

*Evaluation of the Womens Health
Services Physical Activity Project
to Encourage Women
and Their Families
to Become More
Active*



Physical Activity
and Nutrition
Research

Evaluation of the Womens Health Services Physical Activity Project to Encourage Women and Their Families to Become More Active

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Prepared by the

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Executive Summary

In 2008 the Womens Health Services in Northbridge, Western Australia, was the recipient of a Healthy Active Australia grant, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. The aim of the funded project was to increase participation and physical activity levels of marginalised women by introducing them to a range of low cost, easily accessible exercise opportunities and by providing relevant health information. The program ran from late 2008 to early 2010. Program activities included the delivery of thirty three health information talks covering topics such as nutrition, healthy eating, relaxation, stress and the need for adequate levels of vitamin D, as well as forty two blocks of physical activity classes. Activities included swimming, yoga, pilates, gentle exercise and dancing. Other physical activities included three Come and Try days, four organised walks and six bike workshops. Five family activity sessions were also held over the funding period.

A qualitative evaluation of the activities was conducted by Curtin University. Evaluation activities included eight focus groups with approximately sixty participants, eight one-on-one interviews with participants and four interviews with class instructors. Overall, participants were satisfied with the physical activity program they were participating in.

Participants reported that the program had increased their levels of activity, in many cases by providing an opportunity to be active that they would not otherwise have. Barriers to engaging in physical activity included financial barriers such as a lack of money to pay for services and childcare, a lack of affordable services and a lack of culturally appropriate facilities. Other barriers included personal factors such as a lack of confidence or a lack of motivation. Many women, especially those caring for children, did not have time to engage in physical activity outside of their sessions with the WHS. For these women, the sessions offered them 'time out' from the pressures of their everyday lives. Other women experienced mental health issues which affected their ability to engage in physical activity.

In addition to providing women with the opportunity to be active, participants also reported experiencing physical and mental health benefits as a result of the program. The program gave participants the opportunity to mix with peers in a nonjudgmental environment, introduced them to new activities and provided the opportunity to learn new skills. This report presents the findings of an independent qualitative evaluation of participants' experiences with the program. A summary of the recommendations follows.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

All instructors should attend WHS training prior to involvement in any aspect of the WHS program.

Recommendation 2

Differences in motivation to be active are often based on intrinsic, individual differences. These factors should be recognised and fostered where possible to overcome personal barriers to activity.

Recommendation 3

It is important to recognise that whilst WHS clients may want to be more involved in the WHS program, they may not have the financial means to do so.

Recommendation 4

Participants should be encouraged to engage in main stream activities where appropriate, however there should be clear guidelines relating to how, when or if transition can occur, and how it could be facilitated.

Recommendation 5

The Brokerage Program should be clearly articulated to WHS clients. Posters or pamphlets should be developed to clearly detail all aspects of the program and the outcomes expected from those involved.

Recommendation 6

A series of 'stand-alone' physical activity classes should be available for those clients who cannot attend activities on a regular basis.

Recommendation 7

WHS clients should be encouraged to provide feedback to the WHS on their experiences of program activities. There should be an option for feedback to be confidential or anonymous.



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1.0

Introduction

In 2008 the Womens Health Services (WHS), in Northbridge, Western Australia, was the recipient of a Healthy Active Australia (HAA) grant (funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing). The aim of the funded project was to increase participation and physical activity levels of marginalised women by introducing them to a range of low cost, easily accessible exercise opportunities and by providing relevant health information. Qualitative evaluation of the activities was conducted by Curtin University of Technology. The purpose of the independent evaluation was to determine the success of the activities conducted, and to identify barriers and facilitators to increasing physical activity within the target group.

2.0

Background

The WHS Physical Activity Program was established to increase physical activity levels of marginalised women. The major strategies of the program were the provision of a range of low cost, easily accessible exercise opportunities plus relevant health information. Many WHS clients require support to access and maintain physical activity due to their life circumstances. Barriers to participation in physical activity include poverty, lack of English language skills, mental health conditions, alcohol and drug use, stigma associated with mental illness and drug use, issues related to domestic violence, lack of transport, lack of child care, the need for women-only space for cultural or religious reasons, and unfamiliarity with programs and services in their local area. Many women also need to acquire and practice new skills (such as swimming and bike riding) and/or develop confidence in existing skills in order to access mainstream physical activity and recreational activities and opportunities. Recognising these barriers, the WHS Physical Activity Program offered practical support and opportunities for women to improve their health in a safe, nonjudgmental and supportive environment.

3.0

Aims, objectives and strategies

3.1 Aims

The program's overall aim was to increase participation and physical activity levels of women who access the WHS. It also aimed to increase participation and physical activity levels of women in the wider community facing similar barriers to those experienced by WHS clients.

3.2 Objectives

The objectives of the program were:

- to increase women's participation in physical activity thereby promoting physical and mental health and well-being
- to provide relevant health information
- to provide women with opportunities to learn new skills and participate in physical activity in a safe and culturally appropriate environment
- to offer links to mainstream services and advocate on behalf of client groups.

3.3 Strategies

The project intended to achieve its objectives by providing:

- health information
- women-only exercise classes
- opportunities to learn new skills
- fun activities for families
- opportunities to explore the Perth environment
- training and support for instructors and volunteers
- placement opportunities for students
- linkage to mainstream services and advocacy for the client group
- a brokerage program for clients.

Physical activities planned to support these strategies include:

- 30 physical activity blocks
- 30 health information talks
- 9 recreational walks
- 6 bicycle workshops
- 4 physical activity Come and Try days

4.0

Method

4.1 Summary of program activities

The program ran over 6 school terms, from late 2008 to early 2010. Program activities included health information talks covering topics such as nutrition, healthy eating, relaxation, stress and the need for adequate levels of vitamin D. Physical activity classes were held over blocks of 6 to 8 weeks. Activities included swimming, yoga, pilates, gentle exercise and dancing. Several walks were held in local parks, and bike workshops were held for women learning to ride.

4.2 Evaluation

This report presents the findings of an independent qualitative evaluation of participants' experiences with the program. In addition, process and some impact data was collected by the evaluation team and WHS.



5.0 Results

The following tables, provided by the WHS, provide details of the program components, attendance and comments from the WHS on the success and reception of the program.

5.1 Workshops and attendance

Table 1: Information sessions

No.	Date	Topic of Session	Who Attended	# of participants	Outcome / Comments
1	12/3 2010	WA Health System and how to access services; importance of nutrition and physical activity	Newly arrived migrants and refugees attending local TAFE	26	Well received. Likely to continue on as a regular set of information sessions.
2	12/3 2010	Relaxation Workshop	Multicultural women attending WHS Domestic Violence services	8	Well received. 1 st time we have tried the activities in this workshop with this group of women. Participants requested similar workshops in the future.
3	11/3 2010	Healthy Lifestyle Talk	Muslim women	10	Well received. Have requested exercise classes in second term of 2010.
4	17/2 2010	Stress	Mixed multicultural group	42	Well received. Women would like more health information sessions.
5	9/2 2010	Relaxation Workshop	Women attending WHS Drug and Alcohol Services	12 – 15	Well received.
6	1/12 2010	Supermarket Tour	Mental health client	1	One on one session for women from a migrant background with mental health issues. One woman asked lots of questions particular to her situation.
7	30/11 2009	Healthy Christmas Cooking Workshop	Women attending WHS sexual assault program	4	Well received, Evaluation comments included: “Learned lots of ideas & tips when it comes to cooking healthier”. “Thank you – you made it all seem very easy compared to how I usually envisage cooking and shopping to be – to the point”.
8	18/11 2009	Infant and Child Resuscitation	Various clients of WHS	8	Heavy rain on the day discouraged some women attending but still got nearly full quota of ten women.

No.	Date	Topic of Session	Who Attended	# of participants	Outcome / Comments
9	17/11 2009	Healthy Christmas Cooking Workshop	Women attending WHS alcohol and other drug services	4	Well received. Heavy rain may have deterred other women from attending.
10	12/11 2009	Healthy Christmas Cooking Workshop	Mums attending WHS mental health community outreach program	8	Well received with requests for more workshops in the future.
11	10/11 2009	Supermarket Tour	WHS client	1	This was the first time we ran this session at this new local supermarket. Need to advertise more in the future as many people are still unaware that this shop has opened.
12	13/10 2009	Healthy Eating & Budgeting	Women in a local women's refuge	6	Group was made up of women between 20-30 years of age. Very relaxed session with lots of talking and questions. All said they are going to make changes to the way they eat and shop for food.
13	8/10 2009	Mood Foods for Mental Health Week	Mums and kids attending our mental health community outreach program	3 children, 5 adults	Well received. Positive feedback on "cookbook" on 'Quick & Easy Recipe Ideas' as many of the mothers struggle with this when they are not feeling particularly well.
14	3/9 2009	Cooking Workshop with Multicultural Women	Multicultural women attending settlement services	3 women + 1 staff member	Workshop went well. The numbers were down because it was Ramadan. None of the three ladies ate their food at the time – they put in a container to eat later. We had checked with the settlement agency prior to the workshop about doing cooking during Ramadan, but the staff were keen for us to go ahead.
15	20/08 2009	Nutrition	Women's Health Check out	Approx 25	Much quieter than previous one held due to heavy rain on the day.
16	30/07 2009	Vitamin D workshop	Multicultural women attending settlement program in Cannington.	3	Women enjoyed the workshop.
17	29/07 2009	Vitamin D workshop	Multicultural women mainly from Somalia & Iraq at the Edmund Rice Centre	16	Well received. Some women already had concerns about vitamin D deficiency and they liked the information and activity.
18	22/07 2009	Supermarket Tour	Women attending walking group at Hainsworth Recreation Centre	8	Tour went well. Everyone much more relaxed as this was the third time they had been with the presenter. There were lots of questions.
19	15/05 2009	FOODcents Cooking Workshop (Diabetes theme as it was national Diabetes Week)	Women attending walking group at Hainsworth Recreation Centre	7	Cooking went well. Two women with autism had carers to help this time at the session. This made the session go well.
20	09/07 2009	Healthy lunchboxes and easy to cook lunch/snacks	Mums and kids attending our mental health community outreach program	4 Mums 8 kids	Cooking went well with the children doing most of the cooking with guidance from their mothers. Good family activity for this group.
21	08/07 2009	Healthy Eating on a Budget	Women attending walking group at Hainsworth Recreation Centre	5	Two participants had autism but the organizers had not told the presenter this prior to arriving at the venue. Had she known, she would have structured the activities differently.

