

## **Report on the Happy Hearts Dance Project**

### **Introduction**

Over a four month period, Wiltshire People 1<sup>st</sup> ran a **Happy Hearts Dance** project consisting of 3, two and a half hour sessions covering a range of activities and learning in June, July and September 2019.

The Happy Hearts Dance Project, took place at the Studley Green Community Centre, Trowbridge and was led by Angie Carmichael, Director of Wiltshire People 1<sup>st</sup> and a small team of three advocacy support workers.

12 people with a Learning Disability attended the sessions. 10 of the participants were Wiltshire People 1<sup>st</sup> members and 2 younger adults from the local area were encouraged to join in.

The majority of the project funding was from a Community Grant from Healthwatch Wiltshire, for which we were grateful, as without it we could not have held such a programme.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the **Happy Heart Dance Group** was to be active in promoting healthy lifestyles, increasing awareness of Healthwatch Wiltshire and encouraging user engagement with mainstream community services in a fun and inclusive manner.

#### **TARGET GROUP:**

Wiltshire People 1<sup>st</sup> were aware that a number of adults with learning disabilities/difficulties tended to be overweight, rarely cooked or undertook regular activities, for a variety of reasons, including lack of easy read information or practical help. We therefore approached those people we knew from what they had told us previously, who lived in their own homes, and had minimal care or support packages.

Nationally, evidence shows that PWLD have a high risk of obesity and cardiovascular morbidity and mortality, as they often lead socially isolated lives with increased mental ill health and loneliness

as a consequence. Contributing Factors include high calorific intake, low levels of physical activity, limited knowledge of appropriate community leisure facilities, lack of skilled support (carers often eat unhealthily themselves or lack time when supporting individuals, to assist with basic cooking) coupled with the lack of accessible dietary advice, low incomes and the need for practical support hinders people making significant lifestyle changes.

Using a mix of methods and approaches, the three sessions covered key aspects including:

- Facilitated discussions to raise awareness and support participants to have a better understanding of what keeping healthy means and the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, both mentally and physically.
- Provide easy read accessible information to guide participants to a healthier lifestyle covering course content, portion sizes and food groups, along with general health promotion on alcohol, stop smoking campaigns and leaflets about Healthwatch services.
- The most popular was the Easy read recipe cards we produced for participants to take away and try at home.
- Step by step guide to planning and preparing simple inexpensive nutritious meals or snacks – via virtual shopping (online) looking at food labelling, traffic light symbols and cost.
- Followed by a basic cooking skills workshop, where people worked in pairs to make simple nutritious summer fruit Smoothies, Caesar salads and Vegetable Couscous. Participants were able to enjoy eating these together during the short breaks.
- Each session ended with 45 minutes of Dance Activity -e.g. Zumba and/or chair exercises suitable for the fitness and mobility levels of participants

## Session 1 –June 18<sup>th</sup> 10.30-1.00pm

12 people were welcomed to the first session and introductions were made including the aims and objectives. Jo Woodsford from HWW introduced herself and spoke briefly about the work of Healthwatch saying she hoped people would enjoy the day.

A lively discussion took place about why it was important to eat healthily and take regular exercise. Participants were then asked to set down their own goals for achieving a healthier lifestyle and to think about what steps they might need to take to achieve their goals, including what stops them doing things now and to list any support they felt they might need to make things happen.

Most said they would like to have a healthier lifestyle by doing more exercise and eating healthier foods. All said that they were taking part in the project because they wanted 'to think about how to have a healthy lifestyle, try new things, be more independent and feel good about themselves'

After sharing their goals, they took part in a Cookery Skills Workshop where they were shown how to make and then given the ingredients to make their own strawberry and banana yoghurt smoothies.

One person, who stated strongly at the start that they did not like smoothies, even though never having tried one, after drinking the one they made, said how refreshing and nice it was! A dance movement workshop then took place with seated warm up exercises followed by dance moves to music, tailored to meet individual's access needs.



Jo explaining about the work of HWW



Members and supporter enjoying a smoothie



Seated exercises as a warm up to dance

## **Session 2- July 23<sup>rd</sup> 10.30am- 1.00pm**

For session 2, 11 people attended, one having sent apologies due to holidays. After a discussion about what a healthy meal looked like, using portion sizes and talking about healthy and not so healthy food groups, participants were taken on a virtual tour of a supermarket to buy the ingredients needed to make a Caesar salad. They also explored how food labelling and traffic light symbols could help us buy foods low in fat or sugar.

A step by step demonstration to making a Caesar Salad followed and everyone then prepared the ingredients and enjoyed eating this during the break.

As before, one participant said they never ate salads because they knew they wouldn't like it as no one in their family ever had it, and they were reluctant to even make it. However, with encouragement from other participants and supporters, the individual took part and then ate all of the salad, saying how nice it was.

Since then this participant has told us she has started making different types of salads at home and shown her mum how to do it too!

The dance workshop followed, with people enthusiastically taking part. The session closed with a short summary of what had been covered so far and to capture people's feedback.



Making Caesar Salad



Eating Caesar Salad



Learning Dance moves



Seated exercise to finish session

### **Session 3 -September 17<sup>th</sup> 10.30-1.15pm**

10 people attended the final session (unfortunately two people were unwell). We were delighted to welcome Julie Brown from Healthwatch Wiltshire who handed out information leaflets and sat with participants, joining in. After a recap of what the project was about and what had been achieved so far led by Angie Carmichael, we had a further discussion on what we now thought was meant by healthy living and people agreed that this included making healthy food choices, cutting down on alcohol and doing more exercise such as walking.

