



Men's Health and Wellbeing Programme

Impact Assessment



Table of Contents

Introduction

- Background & Objectives
- Research Methodology

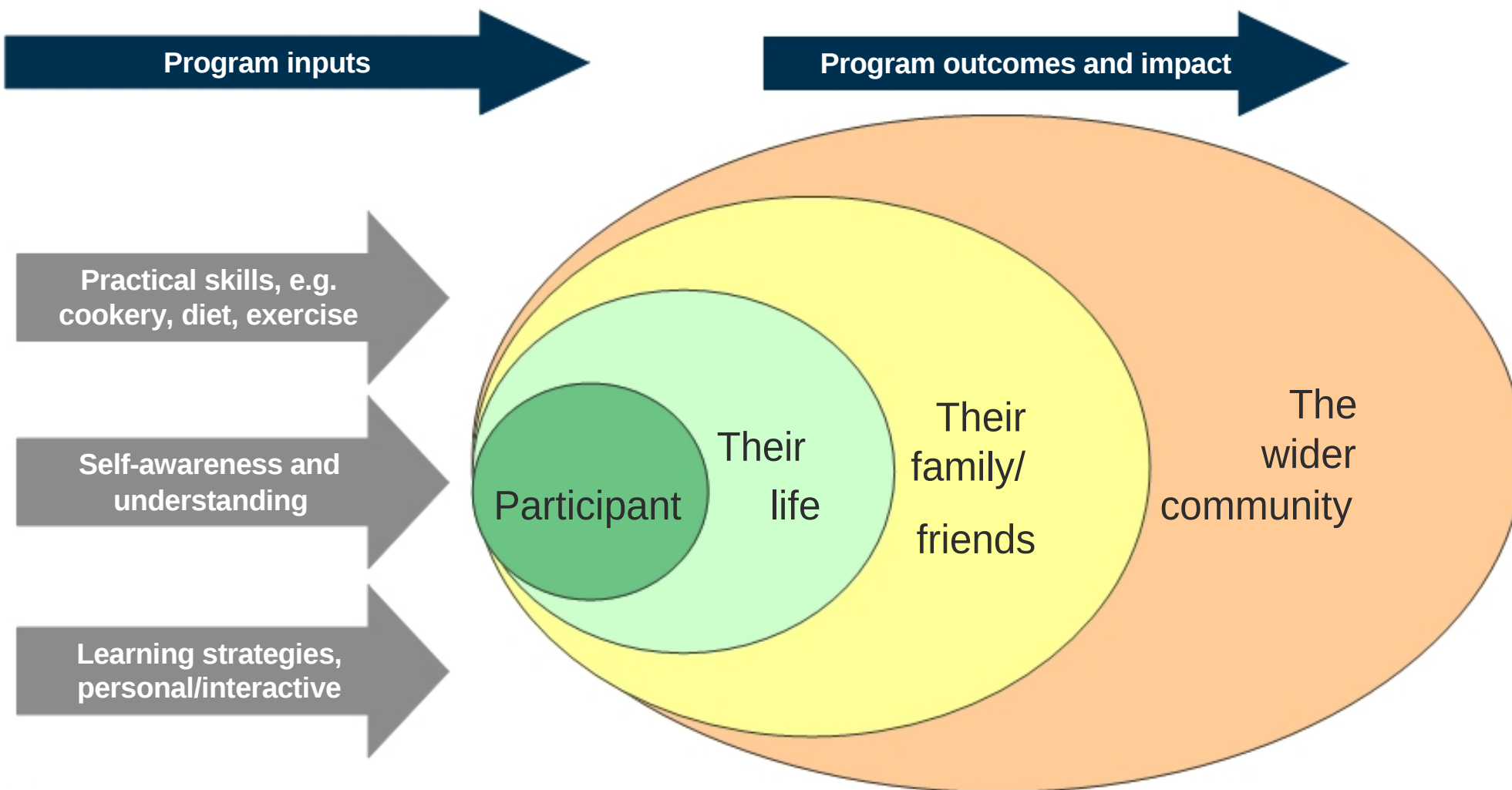
Findings

- Participant Aims
- Diet and Nutrition
- Exercise and Fitness
- Addiction
- General Health
- Stress and Mental Health
- The Social Aspect

Conclusions

Overall Objective

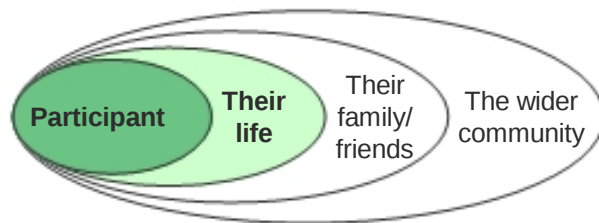
What is the long-term impact of the programme on participants, friends, family and the community?