No.	Date	Topic of Session	Who Attended	# of participants	Outcome / Comments
22	01/07 2009	Healthy Eating	Migrant women in outer Perth suburb (Butler)	10	Well received. Have requested a Supermarket Tour as a follow up session. Women have mixed levels of English so presenters need to speak slowly.
23	26/06 2009	Healthy Food on a budget	Women attending multicultural domestic violence support group	15	Well received.
24	18/06 2009	Healthy Food on a Budget	Women attending settlement service English Classes	6	Well received. Women would like similar workshops on a variety of healthy eating topics.
25	20/05 2009	Vitamin D workshop	Cyril Jackson High School post-compulsory high school students (high number of refugee and migrant students)	50	Highly successful workshop run over several hours with young women coming in small groups as part of the school health fair.
26	07/05 2009	“Check- out” program Mirrabooka Shopping Centre 2 stalls provided: one on nutrition and one on physical activity	Various women’s health service providers in the metro area	100+	Good turn out to this event. Looking at replicating for other shopping centres.
27	05/05 2009	Talk about WHS program and services, especially importance of physical activity	Communicare Clients (settlement service for humanitarian entrants)	5	Well received.
28	02/04 2009	Food Cents	Mental Health Clients at WHS	6	Well received. Women very engaged.
29	31/03 2009	Healthy Food on a budget	African women attending mother’s group	4	Difficult as no interpreter was there. WHS staff were told that women wouldn’t require an interpreter, but they did need one.
30	02/03 2009	Healthy Eating	Public Servants working for Defense for Intl. Women’s Day	20 - 25	Well received. Request for other talks.
31	25/02 2009	Informal chat about healthy eating and physical activity	Women attending WHS alcohol and other drug services with co-occurring mental health problems	5	Well received. Were interested in the brokerage at local pool.
32	Jan 2009	Physical Activity in the New Year. Session also promoted WHS activities	RTR radio broadcast	unknown	Very positive response from radio announcers who will continue to inform the public on WHS services.
33	Dec 2008	Relaxation and Reflexology	Multicultural women’s group (mainly Iraqi women)	6	Well received. Part of final wind up for the year.

5.1 Workshops and attendance (contd.)

Table 2: Blocks of 6 to 8 week Classes

No.	Dates	Type of class	Who Attended	Average # of participants	Outcome / Comments
1	1st term 2010	Swimming lessons	Multicultural Young women attending local college	15 - 18	Well received. We are advocating that these classes be taken over by the WA Education Department.
2	1st term 2010	Swimming 2nd session	Multicultural women	7	Very well received program - continues to be successful.
3	1st term 2010	Swimming 1st session	Multicultural Women	9	Very well received program - continues to be successful.
4	1st term 2010	Swimming lessons (2 classes simultaneously)	Multicultural women from University of WA and Multicultural and senior women living in Nedlands area	4 (max class size is 5 - 6)	Big interest for swimming classes in this area, especially from senior women. Poor access to parking is an inconvenience. Two classes with max five to six run simultaneously.
5	1st term	Swimming	Multicultural women	2	This class will be dropped in future due to poor turn out. The pool is very open to the public compared to the other swimming venues WHS uses and this may be one reason for poor attendance at these classes.
6	1st term 2010	Gentle Exercise	Seniors from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh	20 - 25	Well received.
7	1st term 2010	Gentle Exercise	Iranian Seniors	20 - 25	Well received.
8	1st term	Line Dancing	Aboriginal seniors accessing HACC service	6 - 10	Well received, although the seniors did find this activity tiring and needed to rest between dances.
9	1st term 2010	Yoga	Staff at Diabetes WA	6 (max class size 10)	Large interest to start off with, but people got too busy at work to attend lunchtime yoga. The people that came consistently are interested in continuing.
10	4th term 2009	Swimming lessons	Multicultural Women	Max class size is 6	Still trying to build the numbers up in this pool. This pool can do several classes simultaneously.
11	4th term 2009	Weights/gentle Exercise	Spanish speaking seniors	20 - 25	Lots of fun and laughter - very interactive.
12	4th term 2009	Gentle Exercise	Seniors from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh	20 - 25	Love the exercise - very well received.
13	4th Term 2009	Swimming	Multicultural Young women attending local college	17	Quite notable that this group of students have improved behavioral, communication and social skills with their teachers and their peers.
14	4th term 2009	Gentle Exercise	Iranian Seniors	20 - 25	Always well received.
15	4th term 2009 (6 weeks)	Bollywood	Clients from mental health community outreach program at WHS	3	Many of the women who requested this program were unable to attend due to personal issues as well as issues with children.
16	4th term 2009	Swimming 2nd session	Multicultural women	7	Very well received program - continues to be successful.

No.	Dates	Type of class	Who Attended	Average # of participants	Outcome / Comments
17	4th Term 2009	Swimming 1st session	Multicultural Women	9	Very well received program - continues to be successful.
18	3rd Term 2009	Pilates	Multicultural women	15	Very well received.
19	3rd Term 2009	Gentle exercise/ resistance class	Seniors - Middle Eastern Seniors-(Iranian)	10 -15	Very well received.
20	3rd Term 2009	Gentle Exercise/ resistance class	Seniors (Sri Lankan Burmese Pakistani Indian)	10 -15	Participants greatly enjoyed.
21	July 2009	Hip Hop	Clients from alcohol and drug program at WHS	10 -12	Participants loved it! Will continue in dance studio for fourth term if all goes well.
22	3rd term 2009	1 x Swimming lesson 45 minutes (Pilot program in new area)	Multicultural women	6	Gradually building numbers should go well. Clients happy to continue to patronize for the future.
23	3rd Term 2009	Pilates	Domestic violence clients at WHS	8 - 10	Well received.
24	2nd term 2009	Weight/ Resistance Training	Spanish speaking seniors	15 - 20	Participants enjoyed music and movement - great fun!
25	2nd term 2009	Belly dancing	Humanitarian Entrant women at Settlement service	10	Well received.
26	2nd term 2009	Yoga	Iraqi women through migrant resource centre	15 - 20	Participants enjoyed the social interaction and time out for themselves.
27	2nd term 2009	Swimming 3rd session	Multicultural women	6 - 8 (maximum of 8 per class)	Many now able to swim. Will continue to patronize.
28	2nd term 2009	Swimming 2nd session	Multicultural women	6 - 8 (maximum of 8 per class)	Many now able to swim. Will continue to patronize.
29	2nd term 2009	Swimming 1st session	Multicultural women	6 - 8 (maximum of 8 per class)	Always enthusiastic and keen to learn.
30	2nd term 2009	Belly dancing	Mental health clients at WHS, mums with alcohol and other drug issues accessing WHS, and other WHS clients	10	Participants loved the dancing!
31	Term 1 2009	Chi Gung	Mental health community outreach program	6 - 7	Participants enjoyed the class and found the relaxing movements very helpful.
32	Feb/ March 2009	Belly dancing at Communicare	Multicultural women	6 - 10	Well received.
33	Feb/ March 2009	Swimming Lessons 1st session	Multicultural women	6 - 8 (maximum of 8 per class)	Overcoming fear of water was a great achievement for many.

No.	Dates	Type of class	Who Attended	Average # of participants	Outcome / Comments
34	Feb/ March 2009	Swimming Lessons 2nd session	Multicultural women	6 - 8 (maximum of 8 per class)	Overcoming fear of water was a great achievement for many.
35	Oct/Nov 2008	Body Balance	Multicultural women survivors of domestic violence in Mirrabooka	8	Well received – would like to do again.
36	Oct/ Dec 2008	Tai Chi	Multicultural Women’s Group	5 - 9	Well received Instructor easy to follow.
37	Oct/ Dec 2008	Swimming Lessons 1st session	Multicultural Women’s Group	7	Very well received. Majority of women will do again in 2009.
38	Oct/ Dec 2008	Swimming Lessons 2nd session	Multicultural Women’s Group	6	Very well received Majority of women will do again in 2009.
39	Jan/ March 2008	Chi Gung/Pilates, Belly dancing	Mental Health Community Outreach Program (women with chronic mental health problems)	5	Well received – small numbers partly due to school holidays.
40	Nov/ Dec 2008		Multicultural women survivors of domestic violence in Fremantle	5	Well received. Did only six classes due to end of year activities.
41	Nov/Dec 2008	Belly dancing	Multicultural Women’s Group, Noranda	6 -12	Very well received, lots of fun!

