

GREATERSPORT

THE GREATER MANCHESTER ACTIVE AGEING PROGRAMME

Learning report



THE PROGRAMME

The Greater Manchester (GM) Active Ageing programme was a £1-million initiative, funded by Sport England for a two-year period and commissioned by GreaterSport. It explored new ways to encourage physical activity amongst older adults (over-55s) in the GM region.

The programme needed to explore healthy ageing to tackle inequalities and the psychosocial barriers to physical activity amongst older adults: a broad term for the over-55s age group that covers a huge range of active abilities.

The reasons behind activity drop-off rates needed to be understood in order to prevent them. Crucially, older adults' views and feelings were wanted to ensure the programme delivered a diverse range of activities to suit varied needs, so activities could be developed with mental wellbeing as well as physical benefits in mind.

Individual Metropolitan Borough Councils (MBCs) in GM designed their own activity programmes with local older people. They developed a series of pilots across eight of the ten GM localities: Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, and Trafford. This approach was important. It allowed each MBC to respond to local needs and capacities, but with a shared goal for all of GM in mind.



GM DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

A whole system approach is one of the ways we do things differently in GM. This means that each different partner we work with can take mutually beneficial action for a greater impact as, together, we have the same goal.

This infographic provides examples of how the GM principles work:

	Traditional national model	Greater Manchester model	Active Ageing model (e.g. Bolton)
Relationships	Driven by process and formality.	With people, communities, businesses and places.	Older people of Bolton community, Age UK Bolton, Bolton Council, Bolton Arena, Bolton CVS, building on existing relationships.
Demand	Reactive response - picking up the pieces.	Proactive and preventative, focus is on an effective response, we come to you and work together.	To understand the drop-off in activity levels at 65 and increase activity levels amongst the inactive as a preventative approach.
Service design	Siloed and specialised.	Co-design and co-production, purposeful and based on the needs of individuals.	Commissioning a specialist behavioural insight team to lead focus groups/ interviews to work to understand the views of older people and to design/adapt services based on older people's views.

Method	>	Programmes and projects fixing problems within policy limits.	Strength-based, building integrated solutions around people.	Aiming to bring together people in later life, their friends, families and carers, social entrepreneurs and public sector leaders within communities in Bolton.
Decision making	>	Top down and disconnected.	Connected to individuals and communities, informed by bottom-up approaches.	Local businesses, entrepreneurs developed plans based on the activation brief displaying the insight as to how they can test their model to support more people to become active e.g. Grandparent & Toddler yoga.
Citizen & state	>	Do to people.	Do with, supporting communities.	Involvement of older people, local communities, organisations working to achieve a common goal.
Focus	>	Achieving organisational outcomes.	What matters to people - their strengths and hopes.	Putting the individual first - designing services based on the feedback of older people in Bolton to test what works.
Purpose	>	Manage spend, reduce demand, reduce organisational risk.	Empowered to change lives - good physical, mental and social wellbeing in thriving and caring communities.	Making sustainable change for Bolton, working with partners to maintain activity and integrate into existing services post funding e.g. adding a small cost to sessions from the outset.
Measurement	>	Short-term budgets and monitoring lagging statistics.	Measure what matters to people, long-term incentives to invest in prevention and improve through innovation.	Using a test and learn approach to understand what matters to people through trial and error.



ACTIVE AGEING: PREVIOUS APPROACH

Old methods of promoting physical activity often involved policy makers and services developing and delivering interventions for older adults, without their involvement. This came from a paternalistic view that policy makers and organisations knew what was best for older adults.

The changes were small and not typically maintained longer-term. The majority of older adults had limited interest in the approach; troublingly, this was particularly the case amongst the older adults who would get the most benefit from the activities.

ACTIVE AGEING: NEW APPROACH

Now, we approach active ageing with a 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' ethos. This means we're speaking with older adults about their physical activity, discussing their strengths and valuing their thoughts. We 'test and learn' activities with them to find the right sessions, making sure the programmes work for them and their feelings and motivations, and past experiences of physical activity are understood.

“ALL THE IDEAS THAT HAVE COME UP HAVE BEEN THE GROUP’S OWN IDEAS. I DIDN’T WANT TO PUT SOMETHING OUT THERE FOR THEM AND PEOPLE OVER FIFTY-FIVE WOULDN’T ENJOY IT.”

