

Guide 6: How do I engage participants in my service?

Delivering a sport and physical activity service
A toolkit for mental health providers



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This guide covers

- An overview of typical behaviours and attitudes people display when trying to become more physically active.
- How to address the common barriers to becoming more active that people with mental health problems can face.
- Tips on maximising the experience for your participants.
- Tips on designing an effective referral pathway.
- Key audiences to focus on.

It's important to ensure that your sessions serve the needs and aspirations of your participants.

I've always loved football but never had the confidence to join a team. I went along to the training session full of anxiety, but it was fantastic. They made me feel welcome and encouraged me, even though I was extremely unfit and not much cop. I've since lost weight and become much fitter, and even scored my first ever goal. I've come a long way since being left out of the school team. My proudest possessions are now my football boots and the medals I've won. I can't begin to explain how much this has helped my confidence and self-esteem.

Get Set to Go participant, Mind in Croydon

How can I make it easy for people to join my sessions?

There are two main pathways that people can take to join your service:

- **Referral:** where individuals are signposted via a partner organisation or another service within your organisation.
- **Self-referral:** where people can join without the need to be referred.

Both pathways are highlighted in the diagram on page 12. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, and may be adopted depending on the audience you are trying to reach and the restrictions from funders and partners. To make sure you engage a wide range of participants, it's best to use a mixture of referral and non-referral pathways.

When planning these pathways, engage referral partners to help you design them. This will help them gain a better understanding of who the sessions are aimed at and ensure that your referral processes complement their own.

Make sure all marketing information (whether that's non-referral or referral) clearly explains the aims of the service, and what participants should gain from it. It is a good idea to have this information available on your website.

It is also a good idea to provide some key information about the service in the referral form. This should help referral partners decide whether it is right for the participant at this stage in their journey. Include information like the type of support you can offer participants and ask for details about any physical and mental health conditions.

An example referral form can be found at the end of this guide.

Becoming more active – people's behaviours

Sport England has conducted a lot of research into the process a person will consciously go through when they are trying to change a behaviour, or build a new habit. It has developed a 'Stages of Change model', in partnership with the Cabinet Office (2014), to visualise the steps people need to take to create a new habit.



People can move back and forth through these stages

Becoming more physically active is a conscious effort and lapsing, even from the maintenance stage, is quite normal.

It's important to have an awareness of behaviour change, especially for staff who are leading sessions who can then intervene to support participants to stay active long term.

It's difficult to influence the pre-contemplation stage unless you have the resources to reach your local community. However you may be able to intervene by adopting the marketing strategies (outlined in the 'How do I market my sessions?' guide).

It might be useful to conceptualise the participant journey through your programme using the stages of change as a framework.

What are the common barriers that people face when trying to be active? How can you help participants to overcome them?

Mind's research shows that nearly 70 per cent of people with mental health problems feel that their mental health makes taking part in sport too difficult.¹

Case study: Lancashire Mind participant

James has been receiving help from mental health services since his teens. He's always enjoyed being active during periods of wellness, but says his lack of confidence has been a major barrier for him getting involved; in the past he has feared judgement and feels that people generally define him by his mental health condition.

Since he's been coming to the Get Set to Go taster sessions James has been taking part in a local free leisure programme and is going for a swim once or twice a week. James has signed up for more activity sessions and is thinking about becoming a volunteer on the programme.

I have never been treated more normally, I've felt really inspired by the programme and have written my own A to Z of wellbeing – my own list of things I need to do to feel happy.

Get Set to Go Participant

¹ Mind (2015). <http://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/people-with-mental-health-problems-put-off-of-sport-because-they-are-not-gym-body-ready/#.WAiqnYg800>

Barriers to exercise faced by people with mental health problems, and ways you can help

Physical

Barrier	Solutions
Medication may make participants feel particularly tired	Offer sessions at a range of different times; encourage participants to consider when they feel most energetic and to sign up to sessions taking place at those times (where possible).
Medication can cause increased sensitivity to the sun	Provide sun cream and encourage participants to use it.
Medication can increase thirst levels	Make sure water is provided and encourage participants to take breaks.
Participants may have other health conditions or disabilities	Ensure coaches are aware of any disabilities or health conditions of participants in the session, and that a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) or health questionnaire is completed. Coaches should be aware of participants needs and differentiate the session accordingly.
Having to travel long distances to access the service	If no local service is available, could you provide travel support? Work with partners to provide sessions in a range of community venues.
Medication and other mental health problems such as hearing voices or ruminating thoughts can make it difficult for participants to concentrate	Provide shorter, fun, have-a-go type sessions and regular breaks. Limit the demands you make on participants. Keep instructions clear and concise and avoid jargon!

