Foreword

Those who play, follow, love or work in the game will appreciate how football has the power to improve and transform lives. Its benefits, which extend well beyond the pitch can have a significant impact on health and social issues.

I have seen for myself how it can improve physical health, help make friends for life, raise aspirations, increase confidence and bring communities together. And that is why The Football Association is so pleased to host the 10th Anniversary of the magnificent Coping Through Football project.

With mental health issues affecting one in four of us there is a real need for innovation around improving preventative and recovery measures. Coping Through Football demonstrates how a multi-agency approach involving the NHS (in the form of NELFT) and two sporting charities, London Playing Fields Foundation and Leyton Orient Trust, can use football to engage with and improve the lives of one of society’s most marginalised groups. What these three partners have done over the last ten years has been remarkable and is certainly worthy of emulation.

The thing that makes Coping Through Football so special is that it works hand in glove with NELFT to provide four London boroughs with a service with a difference. It uses the environment around the football experience to help people who have deteriorating physical health, low confidence and self-esteem and diminished social skills to get their lives back on track. As you will read in this report some of the results have been stunning and we congratulate all involved.

Greg Clarke
Chairman, The Football Association

Introduction

Coping Through Football is an innovative project that focuses on the recovery of young people and adults experiencing mental health problems with the intention of helping them to live more independently. In doing so the project is seeking to transform and add sustained value to existing community mental health services. Coping Through Football highlights the value of multi-agency working by demonstrating how two charities (London Playing Fields Foundation and Leyton Orient Trust) can collaborate with the NHS (NELFT) to use football to improve the lives of one of society’s most marginalised groups.

The annual economic and social cost of mental health problems is estimated to be £105bn

23% of the national disease burden is attributable to mental health

Suicide is the leading cause of death of men aged 15-49 yrs

50% of all mental health problems are established by the age of 14

The need

Mental ill health represents the largest single cause of disability in the UK. One in four adults experience at least one diagnosable mental health issue per year and tragically suicide is the leading cause of death of men aged 15-49 years. The annual economic and social cost of mental health problems is estimated to be £105 billion, yet despite mental illness accounting for 23% of the national disease burden it only receives 13% of the NHS budget. For those suffering from long term conditions they are at risk of dying an average of 15-20 years earlier than the general population with two thirds of these deaths being from preventable illnesses including heart disease and cancer, largely through smoking. People with a long standing mental health problem are twice as likely to smoke as the general population. With 50% of all mental health problems established by the age of 14, rising to 75% by the age of 24, early intervention and timely access to good quality care is vital.

Project origins

Driven by the obvious needs, the project stemmed from an approach that London Playing Fields Foundation (LPFF) made to NELFT (formerly North East London Foundation Trust) in 2005 to explore ways in which football could be used as part of a recovery model for people in the London Borough of Waltham Forest who were experiencing significant and more enduring mental health issues. With a track record of designing, developing and delivering successful sport based projects where the focus was on wider social outcomes, LPFF believed that a similar partnership approach would work with mental health.

"At the project we encourage each other to get fitter and stronger. It’s a good community group, we chat and have a laugh. I’m working part time about 16 hours per week now and I find that work is good for my mind."

"Since attending Coping Through Football I feel that half of the ‘weight’ has lifted from me. I feel ‘lighter’ in myself. I enjoy making friends and I try to be positive. There’s a huge improvement in my life."

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From the outset the intention was to be transformational and to produce a project that would in time become part of mainstream services and not another “sticking plaster” intervention, here today and gone tomorrow when the funding expired. It was therefore critical that the project had clinical credibility, was shaped by a robust evaluation methodology that built on previous evidence of a positive link between exercise and mental health and was delivered by coaches in a way that did not focus purely on football outcomes.

