Active for Life/Steps for Life

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1.0 Introduction

The recently published report by NHS England report “Improving the Health of People with Mental Health Problems” bluntly acknowledges that “Many people with mental health problems do not take enough exercise”.

The report confirms that increasing physical activity levels can improve both physical and mental health, enhance psychological wellbeing, reduce mortality and improve life expectancy. People with severe mental health problems are more likely to be inactive than the wider population, yet some regular physical activity can help reduce conditions associated with high levels of sedentary behaviour in this group. Additionally physical activity may also improve aspects of cognitive functioning and is increasingly associated with delaying the onset of, and slowing the progress of dementia.

Even small increases in physical activity can, over time, lead to health and wellbeing benefits. In order to achieve this, the report recommends that mental health professionals “work with local partners and other agencies to ensure service users have access to leisure centres, gyms and sports facilities”. As exercise referral schemes this is exactly what Active for Life (AfL) and Steps for Life (SfL) facilitates. The schemes take referrals from mental health and dementia specialists and enable participants to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to become more active. Referrers can be confident that their patients will receive tailored exercise advice and support from qualified exercise professionals experienced at working with these client groups.

By working one to one or in small groups at various venues throughout Kirklees, AfL and SfL seeks to not only give participants the opportunity to discover the enjoyment of physical activity, but also find ways in which it can become a sustainable part of their lifestyle in the longer term. The schemes make physical activity a real world option for participants, working with them to overcome the barriers preventing them from being more active.

In the case of mental illness physical activity can act as a catalyst to recovery. Many participants who have successfully completed the Active for Life programme identify regular exercise as an important step in re-establishing a regular daily structure or routine to the week. Exercise can also be a great way of building confidence to meet new people, take part in group activities and return to mainstream locations. Similarly for people living with dementia, regular exercise has been shown to improve cognition, increase memory and slow mental decline, in addition to reducing the risk of falls by improving strength and balance.

The schemes are delivered through Kirklees Council’s Sport and Physical Activity Development Team, and are funded by Kirklees Commissioning and Health Partnership and both the NHS Greater Huddersfield and North Kirklees Clinical Commissioning Groups. Working in close partnership with Kirklees Active Leisure, the schemes are able to offer participants access to leisure facilities within Kirklees at significantly reduced rates. Participants are supported to engage in a personalised 45 week, goal orientated, structured exercise programme, which may include a range of activities. Using a gym, swimming, walking and attending groups or specialist exercise classes are just some of the opportunities available to participants.

What follows is a summary of the main developments within the service throughout 2015-16 period. There is an overview of outcomes achieved by participants, statistics and financial information along with an outline of further visions and targets to be achieved in 2016-17.
2.0 General Developments

Both AfL and SfL have witnessed another productive year, the main highlights of which are summarised below.

- The year on year increase in the total number of contact hours with participants has continued in 2015-16. This year the AfL team delivered a total of 3905 hours of contact time, an increase of nearly 200 hours on 2014-15. SfL which is a smaller scheme with substantially fewer staff delivered 760 hours of contact time.

- During the year 75 people have progressed from Active for Life into more mainstream activity opportunities. The majority of these have moved onto the PALS exercise referral scheme, but others now use private gyms and other community activity options. Additionally over 200 other participants have benefitted in having the opportunity to make physical activity/exercise part of their recovery strategy.

- Both AfL and SfL continue to work in close partnership with Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL). Working closely with KAL staff helps to ensure AfL & SfL clients feel comfortable, safe and supported when using the centres. Particular developments this year have included the introduction of AfL supervised gym sessions at many KAL centres, whereby at a set time each week a member of the AfL team offers a “gym clinic”. Any AfL client (past or present) is welcome to call in, for some additional support, a review of their gym programme, hints and tips, or even just to simply say hello. These sessions have proved popular with clients and also are a more efficient use of staff time than the more traditional one to one personal training sessions, which continue to be offered to newer clients.

- The partnership with KAL has also enabled the scheme to offer courses of swimming lessons to AfL clients at substantially discounted rates. This was an identified as a need as many AfL clients expressed a wish to improve their swimming but were put off by the relatively high prices of swimming lessons. Through some external funding and negotiation with KAL, AfL has been able to offer substantially subsidised rates which will mean that for the next 12 months more AfL clients are able to benefit from swimming lessons.

