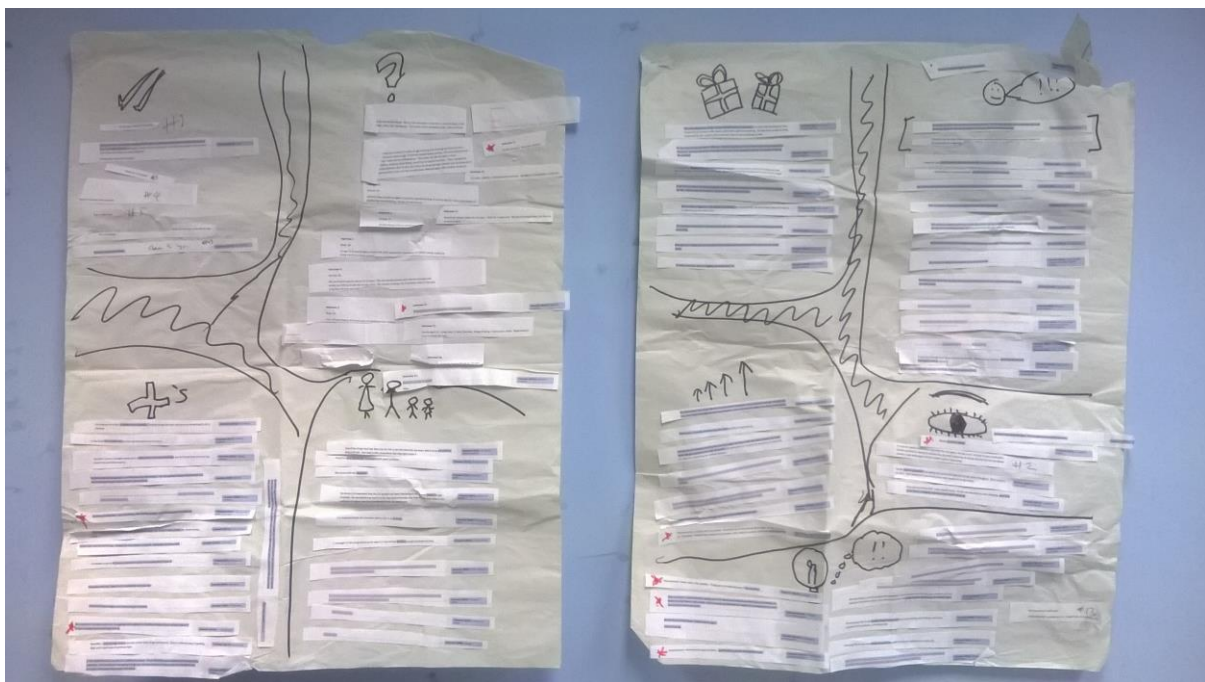


83 (40%) of participants had started the programme within the last twelve weeks. 122 (60%) had started the programme more than twelve weeks ago. Of those who had started the programme more than twelve weeks ago, 85 (70%) had also taken part in an at least one activity within the last twelve weeks.

The quantitative data suggests that the programme has been successful at establishing a good number of events and activities across the four sites, and of attracting a large number of participants in a short period of time. The programme is succeeding in attracting roughly equal numbers of men and women, although it is better at attracting slightly older participants. This may be reflective of the fact that the programme is recovery orientated however, and many younger substance misusers may be at relatively early points in their drug and/or alcohol taking careers and not yet ready to contemplate change. Large numbers of participants are engaging in more than one session and are maintaining contact across periods of twelve weeks or more. This suggests that the programme is not only good at attracting initial interest from participants, but also that it has the potential to sustain and maintain on-going engagement.

Qualitative data

How the programme works



It was clear from the responses to the individual interviews that the CSI programme works as part of a wider programme of recovery. Over half of the participants talked about attending the CSI programme on top of other activities which they saw as equally important in their recovery.

For example,

I am attending college and I have started work as a volunteer. The sessions here have helped me to feel a part of something and to connect with others

The activities here at the gym and the leisure centre are as important as the NA meetings. They all help to keep me clean.

I have regular therapeutic counselling, but beyond these sessions I would be at a loss as to what to do, if you know what I mean. I would have a lot of time to fill and nowhere to go.