After a reminder about food labelling and traffic light symbols, the cookery workshop took place on how to make a Vegetarian Couscous, with most people again, trying out food they had never eaten before. Everyone said how delicious it was and one keen participant gave suggestions on other types of couscous to make which sounded tasty.

The dance workshop was again enjoyed enthusiastically ending with Queen's "We are the champions!"

In order to measure how helpful the course had been, we then asked participants to give feedback on the three sessions and to also revisit their Goals, reflecting on what they felt they had achieved since the start of the project.

Angie, assisted by Julie from Healthwatch, gave out certificates to participants for successfully completing the course.



A discussion on healthy living led by Angie Carmichael



Preparing the couscous



Having fun in the dance workshop



Presenting certificates



Receiving a certificate

## Goals and Outcomes

Here are some of the comments:

*'I now shop for healthier foods and go out on my own more.'*

*'I have learnt a lot and tried different food dishes.'*

*'I enjoyed trying new things – making smoothies or couscous.'*

*'I liked talking about the Eatwell plate and now try doing different things like walking to work.'*

People were invited to give their feedback- some did this on paper, others were happy to appear in front of the camera to record 'vox pops'. Here's a sample of what they said:

### **Q1. Was the information about healthy eating useful?**

10 said the information had been very useful.

### **Q2. Do you feel you eat more healthily now?**

9 said yes that they eat more healthily now.

1 said that it has made them *think more* about what they eat.

### **Q3. Do you think you will try to exercise more?**

10 said yes they will try and exercise more.

One of the 10 said they had begun walking to work every day and another said they went swimming weekly.

### **Q4. Did you find the cookery session useful and it gave you good ideas?**

8 said the cookery sessions were very good,

2 said they were good.

### **Q5. What did you think of the dance sessions- fun and interesting?**

9 said they were very good and they had fun.

1 said they were good.

**Q6. Was the information about Healthwatch Wiltshire useful- do you feel you know more about what they do now?**

9 said yes.

1 said that they would like to know a bit more.

**Q7. What did you think about the venue facilities and its access?**

6 thought the venue and its access were very good.

4 said good.

**8. Would you recommend this project to your friends and other people with a Learning disability?**

10 said yes they would recommend the project to others.

**List 3 things you liked or enjoyed most about the project sessions:**

10 participants said they enjoyed the cookery workshops including preparing/ making the food, trying healthy food and being able to take the recipes home.

8 said they enjoyed the discussions and learning about a healthy lifestyle.

6 said they liked the dance workshops best.

**Q9. Any other comments:**

Participants added that they “really enjoyed the project”.

‘It’s given me good ideas about keeping healthy.’

‘It’s nice to learn about healthy food dishes, look at different food recipes and learn the different food groups.’

**Conclusion**

Looking at the feedback from participants this project appears to have been a success and we have achieved what we set out to do.

This has been a fun and interactive way to introduce people who previously were reluctant or had never before had an opportunity,



to think about what a healthy lifestyle was and to be able to try out new things in a safe and pleasant environment where access needs were met and everyone's views were listened to.

Other members of Wiltshire People 1<sup>st</sup> have told us that they would like to take part in such a project if we run it again, and those who attended this course said they wished it had gone on for more than 3 sessions as they felt they benefitted from meeting in this way and could learn more over a longer period. We will be looking for funding to run future projects as a result of the positive course feedback and requests.

## LEARNING FROM PROJECT

- People with learning disabilities/communication and health needs should be given more opportunities to try out new things, including activities and food.
- People need to be encouraged and given practical support to be more active and take part in mainstream community activities and events, using a community asset based approach and volunteers.
- Participants told us that they may want someone to go with them to give them confidence and show them what to do e.g. in the gym or going to a café. Others mentioned that they needed support to travel, that they tended to rely on lifts which limited where they went and whom they went with, and those who were able, used the bus only on specific journeys (going into town centre) as they were not sure about going to new places, indicating the need for better information and travel support.
- Health and safety assessments should always be carried out and all of the participants were asked about health conditions, allergies or food intolerances before their place on the project was confirmed, and again at each session we specifically asked about food allergies before beginning the cookery workshop element. In our information pack we advise everyone to check with their GP or a health

professional before they take up new or rigorous exercise activity and we repeated these messages at each session. All of our seated dance activity had been designed to accommodate individuals' abilities as well as to be inclusive.

- The small grant from Healthwatch for which we are grateful, enabled us to organise and deliver this brief project to a small number of people. However, if reproducing similar events, the real level of time, prep/support cost needed to hold these sessions, should not be underestimated.

Thank you to Healthwatch Wiltshire for the community grant.

Thanks also to everyone who took part and those key people who supported and enabled the sessions to run so smoothly.

If you would like more information about this project please contact Angie Carmichael, Director at [angie@wiltshirepeople1st.org.uk](mailto:angie@wiltshirepeople1st.org.uk) or write to us at

Wiltshire People 1<sup>st</sup>, Independent Living Centre, Semington, Wiltshire, BA14 6JQ. Tel: 01380871900.

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