- The opening of the new £36 million Huddersfield Leisure Centre the summer of 2015 has proven a great asset to AfL. Clients of the scheme (together which much of the local population) were very keen to make the most of the new facilities, resulting in increased attendances at many AfL sessions when compared to those at the old Huddersfield Sports Centre. The design of the building also suits many clients with numerous quiet seating areas and a relaxed feel, making it easier for AfL staff to meet with clients for reviews and other sessions. By contrast the Leisure Centre has been less of a hit with SfL clients. Those with dementia have found the environment and the décor more challenging, and as such some of the activities have been relocated to the Stadium Health and Fitness Club. This demonstrates how, through our partnership with KAL we are able to more effectively meet the client needs.
For the fourth consecutive year a “Dales Challenge” was undertaken as a partnership project between Pathways Day Services and AfL. The project which saw 10 previously inactive individuals train over a period of 12 weeks for a residential trip and a challenge walk involving an ascent of Whernside in the Yorkshire Dales, the highest of Yorkshire’s famous 3 Peaks. Building on the co-productive ways of working established previously, this year the participants took an even greater role in planning and delivering the project. This included screening participants, researching public transport links to walk locations, planning and leading walks.

The weekly AfL cycle sessions at Leeds Rd Sports Complex and Spenborough Pool continued throughout the year. Unfortunately early in 2016 the entire fleet of bicycles from the Spenborough site was stolen meaning activities there have been curtailed. Funding has now been obtained to replace the bicycles and sessions will resume in summer 2016.

AfL continues to deliver weekly exercise sessions on Wards 18 and 19 of Dewsbury hospital. This provides the opportunity for inpatients to do some structured physical activity. The ward’s Occupational Therapy teams continue to regularly make referrals to AfL as part of patient discharge plans.

In autumn 2015 the entire team undertook and passed a Level 4, 3 day Exercise and Mental Health training course to update specialist knowledge and ensure AfL and SfL could benefit from the latest examples of good practice.

3.0 Outcomes

AfL is based on the belief that physical activity, sport or exercise can act as a key element in an individual's recovery from mental illness. The positive feelings associated with training in the gym, dancing, cycling or other forms of activity can form a central plank in a patient’s recovery.

Outcomes derived from engaging in regular activity vary from person to person. For some success may take the form of weight loss, improved muscle tone or achieving a goal such as running a marathon. For those experiencing serious mental health issues such goals may still be relevant, but others may be more pertinent. Gaining the confidence to use a leisure centre, increasing social contact by attending an exercise class, and having a reason to leave the house may all be equally relevant and important outcomes for those recovering from mental illness. For someone living with dementia developing strength and co-ordination to lessen the chance of falling may be an outcome which significantly improves their quality of life.

For this reason both AfL and SfL recognise that outcomes vary from individual to individual and what may seem relatively minor outcome for one person could be a significant achievement, and the result of many months work for another. The scheme seeks to monitor outcomes through various measures including client perceptions of how increasing physical activity has impacted on their lives.

The following section outlines some of the main outcomes AfL monitors and gives some short quotes from AfL participants illustrating these.

Outcome 1- Increased Levels of Exercise/Physical Activity

Active for Life’s primary goal is to get participants more active which in turn leads to associated physical and mental health benefits. At the time of referral many participants (63%) class themselves as inactive. By the time the Week 10 review point of the programme had been reached a figure of 54% classed
themselves as “moderately active” (1-2 times a week) or “active” (3-4 times a week), some (9%) described themselves as “very active”, engaging in activity on 5 or more occasions during the week.

“If somebody had of told me that I'd be doing the gym twice a week and swimming too I would've laughed. Before starting Active for Life my main exercise was walking up the stairs at home, now I run up them!”

Outcome 2 - Exercise/Physical Activity Confidence

Developing the confidence to exercise is essential if participants are to succeed in becoming independently active in the longer term. Some participants may require gradual exposure to exercise environment, steadily building up from what may initially be very short visits. Others may simply require the basics and a few appropriate words of encouragement to set them onto the path to independent exercise. One strength of the AFL team is their ability to assess individual needs and negotiating with the participant a suitable level of support, as they become more confident. During their period of participation 77% of people reported that their confidence to exercise had increased.

“Two years ago I never would have left the house. I never would have been able to come to the gym on my own, but now I do. Active for Life has helped with this. Going out still makes me anxious but I know I can do it, sometimes I come here three times a week. I can talk in groups now too.”

Outcome 3 - Exercise/Physical Activity Enjoyment

Enjoyment is key to any successful exercise programme, AFL staff work closely with participants to identify activities which are appropriate, enjoyable and effective. For some this might be a regular session in the gym, going swimming or attending an exercise class, whilst others find they prefer activities outside such as walking or the weekly cycle sessions. 77% of participants felt that their enjoyment of activity had increased as a result of their participation in Active for Life. A total of 38% said that they now “really enjoy” their activity sessions.