I've started driving lessons and I've started at college, but I always keep these (CSI) slots free cos I just love it that much.

Participants are often keen to take part in a number of different activities.

I have been attending the gym and the leisure centre. I have also done recovery walks and taken part in rounders in the park.

I come to the gym twice a week. I go the swimming session with my family on Wednesdays. I tried the salsa, but that was not for me.

I have been coming to the gym. I have also been to the sessions at the leisure centre. Volleyball, swimming, badminton, basketball.

Been coming since it started. Two to three months? Netball, football, badminton, rounders.

Both service users and project workers described how the programme often grew organically. This can mean that initial small numbers taking part in an activity can grow in to larger numbers over time or that individuals may start with just one activity but then begin taking up others.

For the first recovery walk only eight people turned up. But on the last one there was more than twenty.

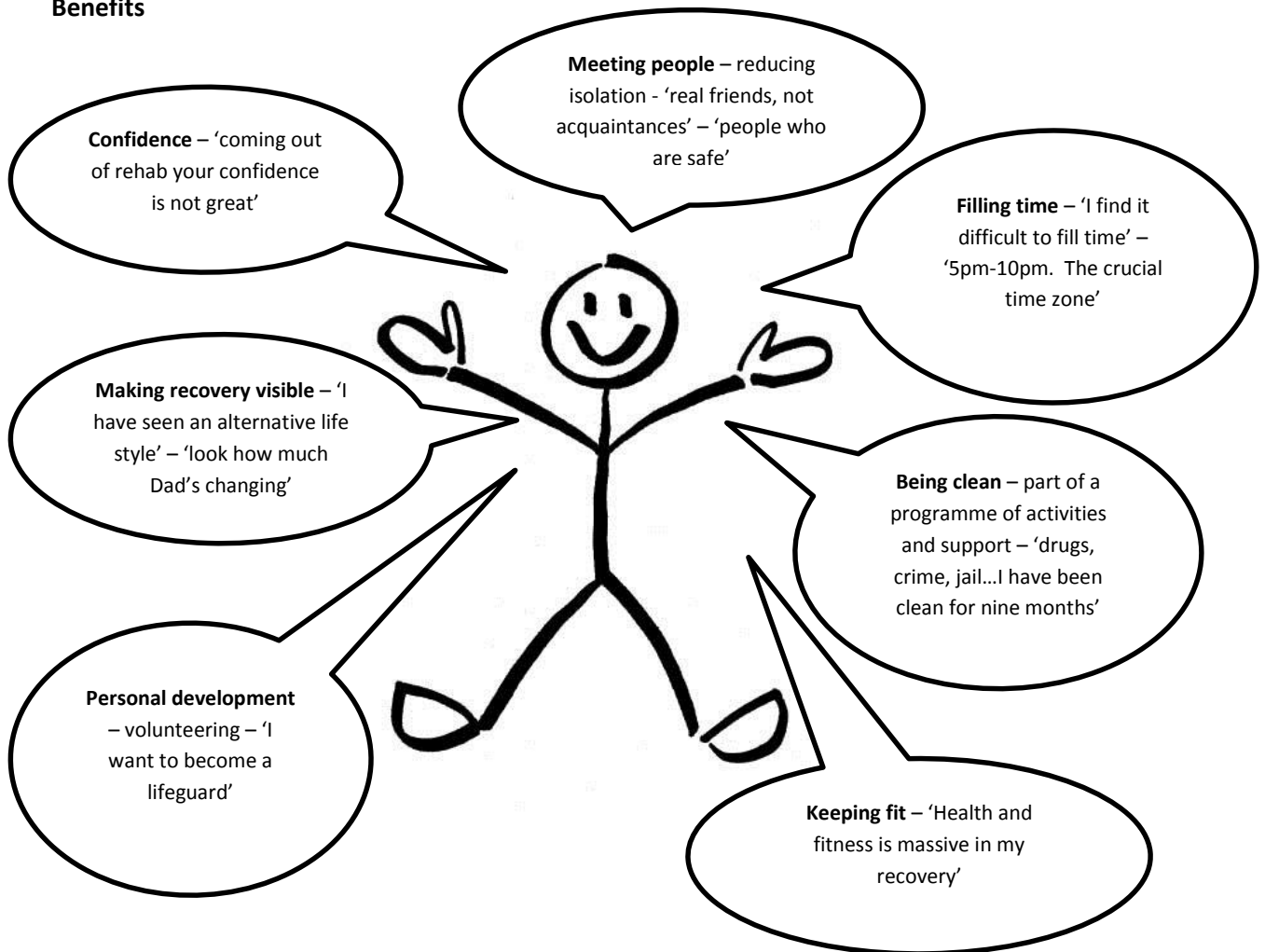
I just came along for the netball to start with. But then I heard about the badminton.

