Delivering sports sessions in residential sites: lessons learnt

The Mobile Me project took place in **fifty-two** sheltered housing accommodation and residential care setting sites in Norfolk. Each site was visited for two hours a week over ten weeks. Residents were introduced to sports such as Boccia, New Age Kurling, Short Mat Bowls and Table Tennis. After ten weeks, the instructors left the equipment for one sport, chosen by the residents, on-site. In many of the sheltered housing sites residents have organised themselves and continued playing, sometimes with the help of volunteers from Age UK Norwich. In most of care setting sites, where residents are less independent, staff have been helping residents to use the equipment with their residents with the encouragement of management.

This document aims is to pass on some of the lessons learnt about the delivery of sports sessions in residential sites for older people – particularly New Age Kurling, Short Mat Bowls and Boccia.

**Ways we found to**

**Encourage residents to come back to the sessions**

* Making the sessions welcoming, and fun
* Enjoying the sessions ourselves
* Using people’s names
* Varying activities across the ten weeks
* Introducing friendly competition (see below)
* Welcoming family members and staff, and letting them join in
* Liaising with staff who would often remind residents
* Checking timings – is there something else on that day, will there be staff around?
* By delivering on site in the resident’s communal lounges, it ensured that sessions were physically accessible and the familiarity of the lounges supported with confidence
* Recap after each session and explain what we’ll do or what the residents would like to do the following week
* Give motives for returning i.e. “you can try and beat Vera next week”

**Ways we tried to make it**

**Competitive but failure free**

* Arranging seating so that everyone could watch play
* Telling people their score after each go
* Writing scores on a board so people could see them as well
* Re-starting the scoring for each game so everyone had a chance of winning
* Introducing other competitive elements e.g. the best shot of the day
* Motivating those with low scores, “you have beaten your last score”
* Keeping it friendly and fun; encouraging clapping and cheering
* Offering the option for residents to play a match against each other or to solely record their own personal score, depending on what the individuals found most enjoyable.
* During Seated Exercise, residents can exercise at their own speed and take rest breaks whenever they need to

**Ways we tried to make it**

**Inclusive**

**Examples of adaptations**

* Playing seated, or holding onto the back of a chair
* Throwing the ball palm down rather than palm up
* Using a ramp, or chute
* Using different words. For example, ‘roll it to the mat’, can be changed to ‘roll it to me’, or to ‘roll it like this’.
* Explaining that do not need to attend each session, and they did not need to ‘perform’.
* Making sure everyone that wanted to, could take part
* Assuming that everyone could play independently until proved otherwise – some people surprised us
* Finding adaptations, but not making a fuss about it
* For people living with cognitive impairments, such as Dementia, explaining things in lots of different ways.
* Normally, double-checking whether people not playing wanted to join in when the play came round to them.
* But also realising that some people would rather watch than play.
* Ensuring that equipment used was appropriate, e.g. ball collectors are provided for groups where collecting them after use would be a barrier.

**Ways we tried to ensure it**

**Strengthened communities**

* Making it clear to residents that it is their session, and we were there to facilitate. So letting residents choose which activities to do, for example.
* Encouraging residents to help out where safe to do so, for example, setting up the room, collecting balls, adding up scores, making tea and coffee.
* If there are residents that need to have the activities adapted, for example, hold on to a chair or use a ramp – after a few sessions I will encourage other residents to help place the chair or ramp so they are able to do this after the 10-week delivery session
* Having a coffee break in the session
* Understanding that, while some sites have an active social scene, at other sites groups may be small, this is not a failure, it’s a start.
* Understanding that we as a delivery agency are entering the resident’s space, and to act in an appropriate manor when doing this. For example, leaving the communal lounge as we found it.
* Understanding the importance of the social aspect of sessions to make resident’s feel comfortable, for example, the friendly and engaging nature of the instructors is key to resident engagement and enjoyment of sessions.

**Ways we tried to**

**Increase physical activity**

* Boccia: can be played with a jack or a score mat. Very accessible and works on most surfaces
* New Age Kurling: Suitable for most surfaces except thick carpet (in which case a vinyl mat can be put down). Pushers available for people who cannot bend down.
* Short Mat Bowls: More technical as bowls have a ‘bias’. Depending on the surface you may need to put down a mat, these can be heavy.
* Understanding that even very small amounts of physical activity may be very difficult for some residents. Rather than setting generic goals, explaining the benefits of keeping active in a way that does not detract from the fun of taking part.
* Where safe, encouraging residents to progress, for example, by standing up when bowling, or reaching down to pick up their own bowls.
* Recognising small improvements and small changes in activity levels, for example, getting up and down out of a chair several times in a session, or walking to a session.
* Pointing out to residents how much activity or sport they had done in the session
* Educating staff about the benefits of physical activity, especially for conditions such as rheumatism.
* Giving residents examples and ideas as to how to include physical activity into their daily life, for example, chair based exercises that can be performed in front of the television of an evening.