Mind Fit Campaign: Small Heath Boxing Club supporting adults with mental illness
Researched by Craig Strong, Nottingham Trent University.

Key messages

• This case study is highlighting the benefits of the Mind Fit Campaign, a scheme that supports young adults with mental health illness in Birmingham, which is organised by Small Heath Boxing Club.

• The aim of Mind Fit Campaign is to help some of the British population who experience mental health disorders. With one-quarter of the British population having some sort of mental illness, the cost to the UK is estimated at £22.5 billion per year (McCrone et al. 2008).
What is ‘Mind Fit’

• Mind Fit is an innovative sport development scheme that utilises the art of boxing help improve physical activity to young adults with mental illness.

• The once a week session provides the members an opportunity to work on their physical activity and to improve their physical literacy abilities, social skills and support their mental well being.

• The participants have an array of mental illness, from drink and alcohol abuse to severe learning difficulties, the scheme caters for all and has no discrimination of the level of mental illness the participants may have.

• Over thirty people have now joined the Mind Fit campaign. 60% of members are regular visitors to the club, with 20% turning up fortnightly, 10% monthly, with 10% experiencing Mind Fit on one occasion.

• Due to the strong retention figures, Mind Fit will now be running until August 2016, hoping to extend the scheme with additional support from Sport Birmingham.

Major issues and barriers

• People with serious mental illness have a life expectancy of up to 15 years less in comparison to the rest of the population (Thornicroft, 2011).

• Newcomer & Hennekens (2007) researched that the mortality gap is more due to cardiovascular disease than suicide, so it is important for this subset population to partake in regular physical activity.

• The Mind Fit Campaign was designed by Small Heath Boxing Club and supported by Sport Birmingham. Paddy Benson (Youth Development Manager) & Ann Strach (Centre Manager) started the scheme in November 2015 in aid to support young adults with mental illness within Birmingham and the West Midlands.
Operating and Managing Mind Fit

Several business procedures are essential when devising and delivering a sport development scheme like Mind Fit

Promotion & Awareness

- Liaising with Sport Birmingham and Birmingham City Council, a referral pathway was built to promote Mind Fit to twenty charity organisations around Birmingham; these included Crisis, Birmingham Mind and Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP).

- Via social networking a promotional leaflet was designed explaining the Mind Fit campaign, which was sent to all the mental health charity organisations. An open day was arranged to promote the Mind Fit event, with e-invitations sent out to all charity organisations.

Investment & Capital

- Small Heath Boxing Club is a well equipped facility, though financial support was required to promote the Mind Fit Campaign. The first objective was to work with Sport Birmingham and the Sportivate initiative, who provided £2,500 to start the Mind Fit campaign. A further £2,000 has been provided to sustain the activity through Satellite Club funding.

Training & CPLD

- The coaches and apprentices of Small Heath Amateur Boxing Club went to a two day Mental health First Aid course and an Introduction to Safeguarding with vulnerable adults training event. These free courses were provided by local charity organisations.

- Training on registrations, Health Screen Questionnaires & Waiver forms were also completed by all staff for safeguarding issues. All this helped the staff to have more empathy and understanding with vulnerable adults with mental health issues.

Members of Mind Fit

Name: Steven Jones
Age: 25

Steven is currently on a drug recovery programme. Since joining Mind Fit he has been out of remission for three months, highlighting that the campaign has supported him greatly.

Steven explained that, “I look forward to coming to the gym every week. I am able to let off steam and of course keeping fit. I like meeting the people and having a laugh. I have learnt new skills and techniques for instance, how to throw a punch, the best way to stand also how to control myself, self-discipline. It gives me a routine which I need.”

The chance of increasing physical activity within a group environment provides people with mental illness a better chance on improving their physical literacy skills and provides the opportunity to meet new friends which in turn improves on social cohesion.
The Shared Values of Mind Fit

Paddy Benson (Youth Development Manager): “The main objective for the Mind Fit campaign is to make a difference to people’s lives. Physical activity is a natural way to combat many issues in mental illness. The Mind Fit model could go out nationally….It can also re-position boxing in a positive light within sport. The money we save in the community of Birmingham for adding value to young adults and reducing costs to policing, the NHS and Birmingham City Council are major reasons to keep Mind Fit running.”

Ann Strach (Centre Manager): “We want to carry it on (Mind Fit Campaign)! Some other charity organisations (New Leaf, Sanctuary, Start Again) are hiring out Small Heath Boxing Club to help improve physical activity to their patients. This is all because of the positive results from the Mind Fit Campaign.”

Tom McIntosh (Sport Birmingham): The boxing club have really sought understand new audiences and customers. They have developed a new, exciting opportunity to provide physical activity to individuals to improve both physical and mental health and well-being”

For more information

• For further information of Mind Fit Campaign please contact Ann Strach: ann@patbensonboxingacademy.co.uk.

• Alternatively more information can be found on the Sport Birmingham website: www.sportbirmingham.org