



Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Health Improvement Programme Outputs and Outcomes Report 2019-2022





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Verve Healthy Living Network was established in the Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in 2012, bringing together a number of local community partners with a shared focus on improving health and wellbeing. This work aims to improve health and wellbeing and has been funded by the Department for Communities since 2010 under its Neighbourhood Renewal programme.

Using an asset-based community development approach, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust has supported, trained and equipped individuals, groups and communities over a ten year period to respond to health and wellbeing needs.

This report provides analysis of the delivery and outcomes of the Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Health Improvement Programme during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022.

Verve Delivery Model

There are three core components to the Verve Delivery Model:

1. The Verve Healthy Living Network
2. Community Health Trainers
3. Health and wellbeing programme delivery

The Verve Healthy Living Network Craigavon is a collective of local organisations, based in the target community areas, who work in partnership to deliver this programme.

Embedded within the Verve Network is a team of Community Health Trainers. Drawn from within the local area, the programme has built the capacity of local people to become health activists within their local communities, paid on a sessional basis. They work through a hybrid health coaching and social prescribing approach delivering both one-to-one and group programmes.

The Verve Model supports a regular programme of activities to support health and wellbeing, so that each Verve member acts as a vibrant health and wellbeing hub within their own community. This has enabled the Health Trainers to refer into a range of activities, supports and programmes that are local and accessible for the client group and resourced through the Verve Network.

Summary findings

The Verve Model has created a strong local partnership of community organisations who work collaboratively, drawing on each other's strengths to deliver a vibrant programme of health and social wellbeing programmes and activities across the local area.

Despite the restrictions that were in place for much of the reporting period due to COVID-19, the Programme adapted to the changing circumstances to meet or exceed all of the targets set.

Over the 3 year period of delivery to 31 March 2022, Community Health Trainers and Verve Centres have had:

- 2,690 interactions with individuals
- 3,148 participants on programmes
- 2,027 individuals receiving health information from a Health Trainer
- 173 individuals completing Health Improvement Plans.

Of those engaged:

- 66% were female, 34% male
- 49% were unemployed at the time of the support
- 51% stated they have a disability
- 36% were unpaid carers.

By June 2022, two of the top three sources of referral were health and social care professionals, demonstrating growing confidence in the Programme from that sector. The most intensely monitored aspect of the Verve Model has been the one-to-one health coaching provided by Community Health Trainers, with 173 clients benefitting from this service over the period. Outcomes achieved as a result of this support by clients who were assessed included:

- **General health and wellbeing**
 - o 82% of clients reported improvement in their general health
 - o 61% reported improved confidence in addressing their health needs
- **Physical health assessments**
 - o 86% reduced their waist size
 - o 71% reduced their BMI
- **Healthy eating**
 - o Positive changes were reported across all factors assessed
 - o 83% reduced their portion sizes
 - o 71% increased their fruit and vegetable intake
 - o 64% reduced snacking
 - o 67% were more confident in shopping for healthy food
- **Physical activity**
 - o 58% increased their physical activity levels
 - o The average amount of vigorous physical activity almost doubled (increase from average of 22 mins to 40 mins per week)
 - o The average amount of moderate activity increased by over a third (37%)
 - o The percentage not participating in moderate physical activity reduced from 43% to 18%.
- **Mental and emotional wellbeing**

This was assessed through three different measures:

 - o **Take 5 Star**
 - Participants added an average of 2-3 activities to their week across each of the five areas for self-care and emotional wellbeing
 - o **Loneliness & Connectedness**
 - More than 50% of those assessed reported improvements in relation to feeling lonely and feeling connected to their community
 - The frequency in which participants felt lonely reduced by 34% by end of the support
 - Participants reported a 19% increase in how connected they felt to their community
 - o **Warwick-Edinburgh Scale**
 - 53% of clients saw an improvement in their score with the greatest improvements seen in those at the lower end of the scale
 - The percentage of clients with a below average wellbeing rating had reduced from 42% to just 3%
 - By the end of the support no clients had a very low wellbeing rating (reduced from 18% at initial assessment).

Key Success Factors

A number of factors were identified as contributing to the success of the Verve Healthy Living Network and the Health Trainer Service. These will be important to consider in any plans to replicate or extend the model.

- 1. Asset-based approach** – the model brings together existing organisations, volunteers and skills to maximise the benefit of their combined resources and strengthen collaborative working.
- 2. Community Health Trainer Model** – the investment in and empowerment of local people to become health activists within their own communities has been key. One-to-one health coaching has provided necessary motivation, supporting people to focus on their personal priorities for their health improvement journey.
- 3. Community engagement** – the approach adopted has enabled the Programme to reach significant numbers within the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas due to having the team of Community Health Trainers 'on the ground'.
- 4. Flexibility to meet emerging needs** – the model developed allows for the Programme to react to local needs as they are identified through the use of an asset-based approach.
- 5. Investment** – the funding and support received from the Department for Communities over multiple years has enabled longer-term planning to invest in and develop the model.
- 6. Role of the Southern HSC Trust** – the Trust's endorsement and management of the Programme has strengthened the evidence-based delivery and opened doors for referral pathways from health and social care professionals.
- 7. Membership of the Healthy Living Centre Alliance** – Alliance membership has enabled the Verve Network to attract new sources of funding and expertise.
- 8. Collaborative Approach** – this has allowed the Programme to provide a wider range of services, to bring specialist services into the communities as well as better addressing the needs of the individuals reached.
- 9. Measurement** – the robust approaches to assessment, progress tracking and collection of monitoring data has provided rich evidence with which to measure both qualitative and quantitative outcomes of the Programme.

Recommendations

- 1. Build the evidence base** - Whilst this evaluation has evidenced the individual impact and outcomes, there is an opportunity to further evidence the benefits to the health and social care system.
- 2. Trust wide approach** - There is merit in looking at how the Verve Model can be replicated in other areas, taking cognisance of the key success factors as outlined above. This will require sustained investment and support over an extended period to establish.
- 3. Rural/urban dynamic** – There is potential for applying this approach to rural areas, using a similar hub and spoke model. This could enable reach across a wider geographical area, connecting smaller community groups to a wider network of support with shared programmes.
- 4. Community Health Trainers** - Given the evidence of impactful engagement, there would be merit in seeking to increase the target volumes for one-to-one support. Although this needs to be underpinned by the other elements in the model, this is the area with greatest potential in evidencing the benefits of the overall Programme.
- 5. Dedicated staff coordinator** - This role is essential for ongoing quality assurance - providing governance, training, monitoring, standardising and updating documentation and developing the underpinning digital systems that will allow the Programme to grow.
- 6. Social prescribing connections** - There is strong potential for cross-fertilisation of ideas and collaborative working using the strengths of other schemes where these are better placed to meet the needs of clients or, similarly, where Community Health Trainers can add to their referral pathways.

Conclusions

This three year snapshot of activities, delivery and outcomes across the Verve Healthy Living Network paints a picture of an active, vibrant community, with strong grassroots supports, well connected into an enabling statutory infrastructure.

There is clear evidence of tangible outcomes on both individual health and on community resilience across these areas, both of which are reaping positive health benefits. This was clearly seen through the sustained delivery and adaptability of the Programme during COVID-19, at a time when many others were unable to continue.

A common thread through all programmes, regardless of the main health and wellbeing focus, has been the benefit in creating strong social connections sustained beyond the intervention. With loneliness recognised as having similar health impacts to long term health risk factors such as obesity and smoking, this is a significant outcome.

The Verve Model, consisting of the key three components of the Network Partnership, the Community Health Trainers and the Health and Wellbeing Programme delivery, has provided an effective way to channel and support grassroots approaches to addressing health inequalities.





INTRODUCTION

The Verve Healthy Living Network was established in the Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in 2012, bringing together a number of local community partners with a shared focus on improving health and wellbeing.

Using an asset-based community development approach, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust has supported, trained and equipped individuals, groups and communities over a ten year period to respond to health and wellbeing needs within their communities.

This report provides analysis of the delivery and outcomes of the Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Health Improvement Programme during the period 2019 to 2022. It will focus on the three key components of the Verve Model established under this programme: the Verve Healthy Living Network; the Community Health Trainer Service; and Health and Wellbeing programme delivery.

These activities have been funded by the Department for Communities since 2010, with the current Programme operational since 2012, further supported and managed by the Southern Trust.

The report will seek to highlight:

- The impact and measurable outcomes from the Health Improvement Programme (the Programme)
- The delivery strategies that contributed to the success
- Opportunities for learning and recommendations for future development.

Research methods

One of the strengths of the Programme to date has been the wealth of quantitative and qualitative data gathered, particularly in relation to the Community Health Trainer activities. This evaluation has provided an opportunity to properly collate and analyse this data to identify where the Programme is achieving the strongest outcomes, using the equality monitoring data to explore whether these impacts have benefitted those most at risk of health inequalities.

The report has been prepared using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques that have included:

- discussions with partners and interviews with project participants and beneficiaries;
- desk review of information generated by the delivery of the Programme, including reporting documentation to the funder;
- desk review of information gathered from participants, including statistical data, evaluation reports and testimonials received; and
- consultation with key stakeholders engaged with the Programme, including representatives from the Southern HSC Trust, Verve Healthy Living Centres and Community Health Trainers.



BACKGROUND

Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Health Improvement Programme

The Health Improvement Programme has been delivered across Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Areas by the Promoting Wellbeing Division of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) since 2010. The Programme has been funded by the Department for Communities under its People and Place strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. The Trust has provided in-kind support through the staff coordination and management of the Programme.

The Programme is based on delivering against the social renewal priorities as set out in the Area Action Plans, with the target outcome of working towards an overall increase in life expectancy of 1.5%. These priorities are:

- All local people have easy access to community health care/primary health care
- Older people have easy access to support services
- Better informed community support to families
- Easy access to support services
- Increased advice, support and resources.

¹Brownlow Area Profile 2021 (communities-ni.gov.uk)

²Lurgan Area Profile 2021 (communities-ni.gov.uk)



Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

Craigavon has three designated Neighbourhood Renewal areas. These are wards that are amongst the 10% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and include:

- Brownlow in the centre of Craigavon, made up of 17 housing estates in the wards of Drumgor and Drumgask
- Lurgan, that includes parts of the town centre, Hill Street and areas to the north and estates to the south of the town
- Portadown North West, based around the housing estates along the Garvaghy Road and Obins Street and including part of the Edgarstown estate.

These areas have eight Super Output Areas (SOAs) amongst the top 10% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, with a further six SOAs in the top 20%. The estimated combined population of the three areas in 2017 was 21,560.

From Area Profiles¹²³ prepared by the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in 2021:

- Each area is above the NI average for preventable deaths, physical health-related benefits, multiple prescription use and long-term health conditions/disability
- Deaths of under 75s or a result of alcohol, drugs or suicide are higher in all 3 areas than the NI average
- More than 25% of the working age population are employment deprived (36% in Lurgan)
- More than 15% of the population are living in households whose equivalised income is below 60% of the NI median
- Proportion of working age adults (25-64) with no or low levels of qualifications is more than 50%, considerably greater than the NI average of 36%.

Delivery model

The current delivery structure has been in place since 2012, when the Verve Healthy Living Network was formed and the first Community Health Trainer programme was developed.

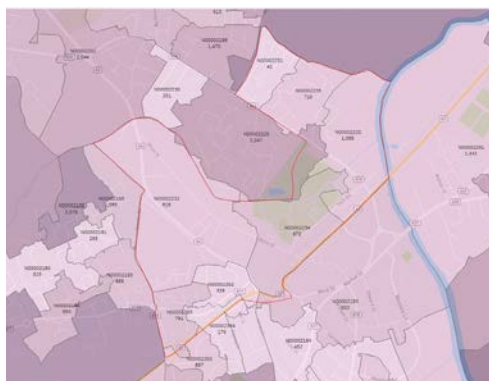
It was informed by the 2004 Department of Health White Paper "Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices easier."⁴ The paper proposed the development of a new role for improving health and reducing health inequalities, where individuals drawn from within local communities (health trainers) provide local people with 'support from next door' rather than 'advice from on high'.

Through the use of brief advice, goal setting and the organisation of groups and events, health trainers seek to empower individuals to make positive lifestyle changes and embed healthy choices within communities.

There are three core components to the Verve Delivery Model:

- The Verve Healthy Living Network
- Community Health Trainers
- Health and wellbeing programme delivery

Each component is analysed in the following sections with reference to performance against targets, measurable outputs and outcomes and qualitative feedback. We will also look at the profile of participants benefiting from the Programme in line with the target objectives. The report will conclude by drawing out some learning and recommendations.



³Portadown North West Area Profile 2021 (communities-ni.gov.uk)

⁴[ARCHIVED CONTENT]
Choosing Health:
Making healthy choices
easier : Department of
Health - Publications
(nationalarchives.gov.uk)



Drumcree Community Trust



Chrysalis Women's Centre

Edgarstown Residents Association



In the community - for the community



TRAIN 2B SMART

VERVE HEALTHY LIVING NETWORK

The Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal Health Improvement Programme is delivered by a collective of local organisations, the Verve Healthy Living Network, based in the target community areas.

During the reporting period, there were 10 organisations in the Network, working to an agreed Memorandum of Understanding, with a mission 'to work together, as a collective of community-based organisations, to support people to address mental, physical, social and financial wellbeing'.

The Network is committed to:

- Sharing and learning from the experience of individual member organisations and other projects engaged in health improvement programmes
- Identifying unmet health needs and developing collective approaches incorporating innovation and good practice
- Influencing service provision by representing a collective voice from the communities living in Craigavon Neighbourhood Renewal areas
- Identifying and accessing funding to enable collaborative working and to maximise the potential of this approach to health improvement in Craigavon
- Promoting and developing the Verve Healthy Living Network through collaboration with other agencies and groups
- Guiding and advising the Verve / Neighbourhood Renewal Health and Wellbeing Programme
- Facilitating inter-agency communication and sharing of good practice.