Structure of the Presentation

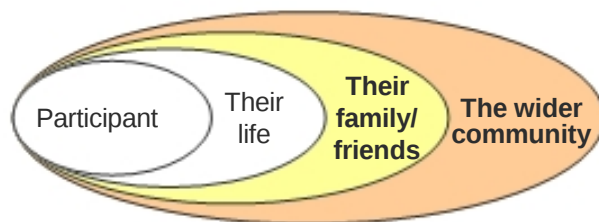
This presentation will address each of the areas covered in the Men's Health Programme (Diet and Nutrition, Exercise and Fitness, Addiction, General Health, Stress and Mental Health, etc.) in terms of:

1. The impact of the course on the participants themselves, i.e., their:



- a. Self Awareness and Understanding
- b. Practical Skills
- c. Learning Strategies

2. The impact of the course on the participants' wider social networks



- a. Family and friends
- b. The wider community

Research Methodology

10 face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with Programme participants.

- Initial invitation letter sent by the Larkin Centre, followed up by telephone by Ipsos MRBI
- Interviews were 45 minutes in duration on average.
- All interviews were conducted in the Larkin Centre.
- No cash incentive was offered for participation.

In addition, each respondent was invited to nominate a friend or family member to take part in a brief in-depth telephone interview. This phase of the research offered an outsiders' perspective on the impact of the Programme on the participants' life.

- Two such interviews were conducted, both of which were with participants' partners.

Research was conducted between 20th May and 12th July 2010, with the majority of interviews taking place in late May (approximately six months after the completion of the Programme).

Participant Aims

Participant Aims

Respondents first heard about the Larkin Centre's Men's Health Programme through:

- Prior involvement with the Larkin Centre
- Seeing the poster around their locality
 - Aiden McGeady/Celtic caught the attention of many
- Being approached by Anne or Nicola from the Larkin Centre

The programme adopted a lifestyle approach and addressed a variety of aspects of men's health and wellbeing. Each respondent had their own **“personal mission”** behind taking part, including:

- Losing weight
- Regaining fitness
- Learning how to cook healthy meals
- Taking greater control of their life
- Looking to meet people in their area

“[Being overweight] was on my mind, but I didn't know where to start.”

“[Joining the Programme] was the first time I did something looking after myself.”



Apprehension Prior to the Programme

Several respondents expressed that they had some concerns and a degree of apprehension prior to starting the Men's Health Programme.

*I will not be fit enough
to take part*

*The rest of the group
will be younger and
fitter*

*I will not see
results*

*I will be
embarrassed*

*The programme will
be competitive*



*The group won't
open up in front
of each other*

As the Programme progressed, respondents found that there was no cause for such concerns.

Diet and Nutrition

Diet and Nutrition - Self Awareness and Understanding (I)

Respondents expressed that they learned **a greater appreciation for the importance of nutrition** owing to their participation in the Programme.

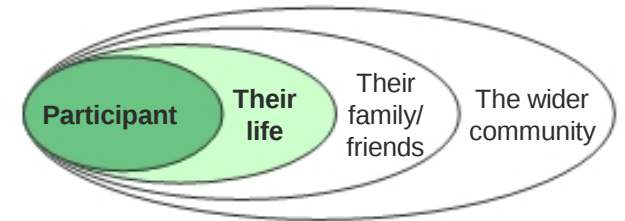
- Lessons relating to the food pyramid and the makings of a balanced diet helped participants to appreciate how their own eating habits shapes their health.

While all were previously aware that fatty foods, excess salt, sugar, caffeine, etc. were damaging to their health, the programme was credited with **bringing the information to life**.

- By demonstrating exactly how such foods damaged the body, respondents were more inclined to cut these foods from their diet.
- Many respondents had cut salt from their diet entirely and almost all had made efforts to reduce their intake of fat and sugar.

"I wasn't aware salt was a big factor in heart disease. I absolutely love salt. I haven't touched salt since the day I started this course."

"I knew it was bad for me but I needed something to show me why it was wrong to eat the fatty stuff."



Diet and Nutrition - Self Awareness and Understanding (II)

What I Eat

As well as learning about unhealthy foods, participants left the course with a **greater appreciation of what constitutes healthy eating**. While certain aspects were new to some (e.g., the benefits of wholemeal bread, brown rice and oily fish) others were generally familiar (e.g., fresh fruit and vegetables).

- The course succeeded in conveying how small changes to their diet could impact their general health.
- Respondents revealed how they had introduced a greater quantity of healthy foods into their everyday diet, oftentimes as a replacement to less healthy alternatives.