5.1 Workshops and attendance (contd.)

Table 3: Come and Try days

No.	Date	Type of activity	Who Attended	Number attending	Outcome / Comments
1	30/06 2009	Hip Hop	PEPISU Pregnancy Early parenting & Illicit Drug use Program	11 mums	Very well received. Organized a six week course to run in third term 2009.
2	09/06 2009	Yoga	Women attending post natal depression program	6-10	Well received.
3	Jan 2009	Swimming with Mums and kids	Multicultural women survivors of domestic violence and their children	12 adults 18 children	Well received holiday activity. This activity was organized to promote the use of this pool by these families as they can gain free entry under the WHS brokerage system.

5.1 Workshops and attendance (contd.)

Table 4: Bike workshops

No.	Date	Type of activity	Who Attended	Number attending	Outcome / Comments
1	27/03 2010	Social Ride	Women from the Community	12	Very well received, big interest in this workshop from community . Support for this workshop was also received from Bikewest as part of Bike Week 2010.
2	26/03 2010	Learn to Ride a Bike	WHS clients and others- some women from the swimming classes came	10	Very well received. Participants look forward to going on a bike ride.
3	22/03 2010	Learn to Ride	Women from the Community	2	Small group – need to hold workshops in other areas and not just WHS premises. Support for this workshop was also received from Bikewest as part of Bike Week 2010.
4	06/03 2010	Bike Maintenance Workshop and short ride	Women from the Community	9	Well received.
5	19/11 2009	Bike Maintenance Workshop	WHS clients and community women	10	Originally planned as social ride to build on skills, changed to a bike maintenance workshop due to rain, which eased - participants did go for a short ride.
6	12/11 2009	Learn to Ride a Bike	WHS clients and community women	8	Very well received some of the women gained confidence again to continue riding.

Table 5: Walks

No.	Date	Walking activity	Who Attended	Number attending	Outcome / Comments
1	Oct 2008	Araluen Botanic Park Picnic and Walk	Spanish speaking Seniors	14	Well received. Tulip Festival promoted lots of walking to look at gardens.
2	Oct 2008	Picnic and walk at Royal St. Park Perth	Spanish speaking seniors	27	Well received.
3	Jan 2009	Kings Park picnic and walk	Multicultural women survivors of domestic violence and their children	14 adults	Well received school holiday activity.
4	Nov 4 2009	Aboriginal Cultural walk	Aboriginal elders, interested WHS staff and clients, community women	15 children	Well received. It was wonderful having older members of the Noongar community participate in this walk with other women.

5.2 Program objectives and strategies

5.2.1 Program objectives

This section of the report will briefly discuss how the program met its objectives.

Objective 1

To increase women's participation in physical activity thereby promoting physical and mental health and well-being.

Participants reported increased levels of physical activity during the program. Some participants reported that it increased their activity levels by '100%', by providing them with an opportunity to exercise. Participants described physical health benefits as a result of participating in the program, as well as mental health benefits such as reduced depression. The program also provided opportunities for social interaction, building friendships and creating support networks.

Objective 2

To provide relevant health information.

Health information sessions were provided for participants during the funding period.

Objective 3

To provide women with opportunities to learn new skills and participate in physical activity in a safe and culturally appropriate environment.

The program provided several subgroups of women with opportunities to participate in activities in a safe and culturally appropriate environment. Clients were offered the opportunity to participate in group activities with women from similar backgrounds in a non-judgemental environment. Women with particular needs, such as Muslim women, were able to exercise in a culturally appropriate women-only space.

Objective 4

To offer links to mainstream services and advocate on behalf of client groups.

Clients were provided with the opportunity to participate in mainstream programs offered by external services such as public swimming pools or gyms through the WHS's brokerage program. The brokerage program covers the cost of these activities for women and their families, providing an opportunity participate in activities outside of the WHS for women who would otherwise be unable to afford it.



5.2 Program objectives and strategies (contd.)

5.2.2 Strategies

This section of the report will briefly discuss how the program met its strategy targets.

Strategy 1

Provide health information

Thirty three health and nutrition talks were held for women during the project.

Strategy 2

Provide women-only exercise classes

Forty two blocks of classes were provided for WHS clients, as well as three Come and Try physical activity sessions, four organised walks and six bike workshops.

Strategy 3

Provide opportunities to learn new skills

The Come and Try days provided participants with the opportunity to try new activities. Many participants interviewed were trying their chosen activity for the first time. Six bicycle workshops held during the funding period gave women the opportunity to learn how to ride and maintain a bicycle.

Strategy 4

Provide fun activities for families

Five family activity sessions were held over the funding period.

Strategy 5

Provide opportunities to explore the Perth environment

Guided walks offered WHS clients the opportunity to explore several Perth parks. Four recreational walks were held during the funding period. Despite interest in the walking group, the sessions did not attract large numbers of participants; however the groups may be restarted in a different time of the year.

Strategy 6

Provide training and support for instructors and volunteers

During the funding period the WHS recruited five new instructors and offered training to all instructors, as well as students and volunteers involved with the program (other funding from the WA Department of Health was also used for instructor training).

Strategy 7

Provide placement opportunities for students

During the funding period three university students on placements and two student volunteers worked on the project.

Strategy 8

Linkage to mainstream services and advocacy for the client group; and a brokerage program for clients

By April 2010 there had been 201 entries of women and children at the swimming pools who offer brokerage to WHS clients. Families accessing the Mental Health Community Outreach program and the PEPISU program (mothers who are pregnant and/or parenting and using alcohol and/or other drugs) have used this system the most. Starting in January 2010 women accessing the Domestic Violence Services at WHS started using the brokerage at local swimming pools more frequently. Brokerage provides a link to mainstream activities for women who are able to attend.

5.3 Participant feedback

5.3.1 Focus groups

Eight focus groups were held with approximately sixty participants from five activities or groups. The aim of the focus groups was to collect participants' feedback on the activities they had been doing with the WHS, and discuss any changes the program had made to their levels of physical activity. Participants were asked about the benefits of the activity they had been doing, whether they would continue with this activity on their own and what other physical activities they were engaged in.

Most participants experienced social and mental benefits from participating in the program, in addition to health benefits. For many participants the program was their only opportunity to be physically active. The reasons for this were varied. For women with young children a lack of time was a barrier to being active, and affordability of services and childcare were also significant factors. In addition, coming to the sessions with the WHS provided them with an opportunity to do something outside the domestic sphere and with relative independence. For Muslim women, there are few services where they can exercise in a culturally appropriate environment. Affordability of services and childcare was also a barrier for this sub-group. For older participants, the program offered a safe and social environment to exercise. The social engagement was of special value to this group. For most focus group participants, the services offered by the WHS provided an opportunity to exercise in a safe environment with people from similar backgrounds.

A summary of the focus group discussion is provided below with discussion questions highlighted. Comments for participants are included in italics to add support to summary comments. More complete results for each activity are included in Appendix A.

Could you tell us about the activity you have been doing with the WHS?

Participants described the activities they had been doing with the WHS. The activities included swimming, hip hop dancing, working out with light weights, line dancing and yoga.

All participants indicated that they enjoyed the physical activity they took part in. Participants discussed some of the benefits of taking part the class, which included increased confidence, learning new skills and having fun, as well as health benefits such as improved fitness and relaxation. Many participants also enjoyed the social aspect of classes, and the opportunity to mix with peers. For mothers of young kids, the classes were an opportunity to do something for themselves, and for many participants the classes provided them with an opportunity to be physically active, which they might not otherwise have.

"Finding a new side to yourself, thinking you can't do something but finding out you can do things."

Young adult swimming group 1

"Well I find it really good as well, cause I believe I'm really learning a little bit. I believe even if I don't learn, at least I have the opportunity to exercise at least once a week."

Adult swimming group 1

"Before I don't know how to swim but now I know a little."

Adult swimming group 2

"It's really good for the mind, for the body as well. Afterward you feel like your mind is clear, your body is more relaxed."

Yoga group

"I'm thinking if one day something happening in my pool, I can swim, for my safety at home."

Adult swimming group 1

"I look forward to the group... It's lovely to interact with the group here and have a good old laugh... Then I'm home with a nice energy boost."

Line dancing group

"Yeah, I'd say I was more fit while I was going."

Hip hop group 2

5.3 Participant feedback (contd.)

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

Most participants were very happy with the classes they attended. Any suggested changes mostly related to the venue. Some participants wanted the classes to run for longer, and another group would like more frequent classes. As the classes were the only opportunity some participants had to be active, more frequent classes would give them more opportunity to be more active during the week. One group of participants was happy with the activity, but not with the instructor who had led the classes.

“There’s nothing that I would like to change about the program. I think it would be great if we could have it say twice a week... But the way the program is I think it’s brilliant and I feel very privileged to have the opportunity being in a group that’s all women”

Adult swimming group 1

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Only a few participants had engaged in the activity they were doing in the classes before coming to the WHS. For many participants this was the first opportunity they had to do this activity in a safe and supportive environment.

“In Indonesia once, but the coach doesn’t take care of me, I (swallow) water and everything. I really had the fear until now”

Young adult swimming group 2

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS?

