

street fit  scotland

# An evaluation of a physical activity and peer support intervention for people experiencing homelessness: Street Fit Scotland

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# Background

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- Street Fit Scotland is a not-for-profit social enterprise which aims to use exercise as a tool to address social isolation and improve general health and wellbeing amongst individuals affected by homelessness.
- Established in 2015 by an experienced homeless project worker.
- Implemented as a direct reaction to noticeable improvements in mental health and health behaviours amongst users of one of Edinburgh's temporary accommodation hostels.

# The Intervention

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- **Recruitment:** Potential participants are invited to take part at the discretion of the staff members, based on individual need, health status and potential to benefit.
- **Staff:** Street Fit Scotland Founder, one volunteer, NHS Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN), qualified fitness instructor, and occasional external workshop providers (Scottish Drugs Forum, NHS).
- **Participants:** Adults experiencing homelessness. Majority are residents of hostels. A number have a diagnosed mental illness, with a minority being drug users or in recovery from drug/alcohol abuse.
- Approximately 15 regular attendees. With a waiting list of over 30 prospective participants, restricted due to personnel and funding.

# The Intervention

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## - COMPONENTS:

- 1) Weekly 60 minute, instructor-led group fitness class
- 2) Free lunch (healthy options)
- 3) 2-hour peer support/health and wellbeing workshop
- 4) Opportunity to access homeless services through staff/CPN



# The Evaluation

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- Independent from Street Fit Scotland (undertaken by SCPHRP)
- Approached to evaluate six weeks into the programme
- Various methodological options were considered, however due to a number of factors such as sample size, timeframe, and available personnel; a qualitative approach was adopted
- Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with Street Fit Scotland Participants
- Interviews mainly focused on participant's experiences since taking part in the Street Fit Scotland programme, specifically with regards to any changes to health behaviours (including physical activity), self-esteem, and mental health and wellbeing

# The Evaluation

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## AIMS

- To gain insight into how attending Street Fit Scotland is impacting on the participant's health and wellbeing, based on their own perspectives.
- Determine which aspects of the programme are important to get right if Street Fit were to be expanded to additional sites.

## OBJECTIVES

- Explore why participants chose to attend the programme
- Explore what impacts the programme has had on participant's physical activity levels and general health behaviours
- Determine whether there have been any perceived effects on mental and physical health due to participation in the programme
- Identify components of the programme which are working well, or areas where improvements can be made

# Results

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- A thematic analysis of the interview data revealed the following:

## **Health behaviours:**

- Increases in self-reported physical activity levels in comparison to before Street Fit Scotland, both on and out-with the programme

*“we have done all sorts we’ve went on walks, we’ve went cycling up at Ratho and that so we’ve done stuff, and I wouldn’t have done it unless I came here [Street Fit] because as I say there’s nothing else to do so, that got me into physical activity”*

- May also be influencing engagement in destructive health behaviours such as drug and alcohol use

*“the working out part is really, really good it’s amazing, makes you feel really good, clear-minded again I keep saying that but I used to smoke cannabis like all the time, constant every...but now I’ve completely cut that out so I don’t smoke cannabis, I’ve stopped drinking alcohol as well. I was always coming into street fit with hangovers and that so I’ve completely excelled myself there”*

# Results

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## Self-esteem:

- Participants generally had very low self-esteem prior to joining SFS. The majority of interviewees reported that this had changed dramatically since taking part in the programme

*“being in the hostel and what-not it did sort of, drop down to zero [confidence], so being here, Michelle [staff member] gives you that confidence, she knows that you can do it, she pushes you to do it because she knows you can. So it does it has given me a massive boost”*

- Having supportive staff members which the participants trust appears to be a major reason for both attendance of the programme, and perceived improvements to self-esteem

*“Michelle is like one of a kind she does 150%, goes above and beyond her job title even at Dunedin hostel like she goes above and beyond what she has to do. She really enjoys her work and you can see it and I suppose it shines through, like it rubs off on us, she enjoys it she enjoys taking part with us and she has the faith and the confidence that we can do it so it then gives us the confidence to do it”*



# Results

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## Perceived effects on mental and physical health and wellbeing

- perceived positive effects of SFS on physical and mental health were reported by the majority of interviewees

*“Well, it’s definitely had a positive effect on my fitness levels and obviously it’s brought my confidence out”*

*“I took my measurements when I started street fit, and I took my measurements now, and I’m a lot more buff and you know I feel stronger and fitter.”*



*“I had a problem with sustaining my moods, like so I was pretty up and down and that quite a lot. But now I’d say it has levelled out because I’m exercising and stuff”*

*“oh definitely, it does [help mental health], it takes your mind off things, it does sort of help you get relief, release a little bit of like stress and anxiety and what-not when you are there because you can’t think about it”*

# Results

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## **Social support and interaction**

- Perceived improvements to social interaction
- Viewed as a valuable support network which is not available to them in other settings (such as hostels)

*“I’d stay in the house all the time didn’t have the confidence to go outside, I felt a lot of like anxiety and this, the gym and stuff helps me with my anxiety really well”*

- Increased access to mental health and homeless services due to the presence of experienced staff

