

Aiming High: Sports for All Liverpool Project Study July 2011 Report



Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Acknowledgements	3
3. Headlines	3
4. Who We Spoke With	4
- Women's Group	
- Men's Group	
5. Findings	5
5.1 Types of Activity	5
5.2 Outcomes	5
- What People Are Getting Out of Sport	
- Most Important Outcomes for Women	
- Most Important Outcomes for Men	
5.3 Barriers for All Clients.....	8
- Cost	
- Health & Safety	
- Other Agencies	
- Badly Organised Activities	
- Losing All the Time	
5.4 Barriers for Women.....	10
- Attitude to sports	
- It's a Numbers Game	
- Lack of Promotion & Motivation	
5.5 Open Access or Homeless Specific	10
5.6 Monitoring & Evaluation	11
6. Recommendations	12

1. Introduction

This report is a Project Study into two agencies who deliver sporting activities with homeless people in Liverpool, and forms part of part of a three years study Aiming High - Sports for All, led by Homeless Link, for which Groundswell are providing a peer research perspective. The Groundswell team first visited Liverpool in November 2010 to conduct a Project Study with the Homeless Football League. There was a very positive response to the project from both clients and staff; we particularly noted excellent partnership working, and motivated staff. The cost of accessing local sports provisions and purchasing equipment was noted as a significant barrier, as it was again in this consultation.

Groundswell researchers visited Liverpool again in July 7th 2011, conducting two focus groups with clients and two interviews with staff. This year we made a particular effort to speak with women as in the previous year it became obvious that women were not accessing sport nearly as much as men. Here we gained insight into the differences in how women and men see sport; what they imagine they will get out of participating and what gets in the way of their participation. We also look at what people get from participating in physical activities organised within the homelessness sector and how this compares to taking part in physical activity in the wider community.

2. Acknowledgements

Groundswell would like to acknowledge the contribution of the 19 clients and two staff members who participated in the consultation and staff at Anne Fowler House and the YMCA who gave us the space to conduct the focus groups. Thanks also go to John Finnigan from Field Lane Hostel and the Liverpool Homeless Football League who assisted us with the promotion and organisation of the focus groups and the interviews.

3. Headlines

- **Almost all the men we consulted play sport and almost all the women do not play sport.**
- **Participating in a group.** Both women and men acknowledged the benefits of participating in sport or exercise in a group. The men specifically in the context of team sports and competition, the women in relation to all physical activities.
- **Importance of well organised activities.** All participants discussed the importance of good organisation, especially in regards to timing - a number of people cited 'waiting around' as a reason why they had stopped participating in sport and physical activity.
- **Finance as a barrier.** Especially in regard to participating in activities provided by local leisure centres such as using the gym and swimming pool or hiring football pitches. Covering the costs of transport can also be a barrier for service providers.

- **Different benefits for women and men.** While both groups identify outcomes from participating in sport and physical activity; women indicated that fitness, discipline and exercise are the most important outcomes, men indicated that developing teambuilding skills, diversion from anti social behaviour and diet and nutrition are the most important outcomes.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation.** There is general agreement on what can be achieved through sport but establishing targets and monitoring progress on them seems to only happen in response to the request from funders. M&E not currently used to promote engagement to clients or to establish understanding of outcomes with other providers eg. Job Centre Plus, probation, drug and alcohol service providers.
- **Making Sport Central.** Staff at YMCA feel supported to develop projects around physical activity as 'body' is one of the three elements of the 'YMCA triangle' - the three sides representing: mind, body and spirit, make working on the body central to the mission of the organisation; this is not the case across the homeless sector, where sport and physical activity is often seen as an optional extra.

4. Who We Spoke With

We conducted two focus groups; one with nine men at the Liverpool YMCA, although only some of the participants were not from this project; the other with 10 women who were all residents at the Salvation Army's Anne Fowler House. In addition we spoke with one key worker and one manager from the YMCA.

Both men's and women's groups comprised people who were mostly White British; just over half were between the ages of 25 and 40. Most of the men play sport and most of the women do not.

Women's Group

- One of the women plays sport regularly, five play every now and then, four don't play at all.
- Eight of the women have children. Seven heterosexual, one lesbian, one bisexual, one preferred not to say.
- Five between the ages 25-40, three between 40 and 65, two between 18 and 25.
- Three have a disability, one didn't respond.
- Eight currently not in a relationship, two are.
- Nine White/ British, one White/ Asian.