Rounders can be up and down. Maybe fifteen one week and then only six the next. And then it's back up to fifteen again.

In summary then, the programme appears to contribute to recovery for those who attend it, but only as part of a wider programme of activities. It is unlikely that the programme would support recovery on its own. Wider connections and links to other activities and programmes that also support recovery are extremely important. As will be discussed later, these are not always straight forward, and need time to be developed, nurtured and maintained.

Critically, the programme also needs time to develop and grow, as attendance at one session can often act as the gateway to others. Attendance at individual sessions can fluctuate week by week and a longer-term view needs to be taken of the popularity of specific events or activities, rather than short snap-shots.

Benefits



Meeting people and reducing isolation

The biggest single benefit that people said that they got from the programme was that of meeting other people and reducing social isolation. All participants described meeting people as something they had benefitted from. Participants described how many of the people that they knew were also suffering with addiction and that this had meant that they had had to make new friends. The programme had helped with this.

The activities here allow me to connect with people – like-minded people who want to stay off drugs and alcohol

I moved here to get away from the drug scene in my home town. Taking part here has enabled me to meet new friends and put roots down. The people I meet here call me up just to see how I am. In the past people only called to see if I had money or if I was going to score.

I have met people. People who are safe. People who have gone through addiction and who are part of the recovery movement. Not false people.

I have met new friends. Real friends, not acquaintances.

The programme makes a significant contribution to allowing people to meet new friends. Importantly, these new friends are often seen as qualitatively different from other friends that people have in that they are (or are aspiring to be) clean.



Being clean

Participants had been clean for periods ranging between five weeks and two years. They saw the CSI sessions as helping them to stay clean. As discussed previously, it would be wrong to conclude that it was the CSI programme on its' own that led to people being clean. Rather it is the CSI programme working alongside a range of other activities and interventions as part of an overall package of support that contributes towards people's recovery and them being clean.

I started drug and alcohol use when I was fifteen. Drinking and smoking cannabis. When I was seventeen I got in to the rave scene and started doing ecstasy, LSD and amphetamine. It was later when I got in to heroin, crack and benzos. Since then my life has been a rocky path. Stealing, robbing, burgling, shoplifting...anything to support my habit. If it weren't for this and the meetings and I know that I would already have been addiction again by now. It is really helping. I have been clean for five weeks.

Exercise is a great remedy. I was a heroin addict for nineteen years, but I have been clean for the last two.

Thirty year history of drug and alcohol abuse. Ever since I can remember it has been a history of drugs, crime, jail, coming out...drugs, crime, jail...Even when I have wanted to stop I have not been able to. I have been clean for nine months.

Confidence

Participants described how taking part in the activities had helped to build their confidence and self-esteem. Participants described having feelings of low self-worth after years of addiction and how taking part in the CSI programme was helping to turn that around.

Coming out of rehab...your confidence is not great. Doing things like this helps.

I know I have become more confident. You know, I have started to join in more.

It has given me confidence and self-esteem. I have gained respect for myself and a feeling of self-worth that I didn't have before.

I didn't jump in straight away. You know, it was kind of difficult to cross the threshold. But once I had done I got more confident.

Making recovery visible

Participants described how the CSI programme helped to motivate them as they could see other people who were doing well. This inspired them to stick with their own recovery feeling 'if they can do it, so can I'. It also helped them to demonstrate to others how well they were doing and how much progress they had made. This was important as often significant others in their lives had almost written them off as a lost cause.

For the first time I have seen an alternative life style. Something that is more than just key worker sessions.

It helps to rebuild bonds. Your family can see you. Your kids can see you and they can see. Look how much Mum's changing. Look how much Dad's changing.