Technical

Barrier	Solutions
Not understanding the rules, or feeling intimidated by technical instruction	Offer short taster sessions, make sure the rules are made clear and keep them relaxed
Coaches and officials may not understand participants' needs	Make sure appropriate training for sports coaches and officials is made available

Psychological

Barrier	Solutions
Participants may feel anxious about trying a new experience	Get them to 'buddy' with an experienced participant or a volunteer with personal experience of mental health problems. Provide positive case studies showing examples of other people who have gone through the same experience, such as those on Mind's Get Set to Go website (getsetto.mind.org.uk). Encourage them to use the Elefriends peer support site elefriends.org.uk
Participants may find decision making difficult	Encourage them to see taking part in a sport and physical activity service as a good opportunity to practice decision making skills
Participants will likely have bad days	Ensure coaches are trained in what to do in a crisis. Provide a quiet room or space. Make sure another coach or volunteer is available to take over the session if needed.

You can find more ideas on how you can work with your participants to overcome these barriers on [Mind's website](#).

How can I maximise the experience for each individual?

Try offering a person-centred approach: start with the needs of each individual participant and design their experience from there (see guide 3: *How do I decide which type of physical activity service is right for my organisation?*)

Spending time with a participant enables you to assess their wider support needs, and identify any potential barriers to them becoming active. Adopt a 'motivational interviewing' approach.

What is motivational interviewing?

Motivational interviewing is a conversational technique used to help others make meaningful change in their lives. By helping individuals find their own internal motivation, motivational interviewing can spur individuals to make lasting changes in their lives in a way that is more effective than other strategies.

Further information can be found at motivationalinterviewing.org

This approach can be time consuming so you may want to ask for this information in group settings. Key questions may include:

- Why did you decide to join the programme?
- What would you like to get out of the programme?
- Are there any changes you'd like to see in the next few weeks/months?
- What do you find hard about getting active?
- What type of support would you like?

Remember that the outcomes participants hope to achieve may not be sport or physical activity-related. Aspirations, goals and challenges may change and it's important that your service is able to respond to these changes.

The Sport England Behaviour Insight team use the acronym EAST to capture the key elements to make your sessions more attractive.²

E – Easy for me to attend. I have information about the session and know what I need to bring with me.

A – Attractive to people like me. I know it's for me and there will be like-minded people I can relate to, for example a beginners' group for people just starting out.

S – Social within my context and territories. It's somewhere I feel comfortable attending, for example in the local park. It's designed for people at a similar life stage or with similar interests, for example mums and buggies; twilight years.

T – Timely. The session is being run at a time of day that suits me and fits with my life stage. For people with mental health problems, think about factors such as the effects of medication and the episodic nature of mental health. Participants may not turn up for a few weeks, and may prefer sessions that start later in the day.

Ideas on how you can implement **EAST** within your own work can be found on the [Nesta](#) website.

² Multiple authors - The Behavioural Insights Team (2014) *EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights*. Available here: http://38r8om2xjhh125mw24492dir.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf

Keeping participants engaged – top tips

Before sessions	During sessions	Between sessions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set the tone of the session – be welcoming and non-judgemental. Let participants know it's okay not to attend every time. • Provide information about the session. What will participants be doing? Where will they be going? What do they need to bring? What should they wear? Who will they meet? What will it cost? • Manage expectations – be clear about the scope of the programme and the level of support you can provide. This may also include agreeing some standards, such as giving notice if a session has to be cancelled/participant can't make the session. • Highlight the different routes/skills participants can gain from the programme, such as training to be a volunteer; coaching qualifications etc. • Identify and welcome people who closely support participants– for instance a support worker, family member or carer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities should be fun, achievable, and social. • Always relate the activity back to the aspirations of the individual. Rewards can be a great way of recognising achievement, however research from Get Set to Go shows that people are more likely to continue if they see the value and benefit of the programme for themselves. • Try to build any mental health component (such as a CBT session) before or after the physical activity component, rather than integrating the two. This can help people leave their mental health diagnoses 'in their kitbag' and focus on enjoying the activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise get-togethers and celebration events to encourage people to have fun and look at what they've achieved as part of the programme. • Develop simple systems for gathering regular feedback to improve the participants' experience, such as short customer satisfaction surveys or comments boxes. • Provide information sheets to recap on the activities you have done, introduce new activities or signpost to further resources such as videos or training plans. • Check in with participants and volunteers who have not attended sessions for a while via texts or emails, and let them know they're still welcome. • Signpost to online support, such as the Elefriends (see below) the online peer support community and wider support through the Mind network and other providers.
All		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep providing positive feedback and be welcoming – encourage that person to come back. • Wherever possible ensure that sessions occur at the same time and place each week with the same session leader. 		

There are lots of easily accessible resources online

Elefriends is an online peer support community for anyone aged 18+ who wants to talk about their mental health. It's a safe place to be heard, listen to others and share experiences.


The community members, or 'elefriends', talk about all kinds of things. From chatting about their day to talking about new medication or what's on their mind.

On Elefriends you can:

- Write posts and comment on others' posts.
- Post images.
- Support other elefriends with likes, 'thinking of you' and 'I hear you' buttons.
- Add a 'theme' to your post, so others can easily find discussions around similar content like 'Being Active' and 'Being Creative'.
- Give and get help on-the-go with our mobile apps for android and iPhone.

Online support is a great way of reaching people at every stage of the behaviour change journey. It provides encouragement and inspiration at every stage and can help people share their own successes and inspire others.

There are some great resources available on Elefriends to support people in their journey to being more active. During the 2016 Olympics, elefriends were set a series of challenges to encourage them to try something new and be more active. Badges (like medals) were available to download for completing these challenges and helped to make the 'Be Active' theme the most popular during this two-week period.



greenscribler
1 hr ago


****Dance challenge****

At 6:30 I'm going to put on a song I like and dance like no one is watching.

All Eles are welcome to join in :)

Elefriends post tagged with 'Be Active'

Theme: Being active



Our experience with Elefriends shows that online activity can translate into positive offline action – in a 2016 survey, over one-third of Elefriends said that they had tried a new physical activity.

Motivational content from Elefriends includes:

- **Being Active** – looking at how people with mental health problems can overcome the key barriers they face when trying to take part in physical activity.
- **Stories from the herd** features real people talking about the steps they have taken to be more active and the benefits they've experienced.
- **Staying motivated** looks at hints and tips on how to keep motivated and maintain an active lifestyle.

You can find out more about Elefriends on the [Elefriends](#) website.

You can also find out about other sources of peer support on [Mind's](#) website.

The **Get Set to Go training plan** was developed to help participants think about what they wanted to get from the programme, and to identify the type of support they might need to help them reach their goals.

The plan was very much a participant resource, which they could share and review with volunteers and staff throughout their journey. The plan supported participants to:

- Set short, medium and long-term SMART goals. SMART goals are:
 - **Specific** – giving a clear idea of what needs to be accomplished
 - **Measurable** – presenting clear steps on how the goal can be achieved and describing what achievement looks like.
 - **Attainable** – they are achievable within the timeframe of the programme.
 - **Relevant** – the goals match the individual's reasons for engaging with the sessions and they can be achieved through the intervention.
 - **Time-related** – each goal has a timeframe.
- identify the barriers to reaching those goals and how they might overcome those hurdles.
- identify the support they may need to stay well and enjoy working towards the Get Set to Go goals.
- a 'Wellbeing Kitbag' to highlight how an individual's mental health might change through the course of the programme and they type of support they might need.

The plan included space to keep notes and jot down any questions or topics that participants might have wanted to discuss with staff. There were also useful tips and ideas on how participants could increase and sustain their activity levels, and ideas of where participants could find additional support, including online support.