Men's Group

- Six play sport regularly, two every now and then, one doesn't play at all.
- Two have children, seven do not.
- Eight heterosexual, one didn't respond.
- Five aged 25-40, three aged 18-25, one aged 40-65 (the only one who didn't play at all).
- One has a disability the rest do not.
- Eight White British, one Other White Background.

5. Findings

5.1 Types of Activity

What sports and physical activity do people want to take part in?

The women we spoke with, like the men, have sport in their history – this has been repeated throughout the study- where people, when young, participated in a plethora of sports and exercise, often to the surprise of the rest of the group **“I did karate for six years”**.

Participants were given images of different sports and types of exercise. The idea was to begin the focus group with a broad perspective of what exercise and sport can involve. Participants were asked to talk about the image they had been given and mention a sport or form of exercise they really enjoyed and one they did not. The women’s group had a long list of activities they had enjoyed participating in the past, including: tennis, football, gymnastics, hockey, trampolining, swimming, karate and volley ball. The men talked specifically about sports and exercise they are currently engaged in, including: football, gym, boxing, rugby, running and, in addition, a number of men suggested other activity that they enjoy including handball, field events, volley ball and a couple think that yoga is not bad.

There were a number of sports that women did not like that men are currently partaking in including football, rugby and boxing. Interestingly, while the women talked about sports they ‘hated’, as prompted by the facilitators, the men were more likely to undermine sports they didn’t like: **“there’s no skill in it”, “it’s not a sport”**. Men valued the **‘skill required’** and **‘how you look when you play’** a sport – where as women were less concerned about the activity and more about what you can get out of it.

The women talked positively about having a ‘Fun Day’, modelled on the idea of a school sports day with different games and sports, so there would be something everyone could participate in, with medals and trophies.

One woman talked about the limitations of being pregnant – for her it was less about what she wanted to do and more about what was feasible.

5.2 Outcomes

What people are getting out of participating in sports?

Both focus groups were shown a list, of outcomes people have got from participating in sport gathered in our previous consultations:

- Improved relationships,
- Team-building skills,
- Health and nutrition,
- Diversion from anti-social activities,
- Helped to get more out of my service,
- Led to other opportunities.

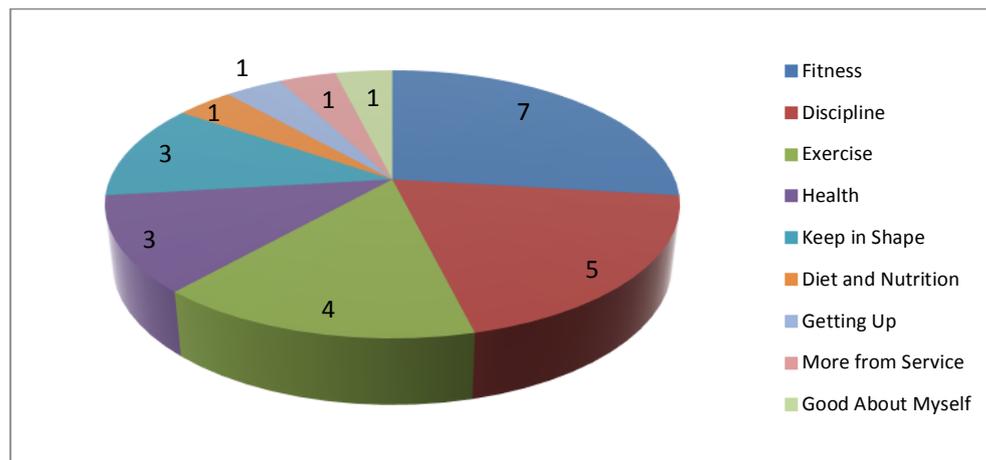
They were given the opportunity to come up with additional outcomes they have experienced – then given three sticky dots to vote on the ones that are most important to them.

Interestingly, the women’s and men’s groups chose very differently with health, diet and nutrition being the outcomes that were common across the groups. Women rated discipline and fitness highest and men selected teambuilding skills and diversion from antisocial activities above the other options. It’s pertinent to recognise that the benefits women value most are those achieved after sustained participation namely fitness and discipline, whereas the outcomes men chose could be obtained through participating irregularly namely team building and diversion from anti-social activity.

Both groups talked about getting discipline and self-motivation from participating in exercise and sport, however despite this discussion, none of the men selected it in their top three. Regarding the benefits of people getting out of the hostel environment, both discussed this issue despite not including it in the voting.