All participants indicated that they would continue participating in activities with the WHS.

“Cause it’s something for me. Cause as a parent you’ve got to do so much for your children you forget about yourself. And this, yeah, revitalises you I suppose.”

Hip hop group 1

“I have a very busy lifestyle; it’s very hard to fit this in. So when we come here we know we’re going to do it and nothing else.”

Yoga group

5.3 Participant feedback (contd.)

Would you do this activity on your own?

Only a few participants felt that they would continue with the physical activity on their own. The reasons for this varied. Some mothers of young children didn't have any other opportunities to exercise, and the sessions provided by the WHS were affordable and there was childcare available. For many Muslim women, the WHS service activities were the only culturally appropriate activities they could access that were for women only. Several women mentioned that they did not feel confident going to mainstream physical activity sessions. For other women, they lacked the motivation, time or confidence to do their activity on their own. For the older participants, they appreciated the opportunity to socialise while they exercised.

"I don't think I'd pursue hip hop if it wasn't through these guys. I just wouldn't have the confidence to take myself to a class and ask if I could join."

Hip hop group 1

"I feel like I probably wouldn't have confidence to do it somewhere near where I live or something like that."

Hip hop group 2

"It's also good cause it's got the crèche, I wouldn't be able to do it without the crèche... the cost can be prohibitive as well."

Hip hop group 2

"It's difficult for me at home, I'm busy with my kids... If I join a swim lesson like my kids, I can't because I have to cover up."

Adult swimming group 1

"A: As long as it's private."

B: "We can't join with any people like, man..."

Participants from adult swimming group 2

Do you engage in any physical activity apart from your sessions with WHS?

Very few participants engaged in other activities outside of the WHS program. A few participants engaged in organised activities such as pilates classes, however walking and household duties were the most common other activities. For Muslim women there was a lack of culturally appropriate facilities. Muslim participants suggested that a women-only session in the enclosed pool would be beneficial to them.

5.3 Participant feedback (contd.)

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Participants expressed interest in a wide range of activities. Participants from different groups were often interested in different activities. Women in the adult swimming group were interested in pilates, badminton, cycling, belly dancing and Tai Chi . The young adult swimming group were interested in volleyball, soccer, netball, basketball, floorball, and badminton. The hip hop participants were interested in Tai Chi, or Tai Kwon Do, yoga, or other dancing such as Bollywood. The women in the yoga group expressed an interest in more intensive cardio workouts, such as kick boxing and, in particular, self defence. Body Pump, swimming, belly dancing and boot camp were other suggestions from this group. The line dancing group was likely to return to more gentle forms of exercise such as using resistance bands, and the group leader would like to try Tai Chi with the group. The other group of older adults did not want any changes to their program of gentle exercise with weights.

Other comments

Most participants expressed a desire for their program to continue.

“I’m really happy with the services offered by the centre. I’m really happy with the things they do. Anything offered is as bonus.”

Hip hop group 2

Are there any other physical activities or exercise programs in your area?

Overall, respondents were unaware of other activities in their area that were accessible to people in their target group. Although there were services such as the gym or community centre, respondents did not feel able to attend these services because they did not cater to their particular needs, such as women-only classes or child care facilities. Other reasons were a lack of programs aimed at their specific group. A further barrier to attending these services was cost. In addition, some participants did not feel confident enough to attend mainstream services, and preferred to participate in exercise with their peers in a nonjudgmental environment.

“Don’t be silly... There’s a community centre and a youth centre, but there’s nothing for mums, there’s stuff for seniors, there’s stuff for young children, there’s nothing for families.”

Hip hop group 1

“Yeah I went to one, but you have to pay, it’s like 15 dollars. It’s quite a bit of money if you want to go every week, to maintain it.”

Yoga group

5.3 Participant feedback (contd.)

5.3.2 One-on-one interviews

Eight one-on-one interviews were conducted with WHS program participants. The purpose of the interviews was to learn more about the individual factors influencing WHS clients' participation in physical activity. The clients interviewed came from the swimming program and the mental health program. Several participants also made use of the brokerage program at WHS, and one client who only used brokerage was also interviewed.

The eight participants were from diverse backgrounds and different programs within the WHS. As such, they presented differing opinions and experiences during the interviews. The following will summarise their responses where appropriate, however quotes will be used to represent the diverse experiences of participants. As the purpose of these interviews was to provide more in depth knowledge on particular issues, the interviews will be used more extensively when discussing these issues later in the report.



5.3 Participant feedback (contd.)

Could you tell us about the activities you have been doing with WHS?

Activities with the WHS included Tai Chi (n=3), aerobics (n=1), belly dancing (n=1), cooking classes (n=3), and nutrition sessions (n=3). Four participants had taken advantage of the brokerage program to go swimming. Participants were also engaged in activities outside of the WHS, these included going to the gym and walking.

“I’ve been here since around November last year and the first one that comes to mind was the ‘Healthy Cooking’ around Christmas last year. Basically we were shown different food and drink ideas that revolved around a more nutritious way than the usual ‘stodgy’ Christmas food. I remember we had ‘fruit kebabs’ and ‘mock tails’ and things like that. We had also been given out pamphlets on different menus and food ideas and the ‘healthy eating chart’ which says what foods you have most of and least of.”

“Last year was just aerobic classes, the tai chi classes, that they do at Cannington Community Care. I was involved with that, to me it was very good, cause of my age, so I need something to help me get healthy... On top of that, I think WHS get someone to tell us about the vitamins we need, how to take care of hygiene, the menopause, all these things help you to educate yourself and make you balance up everything. I really appreciate that.”

“I have done, starting with Naturopath and Kinesiology, and before Christmas, Nutrition when Katie showed us how to make meals which are healthy.”

“Well I’ve only gone to the one physical activity group, so that would be 6 months ago now.”

Participants enjoyed the cooking and nutrition classes as they were informative, and provided practical and useful suggestions. Two of the respondents reported putting the lessons they learnt into practice at home when cooking and in the supermarket when shopping. The simplicity of the dishes was beneficial; however one respondent would have liked information on culturally diverse cuisine. She suggested having a session on the flavour principles of foods from different countries such as Indian or Chinese.

“I liked that they were easy, you didn’t have to be trained as a chef to put together some of the dishes, it was because they were so easy that I think you were most able to remember it at home and put it to use. It didn’t take a lot of time to put things together.”

Those participating in physical activities enjoyed the physical and mental health benefits of being active. Physical benefits included improved strength and fitness, and improvements in mobilisation. Mental health benefits included less depression and increased confidence. Several participants reported that participating in physical activity has improved their depression. Learning a new skill was also beneficial to participants. The social aspect of the classes was also important.

Interviewer:

“Do you think going to the Gym has helped your mental health?”

Participant:

“Yes, I used to do class exercise otherwise I would give up ... I used to cry for an hour but now I do it and I’m fine and before I was thinking about my problem. Now, I’m fine, I don’t cry, I don’t think, I actually enjoy it.”

“I want to recommend it to any woman at that time in her life that needs that support, get a support network and to be involved in activities.”

5.3 Participant feedback (contd.)

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS?

All participants would like to continue in activities with the WHS. Other activities were also suggested. These included yoga, pilates, Tai Chi, Qigong, and other relaxation exercises, games such as badminton, and also aerobics and Bollywood dancing.

Would you do this activity on your own, or if it were offered by a service other than the WHS?

Two participants were already participating in other activities such as gym classes. Another participant expressed an interest in joining a gym, but lacked confidence and would prefer to do the activity with a group through the WHS. One participant would be willing to try other services but didn't know of any other women-only services, and another was only interested in the program she was doing with the WHS. One participant said that the cost of other services was prohibitive.

Suggestions and comments

Clients were complimentary about the services offered by the WHS, and their experiences with the service. Several participants commented on the supportive environment at the WHS. Participants offered suggestions for improvements to activities, such as finding an appropriate venue for physical activities, and having a kitchen to learn in for cooking activities. One participant was very keen for other women to learn about affordable nutrition. Several participants were interested in other activities, such as art therapy.

“I think the other girls should see the nutritionist like how she took me to Coles... If they could be shown that as well that would be a good idea... She showed me the difference between stuff in the bags, and when you have you have got it ready, which you don't realise when you go and buy salad in the bag that \$30's a kilo and the other ones \$18... For a lot of the women here, it's the dollar value more than anything else...”

“This is a really good spot. There is no pressure, you don't feel pressure, it's up to the participant which activities you get involved in. It's really good. Everything's been positive from my perspective anyway.”

5.4 Instructor feedback

5.4.1 Physical activity program feedback

Four class leaders or instructors were also interviewed. The feedback from the instructors was collected to learn from their experiences with the groups they instructed. It also provided further insight into physical activity with women in the target group from the instructors' perspective. A summary of their feedback is presented below.

Please tell me about your experiences instructing the Womens Health Services physical activity class.

All instructors found the experience to be positive.

“It’s been a very positive experience. I’ve really liked interacting with the different cultural groups.”

“Really good yeah. And it’s also been, I guess, a bit of an eye opener. Yeah, just a different experience that I haven’t had before.”

What challenges have you faced instructing the class?

The language barrier was a challenge in some classes. Visual demonstrations can overcome this barrier for some activities, however it would be challenging for others. One instructor found that her class with WHS clients was less structured than other classes she ran.