In the local context of Waltham Forest one of the challenges for NELFT at the time was the lack of engagement from Black 18-25 year old male service users with health professionals. It was envisaged that providing football sessions led by Leyton Orient Trust (LOT) coaches within a community setting would stimulate better engagement as they would not be identified with the stigma frequently associated with mental health services. To ensure that the project had sound clinical foundations fifteen months were spent ensuring that clear NELFT governance protocols were put in place. Pilot sessions began in June 2006 at Leyton Orient’s Score Centre whilst external funding was sought until the project was officially launched by the Minister for Sport in December 2007 at The Emirates Stadium.

**Project outcomes**

With the overall aim of helping participants live more independent lives, the project sets out to:

- Improve physical health and well-being
- Enhance self-esteem and confidence
- Enhance opportunities for improving interpersonal and social skills
- Increase service user confidence and ability to access mainstream opportunities within their wider community
- Reduce reliance on alcohol, cigarettes and recreational drugs
- Provide a route back to employment, volunteering, education and training
- Enhance more positive relationships with health professionals
- Reduce the use of acute care services.

**Impact**

In Phase 1 (2007 – 2010) the impact on 150 service users who were referred to the scheme was remarkable, with 44% of participants moving on to education/training, volunteering and employment. Eight out of ten service users classified as having a dependence on illicit drugs and alcohol, reported that involvement in the project had helped them to remain abstinent or reduce their consumption.

The Evaluation Report produced in 2010 reported that Coping Through Football:

- Provided a service with a difference
- Helped service users get back a sense of identity
- Addressed addiction problems and reduced non-prescribed drug usage
- Promoted smoking cessation and healthier lifestyles
- Enhanced the health and well-being of service users
- Opened up the social world
- Enhanced empowerment

Building on this momentum in Phase 2 (2010 – 2013), referrals increased considerably from Early Intervention Teams and IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) with continued high rates of participation from black and minority ethnic groups (who statistically are 6.6 times more likely to be admitted as inpatients or detained under the Mental Health Act).

Having secured succession funding for Phase 3 (2014 – 2017), Coping Through Football expanded into the other NELFT boroughs of Redbridge, Havering and Dagenham (with a combined population of just under one million) and it was also extended to include 11-17 year olds via Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The referral of participants has widened to include primary care providers such as local GPs and links to acute and inpatient services have been further extended to include escorted provision from both adolescent and adult wards. The project enjoys good links with CAMHS and the recruitment of more young people has become a priority for Phase 4 (2017 – 2020) where the appointment of a Peer Recovery Worker will make a real difference.

**Benefits beyond the pitch**

The Project Coordinator uses the opportunity to monitor service users’ mental health, updating and identifying any concerns. The support provided to participants extends beyond the football sessions with the Project Coordinator working with them to promote a fuller, more independent and healthy lifestyle. These include a programme of health and well-being workshops which address issues such as smoking cessation, diet and nutrition and improving fitness. Dr Imitiaz Ahmad (GP Lead for the project) provides regular football themed workshops on topics suggested by service users.

In addition, on starting with the project and also at review, participants are invited to discuss their aspirations for work, training and study, and identify other activities that they may choose to explore to support their recovery.

**Philosophy**

The football sessions are what draws the service user in and they revenue place where the interface between the service user and their peers and health professionals initially happens. The focus is not on football outcomes such as the creation of a mental health team or league but on the personal and interpersonal aspects of an individual’s journey to health. The project is strongly aligned with the view that more people with mental health problems will recover by having a good quality of life which enables developing a greater capacity to manage their own lives and having stronger social relationships, a greater sense of purpose and the skills they need for living and working. This is based on the premise that the more integrated the individual is, the less disconnected they will become thus increasing the likelihood of a sustained recovery.

**The Sessions**

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**Session delivery**

The six sessions per week which are free of charge and delivered on high quality community pitches are attractive to participants. The project is open to participants of all ages and abilities (ages 13-17 and 18+ participate separately). The Project Coordinator (who is a NELFT occupational therapist), the Peer Recovery Worker and the Leyton Orient Trust coaches work hard to provide a welcoming and supportive environment in which participants can establish new friendships, improve their levels of fitness, increase their confidence and receive support from qualified clinicians.