- CO-ORDINATOR



CASE STUDY

Bury MBC piloted the new test and learn approach with over-55s with long-term health conditions. They focussed on primary prevention supported by an existing therapeutic exercise scheme (BEATS). Older adults became session champions to influence behaviour change with the activities offered. These included Hollins Village Green Gang (Gardening) and The Bay Horse Pub Chair Based Exercise Group, which was run by instructors and volunteers.

The new test and learn approach has been vital. Older adults taking part in the sessions now have a way to share their views about how their activities are run. Collectively, this way of working and delivering new ideas makes participants feel valued and more likely to continue with physical activity.



THE PARTICIPANTS

14,566 older people supported the development of the GM Active Ageing programme by attending engagement events to share their views on future services. **2,666** enrolled in activities, and **1,084** were involved in the project evaluation.

PARTICIPANTS WERE:

71.3%
FEMALE

27.1%
MALE

45.2%
WHITE

48.9%
CHRISTIAN

32.8%
FROM THE MOST
DEPRIVED QUINTILE

8.9%
IN THE LEAST
DEPRIVED QUINTILE

“THE SOCIAL ASPECT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT. PEOPLE WERE TURNING UP EARLY TO HAVE A BREW, AS WELL AS STAYING AT THE END TO HAVE A BREW.”

- MBC LEAD



THE PILOTS

The programme took the traditional national models that support active ageing and adapted them, firstly to suit GM as a whole, and secondly with emphasis on the needs of our individual MBCs' older adults. To do this, we identified areas of concern and ran a series of pilot sessions, each with a different emphasis on the needs of the over-55s. The goal was to understand their motivations for, and barriers against, activity, and the psychological reasons that encouraged or deterred them from attending sessions.

Engagement was a driving factor for older adults in all aspects of their physical activity. This included involving them to design activity sessions around individual needs, bringing people together in sessions with a social element in a comfortable environment to test the success of new activities.



THE RESULTS

At the start of the programme,

71.1%

of participants were inactive at baseline level (less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week).

After six months, this reduced to

14.5%

inactive.

There were increases in subjective wellbeing and development, from baseline to three months:

LIFE SATISFACTION

7.08 TO 7.24 OUT OF 10

HAPPINESS

7.11 TO 7.28 OUT OF 10

WORTHWHILE LIFE ACTIVITIES

6.81 TO 7.15 OUT OF 10

TRUST IN LOCAL PEOPLE

3.63 TO 3.73 OUT OF 5

There were increases in subjective individual development, from baseline to six months:

GOAL SETTING

3.80 TO 3.93 OUT OF 5

'I LIVE ALONE, SO APART FROM MY SMALL FAMILY BUBBLE I DON'T OFTEN GET TO SEE OR CHAT TO OTHERS. THE CLASS HAS GIVEN ME THAT OPPORTUNITY. IT'S A GREAT FUN AND FRIENDLY CLASS WITH A GREAT INSTRUCTOR, WHO ENCOURAGES YOU TO PUSH YOURSELF TOO!'

- BEV 63, SESSION ATTENDEE



CASE STUDY

Bev joined the Witness the Fitness Nifty Over Fifty class at Humphrey Park Community Centre in Urmston, funded via the Active Ageing programme. Her goal was to improve fitness in a local, relaxed class tailored to her specific needs, as well as to meet new people in a similar age group.

The sessions focussed on fitness, friends and fun, promoting increased activity, wellbeing and social interaction. This helped Bev to become more active with her grandson and supported her mental wellbeing.



THE FINDINGS

A number of key themes emerged within the evaluation process that enabled successful design, implementation, evaluation and sustainability of physical activity provision for older adults.



CO-DESIGN SUPPORTS MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

It was crucial to involve older adults, and those who work with them, at every stage of session development. This helped to make sure that a variety of voices and opinions were heard to better understand motivations and barriers to physical activity.

“A CO-DESIGN APPROACH WITH THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE LOCAL RESIDENTS TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY WANT...I THINK THAT’S ENCOURAGED LOCAL PEOPLE TO COME ALONG AND TAKE PART.”