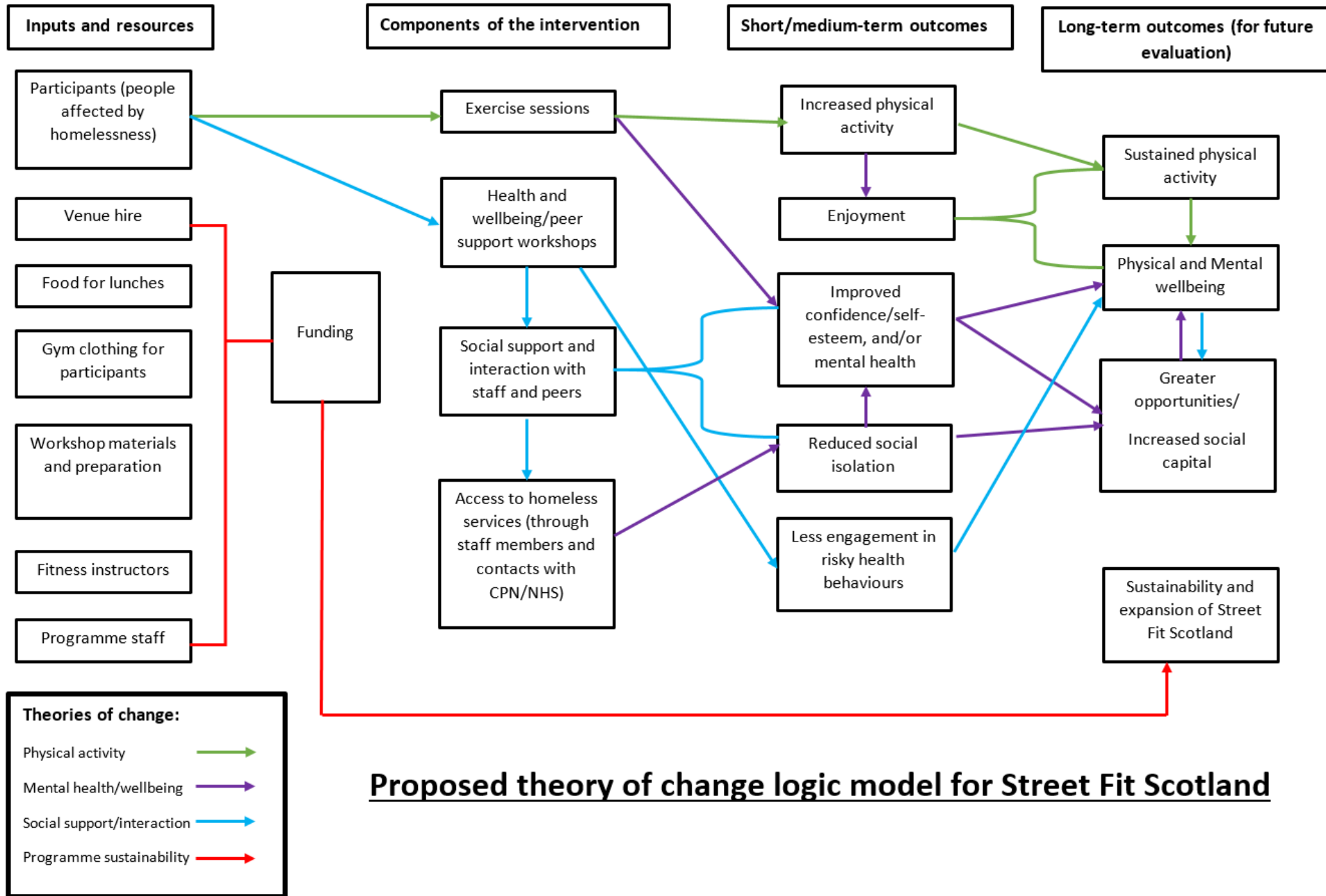
*“I’ve got a social outlet, I’m about people who are like-minded. I’m also getting the chance to work with people, who work with people like myself so like the CPN, psychiatrist and that. So that’s also comforting to know as well that there’s a support network there”*

# Results

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## Identified areas for improvement

- Overall, the feedback was very positive, especially regarding the fitness class content and staff support.
- However, clear areas for improvement were identified concerning the workshop structure, content, and delivery.
- Logistical issues with order of classes, timing, and frequency of the programme were other concerns raised.



**Proposed theory of change logic model for Street Fit Scotland**

# Strengths and Limitations of evaluation

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## Limitations

- Small sample size
- No objective measures of physical activity or anthropometric measures taken
- Lack of a control group,
- Cross-sectional, i.e. no baseline or follow-up
- Potential bias in responses from some participants

## Strengths

- Independent evaluation
- Researcher participation in some classes and workshops to build rapport with participants before interviews took place

# In conclusion

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- Overall, SFS appears to be having numerous self-reported benefits on the participant's health and wellbeing
- Results suggest that the programme is an effective way of increasing physical activity in a hard-to-reach population
- Changes to a number of logistical aspects of the programme could potentially improve its effectiveness
- More planning and resources need to go in to the workshops if they are to have their desired effect

# Expansion of SFS and further evaluation

- SFS was subsequently funded by the Scottish Government through the Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund.
- This has allowed the initiative to expand to a full-time programme of activities and support groups
- Additional members of staff added
- SCPHRP currently looking at options for a larger scale evaluation in the near future



Are you homeless?  
Living in a B&B, hostel or supported accommodation?  
Socially isolated?  
Fed-up with your situation?

Street Fit Scotland offers friendly and supportive exercise classes to build your confidence and self-belief. Improve your mind, health, fitness and well-being!

Just drop in to Street Fit Scotland open sessions. No appointment necessary - just come along!

When	Where	Type of session
Tuesday 11:45am 1pm	Commonwealth pool	Indoor Fitness Studio
	Street Fit Scotland community room	Lunch
1:15pm-2:30pm		
Wednesday 11:45am-1pm	The Meadows (meet us beside the tennis courts) 27/9/17 until 29/11/17	Outdoor Fitness
Friday 11:45am-1:30pm	Commonwealth Pool	Gym Group
Sunday 12:45pm-2:30pm	Commonwealth Pool	Gym Group

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Website: [www.streetfitscotland.org](http://www.streetfitscotland.org)  
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# Thank you

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