I've not spoken to my Mum or sister for two years. I have a son. I was a bad father. I used to say that I wanted to see him, but then when I did I couldn't wait to get away. I just wanted to score. But I have been in touch with my aunt and I know from what she says that they are asking after me. Because they can see that I am doing something different this time. Maybe I will be able to see them again.

Filling time

Participants talked about the time that they had to fill and how boring life could be. The CSI programme helped to fill some of this time.

I find it difficult to fill the time. Even with this it is difficult. I would like to do more of it. See more activities and more hours.

It has helped to give me a bit of a structure. You know, at certain times I know I am going to come here. It is something to look forward to.

During team meetings the support workers described how they felt that one of the biggest problems for people in recovery is filling time. They thought that this was especially the case in the evenings between 5pm and 10pm. They described this as 'the crucial time zone.'

Keeping fit

Interestingly enough, given the nature of the activities, keeping fit was not a significant benefit for many of the participants, most of who felt that meeting people, building confidence and being inspired were far more important. That said, keeping fit was a benefit mentioned by a small number of participants and for these few it was an important benefit.

Health and fitness is massive in my recovery

Health and fitness. This time last year I was in a wheelchair.

Personal development

A number of participants talked about how they could see themselves using the programme as a spring board to other activities. One talked about how he had reflected back on his involvement and now saw himself differently as a result.

I used to come along and just take part. But now I help out sometimes. I help to organise activities

I would like to take on a coaching role

I loved the swimming. I would like to become a lifeguard.

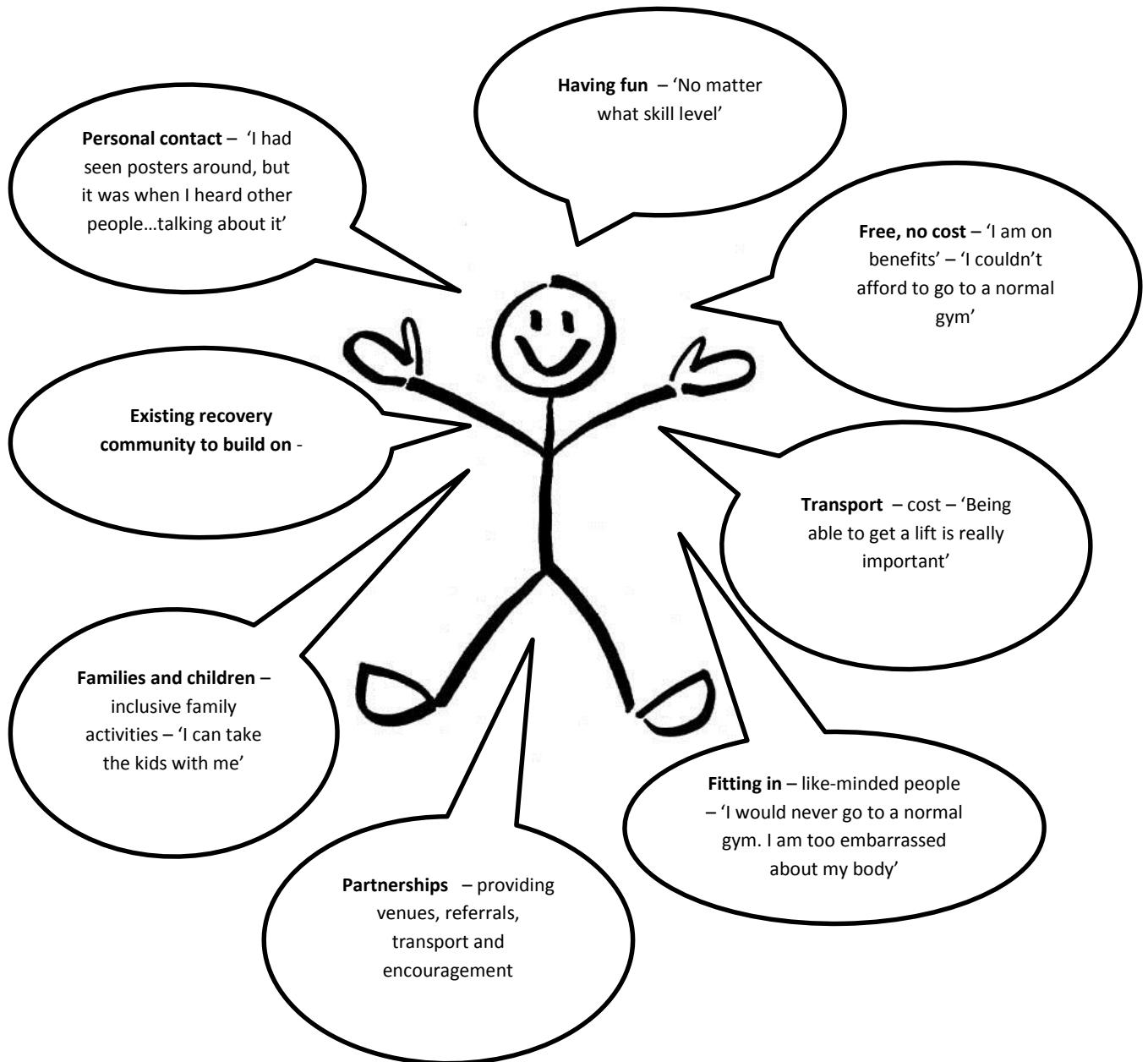
[The worker here] has asked me if I would consider becoming a volunteer. You know, to help find out what people want to do and what they are interested in and to get more people involved.