The current chairperson of the Verve Healthy Living Network spoke to the evaluators about the benefits of the project:

“*The strong partnerships that Verve build allow for support to everyone within communities regardless of background, age, gender or disability. The Verve partnerships help prevent duplication, funding can be shared and used wisely, each partner has a set of skills, opportunities and resources which again can be used to provide a robust, immediate response to all that may be living in crisis.*

The pandemic showcased the strength of the Verve partnerships. They 'hit the ground running' when it came, had a grass roots response to the needs of the community. They worked together, sharing all resources and supported each other in reaching out to everyone. As the cost of living crisis deepens, the partners within Verve will have an important role to play with regards to reaching out and supporting all in need.”

The organisations that are members of the Verve Network are:

- Southern Health and Social Care Trust
- Clann Eireann GAA
- Drumbeg North & South Residents Association
- Drumellan Community Association
- The Fitzone Foundation
- Train To Be Smart
- Clan Na Gael GAA
- The Chrysalis Women's Centre
- Drumcree Community Trust
- Edgarstown Residents Association
- South Shore Health and Wellbeing Project

Further details on the member organisations are available from the Verve Healthy Living Network website <https://verve-network.co.uk/>.

CLICK HERE



Quantitative targets

The following summary presents the outputs achieved by the Programme over the 3-year period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2022. Where applicable, the data will be set against the targets that were established for the Programme at the outset.

The overall annual target set for the Programme has been 10,500 people benefiting from health intervention services across each year, a total of 31,500 people over this three year period. This can be broken down into the following interventions each year:

- 450 interactions with Community Health Trainers across the 3 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas to include health interventions, group activity programmes and pop-up health clinics reaching the community that are deemed 'hard to reach'.
- 12 Community Health Improvement Plans will be developed by the Verve Network to support the development of community-led health improvement initiatives with key partners.
- 50 individual Health Improvement Plans developed through support from a Health Trainer and to include at least one behaviour change goal.
- 10,000 individuals from across the 3 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas to benefit from healthy lifestyle projects, increased health literacy and knowledge on health-related issues through:
 - o Receiving the Fuse Newsletter up to 3 times each year, delivered to homes and community venues across the area, with 10,000 copies produced per run
 - o Social media health education and awareness campaigns including local events taking place, using the Verve Facebook page
 - o Up to 4 Pop-Up Health Clinics per year, including virtual delivery based on COVID-19 restrictions
 - o Signposting and referral on to other support services in the area, including from the Verve Network/Health Trainer Programme and the wider Southern HSC Trust.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the mode of programme delivery, all stakeholders demonstrated the ability to adapt activity delivery methods using a hybrid model, offering support online, by telephone and outdoors, which allowed the service delivery to continue. This also had a positive impact on the numbers engaged, as higher numbers could be accommodated online. This will be reflected in some of the outputs achieved.





COMMUNITY HEALTH TRAINERS

Background

Embedded within Verve Network is the Community Health Trainer model. This approach works by building the knowledge, skills and capacity of people drawn from the local area, empowering them to become health activists within their communities. Through the use of brief advice, goal setting and the organisation of groups and events, health trainers seek to empower individuals to make positive lifestyle changes and embed healthy choices within communities.

Community Health Trainers are trained to Level 3 to deliver both one-to-one and group support for health and wellbeing are paid on a sessional basis. They benefit from health coaching and training using evidence-based health literacy and psychology-informed behaviour change models.

Social Prescribing

The Verve Healthy Living Centre Network and Community Health Trainer Service adopt a hybrid health coaching and social prescribing approach to providing support. The Health Trainer provides the role of the 'link worker', creating the connections for the client referred to their service as well as the provision of support with behaviour change.

Social prescribing connects people to practical and emotional support in their communities. Social prescribers take time to build trusting relationships, co-create a shared plan, which helps support and empower people to find solutions to improve their health and wellbeing.

The Community Health Trainer model embraces the core values of social prescribing in that it is:

1. **Relationship focussed** – a relationship between the social prescriber and the individual which has compassion and empathy at its centre
2. **Holistic and person led** – takes account of the wider determinants of health, addresses health inequalities and helps people to increase control over their own health and lives
3. **A process** – which takes time to co-produce goals through an asset-based approach and helps people to access a wide range of practical and emotional support
4. **Easily accessible** – for the individual and for referrers

5. **Community centred and reliant on partnership working** – delivered in local communities, strengthens community connections and resources and is delivered through partnerships across the public, community and voluntary sectors
6. **Safe and sustainable** – has mechanisms for quality assurance and outcomes measurement built in and is funded in a sustainable way.

One-to-one health coaching

A central aspect of the role is one-to-one health coaching. Working directly with individuals, Community Health Trainers will:

- Assess health behaviour on a one-to-one basis
- Set behavioural goals with clients (including pre and post-assessments)
- Co-develop health action plans to support lifestyle changes
- Connect clients to local supports, services and activities
- Assist the client in self-monitoring through regular contact over a 12 week period.

The team will also use the dedicated Community Gyms to support clients. Located at The Fitzone Foundation and Clan Na Gael, these community based facilities provide an introduction to using gym equipment in a non-intimidating environment, giving clients the ability to control and measure progress towards their physical activity goals.

Community Health Trainers complete Level 2 Gym Instructor training to enable them to provide this support.

Mini Health Checks

Using their training and standardised equipment, Community Health Trainers can support local community events and health fairs, offering Mini Health Checks including body weight, muscle mass, composition, waist measurement and blood pressure. These checks provide the opportunity to open conversations around the lifestyle changes that can make a difference and connect people to community-based programmes as well as one-to-one supports.

Training

There has been ongoing investment into the health trainer's programme over the past 3 years, with 11 new Community Health Trainers trained and 10 Community Health Trainers currently operational.

All new Community Health Trainers completed the Proqual Health Trainer Level 3⁵ certification, which was supplemented by training in delivery of key health messages and practical skills training such as blood pressure, body composition analysis and carbon monoxide monitoring. Once trained they are paid at a standard hourly rate for all delivery and activities under the Programme.

“*The Health Trainer training was very thorough and the trainer knew their material. While the academic side of the training set the context, the face to face practical part of the training provided me with the knowledge and skills to do the job of a Health Trainer within the community. The qualification also gave me the credibility to provide this service out in the community. I really enjoy the health checks. You get to meet a range of people and I feel really good when I can assist people to identify areas where health improvements can be made. Also I've got to visit community venues which are new and that's good and interesting.*”

“*I completed my Health Trainer course in 2020. Course content was delivered and explained very well. Working in groups and using the practical skill workbook along the way made learning easier and more enjoyable and the group interaction was something I really looked forward to. Behaviour change to improve health and wellbeing were my favourite sessions. The training has really enabled me to provide a much better service to our community and I've found it very rewarding on the relationships I've developed and the positive feedback I've received. I highly recommend this course.*”

⁵OCN Level 3 Community Health Facilitator qualification has been used since 2022 as the Health Trainer qualification is no longer available.



Above: Verve Healthy Living Network hosts Emergency Life Support programme, Heart Start

Community Health Trainers regularly complete further enhanced training to enable them to deliver a wider range of group programme activities, in line with their interests and community needs, including:

- **Community Strength and Balance** – a physical activity programme aiming to help those over 55 with balance and posture issues to prevent falls
- **Better Days Chronic Pain Programme** – to improve the capacity for self-management of participants living with chronic pain by promoting healthier lifestyle and treatment choices
- **Forest Bathing** – a mindful, multisensory experience in nature that supports participants to relieve stress delivered over 6-12 weeks
- **Healthy Eating Programmes** – including Cook It, Food Values and Good Food Toolkit
- **Be Active Programmes** – including Chair based exercise, Chi Me, On Your Feet, Cycle Leader, Walking for Health and Boccia
- **Community Gym training** - Accredited Programmes such as Level 3 Personal Trainer training, Gym Instructor Level 2
- **Mental Wellbeing and Self-Care Programmes** – including Take 5, WRAP, Colour Breathing Relaxation Therapy, Laughter Yoga, #think5do5, Tools for Wellbeing and REST Programme.

Community Health Trainers gradually develop the range of programmes they are trained to deliver, based on their personal areas of interest.

They also complete a range of awareness programmes to support their one-to-one coaching roles including: Gambling Awareness, WRAP, Hopeful Minds, Zero Suicide Awareness training, Mental Health First Aid, Trauma and the Body, REST (Routine, Environment, Stimulation control, Thinking) programme, Generalist Advice course, First Aid, Heart Start Emergency Life Support Training, Defibrillator & CPR Refresher, Social Prescribing, Elevate Health Inequalities and Community Development Training.

In total they have been trained in over 31 programmes, building their capacity for information sharing and facilitation of health programmes. A Health Trainer animation can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/557509276/70eea0311a>

WATCH NOW



DELIVERY

Overall Targets

In this period, The Programme had an annual target for each of the three years of developing 50 individual Health Improvement Plans through support from a Community Health Trainer (i.e. 150 in total). Each Plan was to include at least one behaviour change goal.

Community Health Trainers were also required to deliver four pop-up Health Clinics (either remotely or face to face). Inclusive of these clinics, and the delivery of health interventions and group activity programme delivery, they were set a target of 450 interactions with individuals additional to the Health Improvement plans.

In total 173 individuals had a personal health plan developed while working with a health trainer. The target of 50 plans to be completed annually was achieved or exceeded in each of the 3 years.

Over the past 3 years, 2,690 individuals have been recorded as attending Health Trainer programmes or activities overall, with 1,763 (66%) of these interactions taking place in the first year.

COVID-19 related restrictions that were in place for all of 2020/21 and parts of 2021/22 prevented face-to-face interactions taking place. During this period telephone or online (Zoom, YouTube or Facebook) support was provided.

The annual target of 450 interactions has been achieved or exceeded in each of the 3 years.

In this period, there have been more than 3,000 participants on individual programmes delivered through the Verve Centres. Many of these programmes have been delivered by Community Health Trainers. There was a reduction in numbers for 2020/21 but this rose to more than 1,500 in 2021/22. It should be noted that these participants are not all unique; some individuals may have taken part in more than one programme.

Source of Referrals

The project initially generated referrals through health events, pop up health clinics and health trainer engagement. Throughout the pandemic a significant shift occurred in that health professionals started to refer into the Verve Network for specific programmes, e.g. Better Days Pain Support programme, Community Strength and Balance and the one-to-one health coaching with Community Health Trainers.

Referrals are received into the Programme from a range of sources in the Neighbourhood Renewal areas. The top three referral sources for each year are recorded below:

Top 3 sources of referral each year

2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
1 Health Trainer	1 Health Trainer	1 Wellmind Hub
2 Stepping Stones	2 Wellmind Hub	2 Health Trainers
3 Self-referral	3 Spring Project	3 GP

Other referral sources include community and voluntary sector organisations supporting individuals with needs such as learning disability and mental health.

“ We have used the Verve trainer programme on a number of occasions. Our clients have benefited from their experience and knowledge and have been useful in helping our clients in their day to day lives. They are a great asset to the community and will continue to use their service in the future.”

(Paul Baxter Floating Support Team – Leonard Cheshire)

All referrals to the service come through to a central point for response. The Community Health Trainers will then either register the client for one-to-one support or connect them directly onto the requested programme, as required. The reasons clients have been referred into the Programme include:

- One-to-one support
- Physical activity, including accessing a Community Gym
- Healthy eating and/or weight management
- Mental wellbeing
- Social activity
- Alcohol awareness
- Group support
- Better Days Pain Support Programme
- Community Strength and Balance programme

It was noted that during the pandemic there was a reduction in referrals for reasons related to lifestyle and health behaviours and a marked increase in referrals for mental and emotional support and social contact.

Programmes/Activities

As part of the support role, Community Health Trainers connect individuals to a range of additional information, programmes/activities or support (see Table 2).

Table 2: Programmes, Activities and Support

Other Programmes/Activities Offered	Participants Engaged
Health & Wellbeing Information shared	2027
Education & Learning Programmes	28
Lunch/breakfast clubs	44
Social activities (e.g. craft programmes)	163
Better Days Pain Support Programme	77
DfC Warm Well and Connected Programmes (2020-2021) ⁶	144
TOTAL	2,483

⁶ This was additional DfC funding, channelled through the Healthy Living Centre Alliance, during Dec-March 2020-21.

The number of individuals receiving information from a health trainer is particularly notable, with much of this figure reached in 2020/21 despite face-to-face contact not being possible, as Health Trainers actively engaged with people at their doorsteps to promote health and wellbeing. They also used digital methods, such as WhatsApp to pass on information.

The impact of COVID-19 has meant that it was not possible to deliver pop-up clinics over the past 2 years of delivery. In 2019/20, 28 Clinics were delivered, with 448 Health Checks carried out and 83 individuals signposted on to other services as a result.



Left: Doorstep engagement by Health Trainers

Partner comments:

“ We were very lucky to have two Community Health Trainers at our Community Fun day in July. We have never had this service before, and this was very much appreciated by the adults - we probably could have had 4 trainers kept busy. It provided health checks and advice that some members of the community would never have accessed if they had not been at the event, and many made further medical/health appointments as an outcome. We now plan to make this Fun day an annual event and would love to have support from Verve with this resource. ”

(Friends Of St Patricks)

“ St Paul’s Lurgan have now availed of the health trainer service mini health checks twice over the past 6 months. Both times being a huge success. Our members benefitted greatly from these events, many learning new facts on how eating well and exercising can help us to be healthier. ”

(St Paul’s Lurgan)

“ I have had a lot from the Community Health Trainers in Lurgan. We had them in Tesco a while back and they are just amazing for the health benefits for our customers and also our colleagues. They did a lot of health checks and our colleagues would still talk about the things they learned and actually changed their way of thinking. I also work with many community groups in the town and would always use Verve. The Health Trainer team bring great benefit to most of the town. On a personal note I find them all professional and reliable and easy to contact with a wide range of choices. Keep up all your good work Eileen (senior health trainer) and the team we appreciate you. ”

(Edel Foy, Tesco Lurgan community champion, and Member of North Lurgan Community Association)

Right and below:
Health checks



Onward Referrals

Table 3 shows referrals made by Community Health Trainers to other agencies or forms of support.

Table 3: Referrals by Community Health Trainers

Referral to	Participants Referred
Verve Community Gym	335
Blood Pressure Check up (GP)	40
Breast, Cervical & Bowel Screening (GP)	15
Trust Stop Smoking Service	8
Carers Register (Trust Carers Coordinator)	7
GP Referral (for other health concerns outside scope of service)	7
Council Leisure Centre	6
Other Healthcare Professional	5
TOTAL	423

Most notable are the 335 referred to the Community Gyms available at either The Fitzone Foundation or Clan Na Gael, as well as those referred to check for a specific issue as a result of the support provided by the health trainer.