“The biggest problem is we spend too much time in here as it is – the tensions arise”

Most important outcomes from participating in sport and physical activity for women.



Fitness, discipline and exercise were the most important outcomes for the women. Interestingly there wasn’t a great deal of discussion about fitness or discipline, and yet these are the outcomes that seem to be most important for the most women. There was some discussion about diet and keeping in shape, many of the women in that group talked about over eating and while they rated the food at the hostel as **“dead good”** they contributed it to them putting on weight while they were there. One woman talked about watching a film and eating chocolate and how you feel really sickly and bloated afterwards – but after going for a run – you feel really good about yourself. Despite these discussions when it came to voting, ‘keeping in shape’ and ‘diet and nutrition’ were not amongst the most popular choices.

Similarly while ‘feeling good about yourself’ didn’t score high, a number of different women discussed this. One woman in particular talked about feeling **“independent”** when participating regularly in physical activity; physical activity was a way to feel better about herself that was not about taking substances.

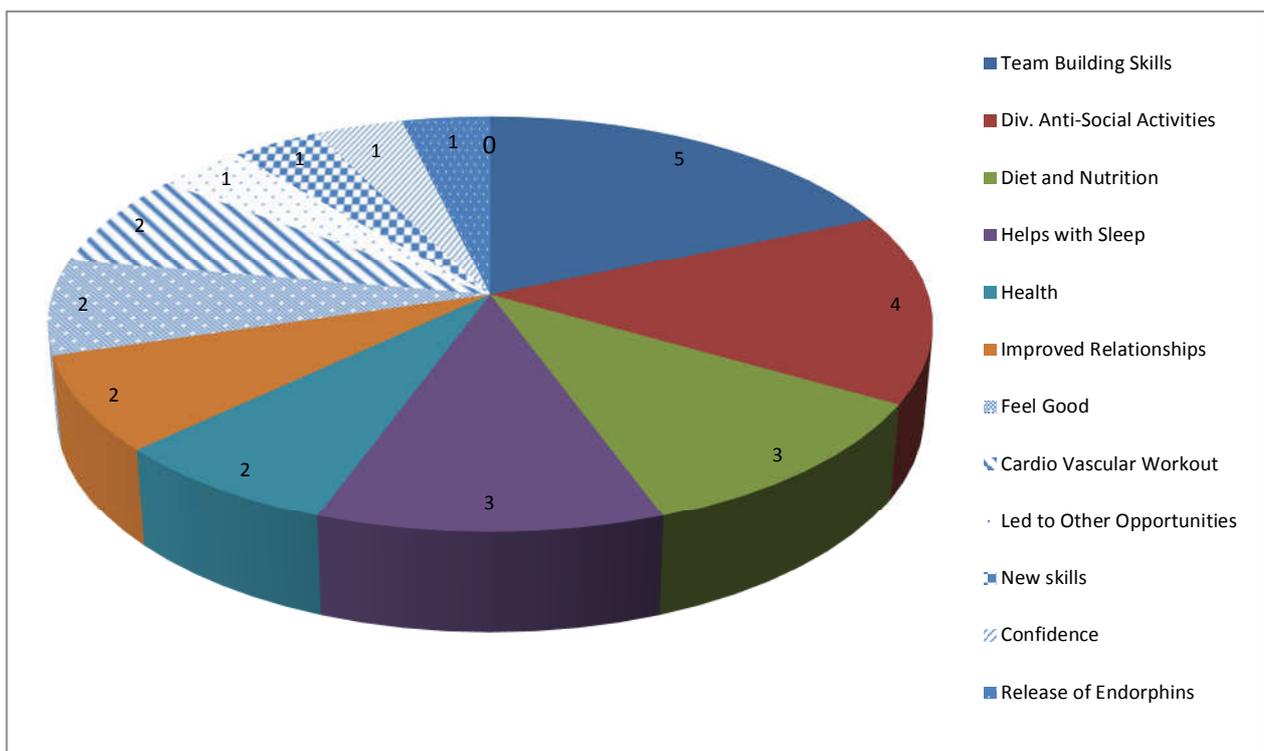
“before I was on drugs I used to do a lot of running – and I remember feeling really good about myself- I remember sitting down, drinking water, I felt dead good- I miss that feeling.”