It has made me think a bit. You can't be good at everything. But it is about having a go and having fun. Just meeting people.

During team meetings, one of the support workers described how one person had gone on to get a job.

Key success factors

Between them, both the participants and the support workers identified a number of factors that were critical to the success of the programme.



Personal contact and introduction

All of the participants said that they had been encouraged to attend the sessions because someone had spoken to them personally about it. In many instances the project worker had been in to an existing recovery group meeting (for example NA or a recovery group organised by a local substance misuse service). In some instances the support worker was already known in the area as someone

who had been through recovery services and this had helped to build trust and confidence. In other instances, participants were encouraged because they had heard about the sessions by word of mouth through other people who they knew and who were attending sessions. The enthusiasm of others, and being told about the programme by people who they trusted was an important factor in helping them to decide to give it a go.

I had seen the posters around, but it was when I heard other people in recovery talking about it that I decided to give it a go

I was going to recovery meetings and the [the worker here] was talking about it along with someone else in the group who also comes.

Someone in one of the groups that I was going to mentioned it

Once at the sessions, it was important that the people that they had met and who had told them about the sessions were also there and were joining in.

[The worker here] does not just tell you about it and then leave you to get on with it. He is here too and he is joining in and getting involved.

Having an existing recovery community to build on

As discussed earlier, the four pilot sites are very different from each other in terms of the extent to which a visible and vibrant recovery community already exists. This was a critical factor in how quickly and easily activities could be established in each area, particularly given the importance of personal contact in the recruitment of individuals highlighted above. As one of the support workers put it when outlining the things that had enabled him to succeed:

Being able to engage with service users has been important. You know, having access and knowing the key services to go to and build links with. I have been a part of the community, so that being known by a lot of people, I have got that visible track record in recovery myself

Conversely, a service user in another area where things had been slower to progress talked about the problems of getting things off the ground quickly where the recovery community was less well developed.

We are only just starting to develop a recovery community here. It would be shame if this dies out. We used to have an NA meeting, but that died. In Fleetwood there is nothing. The fishing industry is gone. It is a small town. We need to develop things here.

It is not that initiatives such as this cannot be set up where there is not a visible or well established recovery community, just that it will take longer.

You need to build it up. The breakfast club here started with just two people. But look at it today. It's full of people.

Families and children

A number of participants talked about how important it was that children and families were also able to attend sessions. As well as children attending events such as rounders in the park, children had also attended gym sessions and walks.

[The worker here] has been really flexible and allowed kids to come. I think that's been really important. It would be really hard for a lot of people, single mums especially, to come. And you can see how much they [the children] enjoy it too.

I have been coming with my daughter

I can take the kids with me and they love it

It's great that I can bring my kids. Not only is it convenient, I couldn't come if they couldn't. And they love it.