- SESSION CO-ORDINATOR



GREATER MANCHESTER EXAMPLES

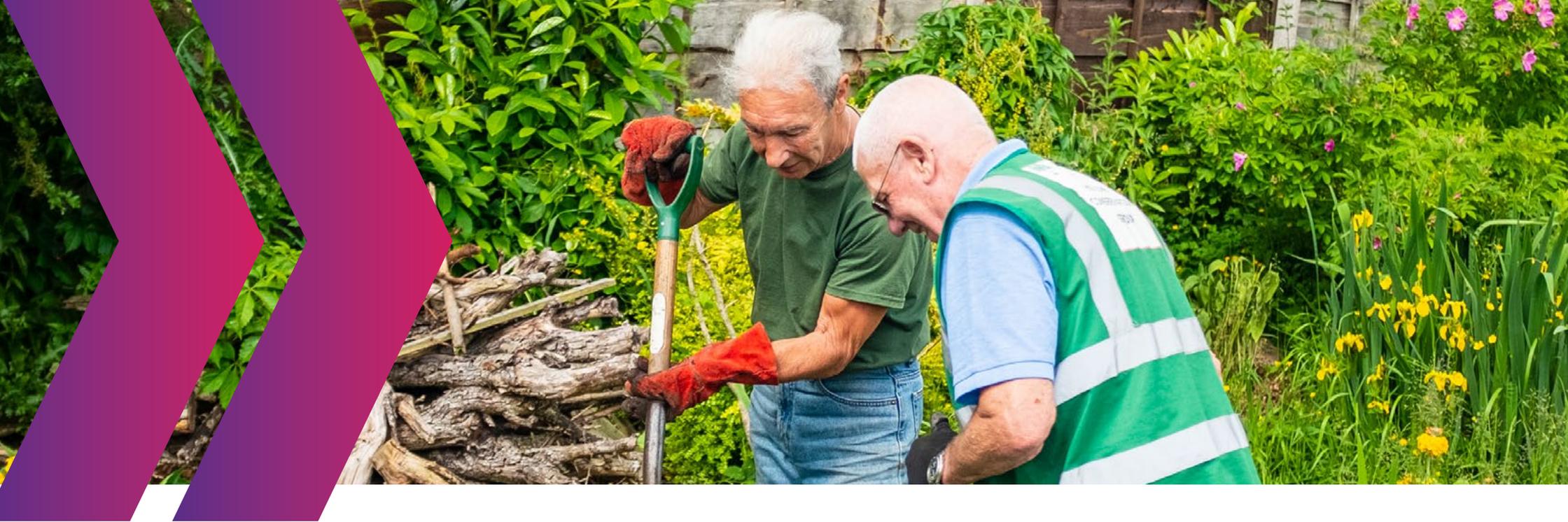
In Manchester, an Active Ageing steering group provided input from an older adult perspective, and a taster day for inactive older adults allowed them to shape future activities and adapt sessions to suit their needs.

In Tameside, volunteers and instructors supported pre-retirement 55-64 year olds in areas of lower socio-economic status and physical inactivity. Activities included Tai Chi, Zumba Gold, and walk-and-talk sessions. Collaborating with community groups and GPs helped identify those people to take part in the programme. Older adults were then invited to an afternoon tea, where they could discuss motivations and barriers to physical activity.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Events that involved refreshments and the opportunity to socialise with each other were well attended and encouraged participants to share their views. Consider engagement events, such as coffee mornings, that bring older adults together to socialise as well as providing the opportunity to discuss physical activity.



DESIGN AND RUN VARIED ACTIVITIES

The needs and abilities of people over 55 varies hugely, depending on factors including health conditions, employment status, age, location and ethnic and cultural background. As such it is important to offer a wider variety of activities to cater for the wide-ranging needs of this population group.

GREATER MANCHESTER EXAMPLES

In the borough of Rochdale, consultation took place with those who have caring responsibilities. As a result, sessions focusing on wellbeing such as nature walks at Hollingworth Lake, were developed in conjunction with Rochdale Carers Hub.

In Bolton, there is evidence of a steep drop in physical activity from those aged 65 and older. Behavioural insight specialists investigated their motivations, barriers and experiences, which led to the development of a variety of suitable activities by the MBC: orienteering, grandparent and toddler yoga, and the FitSteps Fab dance class.

AND I THINK, PREDOMINANTLY THE TIMING OF SESSIONS, YOU KNOW, HAS PROBABLY LED TOWARDS MORE THE OLDER END OF BEING AN OLDER ADULT. [...] NOT REALLY TOUCHED ON SORT OF FIFTY-FIVE TO SIXTY-FIVE, THOSE IN WORK. AND I THINK IT'S BASICALLY TO DO WITH, 1) THE OFFER AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF AGEING. AND THAT, YOU KNOW, FIFTY-FIVE ISN'T OLD. [...] YOU PERHAPS WOULDN'T PERCEIVE YOURSELF IN THAT COHORT OF PEOPLE.”