"I get veg and fruit where beforehand it was crisps and bars."

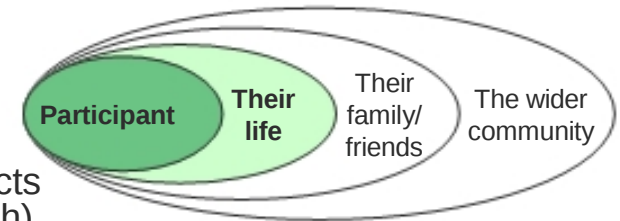
"I never had fruit or veg before but I always have grapes or orange juice around the house now."

"I eat a hell of a lot more fish than I ever did... If you asked me this time last year what Omega 3 was, I couldn't tell you."

How I Eat

In addition to modifying what they ate, respondents demonstrated that they were **changing how they ate owing to greater knowledge**.

- Where many would have once eaten unhealthy fried breakfasts or skipped breakfast entirely, many were now more cognisant of the importance of a healthy start to the day.
- Orange juice, porridge and cereal with *Benecol* with or skimmed milk were examples of new additions to respondents' morning routines.



Diet and Nutrition - Practical Skills

A New Skill Set

Participants had varying levels of experience and ability with regard to cooking prior to taking part in the Programme. While a minority had an interest in cooking and would on occasion cook for their own family, **the majority were less competent in this regard** with some lacking the most rudimentary of cooking skills.

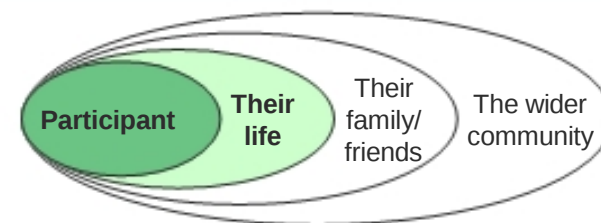
The cooking element of the Men's Health Programme was widely praised by respondents. All expressed surprise at their own development in this area.

"I learnt a lot. I couldn't fry an egg before - I never even tried frying an egg. Now I'm making sauces and everything."

The course was credited with **substantially expanding their repertoire of ingredients, cuisines and techniques.** The course chef was noted to have facilitated adventurousness amongst the group, encouraging participants to try things that were beyond their comfort zone, e.g., celeriac, courgettes, risotto, vegetarian meals.

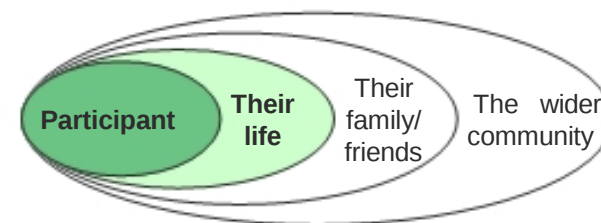
The success of these classes is evidenced by the fact that the **majority of respondents continue to cook on a regular basis.** Many were now cooking for themselves or for their whole family 3-4 times a week. Others have begun to bake their own bread on a weekly basis.

"This programme taught me the cooking skills and I am still doing it and I'm surviving."



Diet and Nutrition - Learning Strategies

Armed with theoretical knowledge on nutrition and practical cooking skills, respondents felt that they had the resources necessary to bring the lessons from the course into the home and build on what they had learnt.



Respondents spoke about how they felt their attitude to healthy eating had changed.

- When shopping, they are **increasingly cognisant of making healthy choices**. Reading and interpreting food labels is becoming second nature.

"When I go into a shop now, I always look at the tins to see what salt content is in it. Even with bread. Before I'd never bother."

The extent to which **home cooked meals were replacing take-away** food was notable.

"I eat a hell of a lot better now than I did before the course. I eat a lot more cooked dinners instead of take aways. Before I might have had a take away twice a week. Now it might be once a fortnight."

"I used to eat a [take-away] curry at least four or five times a week. Now I'm lucky if I have one."

A proportion continue to attend regular cooking classes through the Larkin Centre.

For a minority the change in behaviour was less marked; a handful felt that they could be practising their skills more frequently at home, though they were nevertheless confident that they were now more aware of their diet and knew what was required of them.

Diet and Nutrition - Impact on Family/Friends

Bringing The Benefits Home

Respondents listed numerous examples of how changes to their eating habits have also impacted the diets of those in their household. Among the examples seen were:

- **Cooking more** home cooked meals for the household
- **Teaching others** to cook and about health and nutrition.

“I have two kids. If it is doing me good, I can pass it on.”

- **Encouraging others** to try new foods or healthier alternatives.