Free, no cost events

Two participants said that they would still be able to come even if they had to pay. One said that her husband was working and so money was not an issue and another said that the events were so important to her that she would 'find the money from somewhere, assuming that it wasn't too much'. All the rest said that the fact that the events were provided free of charge was critical to their attendance.

I couldn't afford to go to a normal gym. The good thing about this is that you don't need any money.

I am on benefits so it is essential that it is free. I couldn't afford to come otherwise.

Transport

Closely allied with the issue of cost was the issue of transport. Given that most participants could not afford the money to pay for activities, most could not afford to pay for transport either. Many participants were dependent on lifts or the availability of staff and a minibus from another service to bring them to an event.

We have managed to get 12 names signed up to go for a walk, but it depends on getting a minibus. We need recovery champions who have got a driving licence.

Being able to get a lift is really important. I couldn't get here otherwise. Sometimes events have been organised for when staff are not available to bring us so I couldn't come.

Fitting in

Being with similar people was important for a number of participants. They enjoyed being with like-minded people with similar backgrounds who they felt understood them.

I would never go to a normal gym. I am too embarrassed about my body. People would look at me.

You know that everyone here is like you. We encourage and motivate each other.

There's no awkwardness, you know?

Having fun and not being too competitive

While a small number of participants enjoyed being able to compete, most participants said that what they liked about the sessions was that they were not too competitive and that they were more about having fun and enjoying yourself. Most commented that they liked the fact that they did not have to be good at the event in order to join in.

No matter what skill level or ability you are at, it is just about having fun and taking part.

This is just something that I really enjoy doing. I love it.

Partnerships

Partnership with other organisations was something else that was identified as critical to success. Partnership arrangements might extend to providing venues, providing referrals, providing transport, or providing encouragement to people to attend.

[The worker here] comes to get people signed up, but then I [a worker at another service] have a role to cajole people along and get them to come.

I [a worker at another service] met with [the workers here]. They booked the venue and got the equipment. I helped to find people who are interested.

I found out about this through a worker at [another service]. Then I heard other people talking about it and decided to try it.

Problems and challenges

Most of the problems were identified either by support workers themselves or by workers in other agencies. Participants themselves identified few problems. For the most part they were very satisfied with what was being organised and the way that it was being run.

The sessions are run really well. It is good as it is.

The weather

The one problem that was consistently identified by participants was the lack of indoor facilities and the impact of the weather. The weather had already had an impact on a number of outdoor events (such as rounders and netball) that had had to be cancelled and participants expressed concerns that this was likely to become more of an issue as autumn and winter approached.

The only downside is the weather. We need an indoor alternative.

The netball pitches are dangerous if it has been raining

You need money in order to get more indoor community venues. The YMCA, local churches.



Lack of recovery community or recovery community not well developed

As previously discussed, project workers perceived the lack of a visible recovery community to be a problem in some areas. This made it harder to know where to go to recruit participants. Workers who were familiar with the local recovery community and who had been a part of it generally found it easier to recruit participants because they were already well known and linked in to potential participants.

Money for community venues

Some project workers reported that they found it difficult to access money to pay for community venues. Some said that they did not know how much money they could spend, or that when it had been agreed that they could spend money, it seemed to take a long time for community venues to actually get paid which left them to deal with awkward situations on the ground.



Partnerships

Successful partnership working was identified as key success factor earlier. Conversely however, partnership working could also sometimes be difficult and problematic.

Workers in other agencies said that sometimes events were organised at times that clashed with what they were doing. As one worker put it:

We are running our own recovery groups, so if an event is organised at the same time that we have a group then people will not be able to go. Sometimes the groups run for a number of weeks or months and people can't pick and choose when they are going to come. They have to go to everything. Also, if staff are needed to transport people then events have to be at a time when we are free.

On the other hand, some of the support workers said that agencies did not always pass information on.

We send them information out about what is going on and they say that they will pass it on, but then they don't. If you send them stuff you can't just assume that they will pass it on. You have to ring and ring to check that they have.