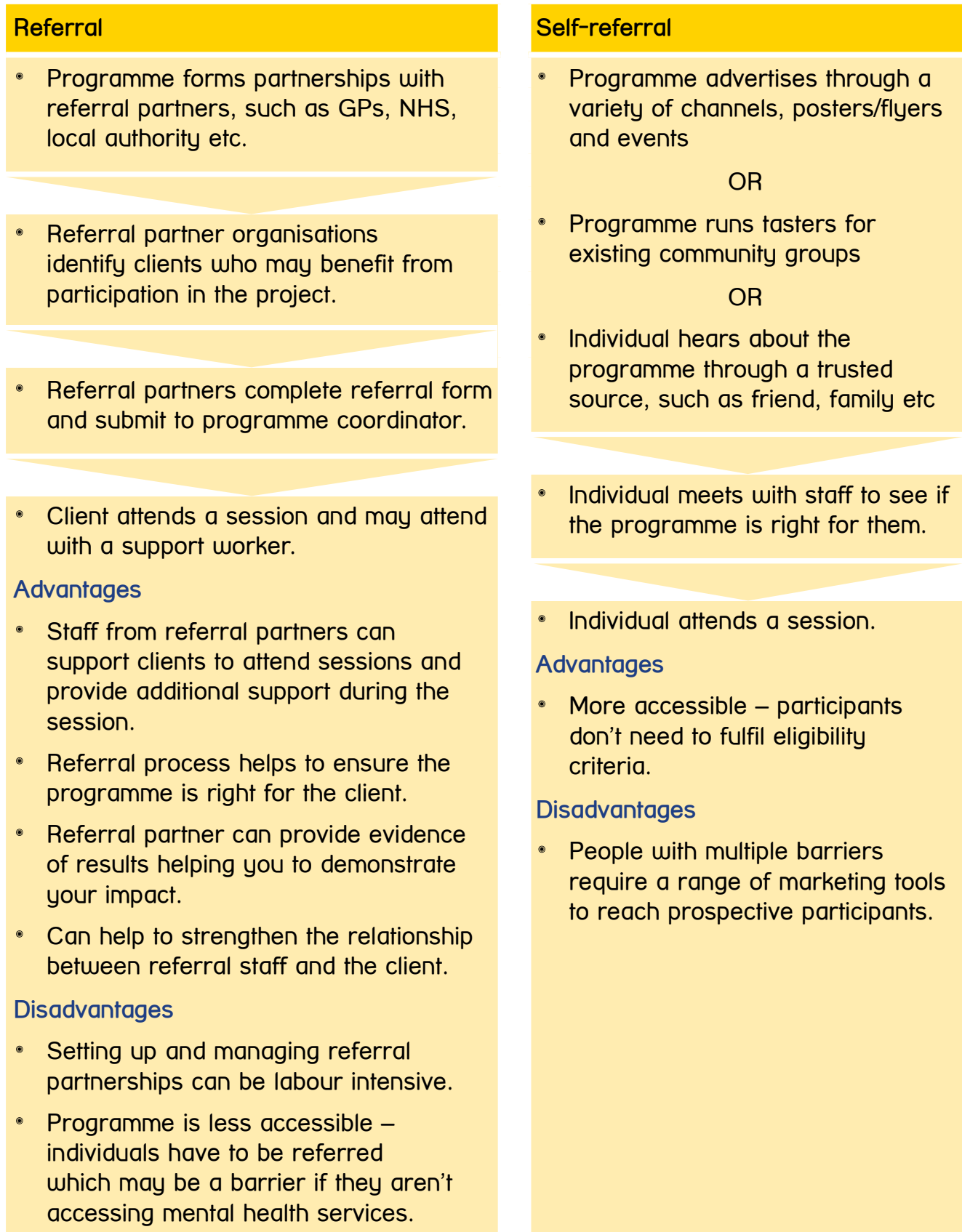
The **Get Set to Go** website addresses the barriers people with mental health problems experience in getting active using case studies, films and blogs to inspire people to get started. It shows how people have overcome barriers and kick-started their passion for sport or physical activity. Visitors can share their own motivational images and messages via social media on the pages.