“English was a second language, so I had to explain things very clearly and precisely and give a lot of actual repeated demonstrations... so that people could understand what was happening, but they were really good once they got onto it.”

“I guess the organisation aspect, just in terms of what to introduce and what they’re trying to get out of it, cause it’s obviously not as structured as the usual...lessons.”

5.4 Instructor feedback (contd.)

What successes have you had with the class?

Successes with the classes mainly involved clients learning new skills and learning to trust the instructor. One instructor spoke of the impact of the activity on one client in particular, and felt that the classes had helped this person.

“She said this is the one thing for one day of the week that is actually helping me with my current... issues.”

“I can’t pick a particular moment, but I think in general it’s just been really lovely to watch people grow and try new things, and each person is different. And that’s what’s been really lovely, is that some people learnt really quickly and some people take a bit more time, some people have been learning more themselves and discovered things and go ‘Look what I can do!’”

Did the WHS make you aware, or were you already aware, of the needs of the target group you are working with?

Three of the instructors were made aware of the needs of the group they were working with by the WHS. One instructor was selected by her supervisor to instruct her class, and felt some knowledge of the needs of her group would have helped her prepare for the class.

Did you do any training with the WHS before instructing the class?

None of the instructors participated in the WHS instructor training prior to classes, however three instructors had already worked with their target group and did not feel they needed further training (although it was offered to instructors). Three instructors had already completed training on working with multicultural women, or other groups with special needs. Three of the instructors recommended training for instructors who had not worked with these groups before.

“I think what I was offered was appropriate. I suppose for me it was easier coming in to it because of my background... But other instructors, I think, if they’re not used to different cultural background or special needs groups I think they should take the training...”

“If it was gonna be a different teacher I’d think that I would recommend doing the training that I’ve done and also probably a briefing by the (WHS), I think that that helps, I know there were a couple of other instructors who did it but they only did for a term cause they didn’t really feel that they knew what they were doing, I think that more training helps.”

5.4 Instructor feedback (contd.)

Do you have any recommendations you would like to make for future classes?

One recommendation for future classes was having an appropriate venue for the activity. Another instructor was happy with the way classes were running, but recommended that any new instructors take up the offer of training and a briefing in the needs of the group from the WHS. Another instructor stressed the importance of being flexible as an instructor working with mothers with young children.

Would you like to continue instructing this class or others like it?

All instructors were positive about continuing with this WHS class, or others like it.

Do you have any comments about the benefits of the program for this group?

Benefits of the physical activity sessions included feeling positive, increased confidence and self esteem for the participants, providing a safe space for exercise and also an opportunity for socialisation. All instructors mentioned mental or social health benefits as well as physical ones.

“It all boils down to self esteem, confidence, you know, health as well. It’s good for them to be out there exercising isn’t it, and just to encourage them and make them feel good about themselves even if it is just that one day.”

“The women have told me in the group how great to was to have the opportunity to go somewhere and to meet other women, or go with their friends somewhere in an environment they feel safe, especially being Muslim women... they felt it was a very safe place. So just from their comments and feedback it was very valuable for them to go there and then not worry that they’d run into males or... you know. It was a very safe place for them and they really enjoyed it.”

“I’d have to say the socialising for them, getting together, doing movement is a big part of it, and also being able to get out and meet other people... it’s a big social network for them I would say, they’re getting benefits mentally as well as physically.”

“I think the benefits are that it’s a very safe social environment where they can come, they do enjoy the exercise, they tell me that. It’s an opportunity for them to actually get out of the house. A lot of them... are quite young with 3 or 4 or 5 children, things like that... It’s a chance for them to actually have a few moments looking after themselves”

5.4 Instructor feedback (contd.)

5.4.2 Barriers to activity feedback

One class leader was interviewed to discuss reasons that some women were not able to participate in physical activity. Factors which prevented women participating in classes included having children and being busy, health problems, feeling uncomfortable participating in exercise in a group, other commitments on the day of the class, and lack of transport, motivation and money. However many women who did not attend classes were interested and willing to participate in physical activity. The class leader noted that part of the aim of the physical activity classes is to encourage socialisation for certain groups of women.



6.0

Discussion and recommendations

6.1 Choice of instructor

“For me it’s been a wonderful experience, our teacher is absolutely brilliant, she’s patient, tolerant, extremely understanding.”

Activity 1

“It was enjoyable but I don’t think the teacher was very supportive.”

Activity 2

It became apparent early in the evaluation that the instructor was a critical factor in the success of the program. With the right instructor, the participants gained confidence in themselves and trust in the instructor. However feedback from participants also indicated that the instructor could have a negative impact on participants’ experiences in the class. Activity 1 represents a group who had a very positive experience with their instructor, while some participants in Activity 2 found the instructor did not adequately engage them and they did not get the most out of the class.

“To [instructor], very good, and the word I want to use for (her) is very patient... And she make it as if you are not tense at all, it’s very relaxed.

If I ask her a question she will answer in a very convincing way, that’s why I think you start not to be scared. So it’s very good that we have people like them trying to help us...”

Activity 1

Interviewer:

“What did you enjoy most about the activity?”

Participant:

“The teacher instilling confidence in us”

Activity 1

“She seemed to give more feedback to the girls who had previously done dance, whereas if you hadn’t, she wasn’t really that interested, if you didn’t pick up the moves.”

Activity 2

Participants doing activity 1 described their classes as positive experiences. The described the instructor as being very patient, and helping them overcome their fears. Participants felt safe with the instructor, and trusted her during the activities.

“[The instructor] does explain things very good. She manages to say things which other people don’t, when I have tried before, they said you do this and you do that. She is actually watching you in the pool, and she’ll say it would just be good if you could do this or do that. I don’t even realise I’m doing it, so a lot of the times she picks up things which I don’t even know I’m doing and it’s helping me.”

Activity 1 (one-on-one interview)

“I don’t want to speak for them, cause I don’t really know... I know when they turn up they’re always really positive, they really want to be there so... and they’re always really appreciative of being here and having that opportunity so, that’s what they’ve communicated to me”

Instructor, activity 1

6.1 Choice of instructor (contd.)

Participants considered their success was in part attributable to the instructor and her skills as an instructor. In contrast, comments made by participants from activity 2, reinforced by comments on written evaluations, highlighted the difference the instructor could make to the participants' experience and learning in the class. This instructor singled out one student who she felt was most worthy in the class, and focussed her attention on this participant. However this did not go unnoticed by other participants, who felt excluded. One participant commented that the rest of the girls felt like 'back up dancers'.

"I was very disappointed with the teacher, She wouldn't help any of us except one girl. We couldn't catch up"

Activity 2, written evaluation

"I found it a little difficult when she'd be moving forward on some steps when the majority of the group were struggling."

Activity 2

"I think there were maybe a couple of people in the class who had done dancing so the teacher was really pleased about that obviously... and once they came in that's when the speed of the class moved up a lot because there was catering maybe towards the people who could dance."

Activity 2

When one of the participants tried to approach the instructor about not keeping up with the group, she felt ignored. Several participants also felt that the instructor moved out of 'beginner's mode' too soon, and that perhaps she was used to teaching students at a more advanced level than themselves.

"Cause I remember I picked up the first bit, and then there was that pointy thing that I didn't get.

And then the next bit I got fine, but because I didn't get the pointy bit, I just lost it... And I tried to talk to her about it, she noticed that I hadn't got that bit, but she just completely ignored me and went on. And it's just confusing when you're not picking something up."

Activity 2

"[The activity] was a good idea, I would still like to attend future classes although found the teacher not very [patient with] my beginner experience. Perhaps if I decide to so another term another teacher might be a good idea (since I was informed that although [the instructor] does beginner classes, she instructs students who have a minimum of 1 yr ... experience)"

Activity 2 evaluation

While the instructor felt her role was to encourage the participants and improve their self esteem and confidence, she also spoke of targeting a particular girl, saying that if she made a difference just to that one person then it was worth it. However this affected the other participants and some did not feel they got as much out of the class as they would have liked.

"I didn't learn to [do the activity]... did you?"

Activity 2

"Once there was someone who could, I think she was so excited... She was getting us all to copy and look at this other person instead, and it was good cause that person would be left feeling really good about themselves, but the rest of us were like... We didn't really get as much out of it as we could have"

Activity 2

"I just felt my side of it, on my side of it, my input to that program was to encourage those people in those areas, and um, you know, help with their self esteem, their confidence, basically make them feel good about themselves, in more ways that one... Just that one person you know what I mean, sometimes you can, sometimes I know with some of the others... they wanted to be there cause they said it makes me feel very good about myself, but with her it was different. It was actually hitting home with her. I think if you ran a program like that just to save one person then it's well worth it."

Instructor, activity 2

6.1 Choice of instructor (contd.)

Recommendation 1

All instructors should attend WHS training prior to involvement in any aspect of the WHS programs.

The choice of the instructor is critical to the success of the program. However a person's abilities as an instructor may be due to intrinsic personal differences. Although all instructors were offered training, not all participated. Instructor 1 did not have the opportunity to do any training with the WHS prior to working with this group, but had had some brief training on working with her group from other agencies. It was her first time working with this group. Instructor 2 did not have formal training with the WHS, but felt her knowledge and life experience was adequate for instructing this group.

