



The inclusion of Healthy Lifestyle Coaches within an intensive community mental health rehabilitation service.

Patient Experience Network National Awards - 2024

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The Collaboration

- The Mental Health Intensive Support Team (MhIST) is an intensive community rehabilitation service based across Cheshire (West and East) and Wirral.
- The service supports individuals with complex, severe and longstanding mental health needs to engage with rehabilitative, needs-led community intervention.
- Active Cheshire are a multi award winning charity that aim to engage, educate, enable, inspire and influence the local community alongside a wide range of organisation, stakeholders and partners locally, nationally and even globally to become more active.
- Active Cheshire consists of a small team of passionate individuals from diverse backgrounds and is a commissioned Systems Partner of Sport England.

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The Problem to Solve

- It is well evidenced that individuals with complex and severe mental health needs are at increased risk of experiencing physical ill-health, including an average reduced life expectancy of up to 15-20 years.
- Alongside this, there are increased rates of obesity, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and cardiovascular disease within this population, with little change being noted in the statistics over the last 20 years.
- MhIST, who support those with severe and complex mental health needs, identified a gap in their service provision relating to the physical health needs of the patient population and set out to try to reduce the health inequalities relating to physical health for those they support.

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Where We Started

- The project started with a collaboration and connection between Active Cheshire and the Mental Health Intensive Support Team in December 2022.
- As a service, MhIST offered community-based rehabilitation from a multi-disciplinary team, however, there was limited physical health specific support above and beyond the general recommendations.
- Following identifying gaps in the service provision and gathering baseline data, we worked to secure ongoing funding for three permanent Healthy Lifestyle Coaches (HLCs) across the MhIST service footprint.

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What is a Healthy Lifestyle Coach?

The Healthy Lifestyle Coach Role

- The HLC role is a full time, permanent role within each of the three MhIST locality multi-disciplinary teams.
- The HLCs offer protected and sustainable physical activity intervention – connecting individuals with existing community resources, overseeing physical health screening and 1:1 and group intervention to meet the needs of those accessing the service.
- The HLCs work in a goal and need directed manner, supporting individuals to work towards their health goals, whilst also holding in mind the bigger picture and well-evidence physical health risks that are prevalent within MhIST's patient population.
- The HLCs are supervised by the clinical team in MhIST, with Active Cheshire supporting the role through connections to trusted providers and communities, identifying and funding relevant training and offering ongoing support and advice.

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The Impact

- We've been able to measure changes in physical health markers, including weight, BMI, blood pressure and blood test results.
- We've noted the HLCs having success in engaging with individuals who are otherwise struggling to remain engaged with other MhIST interventions.
- Individuals are now participating in physical wellbeing activities where they weren't previously.
- Our patient cohort and staffing team have received access to resources that wouldn't have been available for them without the additional funding provided through the collaboration.

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The Impact

- The collaboration offered funding, which has supported person-centred investment in:
- Refurbished bikes through a local charity – Bren Bikes. This has enabled increased activity, but also supported with increased accessibility of other meaningful activities, such as accessing employment.
- Purchasing access to activities that promote movement, such as passes for the local zoo and forest, bowling and football matches.
- Gym passes and access to local leisure facilities.
- Measuring tapes and pedometers
- Activewear, including trainers, walking boots and weather appropriate clothing.
- Standing desks

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The Impact



The roles have also supported connection with local community activity providers that support overall wellbeing, alongside developing skills that promote improved overall health and wellbeing (e.g. meal preparation).

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The Impact

- *“The MhIST project is giving me the motivation, confidence and tools to improve my physical and mental health by having weekly gym sessions.” – Patient*
- *“With the MhIST project and Nigel’s sessions I am engaging with the gym. It has me more focused and working around a healthier diet as I don’t want to eat junk food whilst following an exercise routine. The gym and healthy eating are making me want to look after my overall health now.” – Patient*
- *“The HLCs practice what they preach and are valuable role models and a resource that the team would otherwise be lacking.” – Staff Member*

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Learning

- One of the challenges noted during the project was the different systems and ways of working across NHS organisations and smaller community/charity organisations. This led to delays in the recruitment process and impacted timescales within the project.
- There were barriers in gathering and sharing of data across the collaboration.
- The collaboration has highlighted the value of effective leadership for such roles.
- The collaborations has highlighted the importance of flexibility, effective communication and the importance of considering mental and physical health alongside each other.

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Next Steps

- There is ongoing work within MhIST to ensure that physical health intervention and the HLC role remains protected and embedded as a core aspect of our service offer and multi-disciplinary team.
- There will be ongoing work to continue to foster community connections and collaboration to promote engagement in physical wellbeing activities.
- The HLCs are permanent members of our staffing team, and there is continuous and ongoing input to support the day-to-day functioning and ongoing development of this unique role in our service.
- There is scope to consider further training and personal development of the HLCs to meet the physical health needs of our patient population.

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