The women talked enthusiastically about participating in sport and exercise together as a group, specifically referring to swimming and the gym. ***“Women are more into exercise not weights... for there to be something at the end of it... you’ve achieved it, not about winning about being in it together, having a laugh”***

One woman explained that while experiencing homelessness the lack of things to do and the hostel environment slowed her mind down. From her previous experience with sport she believes that the opportunity to become involved again will help to ***“activate”*** her mind.

“I found when I was playing tennis it took a lot of concentration, it sound stupid, but to make sure the ball wasn’t going over the back line and everything, and you’re just sat here and I don’t know about anyone else here but after a few days here sometimes I’m thinking I need something to activate my mind- I feel like brain dead sometimes like there’s nothing to do to keep your mind ticking over”

Most important outcomes from participating in sport and physical activity for men.



Team building skills was rated as the most important outcome for the men. In a discussion on the topic one participant asked what was meant by ‘team building’ and the facilitator explained that some people are not very good at working in a group and some people find that playing sport teaches them the importance of working as a team; another a participant added ***“some people are lone wolves aren’t they, one man bands”*** the participant who asked the original question responded ***“yeah I am, that’s what I’m like.”*** Five out of the nine in the group went on to select this outcome. People experiencing homelessness frequently talk about isolation, many lose contact with family and friend through the experience and are perhaps more likely to see themselves as ***“lone***

wolves” it seems that for this group sport, especially team sport, is an activity that helps to overcome this. This finding is supported by Groundswell’s research from 2010 where all 22 people participating in a questionnaire at a sporting event agreed that playing sport made them **“feel part of something”**.

It was very interesting to see **‘diversion from anti-social activities’** at number two for the men. One man who accesses the gym by himself said that regularly using the gym **“stops me biting noses off to tell you the truth”**. The senior member of staff we spoke with talked about an individual whose experience with sport had made a significant change in his behaviour **“It’s helped him in terms of managing his anger, I suppose it makes people more disciplined”**.

5.3 Barriers For All Clients

The cost of gyms, and transport the quality of equipment

The price of accessing gyms is an on-going theme. As one woman pointed out **“most of us are on £120 a fortnight and £100 goes to the hostel.”** Both men and women were keen to access gyms, though women would want to go in a group, whereas men were happy to access in their own time. While across the country concessions are available for people on benefits, the additional cost for induction (approximately £7.00) and the like makes the barrier too great for individuals. There was a lack of awareness of discount passes to gyms. Most of the women were interested in having access to gym equipment gym mats, skipping ropes, weights one commented: **“even when you go to prison there’s a gym you can use”**.

The women talked about a lack of access to equipment as a barrier. They reported that there were bits and pieces of equipment available **“mind you they do have stuff out there, they do have tennis racquets and stuff like that for us to use”** others mentioned that it was **“kid’s stuff”** and there was not enough equipment to play together.

The men talked with enthusiasm about a cycling project at the Salvation Army, but that had been stopped owing to the bikes being broken and stolen.

In relation to quality equipment, the staff member mentioned a residential opportunity which is obviously expensive to run but believes that the quality of activities, facilities and equipment has a significant impact on the outcomes for clients who are able to access it.

In the case of sport, to some degree, you can get something for nothing – or something for very little. It is true that it does not cost a great deal of money to arrange a kick about on a bit of green space. However if you have expectations around what you hope to achieve with your client group, like any other meaningful activity, arranging sports activities will cost you time; in good planning, risk assessment, organisation – time in being there, supporting, playing, barracking – and there will be a point where seven year old trainers are not going to hold together for another game and your fledgling team needs half decent kit to compete.

Health and Safety

A number of women mentioned **“health and safety”** as a barrier, that at their hostel they cannot play sport because they do not have the insurance for it.

Other Agencies

There was an indication that other agencies working with clients in the homeless sector do not always see the value of sport and, as a result are not prepared to show flexibility in their requirements of individuals. The examples discussed were the JCP - in relation to back to work programs; Probation- in relation to training programs; and Drug services - especially in relation to methadone scripting. While it is clear that these agencies are obliged to undertake their work with clients, and that this work is essential to the clients' development, there is some frustration that some services are not prepared to be more flexible when there are potentially great benefits to the clients in concern. Across services, and individual staff working in services, there does not appear to be awareness of the identical outcomes that various agencies are supporting clients to obtain nor is there acknowledgement of how different activities contribute to delivering an outcome for an individual. Considering the exemplary partnership working with health services, Liverpool homelessness services should be in a good position to pursue closer working with JCP, treatment services and probation to build understanding around shared outcomes, illustrate how sports and physical activities are helping clients to reach these outcomes, and investigate closer working relationships for the benefit of client development.