The differences experienced by participants may be due to the instructors differing styles and focus. WHS could potentially manage this by reinforcing the importance of group outcomes over individual outcomes during all interviews, orientations and training with staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers should always be made aware of the intricacies of the group they are working with, and a nonjudgmental environment should be maintained at all times.

6.2 Individual factors

Recommendation 2

Differences in motivation to be active are often based on intrinsic, individual differences. These factors should be recognised and fostered where possible to overcome personal barriers to activity.

When discussing individual barriers and drivers to be active, it became clear that the main influences were an individual's motivation to be active, and means to be active. Some participants were more motivated than others, and were lucky enough to have the means to participate in activities. Other participants wanted to be more active, but lacked the means (such as money to pay for classes or childcare, or family support).

Interviewer:

*“What got you started on that one?
(Living Longer Living Stronger program at the gym)*

Participant:

“A girlfriend of mine from Balga said that she goes to the Over 55's, I told the Social Worker... and she helped me enrol and get into it”

Interviewer:

“Had you done aerobics before you came to the WHS?”

Participant:

“Yeah, on my own, just a bit, with the CD, the DVD. But no ones motivates you and you can stop, say I'm tired and go and get glass of water. But with [the project officer] around it's motivation.”

Interviewer:

“You have mentioned childcare, is there anything else that could stop you participating in exercise?”

Participant:

“Lack of motivation. Just being tired, just the usual stresses of the day when you've got a toddler.”

6.2 Individual factors

Recommendation 3

It is important to recognise that whilst WHS clients may want to be more involved in the WHS program, they may not have the financial means to do so.

“A lot of the clients are solo mums.... That’s what it really comes down to, is how much support they’re getting at home. If they want to go to the gym they’ve got to find someone to look after the baby, and often there isn’t the family support there. And the cost, it costs money to go to the gym. And a lot are not going to be able to afford it.”

Interviewer:

“If it was not running with WHS would you do this class with another agency?”

Participant:

“I would but it’s a bit hard financially to do anything like that”

“And we were asked if for some of the things if we could afford some money towards it, how much could we afford a week, and it’s starting at \$5” (participant indicated that \$5 was more than she could afford as a starting point)

Interviewer:

“So you said that you were told to go to the gym. Who told you to go?”

Speaker:

“I was at [another service], because I had post natal depression. They had courses through the day and they told me that I should keep busy and also I got involved here ... And they said they had post natal depression classes which are for mums on a Monday and one of the weeks was you had to try different activities and you had to keep a diary every day of what you do and they try to get you to do things, that you go to the gym. The same with [the other service], they say go to the gym; keep yourself busy, so you don’t go around thinking negatively.”

Interviewer:

“How often do you do that?”

Speaker:

“At the moment, I go here Tuesday and Thursday and the gym Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.”

6.2 Individual factors (contd.)

Recommendation 4

Participants should be encouraged to engage in main stream activities where appropriate, however there should be clear guidelines relating to how, when or if transition can occur and how it could be facilitated.

Some participants are confident enough to participate in activities run by external agencies. However others need the support offered by the WHS, and it may not be realistic for them to participate in activities offered by other agencies as long as there is a need for them to be a WHS client. There are additional benefits, apart from the health benefits, to attending physical activity classes with the WHS. For many clients there were mental and social benefits to participating group activities with peers.

“If clients can build up a peer support network and take it out into the community with them... then they start to build up their support network”

Interviewer:

“Can you tell me why some women aren’t participating in classes?”

Respondent:

“It really depends on the actual day... With some of the women and their... issues, they just wake up and they’re not feeling up to it...”

“Going back to motivation... A lot of the clients need motivation... A lot of them want to get out their home environment. If they’re just staring at the four walls they’re not going to get any sense of wellbeing.”

The WHS can assist with increasing motivation for clients. While one-on-one services are labour intensive, many participants are happy to participate with a group of peers at activities organised by the WHS. One instructor suggested offering incentives for women participating in physical activity with the WHS in order to sustain the activity outside of the agency.

“I think you need an incentive.... I don’t know what the carrot could be, maybe a subsidised or free membership to a gym – if you participate in this program at the end of it you will be given free access to a gym for however many weeks...”

Participant:

“Maybe it would be nice for those interested to do a gym day here and there. At least familiarise ourselves with the equipment, that sort of thing.”

Interviewer:

“Get someone to run through it with you...”

Participant:

“So people are more confident in going there.”

6.2 Individual factors (contd.)

Recommendation 5

The Brokerage Program should be clearly articulated to WHS clients. Posters or pamphlets should be developed to clearly detail all aspects of the program and the outcomes expected from those involved.

For clients who lack the financial means of participating in external activities, brokerage provides the opportunity for exercise for those motivated and confident enough to visit a mainstream service on their own. There is some confusion among participants about whether crèche is included in the brokerage program. Several clients who participate in brokerage also take their children along to activities with them. While they appreciate the opportunity for a family activity, the women may not be getting any physical benefits out of the program as they need to watch their children.

Interviewer:

“So when you went were you able to swim on those days or did you have your family with you?”

Participant:

“Yes I could swim as I usually myself and my child, and I would take my mum as well, so I could go for a swim. Otherwise I would be there assisting my child with early swimming stuff.”

Interviewer:

“So you use the brokerage system to go to the pool... How often do you do that?”

Participant:

“We’ve only just started going. We’ve only been a couple of times.”

Interviewer:

“Would you like to make that a regular thing?”

Participant:

“Definitely.”

Interviewer:

“So you go swimming at the pool?”

Participant:

“I can’t swim”

Including crèche fees in the brokerage program can increase the benefits of this program for the women who are attending facilities such as swimming pools. Uniform availability of services at each location, and raising awareness of the brokerage program and its inclusions to all eligible WHS clients will maximise the potential of this service.

6.3 Other recommendations

Recommendation 6

A series of 'stand-alone' physical activity classes should be available for those clients who cannot attend activities on a regular basis.

Attending a full course of physical activity sessions was difficult for some clients. As previously outlined, there were many things which prevented women from attending sessions. For classes such as dance, some participants found the steps difficult to remember. And as classes were progressive, they were worried that if they missed one or more sessions, there was no point going back. This may have accounted for a drop-off in attendance towards the end of the term.

“It was a good experience but if you missed a few weeks, I worried there was no point going back if I missed a few weeks cause I would be too far behind.”

Hip hop group 2

“It’s a bit hard, the steps you know... But it’s a good one to learn, really.”

Line dancing group

To overcome this, classes could still run over a six or eight week period, but each session could be a 'stand alone' activity, where the participant could learn a specified outcome, for example, a few dance steps or yoga poses. These simple moves could change each week, but would not require knowledge of the previous session for the participant to feel competent in the activity. Ideally, there should be an initial evaluation of the skill level of the class, so that activities, steps and tasks are tailored to be skill level appropriate. The graduation to more advanced skills should be done at a gradual pace, so that women who miss a session due to external circumstances do not feel that they are too far behind the rest of the class when they rejoin. The opportunity to learn new skills without being penalised by absences from class can play an important role in promoting participation continuance.

6.3 Other recommendations (contd.)

Recommendation 7

WHS clients should be encouraged to provide feedback to the WHS on their experiences of program activities. There should be an option for feedback to be confidential or anonymous.

The opportunity to provide feedback is a valuable opportunity for clients to be heard. Feedback can assist both the WHS and participants in several ways. The feedback received can be used to shape future activities, increasing their relevance and accessibility. Areas for focus in instructor training can be identified, and if women have perceived individual failure at an activity, there is a valuable opportunity for their sense of self-efficacy to be restored through peer discussion. For some participants, having their opinions heard validates their experiences. The opportunity to give feedback and discuss classes with peers can play an important role in promoting participation continuance.

To assist with collecting feedback the WHS could consider building feedback into the physical activity programs. An extra session, perhaps a week or a month after the end of the physical activity component could be held with participants at their regular session time. An informal group discussion or several brief one-on-one interviews would be sufficient to assess the clients' satisfaction with the program. Feedback could be collected by an external source, or a trusted WHS staff member. If this feedback is collected, it is essential that it is considered when planning future activities.

7.0

Limitations of the evaluation

The WHS physical activity program was a large program run with many groups of heterogeneous women from different backgrounds, coming together for various group activities with peers in locations across the Perth metro area. It was not possible for this evaluation to represent all women participating in WHS activities. This evaluation provides qualitative feedback from a sample of women from several of the WHS's client groups, including migrant women, Muslim women, women who use drugs, women with mental health issues and Indigenous women.

8.0

Conclusion

This report describes the findings of an independent qualitative evaluation of the physical activity program run by the WHS with funding support from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. Overall, participants were satisfied with the physical activity program they were participating in. Participants reported that the program had increased their levels of activity, in many cases by providing an opportunity to be active that they would not otherwise have. Barriers to engaging in physical activity included financial barriers such as a lack of money to pay for services and childcare, a lack of affordable services and a lack of culturally appropriate facilities. Other barriers included personal factors such as a lack of confidence or a lack of motivation. Many women, especially those caring for children, did not have time to engage in physical activity outside of their sessions with the WHS. For these women, the sessions offered them some 'time out' from the pressures of their everyday lives. Other women experienced mental health issues which affected their ability to engage in physical activity.

In addition to providing women with the opportunity to be active, participants also reported experiencing physical and mental health benefits as a result of the program. The program gave participants the opportunity to mix with peers in a nonjudgmental environment, introduced them to new activities and provided the opportunity to learn new skills.



