The Health and Fitness of People with Learning Difficulties in Wiltshire – Consultation Report

Wiltshire Learning Disability Partnership Board

Report Produced by

Wiltshire People 1st

September 2013
Wiltshire Learning Disability Partnership Board

Have Your Say Consultation Health and Fitness

Over the summer of 2013 Wiltshire People First, on behalf of the Learning Disability Partnership Board, undertook a survey of people with learning difficulties to find out about their health and fitness. 131 people from across the county took part.

Summary of Findings

A lot of people (43) said that walking is main or only physical activity.

The majority of people (95) know where their local leisure centre is, but only half go there.

The main reason for not taking part in exercise activities were: cost, not believing that there was a need to or not important, lack of support and lack of transport to get there.

Support is a determining factor affecting whether people participate in a health and fitness activity or not.

83 people said they need support to help them keep active.

Just over half of the people we surveyed said they try to eat healthily, however only half this number reported that they are able to choose and cook their own meals.

People told us they rarely cook meals themselves because their disability prevented them from doing so or due to the fact that their family or carers did not allow them to use the stove as they felt there was a risk of injury to themselves or ability to follow instructions (menus).
The majority of people have a sandwich for lunch and have snacks of fruit, biscuits, crisps and/or chocolate throughout the day.

Only 27 people said they have a cooked dinner (evening meal) every day.

Less than half of the people interviewed said they drink alcohol, and only 3 people smoke. 1 person would like to quit smoking.

Over 100 people visit their dentist, doctor and optician regularly.

On average, 15 people said that they find the information difficult to understand and this was mostly because of long complicated words, language or accents.

45 people have been in hospital in the last 5 years, of whom 38 found the information they received easy to understand.

113 people told us they have support to visit the dentist, doctor and optician. Those people who do not get support for these visits said they would find it helpful.
Ideas to improve Health and Fitness

Participants offered ideas on how they could keep healthy:

- Help from staff and others to understand a balanced diet (good foods) and eating more healthily.
- Better understanding of why it is important to go to the gym or exercise classes.
- Having more information and opportunities to exercise and keep healthy.
- Doing more walking.
- Having more money to do things.
- Having more support to take part in exercise activities.

Keep Fit Group

70 people said that it would be helpful to talk to a group of other people with learning difficulties about how to keep fit and healthy.

Wiltshire People 1st will ask its members if they would like us to set something up.

Please also see the Appendix to this document containing the comparisons made between the results from the 2013 survey and a previous Health survey carried out by Wiltshire People 1st in 2011.
Wiltshire Learning Disability Partnership Board
Have Your Say Consultation - Health and Fitness

Main Findings in Detail

Introduction

National research has shown that people with learning difficulties are much more likely to have poorer health than other people, due to a number of factors including health inequalities and problems associated with unhealthy lifestyles.

A lack of education, income and medical attention may mean that many people with learning difficulties are more vulnerable to poor nutrition, inadequate physical activity and excessive weight gain.

Local small scale studies undertaken in 2006 and 2011 by Wiltshire People 1st confirm the national findings. Over six years later, the consultation in 2013 continues to highlight a number of similar issues but also shows small improvements in some key areas.

What we did

Wiltshire People 1st, on behalf of the Learning Disability Partnership Board, carried out a survey of people with learning difficulties across the county in the summer of 2013, to obtain a picture of how things are now and to assess what progress has been made.

This is a short report telling you what we found.
About the people who took part

133 people took part in the survey.
There were 69 men and 65 women.
The average age range was 36-45 yrs.

Where people lived

We spoke to people across Wiltshire: from Trowbridge (36), Salisbury (24), Devizes (15), Chippenham (14), Warminster (13), Melksham (7), and Other (21).

‘Other’ areas included Calne, Westbury, Bradford-on-Avon, Malmesbury, Swindon, Southwick and those who did not specify.

The majority of people who took part said they lived in Supported Living (54), or with friends or family (41). Smaller numbers of people said they either lived in a Residential Care Home (17), or alone or in their own home (13). 8 people did not answer this question.
Keeping Fit and Exercising

We asked people what they do now to keep fit, where they go and how often they do activities. We also asked how they travel to these places and about support they receive.

43 (32%) people said walking is their main and only activity.

48 people also go swimming, 26 people said they go to an exercise class, 16 people go to the gym, 15 go to a dance class, 15 people said they go cycling (including arm-bicycles), 11 belong to a sports team, and 3 do yoga.

