

Section three

Community mental health champions



Community mental health champions are local club or group volunteers who promote the benefits of sport and physical activity in maintaining and improving mental health in our local communities.

Research shows that being active boosts wellbeing, but it's not always easy to be active – particularly if you're experiencing poor mental health, when it can be hard to talk openly about how you feel and to get the support you need.

People with existing mental health problems often experience immense barriers when trying to become active. You can [hear from](#) the people with lived experience of mental health problems that are part of Mind's Physical Activity Advisory Group and learn more in our [Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity training](#).

Community mental health champions can play a critical role in promoting being active, understanding people's needs and helping them to access sport and physical activity. They can also help to ensure your club or group and its activities are welcoming and inclusive to anyone experiencing mental health problems.

How to establish a community mental health champions scheme

There are three stages to establishing a scheme in your club or group. We will look at each in turn with practical tools, templates and examples from the sector to help you put these steps into action.

1) Designing and planning your scheme

Gaining consent from decision makers

Before anything else, you'll need to gain consent and support from decision makers in your club or group, such as committee members. To help you do this, you'll need to highlight the benefits of establishing the scheme and what it will involve. We've outlined these below:

- **Increased and more diverse club membership** by recruiting people with mental health problems.
- **Less turnover in membership or participation** as people feel supported to maintain activity levels.
- **Better links with the local community** as relationships are established with local mental health support organisations, and through the delivery of mental health awareness activities.
- **More diverse skills and experience** within the club, and increased loyalty and retention as a result of the improved support network.
- **Improved club reputation and recognition** within the local community, which could potentially help to attract funding.

“ This has had such a positive impact on me, especially as I have had struggles with managing my job alongside my anxiety. Being able to lead a running session, watching people play the games I have planned, hearing people say how much they have enjoyed the session and just people coming in their own time to an event that I have organised means so much to me and has reminded me of my value. ”
An England Athletics' mental health champion

Many of the benefits above apply to a facility or venue operator but the key positive is that the venue is regarded as an accessible and inclusive location. Whilst it is a legislative requirement to meet equality standards for service providers, ultimately if a venue is welcoming of all people and community groups it will generate greater potential income from higher levels of usage.

What it will involve:

- **Time.** Establishing and managing a scheme involves a significant amount of time for both the person coordinating the scheme and the volunteer who is going to take on the champion's role.
- **Finance.** You may need a small budget to pay for champions to complete training and any resource development to support them with their role.

Designing your scheme

We know from experience that the most successful champions schemes are developed by the people you're trying to reach. This includes club/group volunteers, members and importantly people with lived experience of mental health problems. It's important to involve them from the beginning to help you plan and design your scheme (often called a co-design or co-production approach).

Mind's [influence and participation toolkit](#) provides a range of tools to help you involve people effectively in the design, development and delivery of activities. In addition, your [local Mind](#) or other mental health support organisations can help you connect with people or provide appropriate support.

Running a co-design workshop

We suggest running a short workshop to co-design your champions scheme. This can be delivered virtually or face-to-face.

The 5 Ws and H is a simple and effective tool ([see Annex A](#)) you can use in your workshop to map out the scheme. It involves asking questions beginning with Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. For example, what should the champions role entail, what it should be called.

To ensure you test your thinking carefully, always ask why? Taking this approach will help you to justify your decisions and provide the rationale for the champions scheme you're developing for your club or group.

Good practice:

As an example, England Athletics have clear aims for their mental health champions programme across their club network:

- 1) Promote mental wellbeing through running.
- 2) Work with clubs to support members to improve mental health through running.
- 3) Support new people experiencing mental health problems to start, continue or get back to running.

Creating a plan

Once you've decided what your champions scheme is going to look like, you need to put it into action. We've created a template action plan to help you do this (see [Annex B](#)). It includes sections on timelines and deadlines, goals and KPIs, roles and responsibilities and updates and reviews. It's important to consider how the scheme will impact on any of your existing policies and procedures, particularly in relation to safeguarding and managing risk. You'll find more information in our guide to [managing risk](#).

Important note

If someone needs urgent medical attention due to their mental health, direct them to their GP, Accident & Emergency at their nearest hospital, or the Samaritans on 116 123, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Alternatively, the yellow box at the top of every page on the Mind website will help direct people appropriately.

2) Developing your scheme

Recruiting community mental health champions

When an individual wishes to invest their time to volunteer as a champion this should be embraced. However, to ensure people fully understand the role and have the skills, experience and knowledge to fulfil it successfully, it is good practice to undertake a recruitment process. This will also ensure champions are recruited in a fair and objective manner.

The following checklist provides an example of how to recruit community mental health champions within your club or group:

- **Speak to your national governing body of sport**
They may be able to advise on a suitable recruitment process in line with their safeguarding policies and club/group development processes. They may also have policy, process and/or relevant forms you can adapt to save time and effort. Your club or group safeguarding officer may also be able to provide guidance and support when you're establishing your champions scheme.
- **Confirm the recruitment process**
Existing schemes have had champions nominated by an affiliated club/group or by other club/group members. If you decide to do this, you'll need to create an assessment panel to review and approve or decline applications.
- **Create a role description**
This should include the aim of the role and the skills and commitments needed to fulfil it. [See Annex D](#) for more information and a template job description.
- **Promote the opportunity**
Use updates, newsletters, intranet, posters and emails to promote the benefits of taking on the role of mental health champion to encourage participants or members to apply. ([See Annex D](#) for the benefits of the role.)
- **Assess applications**
The assessment panel could assess applications individually then meet to decide which to approve and decline. If decisions can't be made on the basis of the application alone, it may be necessary to host interviews.
- **Inform applicants**
Notify the successful applicants and ask those who were unsuccessful if they'd like to support the work and/or other mental health activities your club or group delivers.

If you are a national governing body of sport or a regional sports organisation you may want to consider establishing a support network for community mental health champions. This could be a WhatsApp group, a closed Facebook group (such as the England Athletics mental health champions group) or a regular meeting space for champions to come together either physically or virtually. This will enable everyone to:

- share experiences and best practice examples
- consult and communicate on new policy
- promote the benefits
- provide ongoing support
- coordinate training.

Supporting community mental health champions

Before promoting your new champions scheme, take the time to put together a support package to help your champions fulfil their role effectively and to provide support when they need it. We've outlined some ideas below, but best practice is to run a co-design workshop with your champions to understand what support they would like. This is a chance to reaffirm what their role as a champion entails, to set boundaries (see Annex E) and to highlight the aims of the scheme.

- **Mental health training**

It's crucial that champions have the confidence, skills and knowledge to fulfil their role. There are several training courses that can help with this (see Available training in Section four for details):

- 1 Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity eLearning.
- 2 Mind's mental health training.
- 3 Time to Change's free champion eLearning training.

- **Champions**

It's good practice to create a **handbook** providing information on your champions scheme, guidance around the role, the support available to champions and where to signpost people who may be experiencing mental health problems.

- **Wellness action plans (WAPs)**

Wellness action plans are an easy, practical way of helping people to support their own mental health. They help us to identify what keeps us well, what causes us to become unwell, and how to address a mental health problem at work should we experience one.

3) Delivering your scheme

- **Announcing your champions scheme**

You could do this through updates, newsletters, social media, posters, or emails from your chairman or president.

- **Adapting and delivering activities**

Time to Change provides information and ideas on how to engage people in wellbeing activities, which can be adapted for your club or group. Having a broad range of activities helps you to keep people engaged and appeal to a wider audience. Below are some examples of activities that champions could deliver to raise mental health awareness in your club or group:

Got a few minutes?	Got a few hours?	Got longer?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome someone new to your club/group. • Share information and good practice about mental health across the club/group using a variety of formats such as social media, posters and flyers. • Signpost people to further professional help and support. • Provide support to other club/group volunteers on how to engage people with a mental health problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a blog or case study about your clubs or group's work to promote positive mental health. • Have positive conversations with people and signpost them to appropriate professional support³. • Provide a training session or presentation to club/group members and volunteers. • Undertake outreach activities with the family of club/group members to talk about the benefits of being part of your local club/group. • Organise and promote mental health awareness training for your club/group workforce. • Run activities with your club/group workforce to raise awareness of mental health and challenge stigma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create links with local mental health organisations to recruit new participants. • Develop social media and promotional campaigns to raise awareness of the activities your club/group offers. • Coordinate and deliver community events to promote mental wellbeing.

³ If appropriate within your club/group's champions scheme, and with appropriate training.

Good practice

Run Together West Berkshire is one of hundreds of running clubs that have signed up to England Athletics' #RunAndTalk programme. They have been hosting #RunAndTalk runs for the last few years, and the numbers of runners continues to grow. After their run, group members meet for drinks and cakes and someone from the group shares their own experiences of mental health. This helps to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems and encourage others to open up about their experiences.

Provide ongoing support to champions

Have regular check-ins with champions to ask about their wellbeing and if they need any additional support. You could do this through a face-to-face meeting, social media such as a closed Facebook group, or using an anonymous survey.

Review the scheme annually

It's important to check that your community mental health champions scheme is achieving the goals and objectives you set out when you first established it, and to ask your champions if they want to continue in the role.