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Appendix A: Focus group summaries

Adult swimming group summary

Two focus groups were conducted with a total of eight adult participants. Women in this group were mostly migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Could you tell me about the activity you have been doing with the WHS?

Participants were asked to describe their experiences with the swimming program. All participants reported positive experiences with the program. Each participant communicated their happiness with the program, and all participants agreed that the program was well managed. In particular, participants were very satisfied with the swimming instructor and the WHS's Physical Activity Project Officer. All participants agreed that the encouragement they received from their instructor was positive. Some of the benefits of the swimming program discussed by participants were increased confidence (n=5), enjoyment of swimming (n=3), making progress (n=3) and learning (n=2), overcoming fear (n=3) and having the opportunity to exercise (n=2). Two participants spoke of a desire to learn to swim which motivated them to join the program; one participant in particular wanted to learn to swim because her children swam in the pool at home. The affordability of the classes was mentioned as a strong facilitator to the women's participation (n=5). Women-only classes were considered essential by all participants.

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

While all participants were very happy with the current format of the classes, two suggestions for improvement were made. The first was to have more frequent classes, possibly twice a week. Participants noted that they were happy with the times the classes were held, as it allowed them time to drop off and pick up their children from school, but felt they might learn faster if there were more opportunities to swim during the week. The other suggestion was to change the day of the classes from Monday, as Monday may be a special fasting day for Muslim women (separate to Ramadan).

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Four participants had swum prior to coming to the WHS lessons. One participant had had several lessons years earlier, but felt that these weren't sufficient. Two participants had tried to learn in other countries, however one had not had the same level of support from the swimming coach as was received through the WHS, and had been afraid of the water. The other participant felt more confident swimming with the WHS program because she was able to do so in a private room.

Adult swimming group summary (contd.)

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS?

All participants agreed that they would continue with the WHS swimming program if they had the opportunity.

Would you do this activity on your own?

Participants had mixed feelings about swimming on their own. A lack of suitable female only facilities was the main barrier to participating in swimming outside of the WHS program. While all women agreed that a female only space was important, it is of particular importance to the Muslim women, who cannot be uncovered in an area where men may see them. This is a significant barrier for this group. A lack of confidence in swimming by themselves was another barrier raised by two participants – one of these participants would swim on her own if she had a ‘buddy’ to swim with. One participant felt she might swim on her own if she had a pool at home. Another participant who did have a pool at home was too busy with her children to swim by herself, but occasionally received lessons from her husband.

Do you engage in any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with WHS?

Three participants engaged in organised physical activity outside of the swimming program, such as fitness classes. The other participants (n=4) did not engage in other physical activities, with one commenting that she was already busy with household duties.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Participants were happy with swimming but some also expressed a desire for more activities. Suggestions for physical activities included pilates (n=2), badminton (n=2), bicycling (n=1), belly dancing (n=1) and Tai Chi (n=1). Another participant expressed an interest in music classes. Two participants agreed that swimming was a big step for them.

Are there any other physical activities or exercise programs in your area?

Four respondents were not aware of any other physical activities or exercise programs in their area. Other services mentioned by participants included those provided by Communicare, and a walking group advertised in the local paper. Participants raised the importance of sessions being held between the hours of 10am and 2pm to allow for school drop off and pick up times.

Other comments

During informal discussion on completion of the focus groups, participants gave some additional feedback on the sessions. One participant suggested that a buddy system would encourage her to be more active, as she would like to swim more often, but not on her own. Other participants felt that the availability of more women-only sessions would encourage them to be more physically active. A popular suggestion was a ‘women-only’ session in the enclosed pool, where the women could come and swim outside of the regular lessons.

Young women's swimming focus group summary

A focus group was held with 16 girls from various multicultural backgrounds including Papua New Guinea, Phillipines, and Japan, all attending a local school. The age range was 13 - 17. The teachers supervising the girls at the pool agreed to provide some background information on the swimming lessons and the impact on the students. The teachers' feedback follows the students.

Could you tell me about the activity you have been doing with the WHS?

The participants have taken swimming lessons for 6 weeks.

What did you enjoy most about the activity?

Participants most enjoyed having fun, learning a new skill, and the activity itself.

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

The girls enjoyed the activity overall, but would perhaps like more time to do it in. They do not have time to eat lunch when they get back to school after the class, and they would also enjoy swimming for longer.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Less than half the class had swum previously.

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS?

All of the girls would like to do swimming again.

Would you do this activity on your own?

Only 2 participants would swim again without the program. Nine girls would only swim again if they could swim with the WHS service, and five were happy to do both.

Do you engage in any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with WHS?

Other activities included school sports, dancing and organised sports.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Activities mentioned were volleyball, soccer, netball, basketball, floorball, and badminton.

What are some of the benefits of the program?

Benefits included making new friends, getting to know each other, learning new skills, and fitness benefits.

Other comments

Several girls thanked the swimming instructor, commenting on her helpfulness, and also the teachers from the school who supervised them during the program.

Teachers' discussion summary

The teachers supervising the girls at the pool agreed to provide some background information on the swimming lessons and the impact on the students.

Have you noticed any benefits for the girls since they've been with the program?

Benefits perceived by the teachers included improvements in swimming skills, overcoming fears, increased confidence and improved body image. Also, the girls had made friends with each other, and are socialising as a group at school. Students are more relaxed generally, and some students have also displayed improvements in classroom behaviour. Another benefit was that as the girls are now able to swim, they are able to participate in school activities which involve swimming, such as end of year trips to a theme park. One of the teachers noted that as international students there was a language barrier; however this is overcome in the water as they learnt the movements to swim.

Has there been benefits to having swimming lessons instead of another kind of physical activity?

The teachers agreed that swimming was a good skill for the girls to have to fit in to Australian society and culture. One teacher related the story of a student who nearly drowned at a friend's house as they assumed she was a competent swimmer. The teachers thought that some information on beach safety (such as swimming between the flags, and information about rips) would be a valuable addition to the swimming lessons. Verbal lessons were not the most practical way of communicating with this group, and the teachers felt that the instructors working with non-English speaking students may benefit from some training in communicating with this group.

Other comments

The teachers noted that the program had benefits for teacher/student relationships. The students have learnt to trust the teachers more as they have assisted them with their swimming. As result the girls have approached them to help them solve problems at school such as racism and bullying.

Weight training group summary

The weight training group was a large group of up to 20 participants. As the group spoke mainly Spanish, an interpreter assisted with the session. Answers were summarised by the interpreter.

Could you tell me about the activity you have been doing with the WHS?

All participants expressed satisfaction with the activity they are doing with the WHS. In particular, the group was very happy with the class instructor. When asked which aspect they enjoyed most about the activity, respondents enjoyed 'all of it.'

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

When asked what changes participants would like to make to make the program more enjoyable, the response was that the program is perfect the way it is, and they don't want it changed.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Participants responded that this was their first time engaging in this activity.

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS?

Participants strongly agreed that they would like to continue doing this activity with the WHS.

Would you do this activity on your own?

When asked if participants would do this activity on their own, they indicated strongly that they would prefer to do this exercise as part of a class. One of the reasons given was the participants enjoy getting together as a group, and appreciated the opportunity to get out of the house.

Do you engage in any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with WHS?

The main activity that participants engaged in outside of the WHS sessions was walking. One participant spoke about his involvement in a hospital based falls prevention program.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Participants indicated that they were very satisfied with the current exercise program. When asked if they would like other exercises added to the current program, they communicated that this was a low impact exercise they could do, and improve over time. They did not wish to add any other exercises to their current program.

Are there any other physical activities or exercise programs in your area?

No participants reported any other exercise groups in their area that they wanted to engage in. They indicated that one of the important aspects of this exercise session was the opportunity to come together as a group.

Other comments

The group communicated that they felt this was the best program, and they were very happy. The benefit of exercising together as a group was reiterated. They noted that they enjoyed training with light weights, and did not want to change activities. The participants had tried Tai Chi, but did not like it as much as the current program. They participants strongly indicated that they do not want to see any changes to the current format of their physical activity sessions.

Yoga group summary

One focus group was conducted with a total of 6 participants. Participants were mostly young Muslim women.

Could you tell me about the activity you have been doing with WHS?

Two participants commented that prior to coming to the yoga sessions, they had a perception that yoga was 'boring'. However they had found yoga to be beneficial. Four participants noted that the stretching was good for their bodies, and three participants reported that yoga was relaxing. One respondent reported that her respiration was improved since attending the classes, and another commented that after classes she felt that her mind was clearer.

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

As the yoga venue shares a room with the child minding facilities, the participants felt that more play equipment for the kids would be beneficial to keep them occupied during classes.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Only one participant had done any yoga before attending the sessions with the WHS.

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS?

All participants agreed that they would continue doing this activity with the WHS next term.

Would you do this activity on your own?

Participants did not feel that they would do this activity on their own for several reasons. A lack of motivation was mentioned by one participant, who also noted that it was easy to get distracted at home. She also felt that without an instructional DVD it would be difficult to know if the exercise was being performed correctly. Another participant commented that she was very busy, and it was hard to fit activity in. However she noted that coming to class was an opportunity to do yoga without distraction. All participants agreed with this comment.

Do you engage in any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with WHS?