- SESSION CO-ORDINATOR



RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants highlighted the importance of sessions that are appropriate to their needs and abilities. Many people aged over 55 are pre-retirement age, so it is important to remember to cater for those still in work, or of a working age.

Location must also be carefully considered; venue familiarity helps overcome the psychological barriers of trying something new, as is ease of access. It is important to understand walking routes, bus routes and bus pass use to support as many older adults as possible to feel comfortable accessing provisions.

“TO HAVE THINGS ON OFFER THAT ARE FAIRLY LOCAL TO THEM SO IT FEELS – ALTHOUGH IT MAY FEEL A BIT CHALLENGING, DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT'S TOO FAR OUT OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE”

- VOLUNTEER



ATTRACTING OLDER ADULTS

Careful consideration needs to be taken when deciding the best marketing channels and messages to reach older adults. Stakeholders believed current physical activity promotion was targeted at a younger, fitter audience, which was off-putting for older adults.

GREATER MANCHESTER EXAMPLES

Marketing materials and channels needed to be designed and chosen with older adults in mind. The participants were also encouraged to be involved in distributing information, such as leaflets, in local places that they suggested would be most likely to attract attention from their peers (such as hairdressers and local shops).

The messaging was also important. MBCs focussed on promoting the social element of the provision, which we know is important for older adults' wellbeing. They also avoided language typical of traditional ideas of exercise, hoping to engage more potential participants. Some localities told older adults' stories in promotional videos to increase relatability.

“THE WORDS ‘SPORT’ AND ‘EXERCISE’, AND SO ON HAVE THESE PERCEPTIONS. SOMETIMES THERE’S JUST A DIFFERENT WAY TO GO ABOUT IT TO GUIDE THAT PERSON TO SOMETHING THAT IS GOING TO HELP THEM.”

- SESSION CO-ORDINATOR



Salford MBC worked with the over 55 community in Swinton to develop a programme of activities called “Move and Improve” – a strapline designed by the older adults themselves.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing sessions as social activities and designing activities with, and for, diverse groups and their needs is key. Whilst social media can be an effective tool to reach some within this audience, many will not be social media users, so more traditional promotional mediums are important.

“YES, SO AGAIN IT’S GETTING THAT MESSAGE OUT TO THEM BECAUSE THE BARRIER IS THAT A LOT OF THEM AREN’T ON SOCIAL MEDIA, THEY DON’T KNOW HOW TO ACCESS THE INFORMATION, SO BEING IN THE AREA AND ON THE GROUND AND BEING THAT FACE OF CONTACT AND GOING TO WHERE THE OLDER PEOPLE ARE IS A MUST. [...] MAKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY INTERACTING WITH THESE ADULTS, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM AND GET THEM TO CASCADE THAT INFORMATION DOWN [...] GO INTO THE PLACES WHERE YOU HAVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH AND USE IT AND UTILISE IT AND HELP BUILD ON THAT.”

- MBC LEAD



VOLUNTEERS

Several MBCs utilised funding to support activities led or supported by volunteers or champions. They played a variety of roles, including peer mentoring to encourage those lacking confidence to take part. The support of their peers was crucial in supporting older adults to feel comfortable in attending new sessions.

GREATER MANCHESTER EXAMPLES

Bury, Manchester and Stockport MBCs used their funding to support activities led by volunteers or champions. Volunteers supported the running of activities, or mentored their peers to encourage those less confident to attend sessions.

Stockport MBC targeted over-65s who had experienced a life-changing event (such as retirement, bereavement etc). In partnership with Stockport Council, Age UK Stockport, Stockport Homes and Life Leisure, they developed a referral pathway. This was based on a peer support volunteer programme for those needing additional support into physical activity, through chair-based sessions and walk and talk programmes.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The volunteers who supported the delivery of activities felt they needed more support from activity providers (particularly those leading groups). Some volunteers also felt undervalued in their roles. It is important to ensure people/volunteers feel more valued by, for example, providing additional support through mentoring and a volunteer support network, to emphasise the importance of the job they do.

YOU NEED THAT KIND OF SUPPORT [...] SOCIAL MEETINGS WITH OTHER PEOPLE IN THE SCHEME SO THAT (A) YOU DON'T FEEL THAT YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN AND (B) IF THERE ARE ANY OTHER ISSUES REGARDING PERHAPS BOUNDARIES."