Staffing

As mentioned earlier, personal contact was extremely important in getting potential participants to engage in the programme in the first place, and having support workers who were themselves (or had been) a part of the recovery scene, proved to be a real asset in some areas. The fact that support workers knew other people on the scene, knew where to go to contact potential participants and could be seen as a role model all helped to attract participants. However, the use of workers with a history of problematic substance misuse was not without its challenges and problems. There was a high turnover of staff within a short space of time (seven support workers were recruited to fill the four vacant posts over the five-month period). Two of the workers had issues around their own recovery and had periods when they lapsed. One experienced significant financial difficulties connected with his transition to part-time work that resulted in the

accumulation of debt and rent arrears when his benefits were stopped. This caused him considerable stress and worry and took up significant chunks of the project coordinators time.

All of the support workers described how they were working in new situations, which took them outside of their comfort zone. For example, one talked about he struggled to turn a computer on. Another talked about how he had had to learn not to swear when he was talking to people. Another described how difficult he had found it ringing up the probation service in order to try to arrange to come and talk to some potential users of the service:

The only time I had ever talked to probation was when I had to talk to my own probation officer. And here I am trying to ring up to say send us some referrals. You know, I didn't know how to pick the phone up and talk to them. I didn't know what to say.

The project coordinator described how she had not been prepared for the level of support that some of the project workers needed at times. She felt that the project had under-estimated this and could have benefited from more advice about this, perhaps by establishing closer and more regular links with organisations such as the Lancashire User Forum.

Even things like knowing what to do if you weren't able to come in to work. (Names project worker) had some issues going on and just didn't turn up. He didn't know that he had to phone up and say what was going on or anything. In any other job you would get sacked if you just didn't turn up and then disappeared and didn't answer phone calls.

This is not to suggest that the programme should not use people with a history of problematic substance as workers. To the contrary, there is evidence that this can have real benefits both for the workers and for participants. Despite the challenges, the support workers learned a lot and gained a great deal of experience. Since the evaluation, two of the support workers have been successful at gaining further full time employment. Neither had been in any form of employment for a number of years prior to taking up the support worker posts. Participants also reported that they often felt inspired by seeing people (support workers) who are doing well in recovery.

[The worker here] used to be just like me. But now look at him. If he can do it, so can I. I get inspiration from seeing how other people here are doing.

What is important is that the additional support needs of people who may not have recent work experience and who may have on-going personal crisis is not under-estimated. The project coordinator needs to have time to deal with these issues and may need to draw on wider support.

Filling in forms

A number of workers struggled with completing forms and paperwork. Difficulties centred around two main issues. The first was a very practical one to do with completing paperwork outside when it might be raining or windy. The second was more to do with not knowing how to complete paperwork without it becoming intrusive.

People have come to do an event. They don't like filling in forms.

Tied in with the section above about staffing, it might be a good idea to create time in staff meetings to discuss ways of completing paperwork as part of this might be about the fact that it is something that is outside of the comfort zone of staff.



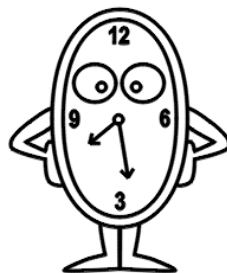
Support workers not having time to do everything that they want to do

The support workers are only employed on limited part-time (ten hours per week) contracts. They all complained that the hours were not enough to do everything that they had to do. Although they were supported by the project coordinator, the project workers had a lot to do within this time including:

- Recruiting potential participants (which might include making calls to or visiting other agencies)
- Organising events (which might include sorting out venues, times, transport, equipment and facilitators)
- Running or taking part in events (some project workers actually ran or took part in the events that they organised)
- Completing administrative tasks (for example, forms and paperwork)
- Attending team meetings or meeting with the project coordinator.

In addition, some workers described how within the events themselves some participants approached them for advice or to have a conversation. They all recognised the importance of developing relationships with participants, but making the time to do this in practice was not always easy. As one project worker put it:

You need to have eyes in the back of your head to keep track of everything that is going on



Managing the environment

Support workers described how they had faced challenges establishing a culture of abstinence at some events, particularly where these were held in public places.

There was a rounders event in the park and some people turned up and just sat down near where we were doing it and they started drinking and smoking. It was not like it was in a venue or something. It was in a public place so how do you tell people to move on? You can only ask them.

All appeared to have been successful in doing this over time however. Sometimes this had necessitated explicit discussions with people to explain what the purpose of the group was and why drug and alcohol use could not be tolerated. Sometimes support workers had had to ask people not to take part because of health and safety concerns if participants were intoxicated. In some instances support workers had established different sessions for participants who were abstinent on the one hand and those who were aspiring to abstinent on the other.