Badly Organised Activities.

Both groups of clients and the two staff consulted all mentioned the dangers of poorly organised activities – this issue arose when discussing barriers explicitly and also when discussing motivation. It seems that the key worker and one of the clients in the women's group experienced the same scenario where women turned up at a football tournament to wait for two hours and play for 10 minutes. As the key worker pointed out clients **"just won't go back."**

Losing All The Time

While the men who participated in the focus group and also participated in the Liverpool Homeless Football League were extremely proud to show their medals and trophies, it was the key worker who talked about how 'losing all the time' can be a barrier. This came through in interviews from our research last year and can be a significant barrier for a team or an individual that does not have the benefit of playing in a regular league, where both the different levels of skill, attendance and mobility of the population can be accounted for. The key worker talks about the fine balance of keeping teams in a position where they can compete but will not experience losing all the time as this demotivates players. This is especially important to keep in mind for clients who have not taken part in sports or physical activity for some time.

5.4 Barriers for Women Specifically

Attitude Towards Sport

There was a significant difference in the way women and men talked about sport. In the men's group there was a lot of talk about competition and skill, about matches and teams; a couple of the participants brought medals and trophies to show. While in the women's group there were two women who played football regularly, but just with each other in the car park and when they were explaining it, or it was being referred to, people minimised it; calling it "little", **"little game like... little kick...have a laugh... something to do around"**; when asked if they had their own team – there was some laughter and the woman that actually played saying **"yeah – our own 5 a side you know what I mean"** as if it was an absurd possibility. So while the men talked about sport as central to their lives and confident that the opportunities they have will continue to be supported, the women did not display much faith that anything would change in regards to the opportunities they may be offered.

One of the women who currently played sport talked about the way women **see** sport and that there needed to be a change in the attitude towards it – **"I'd like it to be seen as a fun thing, because most people see sports as being a 'eugh God sports'"**

It's a Numbers Game

The key worker we spoke with talked about their efforts to engage women in sport – in the case of football they had brought in the England Women's Captain, provided crèches and had pamper days but ultimately **"It's a numbers game"**. They have 50 beds for men 20 for women **"it's hard enough getting a five aside from the men!"**

Lack of Promotion and Motivation

The women did not feel that the services they are utilising encourage them to participate in sport or physical exercise. While the hostel may not have the resources to facilitate physical activity themselves, they do not seem to promote opportunities in the local area that the women could take advantage of.

5.5 Open Access or Homeless Specific?

In response to the often debated question of whether clients preferred sports and physical activity which is specifically for homeless people or open access to the public, interestingly, in this instance clients themselves and were not fussed either way. To begin with, in both groups, there was some discussion about **"not being judged"** as an advantage of playing with people who were also experiencing homelessness, but as the discussion developed the groups came up with more and more reasons why it was better to play in the 'general public' especially meeting new people.

The women felt that they would be just as happy playing sport or participating in physical activity with other people experiencing homelessness or with people who were not. Not having had experience of something like the Homeless Football Club, they were perplexed as to why it would be better one way or the other.

This being said, in conjunction with the men's group they agreed that there would be **"less judgement because you're in the same boat"** but were more interested in meeting new people, which they associated with participating in sport organised outside of the homeless sector.

A number of the men saw it as a disadvantage that they played with in a homeless sector league because they don't feel like they can "**kick off**" if it's in conjunction with the hostel and indicated that the threat of losing their accommodation curbed their behaviour.

The staff member talked about the opportunity for clients to meet with staff and clients from other local projects. He had experienced situations where the 'move on' of individuals had gone more smoothly as a result of this.

Staff report that the relationship they have with clients out of the hostel during sports activities is a benefit, as it enables them to build a different relationship and clients are more likely to share information they wouldn't otherwise.

"When you take someone out of the hostel for a competition and you relate to them on a different level – they're your team mate playing on the same football team, people are a lot more likely to talk to you and discuss things and while you're waiting around the pitch you're more equals in that environment and people are much more likely not to see you as staff and it breaks down that barrier. We've found out so much stuff through football – abuse, bullying – things that have happened that we would never have found out about ..."