Three participants had done swimming previously, but it was unclear whether this had been with the WHS or not. One participant commented that the swimming was not running anymore, but another thought it would be running again in term three. Two participants reported that they walk, but not consistently. Another participant did not participate in formal physical activity, but was busy with house hold duties.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Participants were interested in several other activities. Three women expressed an interest in a more intensive cardio workout. One participant in particular noted that if this was the only physical activity session for the week, she would like to get a more aerobic workout. Participants were also interested in activities such as kick boxing and, in particular, self defence. Other suggestions for alternative activities included Body Pump, swimming and belly dancing. In later discussion one participant expressed an interest in Boot Camp.

Are there any other physical activities or exercise programs in your area?

Only one respondent knew of another free exercise class in her area. She had attended once, but had found the exercises weren't suitable for her.

In discussion afterwards, participants discussed the necessity of women-only classes, highlighting the importance of being able to exercise in an area where there is no risk of being seen by men while uncovered. The need for adequate child care to allow participants' time for physical activity was reiterated. One participant commented privately that she would like more information on being healthy and what that means. Another participant commented privately that she would like information on how to look after her self, and improve her mental health.

Hip Hop group summary

Two focus group discussions were held with two participants at each session. All participants were younger mums. Feedback from the two hip hop discussions will be reported separately as the groups varied in their feedback.

Hip hop group one

Could you tell me about the activity you have been doing with WHS?

The participants describe their hip hop class as learning simple dance moves. One participant said that it is a way for her to get back into physical activity.

What did you enjoy most about the activity?

Participants enjoyed the physical aspect of the dancing. They noted that the class was something to look forward to, and they enjoyed the opportunity to engage in an activity that was for themselves and didn't involve their kids. They also appreciated the chance to mix with other women who were experiencing similar issues to their own. One participant noted that she had put off other commitments to come to the class.

What would you change about it to make it more enjoyable for you?

Both participants agreed that having more attendees would make the class more enjoyable. One participant commented that some 'rules' may help prevent a decrease in class size towards the end of term. Both participants agreed that the venue needed to change, noting the venue needed to cater to dancing students, with mirrors and better ventilation. They were willing to travel to an appropriate venue, and considered that the right venue was more important than the location. They noted that the WHS were very helpful in getting them to the current venue each week. The participants also commented that a later start time may encourage other girls to attend the class.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Neither of the participants had attended any dancing classes before, but had danced in social settings.

Would you like to continue doing this activity with the WHS? Why?

Both participants would like to continue this activity with the WHS. They enjoyed participating in an activity that was just for them, stating that as parents they often put their kids first. One participant commented that the class gave her a reason to get out of bed, and the other noted that her energy levels were increased in the days after attending class.

Would you do this activity on your own?

Neither participant felt that they would engage in this activity without the WHS. The reasons given were that classes were free and easy to get to, and that they felt that activities run by the WHS provided a supportive environment. They noted that they felt that the other women who attend the WHS have similar backgrounds to themselves, and that they wouldn't have the confidence to attend a mainstream class, where they may feel they were being judged. Both participants noted that they feel safe at the WHS.

Can you tell us any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with WHS?

Neither participant was engaged in any planned or organised physical activity.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Participants were interested in doing hip hop again, and other dancing such as tai chi. Other activities mentioned included Tai Chi, or another martial art such as Tai Kwon Do. Yoga was also suggested.

Other activities the participants were interested in were art, and camps. One participant was particularly interested in camps as they found it gave them quality time to bond with their kids.

Are there any other physical activities or exercise programs in your area?

The participants have a community centre and a youth centre nearby but feel that none of the activities are suitable for them – aimed either at seniors or children and not for families or young mums. They note that the WHS offers them everything, and the environment is more supportive.

Other comments

Both participants would like the program to keep running.

Hip hop group two

The second hip hop discussion took place as a less formal discussion and provided different feedback to the first group.

Could you tell me about the activity you have been doing with WHS?

Both participants had done the hip hop class. One had also done belly dancing classes.

Did you enjoy the activity?

Both participants enjoyed the activity; however one felt that the instructor was not very supportive. When asked to say more about this, the participant felt that the instructor favoured the girls who had danced previously, to the detriment of other girls. Both participants noted that some girls found it a struggle to keep up, and one participant said after she had some time away from class due to illness, she didn't feel she could return as the class would have moved on too far for her to pick it up again. The participants noted that if they fell behind in class, the instructor did not give them the opportunity to catch up.

Both participants expressed a preference to learn some dance moves, not just steps that were part of a routine. They felt the level of dancing was beyond their abilities, and would have preferred to learn some dancing basics first. Both participants enjoyed the class in the first few weeks, when there were more stretching exercises incorporated, but with the arrival of girls with dancing experience a few weeks into the class they felt the class became more difficult for the inexperienced members.

Had you done this type of activity before coming to WHS?

Neither participant had done this activity prior to classes with the WHS.

Would you do this activity on your own?

Both participants preferred to do this activity with the WHS for the social aspect of the group. They also felt more comfortable with the WHS than an unknown group, and one participant did not feel confident enough to join another group. The cost was also prohibitive. The crèche also made it easier for them to attend sessions provided by the WHS.

Some participants did get together outside out the WHS service to practice the routine in the early weeks of the course, but this stopped as the routine got harder.

Can you tell us any physical activity you are doing apart from your sessions with WHS?

Other activities included walking. Both participants agreed they were not as active as they should be.

If you could choose other types of physical activities you would like to participate in, what would they be?

Participants were interested in other types of dancing, such as Bollywood. They also expressed an interest in yoga. Yoga was perceived as an activity that could be done at home, and that it wouldn't matter if a session was missed every now and then. One participant noted that any session that could be held on the WHS premises would be good, and that external venues were more difficult to get to. These participants preferred a venue with no mirrors where they could blend in. The participants were also interested in sessions that they could bring their children to.

Other comments

One participant said that she was really happy with the services offered by WHS, and felt that anything offered was a bonus. Both participants did feel fit as a result of going to the class, and particularly enjoyed the stretches. The participants also commented on some of the reasons that other girls in their group did not regularly attend classes. The barriers they nominated were other commitments such as TAFE or kids, or feeling overwhelmed in general. The girls may also be at different stages of recovery from drug issues.

The conversation continued after the discussion was over. One participant felt she had been singled out in class by the instructor after discussing her drug use with her – however the participant did not feel she was judgmental. One of the participants said that she heard that the instructor taught professional dancers (who could already dance), and felt that maybe she was not the right person to teach people at their level of ability. Both participants clearly felt that the instructor had favoured some girls over others, and were very encouraging and complimentary to those girls. They felt it would be better if the classes catered to beginner dancers. They would have preferred to learn some simple dance steps, rather than a routine.

Line dancing group summary

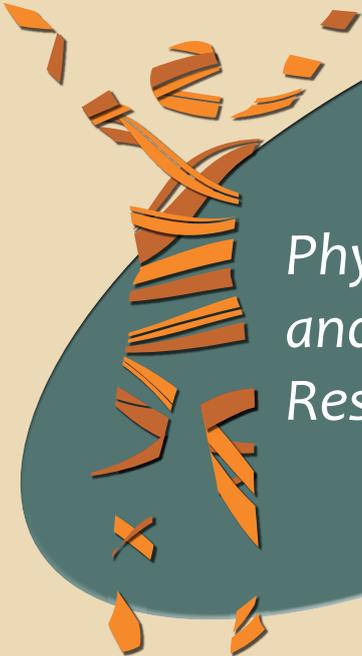
This focus group was conducted with a group of five older indigenous adults who meet every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The group had an exercise class every Wednesday. This focus group was conducted as an informal group discussion.

The group has been doing line dancing classes. Other activities include art and craft, picnics, and movies. One group member mentioned that she enjoys coming to the group to interact, have a good time and a good laugh. They participants have a meal at the sessions also.

In addition to line dancing, a staff member from WHS has implemented an exercise program with the group, which used exercise bands. The group leader thought the group may have preferred the exercise bands to the line dancing. Some participants felt the steps in the line dancing class were a bit hard, but worthwhile to learn. Other exercises include chair exercises and aerobics, however there is a need to be aware of limitations of age and health problems such as diabetes and heart problems in this group. The group leader would also like to try and introduce Tai Chi. She would also like some hand weights for the group, to do some chair exercises. One participant suggests water bottles filled with sand instead of weights.

Other exercises the participants engaged in included being active with the dog, stretching, and walking to the shops. One participant walked round the house, and the backyard – this participant is scared of dogs, and doesn't like to walk on the street. Other participants also walk, often as a means of transport, such as to the shops. Participants also walk at the morning sessions if there are enough staff. Some participants reported gardening as a form of physical activity, and also engaged in house duties; some participants were not able to do gardening due to health issues. Participants also attended 'Have a go' days. One participant does exercise sessions with an Aboriginal health service. These sessions include riding on exercise bikes, walking around the block and hand weights. This participant described how physical activity has helped with her recovery from a stroke.

There are barriers to accessing local activities such as age differences, transport, money and not knowing any one there. The participants enjoy coming to the group activities as they can socialise with people and to get out of the house.

A stylized human figure is composed of numerous thin, overlapping orange strips. The figure is positioned on the left side of a dark teal, rounded shape that resembles a speech bubble or a drop. The figure's arms are raised, and its legs are slightly apart, giving it a sense of movement or balance. The background is a solid, light beige color.

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