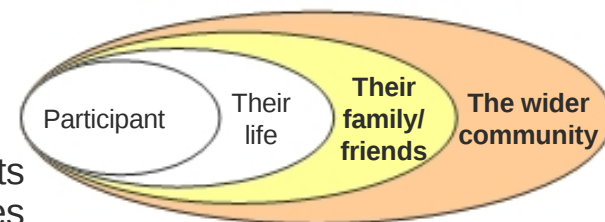
“My partner has benefited. She has tried stuff that she wouldn’t have before. She won’t be eating take away as often as a result.”

- **Removing unhealthy foods** from the home (e.g. salt).

Impact on the Wider Community

On the strength of recommendations from course participants, other men have been recruited to cookery classes in the Larkin Centre, some of whom would never before have considered this.

“They were all laughing me when I was walking by with my little bag [of ingredients]. Now these boys are walking by with their little bag.”



Exercise and Fitness

Exercise and Fitness - Self Awareness and Understanding

Providing Motivation

The majority of respondents did not participate in any regular exercise prior to participating in the Programme.

The prospect of getting fit was the main draw of the Programme for many of those who took part. Several expressed that they had been unhappy with their level of fitness on starting the programme but **needed direction and motivation** to address this.

"I needed something to kickstart me. I didn't know where to go until I saw that poster in the dole office."

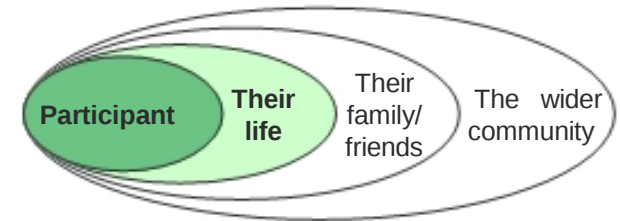
Highlighting a Need

For others, the Programme highlighted that they needed to do more in this area.

"I definitely learnt that I had no standard of fitness before I started. While the course was going on I was a hell of a lot more active - during the course and in my own time as well. I could feel it in every way, even running up the stairs."

There were respondents for whom exercise and fitness was not a primary reason for taking part in the programme. These respondents nevertheless gained an appreciation of the importance of exercise, for instance the positive effect of exercise on temperament.

"My God I haven't felt as good in myself for ten years. That's what the exercise did to me. It improves your mood."



Exercise and Fitness - Practical Skills

The Right Environment

There were some concerns expressed regarding the physical aspects of the course before it started. Some had fears that they would not be able to keep pace with other fitter participants or that the environment might be competitive or intimidating. These concerns were unfounded as;

- Respondents soon found that the course provided an environment where participants felt **free to participate to the best of their abilities**.
- The Celtic coaches were credited with **getting the most out of participants** but giving permission to stop any activity if the strain became too much.
- The **group dynamic** was more encouraging than competitive.

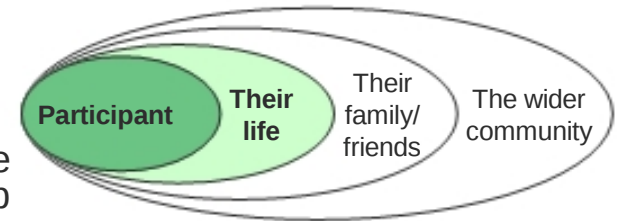
Signs of Development

Through the football training, gym activities and other practical lessons, respondents **learnt what they were capable of achieving**.

- Respondents counted loss of weight, superior cardio-vascular performance, improved beep tests and the fact that they were able to complete a 90-minute game of football amongst their achievements in this area.

Respondents picked up **techniques** for ensuring that they were **getting the most out of their gym activities**, which they continue to use.

- For instance, how to target different muscle groups or tips for making gym sessions more interesting.



Exercise and Fitness - Learning Strategies

A Changed Approach to Exercise and Fitness

The Programme succeeded in teaching participants how to go about continuing with regular exercise once the course ended.

“Now I know what to do [in the gym] I can go in and do it myself, I don’t need anyone to show me.”

“Instead of driving here, I cycled here. I probably would have drove a couple of months ago. And that’s down to this course.”

All respondents found **means of exercising which suited their own needs**:

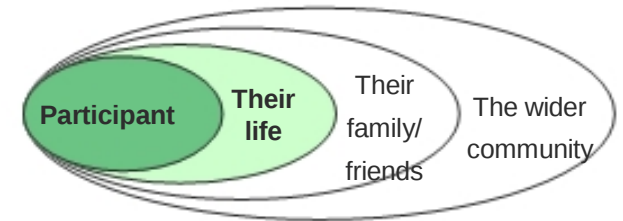
- Some of the older respondents had been reluctant to go to gyms, considering them to be frequented by young “posers”. The gym exercises in the Programme helped to overcome their reservations.
- For others, walking or cycling was more accessible or enjoyable.
- A proportion of respondents kept up with training through the Larkin Centre once the course ended.