Summary

From the data above, it is clear that the programme has been successful at engaging and retaining large numbers of participants in a range of varied events in a very short period of time. The speed of progress has varied across the four sites, largely as a result of differences in the maturity of the local recovery community, the extent of established partnerships, and the retention and/or turnover of individual project workers in each of the four sites. Personal contact and approaches to potential participants has been critical to achieving engagement, as has the fact that events are provided free, are open to families, and can lay on transport.

The programme has faced a number of challenges, perhaps most notably the pressures of time in trying to get such an ambitious scheme of work off the ground in just six months, with such limited resources, and utilising the skills of recovering drug and alcohol users with limited work experience as project workers.

Despite this, the programme has achieved some very real and tangible successes, particularly when experienced as part of an overall package of support by its participants. While keeping fit is almost a by-product of the programme, other benefits have included meeting people; filling time; building confidence and self-esteem; and providing motivation by making recovery visible.

The support workers themselves have gained enormously from the experience with two of them having been successful in gaining full-time employment.

Recommendations and Ideas for improvement

Ideas for improvement were generated from a number of sources including the project co-ordinator, the support workers, participants and members of staff/service user reps from other organisations.



Preparation and partnership

Successful partnership working was identified as both a critical success factor and as something that could be problematic. Partners could help identify participants, help provide venues, help with transport, help motivate participants to attend and help publicise events and activities. They could also help by providing the project coordinator with advice and support about how best to support and develop the project workers. Partnerships do not just happen however. They need time to develop, review and maintain. Future iterations of the programme could benefit from longer lead in times with more time to build partnerships. Part of this is about having time to identify who the potential partners might be and part of this is about having time to work out the way in which organisations can best work together. Given the fact that the programme works best as part of a range of other activities which all support recovery, partnership working feels especially important.

This would also extend to having time to have discussions and meetings with staff from the Job Centre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions around protecting the benefits of project workers.

More development time for staff

As identified in the section above on problems and challenges, the support workers would have benefited from having more development time. This is not to downplay the distance travelled by the support workers and the considerable progress that some of them made. Some of the support workers experienced their own challenges around recovery however, while others had to learn new skills about how to be professional, how to use a computer, how to speak on the phone and how to fill in forms. As one said:

I feel like I am in the middle of everything here. I have to talk to the gym. I have to talk to CSI. I have to talk to probation. I have to talk to service users. I have never done any of this before. Everyday I am doing things that are new to me and out of my comfort zone.

Both the support workers and the project coordinator said that they would have liked to have had more time set aside for staff development. Support workers said that they would have liked to have had the time to work together and see what each other were doing by shadowing each other. This is

clearly linked to resources and the level of finance that is available to the project. It may be that a root for progression can be established within the project with recovering users first being taken on as volunteers and then progressing to become paid workers further down the line, with gradually increasing hours and responsibility.

Wider range of activities provided over longer periods of time

Participants expressed very high degrees of satisfaction with the programme as it was and often struggled to come up with suggestions for how it could be improved, other than to say that they would like to see more events (including more of the same, but also including some new activities that weren't currently available) provided for more hours of the week.

Indoor venues

All respondents recognised the adverse impact that bad weather had had on the programme of activities and that some activities had sometimes had to be cancelled because of rain. They were also acutely aware of the fact that this was likely to become even more of a factor as the autumn and winter drew in, and that this could threaten the viability of the programme if it was seen to stop for any length of time. A number of participants said that they were aware of a range of venues that could be approached (for example, church halls and community centres) and that probably wouldn't be that expensive. Some workers were aware of indoor venues that they could use, but they were unsure how much they had to spend or how they could go about accessing the resources that were available.

Linking sites together

Participants were generally aware that they were part of a bigger programme and that other events were going on elsewhere. Several of them suggested that they could be brought together for either fun events, such as family rounders, or to compete against each other.

Qualifications and personal development

A number of participants, particularly those who had become more active within the programme (for example, by helping to organise or run activities, or by helping to recruit other participants) were curious to know whether there was any chance that the work that they were doing and the experience that they were gaining could be put towards some kind of qualification.

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