



Case study

Oxfordshire Mind – Walking for Wellbeing

Project at a glance

- Walking for Wellbeing provides gentle, accessible walks for people experiencing severe mental health problems.
- It is seen as a trusted and well-used service within the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership.
- Participants have nearly doubled their average activity minutes per week.



310 people have taken part in-person and virtually



Participants' WEMWBS* scores have increased by 1.3 points

The challenge

Following their Active Body, Healthy Mind project in partnership with Active Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire Mind wanted to develop a project that focused on people with severe mental health problems.

The reason for focusing on this community was due to the huge health inequality in this demographic. People with severe mental health problems have a life expectancy on average 15-20 years lower than the rest of the population. This is usually from preventable causes like inactivity.

To ensure they supported people across the county, they joined up with the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership. The Partnerships is a group of local charities and NHS Foundation trust who come together to deliver vital services.

*Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales (WEBWMS) is a measurement of mental wellbeing.

Oxfordshire Mind's response

Oxfordshire Mind consulted with their service users through anonymous surveys to find out what barriers stopped them from becoming more active and what activities they would like to see.

The response was clear, service users wanted an undaunting physical activity in areas near to them and requiring no financial input.

Oxfordshire Mind decided on walking as an accessible activity that ticked all these boxes. They felt walking could be a bridge to other physical activity groups in the community that participants might not yet have the confidence to access.

Their Walking for Wellbeing programme provides walks across the country as well as an online peer support group for people who are unable to attend in-person.

“We have worked with Pets as Therapy to provide a service dog on some walks. Our participants look forward to Sam’s [service dog] visit every month. He is hugely helpful in encouraging people to join and bringing shyer participants out of their shells.”

Oxfordshire Mind



The results

310 participants are registered on Oxfordshire Mind's Walking for Wellbeing programme. The programme is particularly successful in attracting men compared to their other mental health support groups.

Participants in the programme have nearly doubled their average minutes of activity a week from when they started (123 minutes) to after 12 months (254 minutes).

And their wellbeing scores have also increased. Participants' average WEMWBS scores at the start is 18.8 rising to 20.1 points after 12 months.

“It’s the first time I’ve found a support group in over 30 years which has been so beneficial.”

“I feel I really am a different person from this time last year. From being almost completely housebound to now being able to go out and enjoy walks in the countryside is incredible and has given me hope for the future.”

Walking for Wellbeing participants

Learning

- **Consistency is key**

It's essential to have a consistent walk leader so they can build trust with participants.

- **It takes time**

Creating a walking group doesn't happen overnight. It can take time for participants to feel comfortable attending walks.

- **Co-produce with people you are trying to reach**

From the start, Oxfordshire Mind have involved service users. They helped to design the programme, sat on the Project Facilitator interview panel and decide the route at the start of each walk.

- **Challenges faced by partners, particularly the NHS**

Due to the risk, it's not suitable for a single staff member to host walks. Unfortunately, the NHS and other partners lack capacity so can't always support the walks. For future programmes, Oxfordshire Mind would recruit their own second staff member to support the walks.



Relevant support available

Mental Health and Physical Activity Toolkit: Involving people with lived experience of mental health problems in the design and delivery of your work

Mental Health Awareness for Sport & Physical Activity+ eLearning

Mental Health and Physical Activity Toolkit: Engaging people in physical activity to support their mental health