“I can’t imagine not doing exercise now....I just love it. It’s not just that I’ve lost weight, it’s the people you meet in the class and the fact that you feel so good afterwards....I feel like I’m walking on air”

Outcome 4 - Physical Health

It is not uncommon for referrals to have significant physical health problems. With an appropriate exercise prescription (the AFL team are all qualified to prescribe exercise to help individuals manage physical as well as mental health conditions), participants often experience improved physical wellbeing as a result of their exercise programme. AFL clients may be supported to access specialist classes specifically designed for those with physical health conditions.

Throughout the year 72% of Active for Life participants felt that regular physical activity had contributed to improvements in their physical health. Some 58% rated their physical health as poor or very poor when commencing the scheme, a figure which falls to 11% for those who complete the scheme.
“I didn’t think I could do any exercise, I was too ill. But (the AfL Officer) explained that however ill you are there is always something you can do and now I’m feeling much better. I still have some bad days when I’m in pain but it’s much less than before”

Outcome 5 - Emotional and Mental Health

There is considerable evidence to suggest that physical activity is an effective way to enhance mood. Individuals with higher levels of regular physical activity have been shown to experience higher levels of positive emotion such as interest, excitement, enthusiasm and alertness. Active for Life uses exercise as a means of promoting positive mental health and helping individuals manage their mental illness.

Typically upon commencing Active for Life many participants rated their emotional and mental health as being either “very poor” (19%) or “poor” (48%). Whilst physical activity is not a panacea for mental illness, many participants feel that it has made a significant contribution to their recovery. Of those completing the entire the scheme, 84% felt their emotional and mental health to be “good” or “very good”.

“I can never see myself going back into the Priestley Unit again, and that’s due to Active for Life”

“If I’d started this (exercising) 10 years ago I would not have got so ill, it would have helped reduce my depression”

Outcome 6 - Self-esteem

Research evidence suggests that people who regularly undertake physical activity tend to feel better about themselves. Low levels of self-esteem are commonly associated with severe mental illness and invariably new Active for Life participants rate their score for this domain as “Poor” or “Very Poor”.

From a motivational perspective self-esteem is a relatively easy “sell” to participants, as many people feel better about themselves, even if only for a short time following just one exercise session. The Active for Life team help participants focus on this and work with them to recognise longer term self-esteem gains. These might be related to improved self-image, the achievement of specific goals or development of new skills. As a consequence of this 69% of Active for Life participants felt that participation in physical activity/exercise had been directly responsible for improvements in their self-esteem.

“Going to Spenborough for the cycling helps take my mind off things. Doing something and talking to people doesn’t make me feel so worthless.”

Outcome 7 - Social Networks and Relationships

For many people having some social support helps to maintain an exercise habit. Arranging to meet a friend to go to the gym or for a run can make the entire process of motivating oneself to exercise so much easier. In the early stages of the programme it is often the Active for Life instructors who fulfil this motivator role, however as time passes and participants are encouraged to exercise independently peer support becomes increasingly important. Informal links sometimes form between participants and/or other users of leisure facilities which play an important role in keeping both parties exercising.
In statistical terms 57% of Active for Life participants in the last 12 months felt that participation had helped them meet new people and increase their social network.

“It’s difficult when you’re ill and don’t do anything. If you don’t go out you don’t see anyone or talk about anything. At least when I go to the gym I have something to tell my partner about when he comes home from work.”

Outcome 8- Healthy Lifestyles

Whilst Active for Life does not specifically focus on other elements of healthy lifestyles, increasing physical activity levels does sometimes motivate participants to consider other aspects of their lifestyle, including smoking, drinking alcohol and dietary choices. Where this occurs the Active for Life staff are able to signpost participants to appropriate sources of support.

70% of those starting the scheme felt their lifestyles to be “Very Unhealthy” or “Unhealthy”, with this figure falling to 7% amongst those who completed the entire programme.

“I feel fitter and when you feel fitter you start to think about other stuff you can do what is good for you. I need to cut down on my smoking and eat better, going to the gym is just a start really”

Outcome 9- Meaningful Use of Time

Many AFL clients cite participation in the scheme as something which helps break the monotony of being ill, particularly where they do not work or have other family or social commitments. 88% of those who successfully engaged with the scheme felt that regular exercise constituted a more meaningful use of their time than their previous activities. Lifestyle change is a key theme within the scheme and many participants see activity as a means of developing a more fulfilling lifestyle in addition to providing health and self-esteem benefits.