5.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

While the services are under the obligation to monitor activities and evaluate the impact, there is a sense that these monitoring activities take place after the event in order to satisfy the requirements of funders and justify the continuation of funding activities. There isn't an indication that services are building evaluation and monitoring into the activity from the planning stages, nor is it seen as a part of an activities program that clients could have more ownership over. For example we would imagine that involving clients in setting group and individual targets for activities around attendance, levels of fitness, compliance with other appointments even not 'kicking off' and involving them in monitoring of progress against targets set would be an excellent way to give clients ownership and ensure monitoring is central and significant to both clients and staff.

Tracking progress.

We asked staff if they tracked the progress of clients who they had worked with in the past to see if their participation in sport had any long term benefits in regards to their move on from homelessness. Staff indicated that there were a variety of ways they would hear of an individual's progress via workers at other agencies or clients themselves coming back to visit. While this is interesting and provides anecdotal evidence there seems to be enthusiasm to approach this more formally.

6. Recommendations:

Accessing Gyms and Quality Equipment

1. **Discounts.** Research and promote local discounts available to clients for accessing gyms and local sports facilities.
2. **Pay Fees.** Assist clients in paying the registration and induction fees for gyms.
3. **Local Gyms.** Talk to local gym providers about how to increase the uptake of their facilities.
4. **Share Equipment.** Investigate the possibility of homeless sector agencies sharing the equipment they do have with other hostel residents e.g. the YMCA gym.
5. **Bikes.** Investigate the many good examples of bike building schemes in the homeless sector for example: Cambridge Link Up and Bikeworks.

<http://www.cambridgelineup.org.uk/2010/05/build-your-own-bike-project/>

<http://www.bikeworks.org.uk/>

Working with Other Agencies Including JCP, Probation, Treatment Services

6. **Coordinating Outcomes.** When collecting data for monitoring and evaluation purposes, be aware of the outcomes essential to the other agencies that clients work with eg JCP, probation and drug treatment services. This way the case can be made to illustrate how participating in sport and exercise is assisting individuals in meeting those outcomes.
7. **Promote the Positive Impact of Sport.** Promote reports from **Aiming High Sports for All;** that illustrate the impact of sport and physical activity on outcomes especially curbing antisocial behaviour and contribution to employability.

Organisation of Activities

8. **Good Organisation.** Ensure that activities start on time, if it is likely that clients will have to wait for long periods, arrange 'kickabouts' or training sessions that could be facilitated by other clients.

Enabling women to get benefits from sport and physical activity

9. **Working together to promote women's involvement in physical activity.** While only speaking with a small group of women, there isn't the sense that there is enough interest in the one sporting activity to develop something along the lines of the Homeless Football Club. However, it is this sort of partnership approach that would work in delivering sports and physical activity opportunities for women experiencing homelessness in Liverpool.

For example services could offer one day per week, where women can access free/ cheap physical activity. On that day women can access one group activity i.e. aerobics, swimming or gym, and one team activity if there are the numbers and interest on the day. This way, women are free to attend as and when they can and have the opportunity to try different activities.

10. **Other recommendations for women's participation in sport and physical activity:**

- **Women's Fun Day.** Clients proposed a day modelled on a 'school sports day' where a broad range of activities would be offered and medals and trophies awarded
- **Promote opportunities** for women to participate in sport and support them to get involved, utilising notice boards, key working sessions and hostel newsletters. Liverpool has a Sports Development Team and guidance on where to find sport in the community, how to access it and offers discounts for charities.
- **Right Level.** If supporting clients to access local opportunities, ensure they start at a level that is not too difficult in regards to their skill and fitness level.
- **Make contact with the local university** and arrange for women from the hostel to go down once a week for an hour of swimming.
- **Canvas local hostels to measure the interest of women** in participating in an inter-hostel competition in netball, volley ball or football.
- **Deliver some taster sessions for women.** In addition to swimming, football and aerobics women were interested in having access to a punch bag, weights and Zumba classes.

Monitoring and Evaluation

11. Targets. Establish some easy to measure outcomes, for example attendance, and establish targets with clients – report back to them and work with them to consider what can be done to meet targets or whether targets are unrealistic and why. Consider reward programme for meeting targets.

Contact Details

Groundswell UK
1st Floor Lesley Court
23-33 Strutton Ground
London
SW1P 2HZ

Tel: 020 7976 0111
Fax: 020 7233 3674
info@groundswell.org.uk
www.groundswell.org.uk