We have been delivering physical activity sessions since 2006. We had seen how poor physical health is very common in people with mental health problems. This is also compounded by some of the side-effects of psychiatric medication, which can cause people to gain weight and feel lethargic.

We now run two programmes – Active Minds and Get Set to Go – to provide tailored support to help people be more active. In addition to real increases in people's mental wellbeing and activity levels, we have also seen how success in one part of peoples' lives changes their self-image and encourages and motivates them to improve in other areas. People are getting back to work and education, developing new positive relationships, and making better lifestyle choices.

Chief Executive, Mind in Croydon

Common referral pathways³



³ Adapted from Time to Change (2011). Setting up a football and mental health project: A best practice guide for starting new projects.

How can I engage inactive audiences?

Sport England has developed guidance on how organisations can engage inactive people, which draws upon insight from the Get Healthy, Get Active programme. It has also developed a set of principles to help organisations think about how they can design projects and services that deliver maximum impact. You can find these resources on the health and inactivity pages on the [Sport England](#) website.

People with severe mental health problems can often find it really difficult to remain active, and can require a high level of support.⁴ To make sure they're able to participate you should consider the following:

- What type of support you have made available – it's important that there is a member of staff present with the appropriate level of mental health training and experience, such as a support worker, occupational therapist or mental health nurse.
- What size group you have – limit the group size so it's easier to provide support to individuals ensuring that the sessions are person-centred and, where necessary, that individual risk assessments reflect the type of activity and the environment in which the session is taking place.
- Invite support workers and carers to get involved – this will give them the opportunity to experience the sessions for themselves and gain a better understanding of your service. It also means there is more support available within the group.

4 Farholm A and Sørensen M (2016). *Motivation for physical activity and exercise in severe mental illness: A systematic review of cross-sectional studies*. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26833453>

Bristol Active Life Project

The Bristol Active Life Project (BALP) is a partnership between Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust (AWP), Second Step, Bristol City Council and local voluntary sector organisations. BALP also works in partnership with leisure services including Sport and Leisure Management Limited, Hengrove Park Leisure Centre, Empire Boxing and Walking for Health.

The partnership offers activity sessions across Bristol for people who have experienced or are living with a long-term mental health problems.

BALP groups are facilitated by a coach or walk leader, and AWP mental health active life staff are present at each session. AWP staff provide the mental health expertise and support participants both in and around sessions. In many cases, coaches have also undergone mental health awareness training. On average, there are eight participants in a group; however for popular activities like football this number can increase to 14.

Learning from BALP shows:

- Sessions should be flexible enough to identify each participant's needs and support them to take part at their own pace, regardless of ability.
- Sessions should be unpressured, non-judgemental and welcoming.
- Staff should work with participants to set realistic goals.
- Positive encouragement is highly valued.
- Consistency is important – regular sessions at the same time and venue with the same members of staff who have had the time to build trust with participants.
- How a session is delivered is more important than what type of activity is being delivered.

Find out more about BALP on [Bristol City Council's website](#).

Children and young people

Half of all lifetime cases of psychiatric disorders start by the age of 14, and three quarters by age 24.⁵

One in 10 children and young people experience mental health problems⁶ – that's approximately three children in every class of 30. We have listed two resources you can use to support engagement with children and young people below:

- [Sport England's insight into young people's motivations, behaviours and attitudes towards sport.](#)

⁵ Association for Young People's Health (2015) *Key Data on Adolescence 10th Edition (1997-2015)* Available at <http://www.youngpeopleshealth.org.uk/key-data-on-adolescence>

⁶ Green, H., McGinnity, A., Meltzer, H., et al. (2005) *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain 2004*. Available at: <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/pubs/mentalhealth04>

- [British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health \(BHFNC\) resources and applications.](#)

Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities

Sporting Equals is an organisation that promotes ethnic diversity in sport and physical activity. It has conducted research into how organisations can effectively engage BAME communities. You can request access to this research via the [Sporting Equals](#) website.

Women

Statistically, women are less likely to participate in sport and physical activity than men. Insight and resources are available from the [This Girl Can](#) campaign and [Women in Sport](#).