17 people said they do something different to this but did not say what.

People told us they do these activities every day (57), 2-3 times a week (37), or once a week (27).

They travel to these places mostly by walking (68), bus (36), car (23), or by taxi (13).
Out of the 133 people who took part, 95 people said they know where their local leisure centre is.

56 people use their local leisure centre, and 65 people do not.

The main reasons given for not using local leisure centres were: don’t like what’s available (9), do something else instead (8), too busy (5), don’t want to or don’t think I need to (2), can’t get there (3) and cost (2).

Not everyone who said they do not use their local leisure centre gave a reason why.

Of the 56 people who do use their local leisure centre, 26 said they go at least once a week and 12 go less than once a week. Others didn’t say how often they go.

Having the right type of support to take part in activities is important and makes the difference as to whether people exercise or not.

Over half of the people who answered this question (62%) said they need support of some kind to help them exercise or take part.

Of these, 55 said they need help to get to the session, 55 need someone to show them what to do, and 51 need someone to keep them company (due to lack of confidence).

Of the 55 people who said they need help, 15 people need help for two of the above reasons, and 32 need help for all three reasons.
We then asked people: if they are not currently taking part in any form of exercise activity, could they tell us why.

The main reasons given were: cost (25), don't want to or don't think I need to (23), don't know what's available (20), no support (18) and no transport (15).

Some people said their ill health or disability stops them from doing things (6).
Healthy Eating

When asked about eating healthily, just under half (53 out of 133) people said they tried to eat healthily. 60 people said they choose what they eat and cook their own meals.

Most people (124) said they have breakfast; often this is a bowl of cereal and sometimes something else with it.

Only 4 people said they have a cooked breakfast, and 3 people said they do not have breakfast at all.

For lunch, the majority of people (85) said they have sandwiches regularly, on their own or with something else: this included yogurt (9), fruit (9) or crisps and chocolate bars (7).

Only 27 people told us that they have a cooked dinner (evening meal) every day.

18 people said they have chips, pizza or a takeaway, and 2 people also said they had ready meals they can heat up in the microwave. (These were separate to those people who said they have cooked meals).

Snacking:
107 people told us they regularly have snacks during the day, consisting mainly of fruit (48), crisps (26), sweet/chocolate biscuits (18), and cake or chocolate bars (10).
Alcohol and Smoking

Lifestyle

Smoking and drinking alcohol can be bad for our health. We asked people if they drink or smoke and if they do, how often.

55 people said they drink alcohol (either wine or beer).

Some people drink only at weekends (17), some once or twice a week (33) and some people said they had a glass of wine or beer every day (6).

Only 3 people said that they smoke. 1 person said they are interested in stopping smoking.

Most people feel that they are careful about their diet and try to eat healthily. Many people feel that drinking alcohol is bad for you, and most people told us they feel very strongly that smoking is unhealthy, which is why they do not smoke.

Overall, the people who took part in this consultation appear to have taken on board the messages about eating healthy food and are very aware of the risks associated with smoking and drinking, leading to some small but significant changes in habits.

However, people said they ate snacks throughout the day and did not seem aware that this might be unhealthy, especially if they ate chocolate and crisps every day. There seems to be less progress made with regards to taking part in physical activities and using the gym or leisure centre.
Health

Visiting the Dentist

Research shows that people with learning difficulties tend to use primary care services less than non-disabled people. We wanted to find out which services people use locally, and how often they have check-ups.

Most people (114 out of 133) people said that they visit their dentist regularly for check-ups. Of those people, 93 said that they find the information they are given easy to understand. (This information may be written or spoken).

When people don’t understand the information they said this is due to the dentist talking too fast, using too many big words, or speaking in a different language or having a heavy accent.

For the fairly small number of people who do not visit the dentist they told us this is because: they don’t like it or don’t want to go (4), they no longer had teeth (3), or their teeth were ok or they didn’t need to (1).

Visiting the Doctor

Most people told us that they visit their GP regularly (115 out of 133). 9 people said that they only go to the GP when they are ill, others did not answer this question.
Most people (103) said that the information they are given is fairly easy to understand. Information is often provided in leaflets or by speaking to the health worker or professional. However, the majority receive information from conversations directly with the health worker or with the help of a supporter or carer. The reasons given for not understanding the doctor were that he or she either speaks too fast, uses big words or has a heavy accent (4).