Within the Community Gym⁷ setting Health Trainers, qualified in gym instruction, work alongside clients in a small groups or on a one to one basis, as part of their personal health plan to support them in reaching their physical activity the goals. The community environment provides a more accessible introduction to using a gym and being more active, building their confidence in the longer term.

⁷ Verve Network member, Fitzone Foundation, secured capital funding from DfC under Neighbourhood Renewal to set up and resource the Community Gym facility.



Individuals have been referred on to a range of other organisations or services available in the Southern HSC Trust area, including:

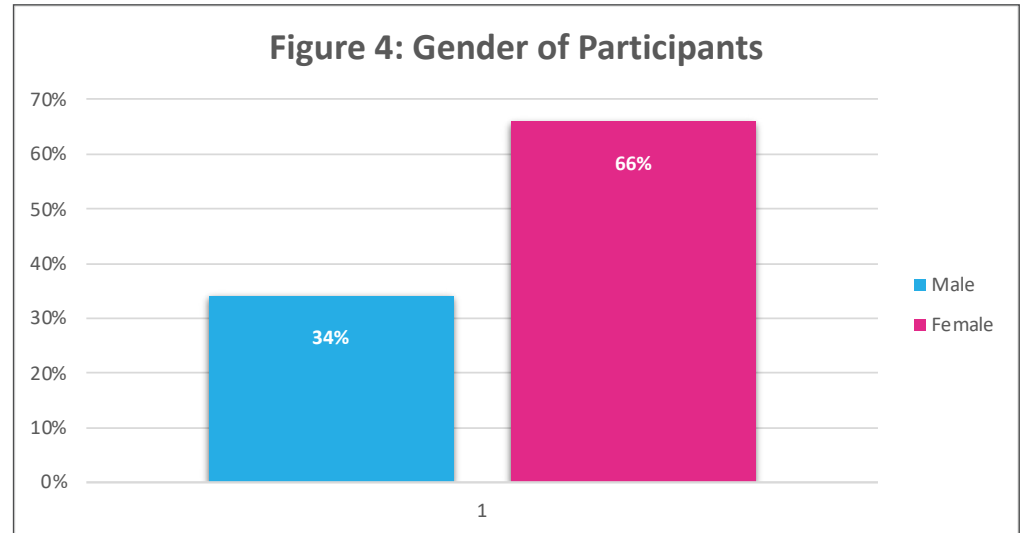
- Services provided by the Trust (e.g. Access and Information Service)
- Services provided by one of the Verve Centres (e.g. Clan Na Gael Friendly Club and Chrysalis Women’s Centre counselling services)
- Services provided by another community voluntary organisation (e.g. Aware NI, Action Mental Health, Versus Arthritis, PIPS, Men’s Shed and ALAnon).

The Facebook page for the Verve Network <https://www.facebook.com/vervecraigavon> has 1,300 'Followers', with regular updates posted for activities happening across the Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

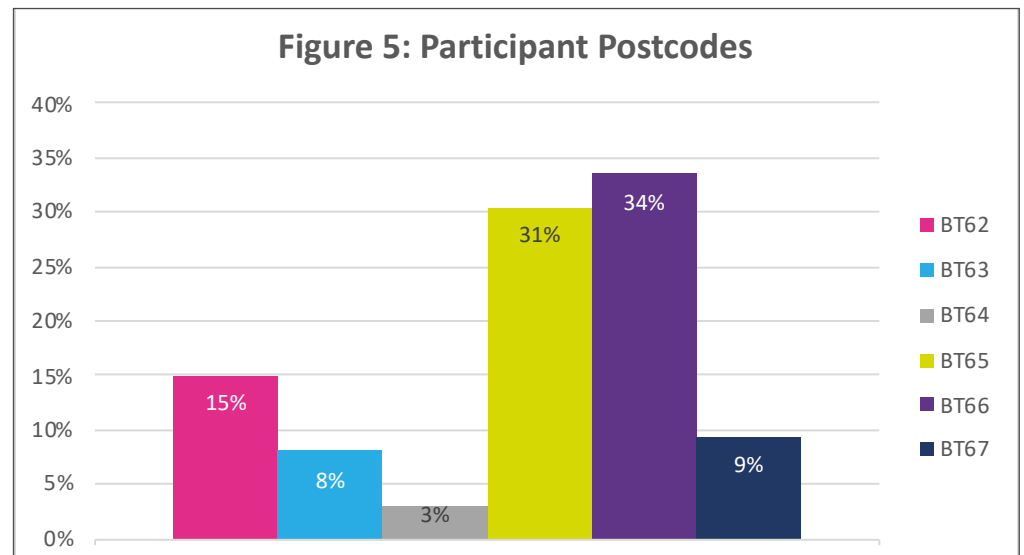
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Demographic profile of participants

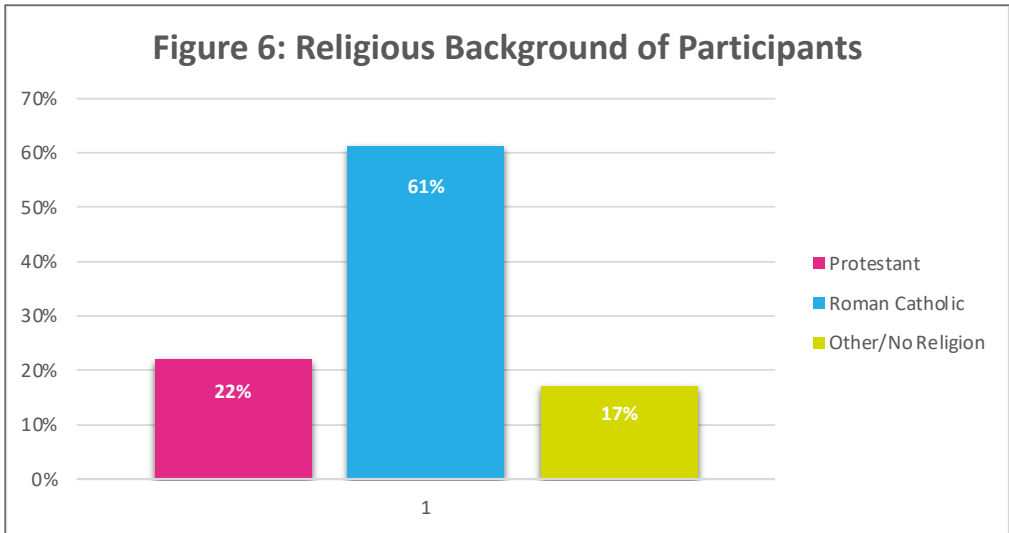
One of the strengths of the Community Health Trainer Programme from an evaluation perspective has been the gathering of equality monitoring data on participants benefitting from the one-to-one health coaching. This allows us to assess whether the Programme has been effective in reaching the target demographic groups across a range of characteristics. The following demographic information has been collated from participants of the one-to-one health coaching completed with Community Health Trainers.



The data collected shows that 66% of those that have engaged are female and 34% male (Fig. 4). Men traditionally have been described as less likely to engage in services and most likely to adopt unhealthy behaviours. It is positive to see strong engagement by men, and with several male-focused activities developed in the latter part of the reporting period, this represents a clear opportunity to address health inequalities.

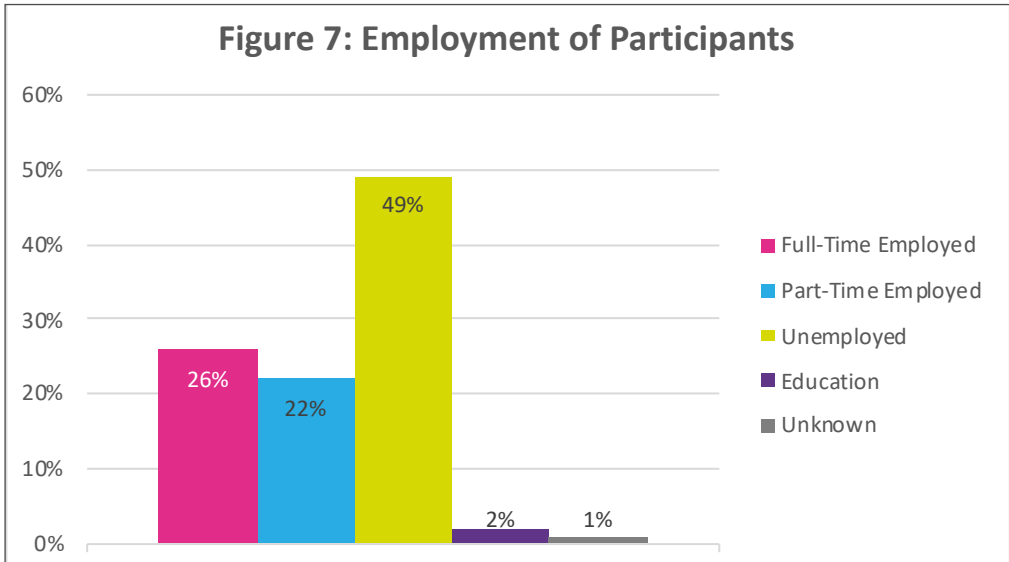


Participants are drawn from across the postcodes that make up Craigavon, with BT65 (31%) and BT66 (34%) the most popular (Fig. 5). As the NR areas targeted are largely located in these postcodes it is positive to see that those from the most deprived socioeconomic groups are engaging effectively and the project is supporting those who typically face greater barriers to improving their health.

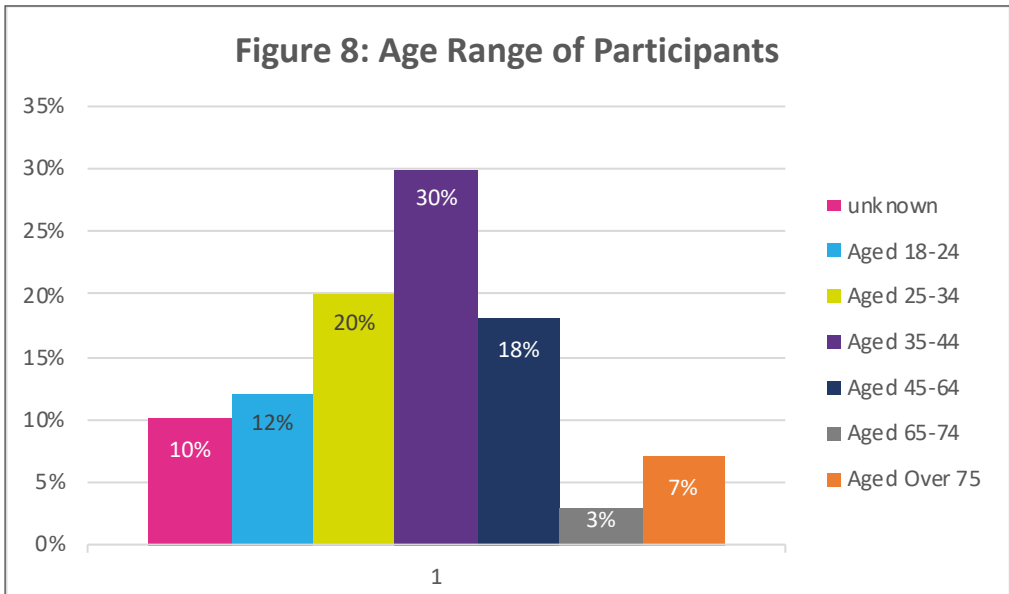


61% of participants are from a Roman Catholic religious background (Fig. 6). This is in line with the religious profile of the three target areas.⁸

⁸ Religion: KS07a (NRA) - Table view - Religion: KS07a (NRA) - Table view - NINIS: Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (nisra.gov.uk)



49% of participants were unemployed at the time of their support, with just 26% engaged in full-time employment (Fig. 7). Whilst participants are drawn from across all age ranges, a majority (30%) are aged 35-44. (Fig. 8).



With regard to ethnicity, 99% of participants identified as White. The Ethnic Monitoring Questionnaire did not capture country of origin and language, which may have provided a more nuanced insight into whether the Programme is reaching newcomer, asylum seeker and migrant communities from Eastern Europe who are resident in these areas.

Monitoring data also shows that:

- 51% of participants stated they have a disability, though the exact nature of the disability and the impact this has on the individual has not been recorded
- 52% of participants have dependents, whether this be children or another family member that they care for
- Amongst those provided with one-to-one support by Community Health Trainers, over a third (36%) identified as carers.

These statistics again show how the tailored support at grassroots level can be effective in supporting the 'hard to reach' groups.

Outcomes of one-to-one health coaching

As part of the health coaching support provided, goals were set with the individual in their personal Health Improvement Plans. These goals typically fell into three main areas:

- Healthy eating
- Mental and emotional wellbeing
- Physical activity

Alcohol awareness and diabetes risk is also included in the health behaviour check and used with clients as appropriate.

In terms of measuring outcomes, we have focused particularly on the provision of one-to-one social prescribing and health coaching. This work involves ongoing contact over a period of time. It is therefore important to understand whether this has been a worthwhile investment:

- Has the support resulted in meaningful outcomes for the individuals?
- Are the benefits greater in relation to certain health behaviours or population groups?

Both of these assessments will inform more effective targeting of the resource for future programme development.

The following outlines the outcomes achieved from the support provided, drawn from assessments completed by Community Health Trainers pre- and post-intervention. Where applicable, case studies have been developed to further illustrate the benefits of the support.

Goal Setting

Participants on the Programme set goals at initial assessment with their Community Health Trainer, re-visiting these goals at 'sign off' to assess the impact of the support on the individual.

In the context of this evaluation and review of the goals set by individuals these have fallen within three main groupings:

Mental Wellbeing

- Increase confidence and mental wellbeing
- Improve mood
- Reduce stress, anxiety and worry
- Increase motivation, positivity and sense of purpose
- Address fear of leaving the house alone
- Make more time for myself

Physical Wellbeing

- Be more active
- Make healthier eating choices
- Lose weight
- Increase physical fitness
- Improve strength and balance
- Reduce alcohol intake

⁹ The Warwick-Edinburgh
Mental Wellbeing Scale
14 item

Case Study – Going it Alone

The client was referred by her GP following the death of her husband. She sought support to leave the house on her own as she had lost her confidence and needed support to get involved in social activity again.

