

Case Study: Exercise Referral Classes

Programme Code: ARUN/ER

Overview:

In August 2023 we were awarded 26 weeks' worth of funding through Active Sussex from the NHS Sussex Personalised Care and Prevention, to target adults with a diagnosed health condition through physical activity sessions. The funding is also linked to the current NHS agenda around increasing referrals to their Digital Weight Management Programme.

We launched our Exercise Referral classes in September 23. Our classes are delivered by our Level 3 instructors, one of whom has extensive knowledge and training in a range of exercise specialties, including Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehab, Long Term Neurological Conditions, Obesity, Diabetes, and Chronic Lower Back Pain and can provide individuals with an incredibly high level of support. Individuals can be referred to classes by an exercise professional or can self-refer. Initially, our instructors did a fantastic job of getting an understanding of a new group of people as well as the multiple and complex health conditions that they have. Understandably, this took up lot of extra time and effort outside of the sessions. Indeed, it is not easy to recruit and sustain activity with people living with a range of conditions who were not previously active. All participants (12 in total to this date) self-referred themselves into the activity sessions which was fantastic, however, this brought significant challenges. After conducting a detailed pre-exercise questionnaire called a PARQ, there were a number of participants who were more at risk than others due to their complex health conditions. For our instructors to be able to continue delivering the sessions safely and appropriately to all participants then Freedom required some of these patients to be signed off by a GP that they could exercise.

This then immediately put a barrier in the way for these self-referring individuals, as it is not easy to see a GP quickly for something that might not be considered a priority. The team at Freedom are passionate about not turning service users away and leaving them without support. Particularly as many of these individuals have made the **incredibly important** first step back to addressing their health and wellbeing. One participant in particular struggled a lot with their anxiety and the instructor was concerned about asking them not to attend until a GP can sign them off as there was a high chance the individual would lose their confidence.

We raised this issue promptly with Active Sussex and with their support, we took our concerns to the ARUN PCN and local GP/Clinical Director. After discussions over the matter at PCN meetings, the following plan has now been put in place by the Clinical Director moving forwards:

- Member of public 'self refers' to our exercise referral classes
- They fill in a ParQ supplied by Freedom Leisure.
- Freedom Leisure send ParQ over to the PCN email address
- Par-Q is reviewed and individual is approved to attend our classes or referred for further review from Clinical staff rather than Freedom staff.
- Member of public has not had to book an appointment with a GP, potentially experience a long wait for this appointment and then potentially lose interest/confidence in their cause, to then be back to square one.

This is partnership working at its best and is a HUGE step forward for Arun and Freedom Leisure. This breakthrough will make such a **huge** difference not only to our service users accessing services quickly but it will allow us to move closer into the community of more vulnerable adults in a safe way,

Feedback:

"The class has made such a difference to my life in just a few months. Having suffered with ongoing age-related conditions over the last 10 years I was extremely apprehensive about attending this class but knew I needed to take the step for my health and wellbeing. My balance in particular has improved incredibly. I have managed to stop myself falling recently which I would never have been able to do before" Class Attendee

Outcomes:

- New partnership with the Arun PCN agreed.
- Individuals PARQ will now be reviewed by a medical professional on receipt from Freedom Leisure, as opposed to the individual having to book an appointment (and in some cases pay) for a GP sign off to exercise.
- Extremely positive joined up approach with Freedom & the PCN to make the individual feel supported on their journey to improve their health and wellbeing.
- Class attendance can take place much sooner for these individuals and instruction given will help contribute to the prevention of further medical issues.
- Retention of participants.



Themes of activity completed (tick appropriate box):

Active Sport

Active Young People

Active Ageing

Active Communities

Active Health

Active Workforce

Email:

Charlotte.simpson@freedom-leisure.co.uk