

Therapeutic Walking and Running Group

Jan Gurung and Danielle Tindall De Carolis
Student Wellbeing and Sports Participation

ABSTRACT

A pilot study for students with depression, anxiety and stress.

To help students manage their mental health by focusing on the benefits and the joy of walking/running in nature.

The NICE guidelines recommend physical activity for mild to moderate anxiety and depression, with activity programmes delivered in groups, supported by a competent practitioner.

Students commit to join the group for 8 weeks.

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Jan Gurung
Danielle Tindall de Carolis
Therapeutic Running Group
j.gurung@shu.ac.uk
Phone: 0114 255 2136

INTRODUCTION

The objectives of the project

- To provide a safe structured NHS couch to 5km programme, led by a Counsellor Run England Group Leader.
- Increase the ability of students to improve and maintain their mental health.
- Reduce barriers for students to join the group and provide an opportunity to talk to other students who experience similar difficulties.
- Educate students how to continue their walking/running outside of the group.
- Provide the opportunity for students to develop social, volunteering, leadership and life skills to enhance their employability.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A mixed methods, longitudinal study

- ◆ The tools of Core to measure risk, PHQ-9 to measure depression and GAD-7 to measure anxiety. Measured pre entry to the group, and after 9 weeks.
- ◆ Semi-structured qualitative research. Focus groups to understand the student experience and to understand what the key factors are in creating changes in behaviour.

The programme is open to students from all faculties and year of study.

RESULTS

Interim findings

100 percent attendance at the launch of the group - on World Mental Health Day.

16 referrals, 10 conversions to join the group
2 x PhD, 1 x Post Graduate, 7 x undergraduates.

Early observations

- **High levels of anxiety prevent engagement and participation in physical activities.**
- **A counsellor supported structured programme creates gateway and safe pathway into the group.**
- **A mixed group of age, experiences and courses creates opportunities for broader friendships and belonging - reducing isolation.**

DISCUSSION

Pre-running

- One-to-one session with Counsellor provides a safe space to explore issues, using Bateson's logical levels, plus motivational interviewing to assess readiness for behaviour change.
- Address barriers to exercise - beliefs about sweating, breathing rapidly and negative scripts.

In the group

- **Track changes in self-esteem, tranquility and post run glow.**
- **Set short term and special event goals for self-mastery. Mastery has been shown to restore hope, counteract catastrophic thinking and increase feelings of self-efficacy and control over environment, which reduces psychological distress.**
- **Highlight the social benefits and experiences of reciprocity.**

CONCLUSIONS

Early indications suggest this is a viable pathway to help students with depression, anxiety, stress and belonging.

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Figure 1. Leaflets



Figure 2. Logo



Figure 3. Running shirts



Figure 4. Run Leader