Assessments were completed using the Warwick-Edinburgh Scale⁹ to assess mental wellbeing and a loneliness assessment.

Working with the Community Health Trainer, the client identified barriers that were preventing her from engaging and goals to help her address these. The client was not a driver and the Community Health Trainer health trainer took the bus with her to go to the Friendly Club at Clan Na Gael.

Following this, the client was able to go on her own, as well as taking the bus to go shopping. This bolstered her confidence and opened up many opportunities to help regain her independence. As a result of the support, the client's Warwick-Edinburgh score improved and her loneliness score reduced by a third.

When asked about the support, the client has said *"thank you so much for your patience and kindness. I'm feeling very proud of myself, couldn't have done it without you."*

Case Study – Growing in Confidence

The client was referred by the Cherry Trees Sensory Disability Team for assistance with their overall health, and with weight management in particular.

The Health Trainer completed an assessment of the client's body composition analysis to determine baseline measurements and used the Health Behaviour Check to determine the client's current choices and behaviours with regards food and exercise.

The Health Trainer worked with the client to improve her strength and balance as well as ways to exercise and make healthier food choices at home. The client was referred on to the Fit and Well Programme through her GP on the advice of the Health Trainer, and a weekly strength and balance class. She was also connected to counselling at one of the Verve Healthy Living Network organisations.

Following the 12 weeks of support, the client saw improvements in many of the areas of measurement. This included losing 3kgs of weight, reducing her BMI by 1 point, eating breakfast every day and increasing her intake of fruit and vegetables.

The client now considers herself to be reasonably healthy, is very confident in reading food labels, with her knowledge of portion size and in addressing her own health needs.

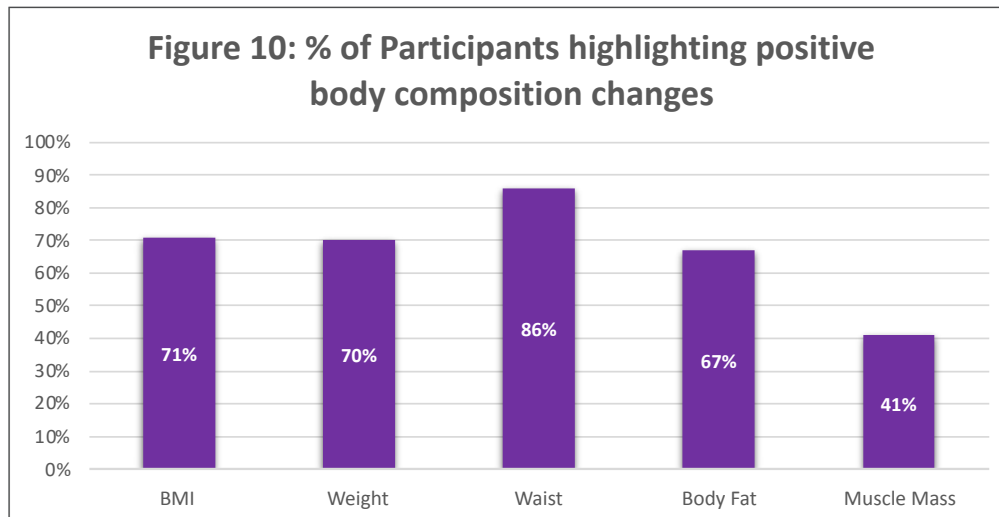
The client has said *"I am more confident, more active and more determined to do stuff every day."*

Physical Health Assessment

83% of clients presented with a physical change goal and completed a physical health assessment before and after the support.

In order to assess physical health, body composition analysis scales are used to give clients insight into their physical health at the initial stages of their programme with the health trainer and at sign off. The key measurements discussed are body weight, body mass index (BMI), waist measurement, body fat and muscle mass.

Figure 10 below shows the positive impact that the Programme has had on the physical health of individuals supported.



Clients showed significant improvement across a number of physical indicators as a result of the health coaching interventions.

86% of individuals assessed saw a reduction in their waist size before and after the support from a health trainer.

71% saw improvements in their BMI. 70% evidenced weight loss and, there were also positive changes in relation to body fat (67%) and muscle mass (41%).

Case Study – One year on...maintaining changes

The client approached the health trainer for support with his mental and emotional wellbeing. He had worries linked to his weight and really wanted to work on this so that he would feel better about himself.

Together with his health trainer, the client used the health behaviour check to identify areas where he needed to make lifestyle changes. In doing so he made his personal health action plan around choosing healthier food and engaging his son in helping to plan healthy meals for the family. He also wanted to become more physically active and he engaged in a programme of walking.

The support resulted in the client losing weight and having a greater understanding of food and nutrition and how to make healthy choices. He has more confidence to engage with groups and has a more positive outlook in life as a result of the health trainer service. One year on, the health trainer met the client and he has continued his success and has instilled good habits into his lifestyle.

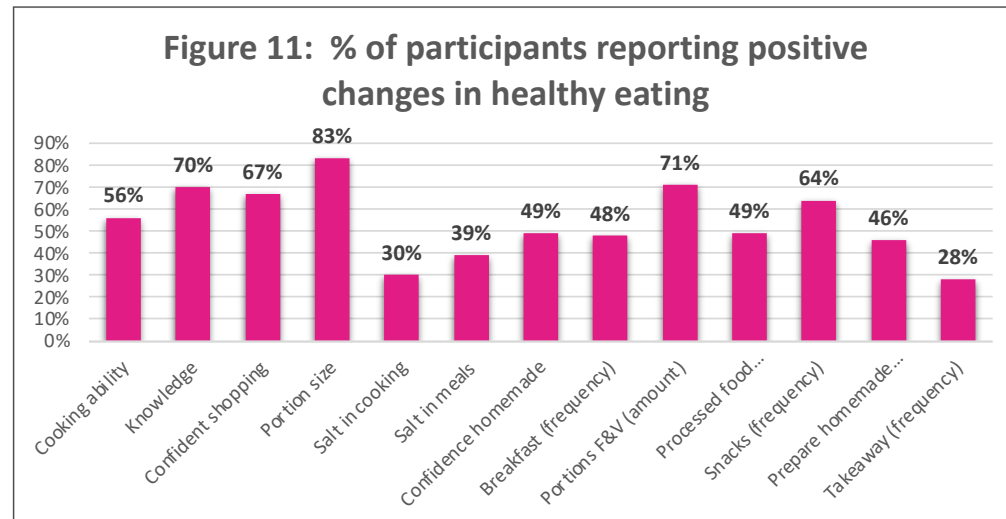
The client commented: *"My health trainer has been excellent. She has helped motivate me when I needed it most and has definitely been a big plus throughout my journey. I have lost 15.5kg and 10cm from around my waist. I am also off all medication because of increased exercise and a healthier diet. There was a moment when we were chatting about my weight loss, etc. and I think you were more overjoyed than I was, it brought a tear to your eye. For me, that showed me the invested interest you have in what you are doing, it actually means something to you. It's about your availability if I ever needed to chat or ask something you were always there, you can't instil those qualities in someone, because those come from the heart, having a caring nature, which you certainly do. What you have done for me was greatly appreciated."*

Healthy Eating

82% of clients identified goals relating to eating a more healthy diet.

Assessment was carried out using a questionnaire to identify areas where awareness of healthy eating, cooking skills or confidence in food choices could be improved. Support was then provided through a range of interventions and programmes over the 12 week period before the assessment was repeated at sign-off.

Figure 11 shows the percentage of individuals for whom positive change was recorded against each of the variables.



Positive changes were recorded across all the variables measured, most notably for reduced portion size (83%), increased consumption of fruit & vegetables (71%), increased knowledge of healthy eating (70%), greater confidence in shopping for healthy food (67%) and reduced frequency of snacking (64%).

Case Study – Connecting to the Support in the Community for Improved Health Outcomes

When referred to the health trainer, the client was overweight and suffering with poor mental health as a result.

With support from the Community Health Trainer, the client learned how to pre-plan meals, read food labels and eat a healthy, balanced diet. Making small changes each week in her personal health plan meant the client maintained control of improving her health.

The Health Trainer also referred the client to Public Health Agency 'Stress Control' programme and Versus Arthritis 'Challenging Your Condition' course, both of which she found beneficial. She also connected her client to a local walking group and luncheon club, where she made new friends in the process.

As a result of the support, the client has lost nearly 6kg in weight which has made her feel better physically and lifted her mood. She is now more active and better able to cope. With this increased confidence, she goes out more as well as helping others through voluntary work. The client has said ***"Both my physical and mental health have improved. I really, really recommend the Health Trainer service to everybody."***

Physical Activity

Physical activity levels are a significant factor in both physical and mental health and wellbeing. On that basis, Community Health Trainers completed assessments with 72% of participants (124 Individuals). Not all of these clients would have specifically identified increased physical activity as one of their goals.

A questionnaire was completed to identify how much physical activity the participant was carrying out each week (see below), the level of intensity and how much muscle-strengthening activity was included. This allowed assessment against the UK recommended physical activity guidelines.

Physical activity pre scoring

1. How many times a week do you usually do:

20 minutes or more of vigorous-intensity physical activity that makes you sweat or puff and pant (for example, heavy lifting, digging or jogging)?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
**Two 10-minute sessions count as one 20-minute session.*

30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity (for example, brisk walking or riding a bike)?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10
**Three 10-minute sessions (or two 15-minute sessions) count as one 30-minute session.*

Physical activities that are muscle strengthening (for example heavy gardening or weight training)?

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Discussion also identified and recorded the barriers to being more active, so these could be included in the agreed intervention plan. The assessment was repeated post-intervention to identify progress achieved.

Figure 12 sets out the average reported minutes and intensity of physical activity pre and post intervention..

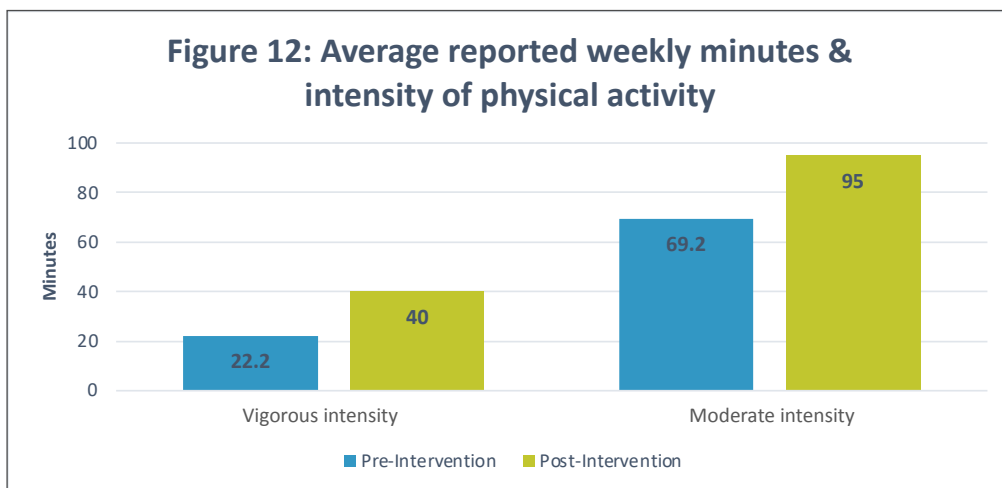


Figure 12 illustrates that participants almost doubled the amount of intense or vigorous activity, with an 80% increase from pre to post intervention. Moderate intensity activity also increased by more than a third (37%) post intervention.

Overall, 58% of those receiving support from a Community Health Trainer recorded an increase in the number of minutes each week spent being physically active.¹⁰ These numbers will include clients who had not set increased activity as one of their goals.

¹⁰ It should be noted that not all clients will have had a physical activity goal but the topic is discussed as part of the health behaviour check with a majority of clients.

The number of individuals participating in moderate physical activity has also markedly increased. At initial assessment, 53 individuals (43%) were not participating in any moderate intensity activity. This decreased to just 22 individuals (18%) not participating in any moderate intensity activity at sign off.

56% of those receiving support increased the number of minutes of moderate intensity activity each week, with more than half of those supported now completing between 30 and 210 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week.

The range of activity levels amongst participants varied considerably, with many seeking to engage with physical activity alongside a second goal whilst others were starting from a much lower base.

The greatest improvements were seen in the number of individuals participating in vigorous physical activity (activity that makes you sweat or puff and pant) markedly increased across the Programme.

At initial assessment, 80 individuals (65%) were not participating in any vigorous intensity physical activity. This decreased to 46 individuals (37%) not participating in any vigorously intense activity at sign off.

Half of those supported were completing between 20 and 120 minutes of vigorously intense physical activity per week by sign-off, supported by a wide range of available programmes across the community.

In addition, 43% of participants reported a positive change in frequency for muscle strengthening activities in the post-scoring physical activity questionnaire.

Case Study – Promoting Independent Living and Falls Prevention

A 73 year old man was referred through a family member who had previously been supported by a Community Health Trainer. After a knee operation, the client had a fear of falling. After completing the falls risk assessment it was determined that the client would benefit from a referral for community strength and balance.

The client was provided with one-to-one support which included increasing his muscle strengthening activities from none to two times weekly. He was also referred on to a home safety officer at the local Council. Having had a home visit from an Occupational Therapist, hand rails have been fitted throughout his house.

The client exceeded his target goal by completing the exercises 2-3 times per week. The client was able to go walking again and also started to use a stationary bike. The Community Health Trainer provided the client with a pedometer to increase his daily steps, and he progressively increased his weekly step count over the period of support.

On completion, the client was able to complete 300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on the bike, and 90 minutes of muscle strengthening activity over two sessions per week.

Right: Strength and balance in the home



Case Study – A Holistic Approach in Practice

The client was referred from a local GP Practice to receive one-to-one support from a health trainer. She is a single mum of 2 boys with autism, and was experiencing mental health issues. The client engaged with a health trainer as she wanted help to engage with physical activity as a way of addressing her mental health. A physical activity planner was used to measure weekly success.

The Community Health Trainer referred her to the community gym where she engaged in physical activity sessions. She also exercised at home to keep active and attended Chi Me classes to help with social interaction.

As the client was often experiencing a low mood, sessions often began with walking and talking, having a cup of tea to talk through the issues she was experiencing, and doing Chi Me one-to-one to help her relax. Undertaking sessions in the gym gave the client confidence to enjoy working out and not feel under pressure from other gym goers. Once the client began to get fitter as a result of the sessions, her mood became more positive, sociable and relaxed, with a greater focus on new goals.

The client has indicated that the weekly sessions and follow up messages of support from the health trainer were motivating and encouraging. When signing off, the client was in a much happier place. Her confidence levels were higher and she felt stronger mentally to achieve more and work on her CV for herself. Having been able to undertake 0 minutes of physical activity in week 1, she was able to do 100 minutes of intense activity by week 12.

She has enrolled with the Chrysalis Women's Centre for Autism awareness courses which will help her as a parent and also enhance her education and CV, with new motivation for progression.

Case Study – Physical Activity in Addressing Chronic Pain and Poor Mental Wellbeing

The client was referred by a Mental Health Social Worker to access the Better Days Pain Programme as well as take part in physical and social activities.

With the Community Health Trainer, the client set goals to increase physical activity levels, undertake muscle strengthening exercise and address portion sizes.

Operating within the context of limited access to programmes during the pandemic the one-to-one support from the Community Health Trainer was key to a health coaching approach to enable behaviour change.

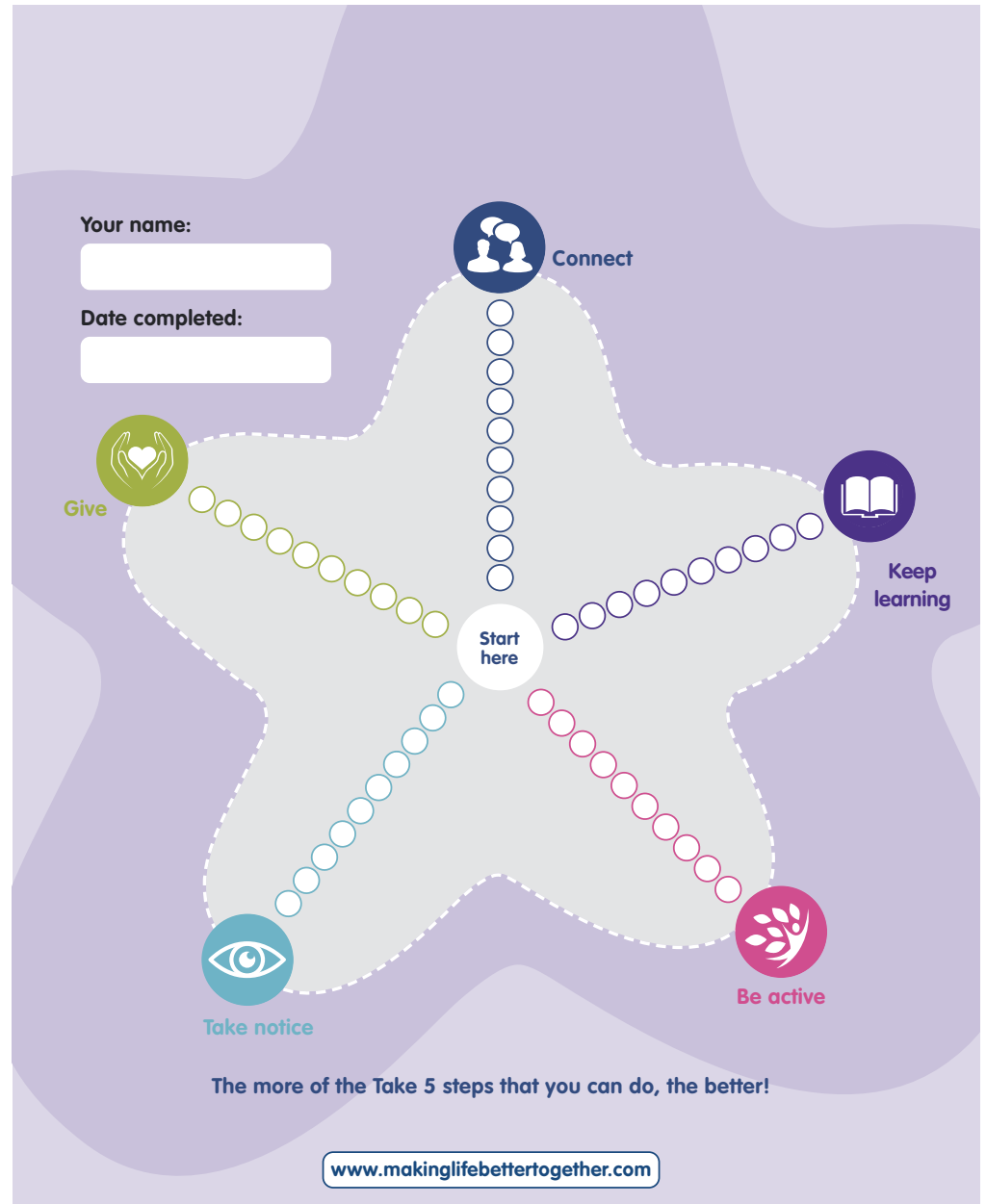
As a result of the support, the client saw an increase in the client's overall health, including an improved understanding about portion size and increase in fruit and vegetable intake. The client was also able to increase their physical activity to 100 minutes of moderate, 90 minutes vigorous and 210 minutes of muscle strengthening activity each week. The client said:

"I found the health trainer to be very supportive in explaining what I could do to improve my physical and mental health. He put me at ease and made the experience enjoyable. He was very genuine in his interest to support and help me to achieve my goals and to manage some of my problems."

The client said *"It was reassuring to know that I had someone supporting me and who would be in contact each week. This gave me encouragement to meet the goals set which in turn helped my confidence and self-esteem when I achieved them. As my mobility and confidence improved I was able to join a craft group and therefore started socialising more again."*

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

85% of participants (148 Individuals) completed the assessments on their mental and emotional wellbeing. For this area, the Community Health Trainers completed a range of assessments with regard to mental and emotional wellbeing and loneliness.



¹¹ Microsoft Word - Five_ways_to_well-being the evidence.doc (neweconomics.org)

The Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing¹¹ is an evidence-based model that explains the five areas of activity that help to maintain our emotional wellbeing. Assessment was carried out using the Take 5 star to show visually how much of the five steps to wellbeing participants were fitting into their regular activities. Clients were asked to provide a rating for each of the Take 5 steps at initial assessment and at sign off from the support provided by the Community Health Trainers.

As with the Take 5 variables, the support provided by the Community Health Trainers has affected positive change for both Connectivity and Loneliness.

The Connected score has increased from 4.3 to 5.1, a 19% improvement in how connected clients felt to their local community.

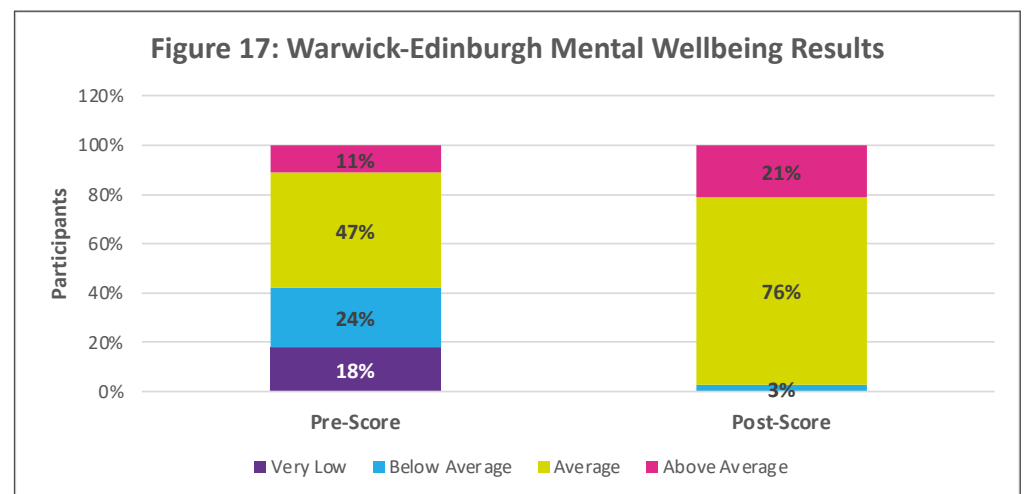
There was also an average reduction of 34% to the frequency of periods during which individuals felt lonely, reducing from 5.9 down to 3.9. There is more of a dispersion in the scores provided for both Connected and Loneliness, highlighting the different positions at which participants were starting from.

Warwick-Edinburgh Scale

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was developed to monitor the functioning aspect of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing.

The WEMWBS was used with a sample of 32 participants from both group programmes and one-to-one health coaching, where the reason for referral or the purpose of attending was to improve mental and emotional wellbeing.

Figure 17 shows participant wellbeing scores and how these changed across the period of the support.



At the initial assessment, 42% of the clients had a below average rating with a significant 18% reporting very low mental wellbeing.

By the end of the intervention, just 3% were assessed as having below average mental wellbeing, none were very low, and the percentage assessed as having above average mental wellbeing results had almost doubled.

Further analysis of the data shows that 53% of clients saw an improvement in their score post the support.

Case Study – Reconnecting Again

The client was referred to the health trainer due to Covid-related anxiety. As someone required to shield, they had not been able to return to work for over 1 year, nor go anywhere where there are a lot of people present. As well as wanting to address these issues, the client also wanted help with their diet, physical activity level and overall mood.

The client set achievable goals with their health trainer, including re-engaging with others and going out in public places, increasing walking and weight bearing exercise, increasing intake of fruit and vegetables, and addressing compulsive cleaning.

As a result of the personal health plan created and the goals set for behaviour change, the client saw a positive change in the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale scores, rising from 40 to 52 overall, with current health rating rising from 3 to 7 out of 10, and confidence in addressing health needs rising from 4 out of 10 to 8 out of 10.

The client has said: *"The health trainer has helped me through the support provided, he has given me the lift I needed to enjoy myself and to exercise. The only thing I would say is that I wish I could have had more time with my health trainer because of the great help I have received."*

Case Study – Take 5 Steps to Improved Wellbeing

The client was referred by the Well Mind Hub for support with mental and emotional wellbeing, healthy eating, as well as having fibromyalgia.

The client completed the Health Behaviour Check using the Take 5 Star and What You Eat section to identify changes in behaviour that would help improve health and wellbeing. The client set goals around the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing and engaged fully in sessions around healthy eating, food education and cookery.

As a result of the support, the client's rating of their health and confidence in addressing health needs both increased from 1 (not at all confident) to 6 (reasonably confident) by the end of the 12 weeks.

Their Take 5 scores all increased, with scores of 10 for Take Notice and Give and 9 for Connect at the end of the support. The client was also referred for bereavement counselling, to the Recovery College and has secured a voluntary placement through the Volunteer Bureau on the Good Morning Call Project.

The client commented: *"The health trainer has been lovely and I have looked forward to her phone calls and our walk and talk sessions which I will miss. She has listened and given encouragement. I have put the ideas she brought to me into practice which has been a great help. She is a great asset to Verve!"*

Case Study – Providing Encouragement and Support Post COVID-19

The individual was referred by the Well Mind Hub for one-to-one support. She was suffering with post-Covid symptoms, resulting in difficulties with walking, exercising and maintaining a healthy diet and weight, as well as having a very low mood, no motivation and poor mental health overall. The client wanted help to improve her symptoms. Long-term, she wanted to return to work.

The client and Community Health Trainer agreed a programme of achievable goals based on the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing after completing the Take 5 Star. This included sitting by the back door to get fresh air and building up walking just around the house; feeding the birds; increasing her interest again in other activities such as gardening, creative arts, going for longer walks and shopping.

The Health Trainer supplied information on strategies that could be used to assist with achieving these goals, as well as on healthy eating, Capacitar relaxation and mindfulness exercises to help with motivation and relaxation.

As a result of the support, the client has been able to improve her mobility and walking, resulting in helping to reduce the pain in her legs. This has had a knock on effect of helping improve her confidence and mental wellbeing, as well as motivation and concentration levels. Whilst she had not yet achieved her long-term goal of returning to work by the end of the support, she has stated she is well on the road to recovery and was enjoying many of the activities she did prior to COVID-19.

Comments from Partner Organisations

Comments received from community partner organisations on the positive impact that working with the Community Health Trainers can have for both their organisation and the communities they support are as follows:

“ We have seen a significant increase in the number of people using our facilities to avail of new programmes and opportunities which we did not previously offer. This has included attending mental health programmes, healthy eating programmes and various physical activities, from 1-to-1 Health Checks to participating in Couch to 5K programmes and the Community Gym.

The Community Health Trainers at the Verve project at Clan na Gael have added an extra dimension to the club and how we can assist those in our community. While we are a Gaelic football club firstly, we feel we have a responsibility to assist those who need support to stay healthy and fit in other ways. We also have a duty to support those who are elderly and lonely to ensure they still feel a part of our community.

In having the Verve project and the Community Health Trainers in particular, we are meeting some of these needs.

The programmes they offer give them confidence and provides assurance to ensure people can make transitions in how they live their lives.

This support has also had a knock on effect, where we have seen new people become members of the club and take up volunteer roles. The partnership has been an invaluable addition to the club and the area and we hope that this continues in the future. ”

Paul O'Hagan, Secretary, Clan na Gael

Right: Health trainer at Clan na Gael



“ We have been working in partnership with the Verve Project in the Brownlow and Lurgan areas over the last few years. They have been an invaluable resource in terms of providing us with Health Checks for our family events. This has enabled us to provide health checks for our parents who might not normally attend their Family Nurse or GP to monitor their health. I have been able to use them for my events with fathers and many admit that they would never have obtained one otherwise and similarly they have made lifestyle changes as a result of the health check results.

Verve also provided us with a pilot 'Water Sports Health & Wellbeing Programme for Men' for our fathers within Splash SureStart. This seven week programme involved health checks at the beginning and completion of the water sports programme and weekly sessions of kayaking, paddle boarding and also forest bathing.