People living with disabilities and long-term conditions

Almost 1 in 5 people in England have a long-standing limiting disability or illness, and 14% of disabled people state that they have a mental health condition.⁷ The Richmond Group of Charities – a coalition of health and social care charities working to improve the care and support of people with long-term conditions – has developed insight into how people living with long-term health conditions view physical activity. You can read more on the [Richmond Group's](#) website.

The English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) has a range of resources to help you to design more inclusive sessions, and to promote your activities to people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. You can access these on the [EFDS](#) website.

Older people

One in five people aged over 55⁸ experience depression and poor mental health. This figure rises to two in five for people living in care homes.⁹

Keeping active later in life can help to maintain independence and social relationships.¹⁰

7 Sport England (2016) *Mapping Disability: the facts*. Available here: <https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/disability-sport/mapping-disability/>

8 Beekman, A.T., Copeland, J.R. & Prince, M.J. (1999). *Review of community prevalence of depression in later life*. *Br J Psychiatry*, p174, 307–311.

9 McDougall, F.A., Matthews, F.E., Kvaal, K., Dewey, M.E. & Brayne, C. (2007). *Prevalence and symptomatology of depression in older people living in institutions in England and Wales*. *Age Ageing*, p36, 562–568.

10 Taylor AH, Cable NT, Faulkner G, Hillsdon M, Narici M, Van Der Bij AK (2004). *Physical activity and older adults: A review of health benefits and the effectiveness of interventions*. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, Vol 22, Issue 8, p703-725.

It can also reduce risk of depression¹¹ and cognitive decline.¹²

Sport England has researched the motivators and barriers to older people keeping active. You can find out more about this on [Sport England's](#) website.

Other resources you may find useful include:

- The Ageing Well/Community Sport initiative from Age Concern Northern Ireland.
- The information about older adults on the BHF National Centre website.

I'm starting to feel more flexible, which has helped my arthritis. Now I have more stamina to exercise longer and my high blood pressure is also starting to lower. I love boxing so much I have signed up to a Crisis boxing session.

Get Set to Go participant, Tyneside Mind

11 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2008). *Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. Physical activity guidelines advisory committee report*. Available here: <https://health.gov/paguidelines/report/>

12 Sofi F, Valecchi D, Bacci D, Abbate R, Gensini GF, Casini A, Macchi C (2010). *Physical activity and risk of cognitive decline: A meta-analysis of prospective studies*. *J Intern Med* p;269(1):107-117.

Resources

Example referral form

Short programme description

Who is the programme designed for?

Include information on:

- Target age range.
- Target community (if applicable).
- The challenges for the participant that you will address, such as social isolation, lack of confidence etc.
- The support and resources you can provide.
- The settings in which activities take place, such as leisure centres, parks, schools etc.

To ensure that the service meets the needs of your participant, please consider the following questions before making the referral. Please note that we will not be able to accept referrals that have incomplete information.

- Is the client ready to engage with the project?
- Do other issues need to be addressed first?
- Does the client have the time to engage with the project?
- If the client has physical health issues, please provide any relevant details that may impact their ability to engage in physical activity.
- Are there any safeguarding issues of which we should be aware?

Client Information

Full name:	
Date of birth:	
Home address:	
Postcode:	
Telephone numbers:	

Email:	
GP name:	
GP address:	
Emergency contact details:	

Why would the participant like to attend? Is there anything they would like to get out of engaging with the programme?

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General

Why would the client like to attend? Is there anything they would like to get out of engaging with the programme?

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Physical activity and sport

What activities or sports is the participant interested in?

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Health

Please give a description and history of the participant's mental health

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Are there any known physical health issues? If so, please give details on how they might impact on the individual's ability to engage with the programme.

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Safeguarding

Is the participant prescribed any medication? If so, please give details on how this might impact on the individual's ability to engage with the programme.

--

Is there a known risk to self or others? If so, please provide relevant information.

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Referrer details

Name:	
Organisation/ department:	
Address and postcode:	
Telephone number:	
Email:	

By submitting this application, I affirm that the facts set forth in it are true, complete and without any false statements, omissions, or other misrepresentations.

Name (printed):

Signature:

Date:

Referrer

Would you like us to contact the client direct or would you, as the referrer, like to be involved in the first meeting?

Thank you for completing this referral form and for your interest in this project.

Please return this form to:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

Website: