

A large, stylized white graphic of a bicycle wheel and handlebars is positioned on the right side of the image. The wheel is a simple circle, and the handlebars are a vertical line that curves at the top. The background is a solid, vibrant blue.

Case study

Boosting wellbeing through cycling

Project at a glance

- Cycling for Recovery is a collaborative programme between Devon NHS Community Forensic team, Active Devon and Ride On that uses cycling to help improve mental health
- Devon Community Forensic Team support people discharged from a secure hospital to develop community skills.
- The programme was co-designed by people with lived experience who wanted to get involved in cycling to boost mental and physical health.
- The project has helped improve the group's physical and mental wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Why it happened

“For some of us, lockdown meant doing less physical activity.”

Chloe Rosser, rehabilitation lead at Devon Community Forensic Service, saw first-hand how motivation and participation in physical activity were falling among people in secure hospitals who were preparing to transition back into the community.

“We wanted to offer the opportunity for people to engage in meaningful activity that would impact their physical and mental health.” Chloe Rosser

“It’s about social connection –helping people draw a breath from a chaotic life. Getting on a bike is like taking a breath, a pause. You can see the world in a different way.” Gareth Dix

How it happened

Initially, Chloe consulted with service users from the community forensic service to identify if they wanted to access physical activity opportunities, and if so, how. Cycling emerged as an option.

Chloe approached Ride On – a local charity and social enterprise. Ride-On are committed to getting more people in the saddle more often through providing refurbished bikes, and sharing the skills to ride them.

Chloe worked with Ride On and Active Devon to successfully apply for the Tackling Inequalities fund. The project began with four to six riders each week who came out to ride in the local area and have a coffee together.

It wasn't without its challenges. Lockdown meant the team had to grapple with changing Covid-19 guidelines. Plus, the cold winter weather meant investing in warm riding gear.

“Cross sector working breaks down the stigma and barriers that some of our clients face by offering opportunities for them to be included and be a part of the wider community. We can all work together to achieve the same goal to promote physical activity and wellbeing.”

What the participants said

“It reduces stress and helps me socially. Cycling boosts my mood each week.”

“My fitness has improved and I definitely feel more confident cycling! I like going to different places and having a nice chat.”

“It’s made me feel committed and healthy. I feel good being part of the team.”

“It fills my day and helps clear my mind.”



Learning

Look at the bigger picture

Gareth Dix, Director of Strategic Relationship at Action Devon, recommends investing time in looking at the ‘bigger picture’. Cross-sector collaboration means organisations can connect and support each other. “People are incredibly busy and the system can be complex. So it’s important to know what people are doing and what mutual connections can be made.”

Be creative

“I think it’s important to be creative,” says Chloe. “The group gave people hope and something to look forward to. Regular communication between the services was really important to be confident in what we could deliver.”

Be person-centered

“The bikes were something that our clients wanted – it came from them,” says Chloe. “It’s great to have lots of different activities. But you only really get the engagement if the idea comes from the people involved.”

Offer purpose and connection

“Find an activity that people want to do and offer opportunities for people to be connected in their community,” says Chloe. “Be clear on how this could benefit the people who are often marginalised in society and understand that they may need additional support to begin with when joining.”





Relevant support available

Mental Health Awareness for Sport & Physical Activity+ eLearning

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

Mental Health and Physical Activity Toolkit: Making physical activities inclusive to people experiencing mental health problems

Taking a person-centred approach