Making Time for Exercise

The course helped to **put a structure on participants’ exercise regime**.

- Most respondents now **set aside a certain part of their day or week** in order to exercise, for instance, one respondent now walks as much as four hours per day or others attend the gym 2-3 times per week.

“I go up to the local gym three times a week and on the other two days I go for my old walk.”



Exercise and Fitness - Impact on Family/Friends

A Positive Influence on Family/Friends

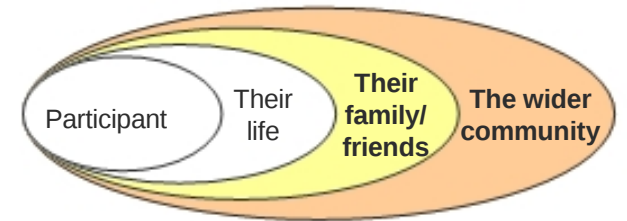
About half of the respondents found that their families had also changed their approach to fitness.

- Many began walking or running with their partners or children, some on a daily basis, finding that the **social aspect improved the experience.**
- Others found that members of their family would walk more on their own initiative, **inspired by the participants' progress.**

Impact on the Wider Community

One respondent has since started to **coach kids' football** - he considered this to be **giving something back to the community** after receiving the support of the Larkin Centre.

"My mam cannot believe her eyes. From a couch potato to someone getting out and helping kids in training... giving back what I got freely."



Addiction

Smoking

Most of the respondents interviewed were smokers, all of whom expressed a desire to cut down for the sake of their health.

Two such smokers had succeeded in cutting their consumption of cigarettes in the months prior to the Programme (motivated by changes to their personal circumstances).

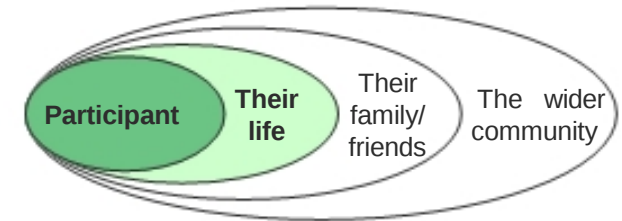
- These respondents were interested in learning how to maintain the progress they made.

One respondent succeeded in quitting cigarettes entirely on starting the course while another cut his consumption in half. Both have maintained their progress.

*“He cut down on his smoking - he just wouldn’t smoke as much. He hasn’t found it too difficult.”
(Participant’s partner)*

A further two smokers felt that they needed more to help them tackle their smoking addiction.

- The Larkin Centre recommended that these people participate in a separate course specifically aimed at stopping smoking.



The Programme succeeded in communicating the impact of smoking on the body, the stages of addiction and techniques for tackling addiction.

The fitness element of the Programme also provided an impetus for smokers to cut down or quit.

“When I started the course I was wrecked doing the running. I got up one morning and I said I’ll knock [cigarettes] on the head.”



Alcohol Consumption

All bar one of the respondents spoken to either did not drink or felt that their alcohol consumption was low and/or under control.

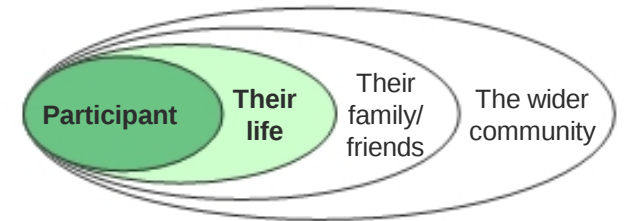
- As with smoking, some had cut down on their drinking independently due to changing personal circumstances.

The Programme educated participants about the effects of alcohol on the body, e.g.:

- Immediate impact on the body
- Lasting impact on organs
- Understanding the effects of binge drinking

For those that had cut down on their alcohol consumption prior to the Programme, **the lessons reinforced their decision and their efforts to cut down/quit.**

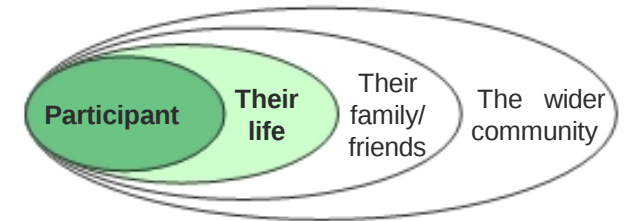
Some respondents felt that the Programme could place more emphasis on the topic in the future.



