



Provision of Therapeutic Boxing for Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit

Description

The aim of the project was to increase access to physical activity on a 10-bed Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (Willows). The Live Team at Highbury Hospital, worked in partnership with a Nottingham City Council project, Get Out Get Active, and local boxing initiative Evolve CIC, to provide a continuous intensive boxing course directly onto the Willows Unit.

Inpatients on the Willows Unit were offered two sessions a week of non-contact boxing skills, through a professional boxing instructor from Evolve CIC, and encouraged to continue participation at the instructor's club with increased support post discharge.

Context

Evidence shows that people with Severe Mental Illness die up to twenty years younger than the average population (NICE 2018; De Hert et al., 2011; Stubbs B et al., 2015). Physical activity could have a vital role in addressing the health inequalities experienced by people living with severe mental illness, in addressing premature mortality, in preventing the onset of comorbidities, and in improving the overall health and wellbeing of this population. (Ashdown-Franks et al., 2018).

The Live Team were initially awarded Sport England year-long project funding in September 2018, to address inpatients requests for increased levels of physical activity across multiple hospital sites within Nottinghamshire.

The boxing sessions were tailored and adapted to meet the needs of the Willows Unit inpatients, as the Unit provides specialist support to high-risk patients from a diverse population. Our objectives for the boxing sessions were to embed physical activity on the Willows Unit; engage the whole ward team; inspire and support inpatients to continue to access boxing beyond admission; improve levels of engagement and improve mood.

As boxing sessions developed, staff observed and tried to capture the positive impact on the ward environment and identify any correlation with a decrease in violence and aggression incidents.

Method

Through a partnership with Nottingham City Council's Get Out Get Active inclusive sports project and Evolve CIC, a Nottingham estate-based boxing club, collectively we aimed not only to engage inpatient services but to maximise the benefit and connect the Willows inpatients to the wider non statutory community sport resources, and demonstrate investment and relevance in valuing our services users by providing best quality to ensure engagement.

The boxing instructor offered an outside perspective and created a different dynamic in the Willows Unit. Boxing skills and breathing exercises were included in the sessions that were offered twice a week. The instructor's approach and personality fostered good team cohesion and had a positive impact on the ward atmosphere each time they arrived, their approach appeared to normalise discharge and created opportunities for inpatients and staff to think about engaging in community boxing or general physical activities post-discharge.

Internally a whole team approach was essential to support the success of this project, inclusive of the Live Team, Willows ward management to healthcare assistants and therapy staff, all who worked collaboratively and collectively, ensuring suitable engagement and safety was maintained.

Outcomes

The impact of the boxing sessions was captured via multiple qualitative outcome measures including an electronic feedback form that sat within an inpatient's electronic note, staff interviews, individual case studies and the Incident Reporting System.

Willows ward staff reported that they observed positive changes in inpatient behaviour and were surprised at the levels of engagement from specific inpatients who had declined offers of other onward activities or social interactions with staff.

Inpatients who engaged in a boxing session were supported by staff to complete a feedback form that focused on the individual's mood pre- and post-boxing session. Results from this after every session showed an uplift in mood for all inpatients, which therefore created a positive impact overall on the ward after the session had taken place.

There were several requests from inpatients to access Evolve CIC's boxing club within the community, post-discharge from the Willows Unit. Details of the boxing club were passed on to inpatients upon this request, as well as Evolve CIC setting up a dedicated session at the club specifically for Willows service users to attend, having one service user attend the club independently amongst the public, beyond his discharge from inpatient services.

Reporting level of incidents: days of session / days not / for engaged/participants / reduced violence and aggression through relieving stressors – why and rationale? Nature of the ward, boxing negative?

Learning points

Collecting data and measuring impact poses an on-going problem and having additional training on this may have been beneficial to all staff involved. All staff and external providers agreed it was hugely successful and identified numerous benefits but this was mainly via discussion and observation with all involved. It is difficult to represent that with evidence particularly in relation to cost effective/value for money and longer-term benefits in health and prevention especially in terms of securing or ensuring this is funded.

The perception of boxing initially created its own barriers with ward staff, with serious concerns about increased risk of violence and aggression, but these were easily challenged when sessions were witnessed in action, and we learnt to anticipate this and reassure staff teams when rolling out sessions on other wards. Additionally, we found that when staff participated in the sessions alongside the inpatients, it changed the dynamic of staff and inpatients' therapeutic relationships.

On-going plans are to continue to roll out across wards, including a dementia ward. The next steps are to seek funding to enable access to more boxing sessions on multiple inpatient wards and for further funding to be sustained via the wards. We hope to further develop links to community boxing resources and support transition to community access for inpatients.

The COVID-19 pandemic did put the project on hold, but the Live Team remain committed to continuing the developments of provision of boxing sessions when safe to do so.

References

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