The project aims for maximum involvement with an emphasis on enhancing self-esteem so as the session ends the participants leave with a greater sense of self-worth and achievement.

**I’m feeling positive in myself and I’ve been working part time. I’d like to start a children’s project using multi-sports to improve their confidence. So Coping Through Football keeps me looking forward and bettering myself.**
The number of:

| Attendees | 162 | 53 |
| Sessions | 197 | 95 |
| Visits  | 2855 | 453 |

Gender:

| Adult   | 95% | 5% |
| Youth   | 87% | 13% |

Outcomes:

| Education | 27 |
| Employment | 16 |
| Volunteering | 3 |

Main Diagnoses:

- Schizophrenia
- Depression
- Bipolar affective disorder

Main referral sources:

- Community Recovery Services
- Early Intervention in Psychosis
- Acute Inpatient Ward
- Youth Offending Service
- Child & Family Consultation Service
- Parent

Ethnicity:

| White  | 11% |
| Mixed | 7% |
| Asian | 15% |
| Black | 18% |
| Other  | 37% |

Notes


Research

There is growing evidence that football-based public health interventions can have a positive impact on emotional, physical and social well-being in people with mental health problems. There are three published studies of Coping Through Football making it the most widely studied scheme of its kind. These describe the range of benefits participants ascribe to the project and how they perceive these to occur.

In the first in-depth study, “A role for football in mental health: The Coping Through Football project”1, participants felt that the project offered a very different experience to previously accessed services as it was not problem focused and offered what might be termed empowerment. One of the strongest outcomes to emerge was increased self-confidence/self-esteem and even what success looks like and how it will be measured.

Creating an inclusive environment.

The use of good quality community facilities where everyone is welcome and service users enjoy a sense of belonging is crucial. Running for 50 weeks in the year, the atmosphere is relaxed, non-judgemental and friendly and for those service users feeling anxious the sessions provide a stress-free environment.

Managing the football experience.

Where possible, the same LOT coach, accompanied by the Project Coordinator, is constantly present and this provides reassuring continuity for the participants. The coach is suitably trained, qualified and experienced and coaches to improve feelings of self-worth rather winning football matches.

What makes Coping Through Football work

- Being underpinned by clinical credibility:
  The contact, referral, assessment, review and governance procedures have been drawn up in conjunction with NELFT and critically the project has the full backing of the Trust’s Leadership Team and Board. The referral pathway is controlled by clinicians making it easy to transfer the model to other NHS Trusts looking for more innovative ways of reducing the reliance on acute care, as well of promoting more recovery led approaches to service user care.

- Being driven by an evaluation methodology:
  Established by Dr Oliver Mason, Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology, University College London, the clear evaluation framework recognises what success looks like and how it will be measured.

- The future

Having reached the ten year milestone we remain committed to continuous improvement of the project and especially to the contribution it makes to young people experiencing the onset of mental health problems.

Looking forward we have two main goals. Firstly for Coping Through Football to become fully integrated within mental health service delivery, so it is less reliant on external funding. Secondly, via the production of a toolkit, we want to promote the Coping Through Football model to other trusts and their local football partners, meaning more people experiencing mental health problems can have their lives transformed through the power of football.

For those of you who have been informed and inspired by this report we would love to hear from you.

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Funders

Thanks to our funders for their support

Phase 1
• Football Foundation
• City Bridge Trust
• Henry Smith Charity
• Capital Volunteering
• London Catalyst
• Trusthouse Charitable Foundation

Phase 2
• Man Group Charitable Trust
• Henry Smith Charity
• LBWF
• NELFT

Phase 3
• The Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation
• Wembley National Stadium Trust
• NELFT

Phase 4
• The Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation
• LB Redbridge Public Health
• NELFT

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