As a result all of the participants reported an improvement in their overall mental health and wellbeing and that the programme had 'kick started' them into activities again. In addition, all our staff use the Verve Newsletter as a source of information of health and wellbeing programmes taking place in the area and we refer parents accordingly and publicise them on our Facebook. 99

Keith Cullen, Family Support Worker, on behalf of Splash SureStart



Left: Pop up Health Trainer clinic at Splash SureStart health event

Client Satisfaction

In the assessments carried out by Community Health Trainers at sign off from the support offered, clients provided feedback on the service they have received. The results are as follows:

- 70% of clients achieved the behavioural change they had wanted, with 29% partly achieving this
- 66% are very satisfied with what they have achieved, the remainder quite satisfied
- 100% are very satisfied with their health trainer;
- 99% are very satisfied with the information they were given
- 92% are very satisfied with the materials used in meetings, the remainder quite satisfied.

In terms of how the health trainer programme has been of benefit:

- 71% have the confidence to be their own health trainer
- 93% are able to set realistic goals
- 82% have been helped to achieve their goals
- 93% have confidence in themselves
- 89% have been helped to feel better
- 48% have made new friends
- 61% have made more time for themselves
- 55% feel better connected within their community
- 80% have the skills to better manage their health
- 89% have an improved sense of wellbeing
- 88% are now able to identify unhealthy behaviour.

ONE TO ONE HEALTH COACHING SERVICE FEEDBACK



Case Study – Becoming My Own Health Trainer

The client found out about the health trainer service at a drop-in health check provided by Verve at a local library. Due to a medical condition, the client had become physically inactive and was comfort eating. This led to weight gain and not fitting into his normal clothes.

Due to the lockdowns, support was provided both face-to-face and by telephone.

Initially, the health trainer was helped by looking at their diet, recording daily food intake, setting realistic goals each week to improve diet and physical activity, leading to an improvement in emotional wellbeing. The client was also given opportunities to talk through stressful situations and provided with relaxation techniques to address these, including Colour Breathing, which was very helpful.

The client has said: *“I would highly recommend Verve one-to-one Health Trainer support and motivation for health and wellbeing. The Community Health Trainers have given me the tools to achieve my goals and the confidence to set new ones for this I am most grateful.”*

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROGRAMME DELIVERY

A key feature of any social prescribing programme is the ability to refer into a range of activities, supports and programmes that are local and accessible for the client group. These activities themselves need to be appropriately resourced and supported, with providers engaged through a strong partnership approach.

The Verve Model has fully embedded this approach, mapping and building partnerships with a wide range of local groups and providers but also investing in the skills and capacity of local individuals and groups to deliver programmes aligned to assessed need.

This ensures a regular programme of activities to support health and wellbeing, so that each Verve Network member acts as a vibrant health and wellbeing hub within their own community. Activities are widely promoted across the area using the Fuse Newsletter and the Verve Network website.

Each Verve Network member is supported by the Promoting Wellbeing staff to develop their Community Health Improvement Plan, based on identified and emerging needs. The Trust then provides support for delivery against this plan through:

- Providing funding on a quarterly basis, enabling a regular programme of activities
- Investing in the skills of local people, including the health trainers to deliver
- Connecting action plans to wider health improvement campaigns throughout the year.
- Promoting activities widely through the Fuse Newsletter and social media
- Connecting to evidence-based, community programmes from the Trust, PHA and through the Healthy Living Centre Alliance.

Connecting to public health campaigns

The Health Trainer team actively promote regional public health campaigns. Examples include:

- No Smoking Day
- Mental Health Awareness Day
- Know Your Numbers Week
- Loneliness Awareness
- Week of Get Togethers
- Falls Awareness Week.

They also use their brief intervention training and the principles of 'Make Every Contact Count', providing health information to 'nudge' members of the public to think about changing their lifestyle choices.



Left: Pop up health trainer clinic at Tesco Lurgan, promoting No Smoking Day, 2019

Men's Health Week

Feedback from Men's Health week in 2021 is presented below, where the theme was 'Can Do' challenge, embracing the Take Five Steps to Wellbeing over 5 days.

Amongst the events that took place were fitness sessions, Chi Me classes, the provision of health checks and a Comedy Night, all designed to address different elements of men's health. As a result of the support, participants surveyed after the supported stated as follows:

- 89% felt their mood had improved as a result of attending
- 78% felt better connected to activities and services in their community
- 78% were more motivated to be physically active
- 50% felt better connected to others
- 50% had a better understanding of how to care for mental and emotional wellbeing
- 39% more motivated to make healthy food choices.

Comments made by men that had been supported included:

“ Love it, and keeping it local was great too. Thank You! ”

“ I have arthritis and have to do chair exercises. The Health Trainer was very helpful and accommodating. ”

“ I feel this is something everyone should get for their own peace of mind and also to find out what they need to do to improve their overall health and wellbeing. Brilliant! ”

“ Great to have this service available in the community. Definitely will increase my daily/weekly physical activity. Service providers were excellent. ”

“ If I'm honest I wasn't going to go but I was interested in the men's health check. I'm glad I went now. I got some great information from the health check, the table tennis afterwards was great craic, and I'm looking forward to going again. ”

“ Would be good if it was a regular event. ”

Right: Mens Health Week.
Health checks at the Fitzone
Foundation.



Promoting activities

Up to 3 Fuse Newsletters are produced each year providing:

- Information on upcoming activities taking place across the Neighbourhood Renewal areas;
- Details on what has been achieved by the Network in the past;
- Links to national or regional health improvement activities or campaigns taking place;
- Useful tips to address health-related issues individuals may be experiencing; and
- Contact details for the Community Health Trainers and Verve Centres providing the activities.



[CLICK HERE](#) 

Newsletters are distributed widely throughout the target areas, though it is not possible to accurately identify how many individuals will actually benefit from the production and distribution of Fuse. The most recent editions of Fuse can be accessed here: <https://verve-network.co.uk/fuse-newsletters/>.

Online delivery

Figure 1 shows the impact that online or virtual delivery can have on the numbers engaging. There were more than 7,000 engagements with physical activity (Chi Me, Chair based and Low Intensity) and mental health (relaxation) programmes delivered online (through YouTube and Facebook), although again it should be noted that individuals may have taken part on more than one programme.

The number of individuals engaged in face-to-face physical activity programmes is due to the fact physical activity sessions are more suited to larger numbers than programmes for healthy eating and mental and emotional wellbeing.

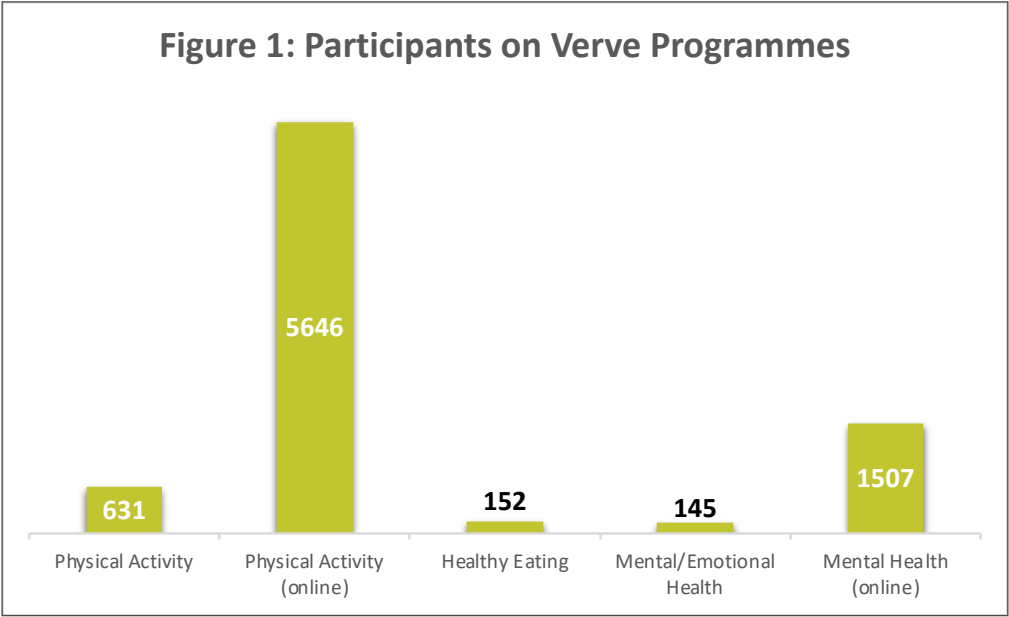
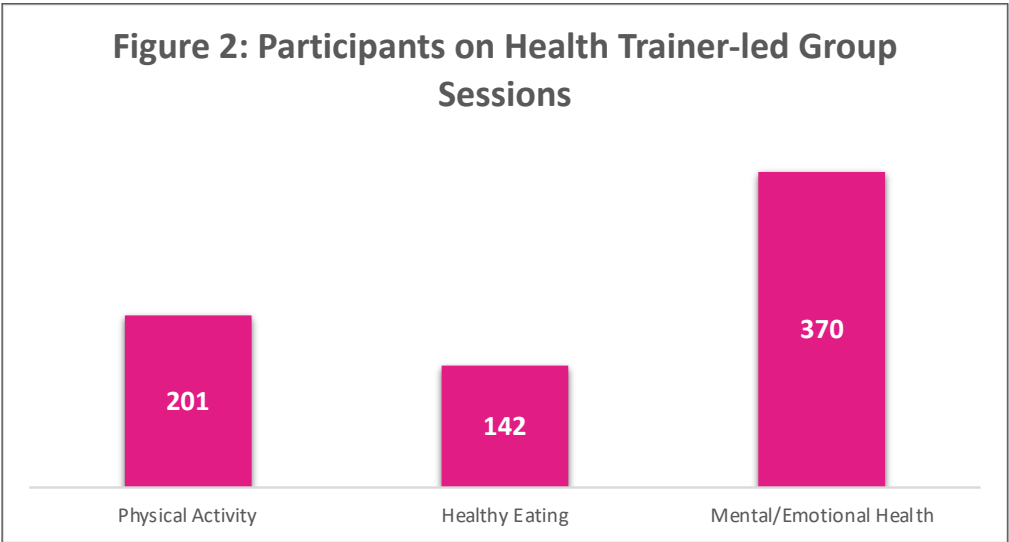


Figure 2 below shows that the number of individuals engaging in group sessions supporting their mental/emotional health were noticeably higher than for physical activity and healthy eating. During this period, Community Health Trainers were actively promoting the Take 5 programmes, with a high number of sessions delivered.



Connecting to evidence-based programmes

The Verve Centres support local delivery of evidence-based regional community health programmes available across Northern Ireland. Close working with a range of staff within the Trust's Promoting Wellbeing Division has also enabled them to innovate, design and tailor delivery models to meet local need, drawing on staff expertise.

The following case studies and client testimonials provide examples of programmes and activities delivered across the Verve Healthy Living Network.

Cook It Programme at Drumellan, delivered by a Health Trainer

Cook it! is a nutrition programme that has been developed for use in local communities in Northern Ireland. The programme offers hands-on, practical experience of preparing and cooking healthy food on a budget, as well as improving knowledge of healthy eating and food safety.

“ I heard about the Cook it programme at Drumellan through Choice Housing where I live. I wanted to do something to get me out of the house and to learn how to cook better and about healthy eating. I learned about making better food choices and how to eat healthily and I will try to shop for healthier options. I enjoyed coming here and meeting with different people. ”

“ I was very down, felt no purpose in life. Sleeping most days and no energy. The Health Trainer helped me change the way I felt and get more active and with help to eat better and get more active. I have lost some weight and feeling better but must keep thinking positive and trying to keep weight down. I would recommend this to everyone! ”

Connect with Cooking at Clan Na Gael Client

“ Being visually impaired and finding it harder now to get around thanks to my joints getting old, more like snap crackle and pop now every time I move, I have found this third lock down a bit harder to deal with. I have been finding it harder to get motivated and have the get up and go to keep doing things, I love cooking and baking, but even that was a chore. Some days I did not even want to get out of bed. With the cooking programme we did, it helped a lot I had something to look forward to. I was delighted to get the box of goodies and find out what I would be making each week. Instructions were easy to follow, and with my sight easy to read. ”

WATCH NOW



A short video of Connect With Cooking participants is available here <https://youtu.be/aYkrHoagWXM>



Right: Connect with cooking participants share their healthy meals through their What's app group during the pandemic

Food Values at Fitzone Foundation Health Trainer

Food Values is a 4 week food budgeting programme that aims to support people to make healthier food choices within a limited budget.

“ Thank you so much Sean for all you have taught our very lively bunch of Juniors. In the group there were many different ability levels and many struggled with concentration but you always adjusted the lessons to match this and it was very hands on and interactive throughout. It was really lovely during week 4 to see how they really started to grasp the different food groups of the Eatwell Guide. Probably my favourite part of the sessions was to watch the girls try foods that they have never tried before and some discovering that they really like it. ”

(Dianne McNabb, Bluestone GB Officer)

Chair Yoga at Drumcree Community Trust

Delivered weekly at one of the Verve Healthy Living Centres, the Chair Yoga has sought to provide mild exercise and relaxation for people of all ages that are suffering from long-term conditions. The sessions also embedded a social element.

As a result of engaging in Chair Yoga, participants have become involved in other health-related activities at the Centre, including Yoga, on your feet dance and mild exercise (can stand or use a chair for this), craft classes, a pain management course, stress management workshops, cookery and a Halloween social event. Members have also engaged with a health trainer after being introduced as a part of the group.

Comments from participants in the Chair Yoga include:

“ I love the chair yoga – I look forward to it every week and it always make me feel better about myself afterwards. It really sets me up for a good day. ”

(female, 75)

“ I suffer from various long term health conditions that also includes severe pain which impacts on my everyday life and chair yoga has been a godsend for me. I enjoy the physical exercise and relaxation, and have learnt some techniques to help me at home. It's lovely to be able to sit and have lunch and a bit of craic after the session. ”

(female, 50)

“ My wife has dementia and I agreed to attend these sessions with her because her doctor recommended I try and keep her active. Everyone is so friendly, supportive and welcoming. Some weeks she's not able to physically do much but I've found that getting both of us out of the house has helped us both. ”

(male, 79)

“ I wouldn't miss the chair yoga, its more than an exercise class to me! I've made so many friends and love the chat and reminiscence. There's always lots of laughter and life honestly just seems better after it. ”

(female, 81)

ABC Community Network Walking Group

The Walking For Health group was set up by Health Trainer Faye. They have met once per week since 2018, led by a group walk leader and culminating with a cuppa and conversation at its conclusion. From an evaluation carried out with those that have participated, the following results were achieved:

- 100% of participants saw an improvement in their physical and mental health, with all rating their health as good or excellent following engagement
- 100% of participants stated that they felt less stressed, more confident, more energetic, less tired, more likely to go out, have made new friends, have learnt of other activities in your community, and learned something new with regards to health and wellbeing.