- VOLUNTEER



SUSTAINABILITY

An important consideration is the ability to run the projects upon cessation of programme funding to ensure long-term benefits. MBCs felt the two-year timeframe was too short to build relationships and new approaches. Sustainability of the provision must be considered from the outset.

GREATER MANCHESTER EXAMPLES

Those in GM-wide roles, and MBC leads, spoke about how important it is to work with and listen to what the older adult participants are saying and suggesting. This is in order to determine how best to sustain the sessions and whether adding a cost would be acceptable to participants. If these ideas come directly from the older adults themselves, such as suggesting to pay a fee, it would imply that this is a way of sustaining the session that would be acceptable to that particular group of people.

In Tameside, to increase sustainability from the outset they applied costs to the sessions, which have remained consistent throughout. Refreshments were also included in this cost to incorporate a social element to the sessions.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding older adults as assets and collaborating with them helps to find ways of sustaining sessions that suit each particular group. It is very important to consider programme sustainability, which may involve paying a small fee, from the outset. This will help to comfortably manage personal feelings and expectations and help sessions to continue without programme funding.

THE GROUP ARE ALREADY TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE FUNDING ENDS IN MARCH 2020, AND HOW THEY WANT TO CARRY IT ON, WHETHER THAT'S THAT THEY PAY A SMALL FEE OR THEY APPLY FOR FUNDING. BUT THEY STILL LIKE HAVING THAT KIND OF TASTER SESSION EVERY NOW AND AGAIN. BUT THEY'RE STARTING TO THINK ABOUT HOW THEY MANAGE THAT, WHICH IS QUITE INTERESTING, THAT THE INTEREST IS THERE.

- MBC LEAD



EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME

At the beginning of the programme, targets were set to measure the number of people engaging with the GM Active Ageing Programme. However, MBCs found this did not suit the new ways of working that focused on meaningful engagement with older adults.

Resource was not allocated to data collection in advance, so people running the sessions distributed questionnaires. However, they felt these were a burden and detracted from the session quality. Some participants also had difficulty completing them. Questions around religion and sexuality were removed halfway through the evaluation, following

participant feedback that they were too personal. MBCs preferred the qualitative elements of the evaluation, which they felt reflected learning from the project.

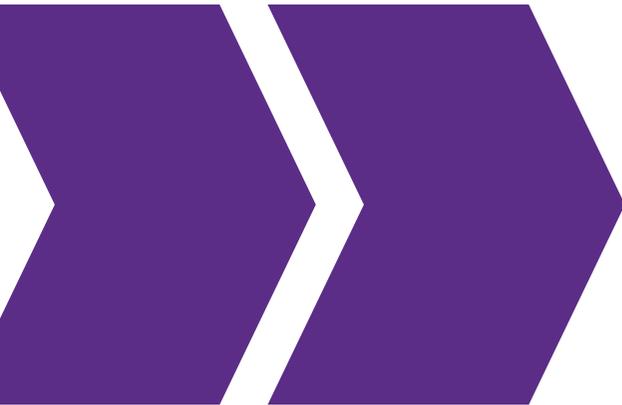
Ethnic minority groups were under-represented in the evaluation. We believe more may have participated in the programme, but had been unable to complete the questionnaires due to language barriers. There are also other considerations for MBCs' in terms of requiring a much more co-created approach with Ethnic minority communities, that are led by community leaders with a trusted voice.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In future, we advise shorter questionnaires are used and piloted before data collection to avoid potentially inappropriate questions and identify potential barriers to administration. We also suggest that the evaluation methods support the project's approach (for example, if it is a 'test and learn' session, we must reflect this in the evaluation). That said, surveys are generally not the best way to gather the views of older adults, who tend to feel more comfortable in informal conversations. Therefore, we must support this and understand it is where we learn about the real day-to-day impact of the programmes.

Make literature and evaluation resources available in a range of languages to increase accessibility and prevent widening inequalities. This is essential to make all older adults feel valued, heard and supported. This will require more than the translation of resources; co-creation with groups through local, trusted community leaders is also key.



THE RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

This programme, and associated evaluation, ran before the Coronavirus pandemic hit the UK. The pandemic has disproportionately impacted older adults and highlighted the importance of maintaining physical health and most importantly mental wellbeing, highlighted through increased social isolation. However, due to the existing threat of COVID-19, accompanied by social distancing measures and stretched VCSE sector, it is increasingly difficult for organisations to continue with their provision for older adults in the same way. For those able to continue to support older people with remote physical activity interventions, it is important to incorporate the social element and provide the time to bring people together.



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