**Visiting the Optician**

112 out of 133 people said that they visit their optician regularly for an eye check up. Of those, 102 people said that they find the information they are given easy to understand.

The people who didn’t understand the information mostly said that the optician talks too fast (1), uses words they don’t understand (2), or it is due to their learning difficulty (1).

Not everyone who said they find information hard to understand gave reasons why.

**Hospital**

Out of the 133 people who took part in this survey, 45 said they had been hospital in-patients within the last 5 years. Of those, 38 people said that they found the information they were given easy to understand.

We did not ask about outpatient experiences.

The people who didn’t understand the information said that it was too complicated (1), too hard to read (1), or they kept talking to my sister (1).
The majority of people (113 out of 133) said that they have support from someone when they visit the dentist, doctor or optician. 17 people said they do not but would find it helpful if they did.
General Feedback from Survey Participants

66 people gave us ideas about what they could do to keep healthy.

These included:

- being able to go to the gym, leisure centre or exercise classes (10)
- having more information or opportunities (8)
- doing more walking including organised walking groups (7)
- having more support or transport to make exercise easier (4)
- eating more healthily and drinking lots of water (3)
- having more money to do things (3).

Of the 133 people who took part, 70 people said they felt it would be helpful to talk to a group of other people with learning difficulties about how to keep fit and healthy.
Recommendations

We have reviewed the feedback from survey respondents and consulted with a small group of self advocates.

The following is a list of recommendations to improve the health and fitness of people with learning difficulties in Wiltshire:

There is a need for better information about walking groups, leisure centres and other fitness related services: information should be widely available in accessible formats including Easy Read and large print.

People with learning difficulties say they need more targeted information about keeping fit and eating healthily. Self advocacy groups could encourage their members to eat well and be more active. Day centres could also do more to help their service users.

Support is vital if people are to take part in leisure and other exercise activities.

People with learning difficulties should be encouraged to have regular health checks: reminders and support to attend checks could be provided by the primary care services for those people who do not have family or care staff.

The cost of going to and taking part in exercise or leisure activities can be a barrier to people on low incomes. There should be a Health Pass card that allows people with health needs or on low income to have a number of ‘free sessions’ to try out and use a variety of activities in order to encourage wider participation and increase health and well being.
This report was researched and written by Wiltshire People 1st.

If you would like further copies of this report or in other formats please contact admin@wiltshirepeople1st.org.uk or 01380 879100

Thanks to SISAG and Open Mind members for sharing their experiences with us and helping with the survey.
Appendix

Comparisons made between Health Surveys 2011 and 2013

Wiltshire People 1st carried out a related survey in 2011, and some comparisons between the results from the 2011 and 2013 surveys have been listed below. These comparisons were only possible between duplicated areas of the surveys: the 2011 survey did not ask about health practitioners.

Fewer people seem to be taking exercise by walking than previously: 43 people (32%) said walking is their main and only activity, compared to 75% in 2011.

Support to take part in exercise activities continues to be an important factor, however the numbers have reduced slightly. 55 people (41%) said they need help to participate in activities. This compared to 62% of people needing support in 2011.

There has been little change in the numbers and range of barriers to people taking part in activities. In the 2013 survey, 18% of people said cost stops them from exercising, 15% said it was lack of information, and 16% said lack of support. These figures are almost identical to those from 2011.

The number of people choosing and cooking their own meals seems to be decreasing. In 2013 60 people (45%) said they choose what they eat and cook their own meals, compared to 62% in 2011.
There has been a slight decrease in the number of people drinking alcohol. 55 people (41%) said they drink alcohol (either wine or beer), compared to 53% in 2011.

Of the 133 people who took part, 70 people said they felt it would be helpful to talk to a group of other people with learning difficulties about how to keep fit and healthy. This is 41%, compared to 74% in 2011.
Thank You

A big thank you to everyone who has helped us with this work. Thank you to all the people with learning difficulties who took part in the surveys and gave up their time; to those who made us feel welcome at clubs and centres and for the staff and volunteers who provide services. Special thanks go to:

- Wiltshire People 1st Members
- Salisbury Independent Self Advocacy Group (SISAG)
- Open Minds
- The WAVE
- Ashton Street Day Centre
- Monday/Wednesday Club
- Fairfield Farm College
- Trowbridge PHAB
- Gateway Chippenham

If you would like more information, or to request copies of this report, please contact:

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