Participants also indicated that they were sleeping better, worrying less, have lost weight and feel a heightened sense of community spirit. All participants stated they would recommend this programme to others.



Above: Chair yoga class at Drumcree Community Trust



Above: ABC Community Network walking group enjoying a day away

Better Days Pain Support Programme and HOPE (Hold On Pain Easing) Group

The Better Days Pain Support Programme is a 10-week programme designed to improve the mental health and understanding of those who suffer from pain. It is funded by the Public Health Agency and has been devised by the Healthy Living Centre Alliance and a range of professionals who specialise in this field.

Facilitated by Community Health Trainers within the Verve project, a range of approaches are taken to supporting those living with chronic pain, including Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing, Distraction Techniques, Healthy Eating, Being Active with Chi Me, Sleep, and Medication management (including a focus on opioid medication which is delivered by a community pharmacist). Participants also have the opportunity to attend a monthly support group called HOPE (Hold On Pain Easing) that offers ongoing support to programme participants.



Right: HOPE group virtual session with Craigavon historical society on montighisms and calligraphy

Comments from participants on the positive impact of the support they have received are as follows:

- “ My first thought was that it (the support programme) was going to take my pain away. Then I realised it's not going to go away but I that can manage it much better. ”
- “ I have developed a very positive attitude to my health. My consultant was astonished at how well I was doing since she had last seen me two years ago. ”
- “ Even on days I really felt sad, in pain and lonely, the individual classes always gave me a lift. I am now so much more clued into my condition and about ways to distract myself, to use self-care... We have a participant WhatsApp group and although the course is over, a lot of encouragement is given every day. ”
- “ Since I started attending HOPE group I have felt less alone. The topics have been of great value, especially keeping active, talk by the pharmacist and healthy eating. I now walk/move more than I have in years. I have lost over ½ stone and I have reduced my daily medication from 1200mg of ibuprofen to 1 x 400mg, only if needed. ”

Forest Bathing

Forest Bathing is a mindful, multisensory experience that supports participants to relieve stress by slowing down in nature. Participants are invited to deepen their connection with nature through immersive activities within the forest atmosphere and in local natural green spaces. This can have a positive experience on physical health as well as mental health and social wellbeing.¹²

Forest Bathing has been delivered through Verve Centres and Community Health Trainers, including taster sessions and 6-12 week programmes.

As the concept of forest breathing is a relatively new one, many of those that have engaged were not entirely sure what to expect. Many identified that they had mental health issues, were suffering from depression or anxiety and had low mood. There was a desire to get away from the stresses of daily life, to relax, to have the opportunity to spend time in nature with new people and to try something different.

¹² Visit the Verve website to find out more <http://verve-network.co.uk/forest-bathing-programme>

Participants were very positive about the experience:

“ I feel more relaxed and able to come to terms with a sad time in my life. ”

“ I stop more often to enjoy my surroundings. ”

“ It is an amazing experience. Relaxing, chilling, enjoying such good company and sharing experiences and just enjoying nature. ”

“ Went with not knowing what to expect. Found it a fantastic way to relax and meet new people. Highly recommend for everyone of all abilities. ”

“ This is one of the most valuable experiences I have had. Not only does this course help your mind, body and overall wellbeing but the friends you meet along the way. So if you feel down and want to try something different to help your mind, body and soul, this is for you. ”

The Community Health Trainer identified that the valued companionship within the group, so they decided to continue to walk in nature together after the programme had completed, meeting regularly at Oxford Island.

Colour Breathing Relaxation Therapy

Colour Breathing is a stress reduction and relaxation activity that involves mentally picturing/meditating on a colour that represents the way the individual wants to feel or to let go in their life (the stressor).

Participants were asked to assess their physical and mental health before and after the support provided, with the results contained in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Colour Breathing Impact on Physical and Mental Health

	Physical Health		Mental Health	
	Before	After	Before	After
Very Poor	10%	5%	14%	5%
Poor	14%	5%	5%	5%
Fair	10%	10%	33%	14%
Good	57%	67%	43%	62%
Excellent	10%	14%	5%	14%

Table 1 shows that following the support, 81% consider their physical health to be Good or Excellent and 76% their mental health as Good or Excellent. In terms of changes affected from the support, 28% of participants saw an improvement in their physical health and 56% a change in their mental health.

When asked about the benefits that Colour Breathing had brought, participants identified the following:

“ The opportunity to take time out from a busy life, to relax and be able to use techniques learned in class in everyday life. ”

“ Breathing and getting support from people attending with similar problems. ”

“ I find that if I feel down and stressed this course has made me aware and I go to a quiet place and practice my breathing and feel more relaxed. ”

As a result of the support:

- 66% are sleeping better
- 57% are worrying less
- 71% feel less stressed
- 62% have made new friends
- 90% have learnt of other activities in the community
- 76% feel a heightened sense of community spirit
- 76% have learnt new skills
- 57% feel more energetic and less tired
- 81% have learnt something new with regards your health & wellbeing.



Above: Senses meditation in the wildflower meadow at Oxford Island on forest bathing walk



Above: Walking group that has emerged from forest bathing programme

Couch to 5K at Chrysalis Women's Centre

Couch to 5K is a running plan for absolute beginners. The plan involves 3 runs a week, with a day of rest in between, and a different schedule for each of the 9 weeks.

This activity engaged eight young women that were isolated, experiencing low mood, and wanted to improve their physical health and wellbeing. The group met weekly and after the activity a hot meal was provided.

Chrysalis has been able to offer childcare support alongside the programmes allowing for young mums to be able to participate whilst knowing their children are looked after.

The activities delivered have been very successful overall delivering a range of benefits to the participants. One participant on approaching the Centre had limited English and was very isolated, with the facilitators noticing a marked improvement in her English and overall emotional wellbeing.

Other participants were new to the area, first-time mums or had become isolated from others.

The group provided an opportunity to support these women in building a bond, making new friendships, whilst improving both their physical and emotional health. Comments from those that attended the group have included:

“ *I am alone all day in my home with three young boys, I do not go out too much as my English is not good. I have no family here. I can go to Chrysalis as my son is looked after by their childcare team. I make new friends and can be me for a morning. It makes me happy.* **”**

“ *I had to move here due to difficulties within my relationship with my partner. I knew no one, I was alone, I am finally finding myself again, building confidence, making friends.* **”**

Watch this group in action here:

<https://verve-network.co.uk/chrysalis-womens-centre/>

WATCH NOW



Creative Bereavement Workshops at Chrysalis Women's Centre

Targeted at those that had lost someone during the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop was delivered by a bereavement specialist over 4 weeks using creative therapeutic tools with those that had been impacted.

The impact of the pandemic meant that many families did not have the opportunity to grieve properly, to attend funerals in the conventional way or even see the person before they died. The workshops offered the ability for their loss to be acknowledged, to be supported with their loss, for closure and for an understanding of what happened during the pandemic.

Feedback from the workshops were positive, with participant comments including:

“ *I never got to say good bye, I never got to hold your hand, you died on your own without any of us with you. I grieve every day for the words I did not get to say, what you must have thought why no one was there for you. I finally got to say goodbye today and remember you the way you were.* **”**

“ *Covid took away our chance to mourn to bury to say final goodbyes. This course brought closure for many, validation of those they lost. This particular piece of work I felt was exceptionally important to those in our community.* **”**

Summer Camp at South Shore Health and Wellbeing

A 2-day Summer Camp was held in Gosford Forest Park attended by 25 young people and their families. The purpose of the Camp was to help attendees with post lockdown social difficulties and anxieties, to strengthen family bonds and to learning new skills in nature.

The attendees took part in walks, learned camp craft skills, wilderness shelter building, fire and camp cooking, nature walks and natural play, including swing and rope games, as well as attending a family barbecue.

Feedback on the camp was very positive, with facilitators observing young people growing in confidence and improving their social skills when immersed in nature. Families have indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to participate in future similar activities. South Shore Health and Wellbeing plan to incorporate future events such as this into their annual programme.

Menopause Support Group at The Fitzone Foundation

Meeting once a month, the group has sought to address the taboo around the menopause by discussing this with women who are going through or have gone through the menopause. Guest speakers are invited to address the group on a specific issue followed by a discussion on what was raised. Comments from participants have included:

- “ Our menopause support group at Fitzone was very interesting and informative. I really enjoyed the company of other women who were going through what I was going through. We were able to help each other by listening and sharing our experiences of menopause and showing empathy, but also most importantly being able to have a laugh too. ”
- “ We are all learning from each other and our different experiences and having a brilliant laugh! It's good to hear other women describing the same things I am experiencing and knowing I'm not alone. ”
- “ I love spending time with these ladies, I don't get to the group very often but I enjoy the time spent and the craic when I do - a great bunch of ladies. ”

British Sign Language at Chrysalis Women's Centre

Delivered by Hands That Talk, this 5-week Level 1 programme provided an introduction to sign language for 15 women giving an insight into what it is like for those with a hearing disability.

As well as benefiting those that attended, the programme was also of benefit to the Centre as participants were able to provide feedback on improvements that should be made to make Chrysalis more accessible for those with hearing impairments, for example through more signs for toilets, signage for departments within the building and how fire safety is managed.

The Centre would like to deliver a Level 2 course but this is expensive and funding would be required for this. Comments from participants include:

- “ I really enjoyed this course I had no idea what it is like to live without being able to hear the world around me. ”
- “ I am exceptionally grateful and privileged to have completed this course, so I can reach out and communicate with basic sign language. To even be able to say hello, can I help you etc. ”

The Friendly Club at Clan Na Gael

The Friendly Club was set up in 2018 to provide a place for older people in the Lurgan area to come together socially. The purpose of the Club has been to combat loneliness and provide opportunities for social interaction for older people in the community.

It is coordinated by a health trainer in partnership with the Wellbeing Committee at Clan na Gael. The Club is delivered in 8 week blocks and typically attended by 40-50 individuals each week but with more than 100 registered.

Each week, a different activity is delivered based around an element of the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing. This will include guest speakers providing a talk, demonstrations or exercise activities including singing and dancing. Overall, the programme seeks to keep the group informed about issues that will affect them as well as providing tips for things that they can apply themselves.

As well as health and wellbeing sessions, members have benefited from a hot meal, a safe and warm environment and from friendships formed as a result of attendance. The Friendly Club has led to a number of additional activities being developed and delivered, including art programmes, walking groups, music sessions, dances and day



Above: Menopause support group complete an education and support programme in menopause



Above: Therapeutic craft session with Friendly Club members

WATCH NOW



trips. The group are actively involved in organising the activities and events based on their needs.

One participant commented "*Warm welcoming crowd, fun and laughter throughout the hall, old school friends reconnecting and reminiscing, enjoying the talks and presentations and joining in the singing and dancing and arts and crafts, great to be back out in the community not as lonely, highlight of my week, very informative talks.*"

A short video of Friendly Club members speaking about the difference the club makes to their lives is available here: www.verve-network.co.uk/clan-na-gael/

Community Strength and Balance - The Move It or Lose It Project at Clanmil Social Housing

Strength & Balance is a physical activity programme which aims to help people over the age of 55 to improve their balance and posture and strengthen their muscles.

The programme is of great benefit to those who have been identified at risk of falls or who have a fear of falling. Some of the Community Health Trainers are certified in OCN NI Level 3 Award in Planning and Leading a Physiotherapy Designed Exercise Programme in Fall Prevention and Strength and Balance Training

This project at Clanmil has aimed to address reported physical deconditioning and loneliness as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns for the residents of Clanmil Social Housing in Lurgan and Portadown.

Two programmes were delivered outdoors over 6 weeks and included strength and balance exercises, podiatry as well as talks from a Pharmacist, the Council Home Safety Officer and on Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing. Overall 26 residents participated.

Using the 'Campaign to End Loneliness' validated evaluation tool, participants overall loneliness decreased from an average score of 35 in Week 1 to 23 in Week 6.

In addition, participants increased the number of 'Sit to Stands' they could do in 1 minute from 133 to 236 on average, demonstrating an improvement in strength and endurance for participants. As a result of the programme:

- 94% of participants reported feeling more connected to their community
- 100% feel more confident in their ability to avoid a fall
- 100% have learned new information for their health and wellbeing
- 94% report they are more physically active.

As a result of the initial Project, the Lurgan group have started a walking group and are taking part in Chi Me, demonstrating how sustainable physical and social programmes can evolve out of relatively short interventions.

Below: Move It or Lose It Programme delivery at Clanmil Fold, Lurgan addressing deconditioning and loneliness experienced following lockdown



HIM Men's Group at The Fitzzone Foundation

This weekly group is aimed at getting men to engage and socialise outside of the home. A range of activities are offered, including playing games, quizzes, talks targeted at raising awareness of an aspect of their health and wellbeing, use of the community gym and an opportunity to talk to their peers in a relaxed setting.

The participants are encouraged to act and behave like a team, to bond with fellow members as a form of therapy for them. Comments from participants on the positive impact the group has had include:

- “ I attend the HIM course every Monday as it get me out and some exercise and always something interesting to do. I meet other people which if I wasn't attending this I would just be sitting in the house. Having conversation keeps the mind active and the quizzes, the information days are fantastic as they stimulate the mind. I am so looking forward to these carrying on in the New Year, so beneficial. ”
- “ I go because I live on my own and I am isolated and lonely. I suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome and depression, so mixing with people helps cheer me up. I have found the days out, people coming in giving talks, interesting and learned a lot! ”
- “ The Men's Group has turned out to be a great social outlet. I attend every Monday and have met many new friends. It is all quite informal, with games and quizzes with tea and scones. There is usually a talk on men's health and wellbeing. We also went on outings to Lough Neagh Rescue and a trip to Tannaghmore Gardens for a nature study. Sean has got together a great bunch of lads; I look forward to every Monday. ”
- “ The club has been the highlight of my week every week and something I have looked forward to, helping towards relieving me of the boredom which then leads to passing the time with alcohol. The time spent during the club is invaluable not just in occupying time, but for spending time with quality people and having a good laugh and to gain guidance in order to achieve the correct support for each of life's issues. Life gets us all down from time to time, but being able to discuss it in an open and honest way when someone actually cares and listens and empathises is priceless. Sean is a top class gentleman, he explains things very clearly, without patronising and is very understanding and approachable. I eagerly look forward to next year, and can't commend or thank Sean enough for the effort he has gone to. ”



Above: The men enjoying some healthy competition when they play bocce!