General Health

General Health - Self Awareness and Understanding

The Programme addressed issues such as blood pressure and cholesterol management, sexual health, dental and oral hygiene and access to local health services.



What was common amongst almost all participants prior to the Programme was the extent to which **managing their own health was a low priority in their lives.**

- Few had previously had a full medical check-up in recent years.

"I'd never even heard of cholesterol tests."

- Many respondents acknowledged that they tended to avoid or put off visiting healthcare professionals wherever possible.
- Some considered this to be a typically "male attitude" (i.e., self-sufficiency and unwillingness to show weakness).

A number of respondents had a particular interest in this facet of the Programme as they were aware of a history of health issue in their own family.

Some noted that medical terms and issues can be difficult to understand, accordingly, the opportunity to cover these issues in a classroom setting was welcomed.

The Programme successfully **demonstrated to participants the importance of understanding and looking after their own health.**

General Health - Practical Skills

Health Screenings

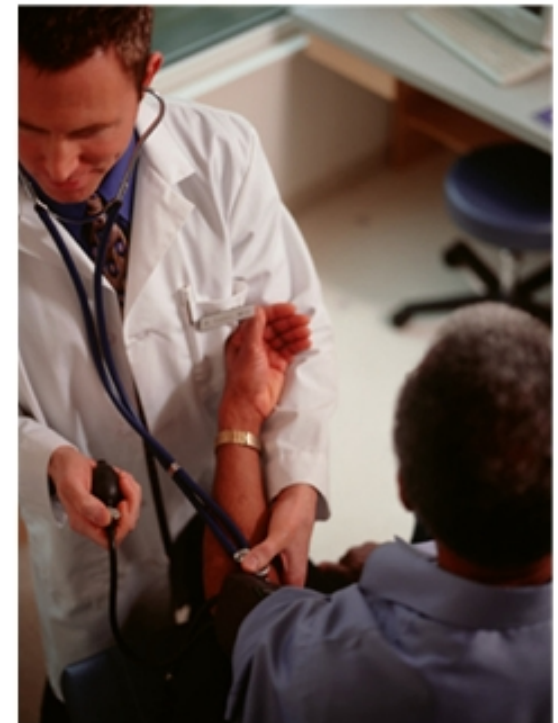
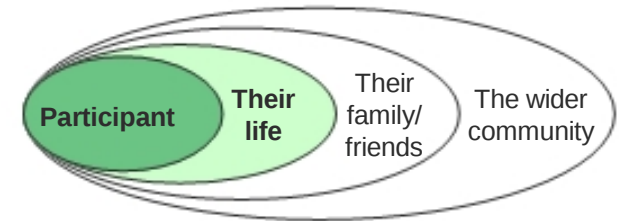
The health screening conducted at the start and the end of the Programme served to frame respondents' understanding of the health issues under discussion and related it to their own personal health.

- These screenings identified a number of potentially serious health issues amongst respondents, for instance high blood pressure or cholesterol. Several participants were referred to GPs on the back of these.

The tangible measures offered by the screening tests served to: personalise the issues; give participants a target; and kept the issues top of mind.

Respondents acknowledged that the screenings and theory lessons **helped to make them more conscious of these issues.**

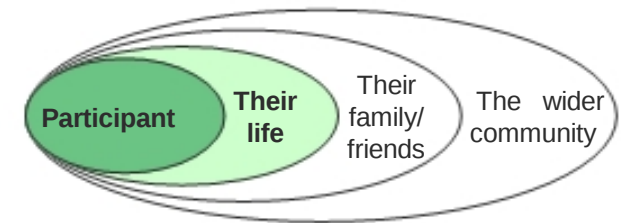
Furthermore, many **simple practical skills were taken on board**, for instance, the correct amount of toothpaste to use.



General Health - Learning Strategies

The Programme succeeded in allowing participants to **take greater control of their own health**.

Group discussion of men's sexual health and testicular cancer helped to remove the embarrassment surrounding these issues.



Accessing Local Health Services

The Programme opened doors to health services for participants.

- The lessons brought home the importance of check ups.
- The health screening took the fear out of having a regular check up.
- Observing how the health screening identified and helped to address issues for others in the group also reinforced their importance.
- Through meeting local health professionals through the course, respondents were less intimidated about visiting their local health centre.

Several respondents stated that **they had seen a doctor or a dentist on their own initiative** as a direct result of the Programme.

"I'm not afraid to go to the doctor now. Before, no matter what was wrong, I would have put it off."

"I am acting on things now instead of putting them on the long finger."