“I always have a better day when I’ve been to the (exercise) class, it sort of sets me up for the day and makes me feel like I can do something for myself”

Given the degenerative nature of dementia outcomes the outcomes achieved by SfL are less tangible. Whilst there is academic evidence to suggest that physical activity can slow the progress of dementia, the condition is so personal that it becomes difficult to quantify the effects of participation in physical activity on the progression of the condition in individuals. However the following quotes from participants and carers, along with observations by SfL staff offer some anecdotal insights into how the scheme can benefit participants.

- The majority of SfL participants only leave the scheme when they are at a point where the dementia makes them unable to continue.
- Often the participant’s carers or family members also take part in the activity with them, gaining physical, social and psychological benefits too.
- “My husband is fitter and happier than he was seven years ago, when he was first diagnosed with dementia”
- “I almost always come to the sessions feeling sluggish and feel so much better after some exercise in the gym. The support is very beneficial, I couldn’t do it on my own, or feel confident doing it”
- “Since starting the programme (5 months ago) my leg strength has improved a lot, I feel stronger and more confident in my ability to walk and do things. My family and friends have also noticed the difference in my posture and fitness level”
4.0 Annual Statistics

Throughout 2015-16 Active for Life has worked with a total of 221 individuals experiencing severe and enduring mental health issues, Steps for Life has seen 52 individuals with dementia or memory issues. This figure includes those individuals formally referred to and engaged in Active/Steps for Life and those attending some of the specialist group sessions, it does not include individuals using some of the more informal drop-in type activity sessions such as the regular hospital ward exercise classes.

This year Afl and Sfl staff have delivered a total of 4665 contact hours to scheme participants. The individual nature of the schemes means that 2702 hours from this total takes the form of one to one support of clients into exercise opportunities. However an important element of the schemes offer continues to be group activity sessions, which in 2015-16 included;

- Supervised gym sessions
- Health walking
- Cycling
- Specialist exercise classes in mainstream settings
- Gentle cardiovascular and resistance exercise sessions in clinical settings
- The Dales Challenge hill walking project

A total of 75 people have successfully completed the Afl scheme in 2015-16. Many have subsequently progressed into more mainstream activity opportunities including the PALS exercise referral scheme, joining private gyms and engaging in community activity options.

Afl and Sfl seek to be inclusive services working with all sectors of the community. Throughout the year the overall percentage of participants defining themselves as other than white is 21%. Both schemes will continue to work closely with referrers to ensure that a representative range of people are able to have the opportunity to be more active.

During the course of 2014-15 a total of 222 referrals have been made to the schemes. Being a larger scheme the majority of these referrals (197) were made to Active for Life, work is being undertaken to increase the number of referrals to Steps for Life in the forthcoming months.

5.0 Summary Financial Report

Below is an outline financial report of the costs incurred by Active for Life and Steps for Life in 2015-16. It should be noted that the in kind contributions represent a substantial benefit to the scheme, without which it could not operate in its current form. Support from Kirklees Communities & Leisure Service is also invaluable, particularly with regard to the management, business and IT support offered. Additionally the partnership between Kirklees Active Leisure (KAL) and the schemes confers massive benefits, both in terms of access to facilities and the subsidised rates offered to Active for Life participants using KAL facilities.
### Personnel Costs

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<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Staffing Salaries</td>
<td>£126,658*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>£3759</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies and services</td>
<td>£3867**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£134,218</strong></td>
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* Figure slightly reduced due to maternity leave

** This figure does not include costs associated with mobile phones. Due to changes in accounting procedures within the council it is no longer possible to accurately identify these costs.

### In Kind Contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Contributions</th>
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| **Kirklees Culture & Leisure Services** | - Office Accommodation  
- Management, business and IT support  
- Team Training Events/Opportunities  
- Telephone |
| **Kirklees Active Leisure Trust**  | - Use of facilities for consultations and activity sessions  
- Subsidised use of KAL facilities for AfL clients  
- Access to physical activity opportunities (to support clients) |
| **Pathways Day Services**         | - Various associated with the Dales Challenge |

### 6.0 Vision and targets for 2016-17

Over the next 12 months AfL & SfL plans to progress in the following areas.

- Continued delivery of core service comprising of one to one physical activity/exercise support.
- Continuing to work to ensure that AfL clients are able to make the most of opportunities at all Kirklees Active Leisure facilities but particularly the new Huddersfield Leisure Centre.
- Reinforcing communication and links with referring partners along with effective more effective marketing to increase referrals to SfL.
- Updated IT systems including the development of a new database which will make many of the administrative functions associated with the service more efficient.
- Staff to be provided with tablet devices enabling them to work more effectively whilst on the move.
- To utilise the new “Everybody Active” Digital Hub to improve client experiences and increase efficiencies in the way AfL and SfL staff work.