Left: HIM members connecting over newspapers and a cuppa

SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Success Factors

A number of factors were identified by the external evaluator as contributing to the success of the Verve Healthy Living Network and the Health Trainer Service. These will be important to consider in any plans to replicate or extend the Model.

¹³ National Occupational Standards for Community Development

- 1. Asset-based approach** – the model brings together existing organisations, volunteers and skills to maximise the benefit of their combined resources and strengthen collaborative working. The Verve Network demonstrates how to achieve the key community development outcomes of cooperation, organisation, confidence, inclusion and influence¹³.
- 2. Community Health Trainer Model** – the investment in and empowerment of local people to become health activists within their own communities has been key to the vibrancy, accessibility and relevance of the Programme. Establishing these as paid roles within the community has strengthened retention levels, allowing health trainers to develop their expertise and expand areas of delivery over time. The availability of one-to-one health coaching has provided the necessary motivation, supporting people to focus on their personal priorities for wellbeing and giving them ownership of their health improvement journey. Coupled with the reassurance that the same individuals are then delivering group programmes, these local connections have underpinned some of the most meaningful engagement.
- 3. Community engagement** – the approach adopted has enabled the Programme to reach large proportions of the population in the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas due to having the team of Community Health Trainers 'on the ground'. This is a first step to effecting change on the health of the population, nudging people into considering and implementing healthy behaviours.
- 4. Flexibility to meet emerging needs** – the model developed allows for the Programme to react to local needs as they are identified through the use of a strengths-based approach. This has helped to ensure that the service provision remains current, up to date and relevant, including during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. This has included the development of initiatives such as the community gym, community strength and balance programme, forest bathing and chronic pain support.
- 5. Investment** – the support received from the Department for Communities over multiple years has enabled longer-term planning to invest in and develop the model. Given the time taken to build partnerships, recruit and build the capacity of local groups and individuals, multi-year funding was an essential pre-requisite. Whilst this funding has been on an annual basis over recent years, it has still supported continuity, development and innovation. Two other key aspects of investment have been the investment into funding programmes within each Network member and the ongoing investment in wide-ranging training for the Community Health Trainers, ensuring skills development based on needs arising.
- 6. Role of the Southern HSC Trust** – much of what has been achieved would not have been possible without the support provided by the Trust, both in terms of being the managing authority/lead organisation but also in terms of the linkages into other services in the area. The Promoting Wellbeing Division staff have underpinned development of the model, using community development approaches to empower local communities and connecting the work constantly back to evidence-based approaches in addressing and mitigating against health inequalities. The Trust's endorsement and management of the Programme has opened doors for referral pathways from health and social care professionals into the wide range of support programmes.

- 7. Membership of the Healthy Living Centre Alliance** – through membership of the Alliance and the relationships developed with other healthy living centres across Northern Ireland, the Verve Network has been able to attract new sources of funding and expertise, as well as the opportunity to share good practice and work in partnership regionally with other organisations doing similar work.
- 8. Collaborative Approach** – the Programme has adopted a collaborative approach through effective partnership working with other community, statutory and health providers across the region. This has allowed the Programme to provide a wider range of services, to bring specialist services into the communities as well as better addressing the needs of the individuals reached. The Verve Network has been connected into a range of local partnership bodies, extending its reach and influence.
- 9. Measurement** – the robust approaches to assessment, progress tracking and collection of monitoring data has provided rich evidence with which to measure both qualitative and quantitative outcomes of the Programme, far beyond the requirements of funders. This has informed adaptations and learning including the ability to identify and respond to the changing needs of participants in the post-Covid environment.

Recommendations

1. Build the evidence base

Whilst this evaluation has evidenced the individual impact and outcomes, there is an opportunity to further evidence the benefits to the health and social care system. A more intensive assessment of the impact on usage of health and social care services would further strengthen the case for investment in these early intervention and prevention approaches.

2. Trust wide approach

Given the evidence of the strengths of the model and impact on individuals and communities, there is merit in looking at how the Verve Model can be replicated in other areas across the Trust. In the process, we would recommend the Trust take cognisance of the key success factors as outlined above. This is not a quick fix approach, it will require sustained investment and support over an extended period to establish, but underpins the wider work of the Promoting Wellbeing Division in addressing health inequalities very effectively. A Trust wide approach would also support stronger profile with potential referral teams.

3. Rural/urban dynamic

The current Verve Network has a very urban focus across a limited geographical area, in line with the funding priorities. Given the highly rural nature of the Trust, they may want to give consideration as to the potential for applying this approach to rural areas, using a similar hub and spoke model. This could enable reach across a wider geographical area, creating similar cluster groups to connect smaller community groups to a wider network of support with shared programmes.

4. Community Health Trainers

This has been one of the most interesting features of the Verve Model, though clearly not a standalone. In the current programme, the target volumes for one-to-one support are relatively modest. Given the evidence of impactful engagement, there would be merit in seeking to increase the target volumes for one-to-one support. This is also the area with greatest potential in evidencing the benefits of the overall Programme.

5. Dedicated staff coordinator

Increased Community Health Trainer volumes has in recent years been curtailed in part by a lack of dedicated staff resource focusing on the Verve Network. This role is essential for ongoing quality assurance - providing governance, training, monitoring, standardising and updating documentation and developing the underpinning digital systems that will allow the Programme to grow. Whilst data collection across the Programme has been a strength, the current systems are inefficient and will require streamlining and review to support expansion.

6. Social prescribing connections

As described in the introductory sections, the Verve Model is a hybrid social prescribing and health coaching approach. As such, it is best placed within and accessed alongside other social prescribing schemes. There is strong potential for cross-fertilisation of ideas and collaborative working using the strengths of other schemes where these are better placed to meet the needs of clients or, similarly, where Community Health Trainers can add to their referral pathways. The Verve Network has already strong relationships with some of these schemes through the Southern Healthy Living Centre Alliance and should continue to foster those supports.

CONCLUSION

This three year snapshot of activities, delivery and outcomes across the Verve Healthy Living Network paints a picture of an active, vibrant community, with strong grassroots supports, well connected into an enabling statutory infrastructure.

There is clear evidence of tangible outcomes on both individual health and on community resilience across these areas, both of which are reaping positive health benefits. This was clearly seen through the sustained delivery and adaptability of the Programme during COVID-19, at a time when many others were unable to continue.

A common thread through all programmes, regardless of the main health focus, has been the benefits in creating strong social connections sustained beyond the intervention. With loneliness recognised as having similar health impacts to long term health risk factors such as obesity and smoking, this is a significant outcome.

The Verve Model, consisting of the key three components of the Network partnership, the Community Health Trainers and health and wellbeing programme delivery, has provided an effective way to channel and support grassroots approaches to addressing health inequalities.

APPENDIX 1: CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

In addition to the Case Studies, clients have provided the following comments on the support they have received from the Programme, and from Community Health Trainers in particular.

- “ The health trainer has given me loads of information which I found very helpful. He also went out of his way to bring me food which I thought was very kind. I talk more and the phone calls help a lot and the text messages as it's great to know someone cares. Due to COVID-19 and lack of face to face contact, I am very happy with health trainer. ”
- “ Health Trainer is very easy to talk to and was very accommodating. Sent loads of information and prioritising goals each week. Having a non-family member was easier to speak to. She covered the health plan to suit individual needs and was very encouraging and giving plenty of tips and remedies. ”
- “ I felt someone was trying everything they could to help me in a variety of different ways. They adapted to my needs over and above my expectations or normal remit. ”
- “ I found the health trainer to be very helpful and good at putting across aspects of how I could improve both my physical and mental health. He put me at ease and made the experience a very enjoyable one. He is very genuine in his interest and support in helping me achieve my goals and managing some of my problems. ”
- “ The health trainer is easy to talk to and very approachable. I feel I could talk to her about anything. The Programme helped build up my confidence and I am happy to tell others about it. I will definitely use the healthy eating information and traffic lights/ portion size info. I found all the topics areas very interesting. I will be linking into the Verve Facebook page and try to keep up my journal on '5 ways to wellbeing.' ”
- “ I was surprised I enjoyed my sessions as much as I did, so it has made me want to continue by myself. Health trainer was a great support and very professional. He has given me confidence to continue with my goals. ”
- “ The health trainer was great, she was always willing to work with what suited me at short notice, she was fantastic listener and gave me very good advice and because of her help I am now able to function again. ”
- “ My Health trainer was very good at providing me with information and meet my goals. Very friendly and supportive. Hope to continue with the positive changes I have made in my life. ”
- “ The health trainer was a great help and was very supportive over the weeks. He encouraged me and helped motivate me to get back to regular physical exercise which has been great for managing my mental health. He was able to teach me a lot over the weeks and helped me become my own health trainer. ”
- “ I can't thank you enough for all the support you gave me. I found the manner and way you were with me to be 100%. You are very committed to the service and the way in which you deliver this is a credit to you. Unfortunately I wasn't able to commit 100% to The Health trainer service, however, it has helped me realise that I need to make changes in many aspects of my life. The most important one being my work/life balance. Once life returns to normal I hope to make big changes and am looking forward to the challenge. I have made some small changes to start with my diet, walking and exercising at home for the moment. Enjoying your online sessions, keep them up but looking forward to getting out in the fresh air again. Keep up the good work and thanks for not giving up on me. ”
- “ The Health Trainer helped me come back to myself massively 100%. She guided me for my exercise and healthy eating. The cookbook she gave me is used regularly. Just talking to her gave me such a lift and motivation to go out with friends and also to do more exercises. ”

- “ The Health Trainer service has made me more aware of the importance of healthy eating and getting more exercise...I already feel better for the changes made in my life both physically and emotionally and I feel better about how I look. ”
- “ The Health Trainer service has helped me get my life back together. Help and advice on healthy eating and exercise on a daily basis has helped me to get back on track. In particular the advice on how to manage my anxiety has been of great importance. ”
- “ I heard about the Verve Community Health Trainers at a carer’s meeting and decided to get in touch for support with being more active and eating more healthily. With support from my Health Trainer I lost 1.5 stone. ”
- “ I was told about the Verve Programme through a friend. I wanted to get fitter and eat better so that I could lose weight. After meeting with the Health Trainer and completing the food and mood diary I realized the underlying issue was anxiety and sleep problems. The Health Trainer provided me with information and tools to address my wellbeing and as result I am eating better, fitter and have a better outlook on life. I am a much more chilled and happier person. ”
- “ The health trainer service has been really good. The health trainer has been great in helping me learn about proper techniques which have given me the confidence to go to the gym. It has also helped my daily nutrition, physical activity levels and improved my mental health significantly. ”
- “ I wanted to change my eating and exercise and stop staying in bed, so with my Health Trainer I set goals to get up earlier, eat healthier and to achieve a Couch to 5K. This service has given me confidence to be my own Health Trainer, helped me feel better and improved my sense of wellbeing. I have achieved my personal health goals with the support of the Health Trainer and I have also made new friends. I couldn’t have had a better Health Trainer. Super friendly and made the Couch to 5K easy. I also really enjoyed talking about life. ”
- “ The Health Trainer was absolutely amazing and truly inspirational and supportive in so many ways. Both on a mental level and reaching my personal goals. Thank you to Verve for supporting people and their mental health. Thank you to my health trainer and his massive dedication in supporting me in a time that I greatly needed it and giving me such great hope for the future. ”
- “ Health trainer was supportive throughout all sessions. Constantly encouraging me especially when I felt I couldn’t achieve something. He made exercising enjoyable again. I felt comfortable talking to him and he always had great advice. Really improved my mental health. ”
- “ When I first started this programme, I wasn’t sure, through my anxiety and depression, whether I’d complete this. From my very first day of meeting my health trainer, he put me at ease and I enjoyed every session with him and I can’t thank him enough. ”
- “ My Health Trainer was fantastic. I have started to put myself first. She gave me the courage to a healthier lifestyle and changing things in my life which will help me going into my 50th year. ”
- “ My mental health was really rock bottom over lockdown along with my mobility. I am trying to walk more but have had a few falls unfortunately but my health trainer has been amazing helping me and keeping in touch. I look forward to the sessions now even though it’s through Zoom. We still learn and also enjoy some company and always have a wee giggle. This programme has taught me that I need to start taking care of myself and I have signed up for other courses with Fitzone and other places and keeping up with exercises. Thank you for everything. ”

- “ I was referred to the Verve Health Trainer project as I really wanted support with my emotional wellbeing and stress levels. I now know how to set realistic goals and can identify when my behaviour is unhealthy. I have made more time for myself and as a result I feel better. I feel more in control, can see things clearer and I would really recommend this service to others. ”
- “ A good source of support and advice, the walking and personal interest helped me emotionally to get motivated. ”
- “ An amazing Health trainer. She is so positive and very empathetic. She has given me loads of confidence to help myself. I really appreciate everything she has done for me. ”
- “ The Health Trainer was very helpful, good to work with, easy to get on with and give me the confidence to feel better in myself. ”
- “ My Health Trainer has helped me in a lot of ways e.g. feel confident in myself and help me to make progress in my daily life and look to my future in a positive light and help me set goals. For that I am very thankful. ”
- “ After having counselling for depression this service helped me adapt back to living and helped provide me with the encouragement & confidence to achieve a more fulfilled life. ”
- “ I was very lonely after the death of my husband but now I am going out more and trying new hobbies. ”
- “ My Health Trainer was amazing, time to listen and give me lots of encouragement, building my confidence. Letting me know how much I had progressed in the weeks past. She was my crutch through hard times. Still a bit to go but can now plan and pace my progress. I know it will take time but I will get there. ”