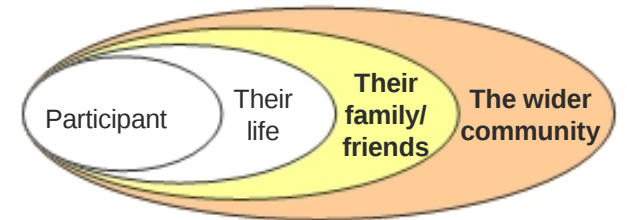
"The course taught me to look after myself. I wouldn't have enough fingers on two hands to count the number of friends from school who are dead due to not looking after themselves from drugs and all that."

General Health - Impact on Family/Friends

Sharing their Knowledge

A number of respondents noted that they shared some of the health lessons they picked up through the Programme with their family.

One respondent felt that his friend could be doing more to manage his health and recommended that he participate in the next stream of the Programme on this basis.



Stress and Mental Health

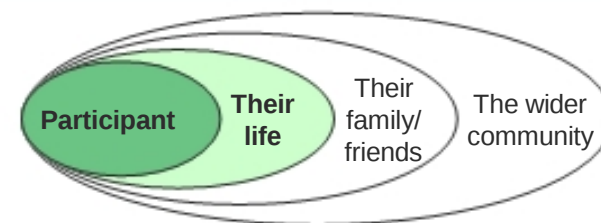
Stress and Mental Health - Self Awareness and Understanding

The Programme addressed the issues of stress and mental health through classroom sessions where **participants were encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences.**

- Stress was an issue for a proportion of individuals, while others felt that they lacked confidence in certain areas of their lives.
- Others recognised depression (diagnosed or otherwise) in their own lives, attributed to unemployment, financial pressures, addiction, the demoralising experience of job hunting, etc.

Some respondents were all too aware of the precarious nature of mental health owing to people that they knew who suffered from depression, other mental health conditions or who had taken their own lives.

For the respondents who did not consider these issues to be particularly relevant to them, they nevertheless valued this aspect of the Programme for **helping them understand the issues.**



Stress and Mental Health - Practical Skills

A Problem Shared...

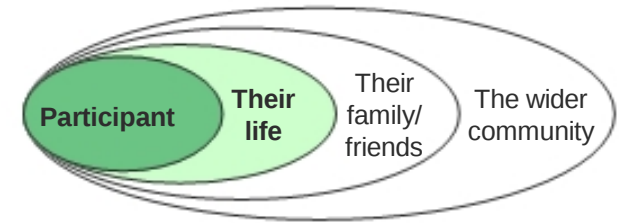
Through talking about the issues in a group environment, many respondents recognised aspects of their own lives in what others were saying. The exercise:

- Made it permissible to talk about feelings and personal problems.
- Made respondents more aware of their own mental wellbeing.
- Helped to dispel the stigma sometimes associated with mental health.

Respondents found it was rewarding to listen to others' real experiences as well as contribute to discussions.

"I wouldn't have been inclined to speak about things like that, depression and that. But I was glad to listen to these people."

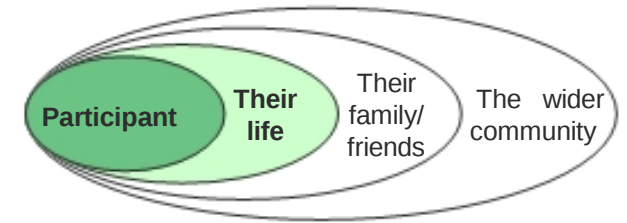
Respondents suggested that this aspect of the Programme contributed most towards bonding the group as the discussions allowed for very personal issues to be addressed in an honest and open environment.



Stress and Mental Health - Learning Strategies

Learning Coping Skills

Respondents were taught about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate methods of relaxation and coping skills which could be used in stressful situations. Many respondents noted that they were **better placed to manage stress in their lives** by taking on board these tips.



"I find I'm getting stressed now I just get up and say I'll be back in five minutes."

Providing Structure

From the Programme, a number of respondents found that **introducing structure and routine** into their lives helped them to tackle depression.

- The routine offered by the Programme itself was enough to start this process in certain cases.
- Outside of the course, several made greater efforts to introduce routine into their own lives.

"I used to be sitting at home and just eating with depression. With the course, I lost two stone."

"Depression set in on me when I was made idle... [The Programme] saved me from a deep depression."

Respondents acknowledged that to successfully addressing difficult issues such as these **requires a lifelong effort** on the part of the individual.

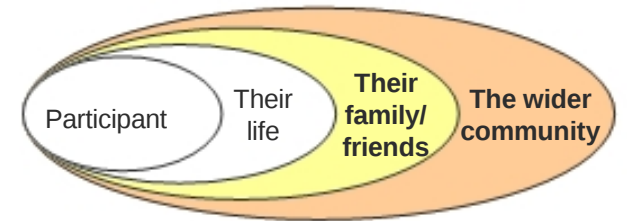
"[Stress] is not something that you can switch off overnight but I'm working towards it."

Stress and Mental Health - Impact on Family/Friends

A Personal Mission

In contrast to other areas of the Programme, where participants were keen to share what they had learnt with their family and friends, the sessions on stress and mental health were much more of a personal occupation.

Nevertheless, the sessions themselves were characterised by **openness and sharing between the participants**.



The Social Aspect

The Social Aspect

All respondents commented on the positive social environment of the Programme. Only a small number started the Programme knowing other participants but by the end, many lasting friendships had been made.

Respondents looked forward to the Programme and attendance remained strong throughout.

- Respondents welcomed the provision of a social outlet for males which **did not revolve around drinking**. *“He enjoys a bit of company - the fact that so many of them are not working it is sometimes their only social outlet. It’s done his morale great. He’s happier in himself.” (Participant’s partner)*

Support

Participants supported each other throughout the exercise and fitness tasks. There was little **negativity or competition** amongst the group.

“If I was down today, they’d say, c’mon.”

This support was evident in other aspects of the programme as well; respondents **wanted to see their colleagues succeed** in losing weight, fighting depression, etc.

“You should see some of them coming along because they have something to look forward to.”

Interaction

There was some banter when covering some of the more potentially embarrassing health issues but the discussions were nevertheless successful and **the key message sunk through**.

- When addressing sensitive issues such as addiction, depression and mental health, respondents were surprised to the degree that the group opened up.

Conclusions

The Impact of the Men's Health Programme

Diet and Nutrition

- Greater knowledge and understanding of the what makes a balanced diet
- Many cooking for selves and others on a regular basis
- Cutting out unhealthy foods and introduced healthier alternatives
- Weight loss which can be attributed to better diets

Exercise and Fitness

- Greater appreciation for the need for and benefits of exercise
- Increase in general level of fitness
- Picked up techniques and tips for keeping fit
- Helped to identify exercise regimes which suited individuals
- Many now taking regular exercise with friends and family

Addiction

- Better understanding of the modes of action of alcohol and tobacco
- Programme supported efforts to quit
- Opened doors to additional resources

General Health

- Health screening identified dangerous health issues
- Aided participants' understanding of terminology and their significance
- Motivated participants to monitor and improve their own health scores
- Opened doors to local health services

Stress and Mental Health

- An environment which allowed participants to open up to each other
- A greater understanding of own mental health
- Learnt coping skills for dealing with stress
- Brought structure to unstructured lives
- Personal achievement

The Impact of the Men's Health Programme



While many respondents joined the Programme with the intention of addressing one or two health issues in their lives, many found that they left having benefitted from so much more.

There was a strong synergy across the Programme's different modules, e.g.

- Learning about heart health helped to develop an appreciation of the importance of nutrition, which in turn informed the cooking lessons.
- Taking up more exercise provided further motivation to cut down on cigarettes.
- Coping skills for dealing with stress can substitute for addictive behaviours.
- Exercise sessions brought home the link between fitness and mood.

Often where benefits were seen in one area, this encouraged participants to continue for other areas.

The Impact of the Men's Health Programme

Throughout the interviews, respondents took pride in their own achievements and that of the group as a whole.

- That participants had a high degree of ownership of the content and direction of the Programme added to this sense of pride.

The fact that so many respondents had recommended others to take part in the second wave of the Programme speaks volumes about their satisfaction with its impact.

For many participants to the Men's Health Programme, the challenge of finding work remains, yet these respondents are now in a stronger position to address this.

Closing Comments

“Learning to live on your own, cooking, cleaning, exercise...I had none of them.”

“Since this course, it’s unbelievable, the peace of mind. The way I can sleep without medication. It took a few weeks mind but I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

“It wasn’t easy at the start but when you start getting the benefit from it you think ‘Why didn’t I do this sooner?’”

“I’d love to see it in every town and I guarantee that you wouldn’t have the queues in A&E that you have.”

“Everyone had a different focus (stress, smoking, weight) and we all got something out of it.”

“This course has probably given me an extra 5 to 10 years on my life.”

“When I get up in the morning I find it hard to believe that there is going to be no stress on me today.”

“I was hoping to lose weight. I achieved that and more.”

Thank you

For further information contact

Tarik.Laher@ipsos.com

Kieran.Tucker@ipsos.com

on 00 353 1 4389000

Ipsos MRBI