

Moving in the Margins

A qualitative study into the role of physical activity in marginalised communities

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Mauri tū
mauri ora

“An active
soul is a
healthy soul”

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity is an essential aspect of health and well-being that has been described as a human right (Messing et al., 2021). However, marginalised groups that are characterised by financial precarity and housing insecurity often experience reduced access to physical activity (Withall et al., 2011). In Wellington, the charitable organisation Wellington City Mission works to reduce financial barriers to physical activity by providing clients with passes to facilities such as leisure clubs and swimming pools, or sports equipment. Prior to this project, no research has investigated the outcomes of such subsidies.

Primary Research Question: *What were the outcomes for clients receiving physical activity subsidies from Wellington City Mission?*

METHOD

Semi-structured interviews with Wellington City Mission clients (N= 12).

Key question

What outcomes have you experienced as a result being supported to be physically active?

Analysis

Interview transcripts verbatim were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS

Wellington City Mission provided participants opportunities for a wide variety of physical activities including swimming, sports, and martial arts. Participants described how they were given the opportunity to **shape their own health and well-being** in four interweaving areas: **mental, behavioural, social & physical.**

Management of existing mental health conditions

“You just push yourself, ‘right I’m going to the gym, I’m gonna do this’... and that sort of kick-starts you out of your depression”

Improved body image and self-esteem

“I don’t hate seeing myself in a mirror... I genuinely would not go outside some days because I just didn’t feel like being seen...but that’s not stopping me anymore”

An alternative to maladaptive relationships

“I know for myself, meeting my friend, it’s been good having someone else to talk to because I cut everyone out of my life that was in the drug scene”

Breaking down social barriers

“All of a sudden, you’re talking away with someone you don’t know, who has a completely different lifestyle...it takes you out of your world”

Mental
Hinengaro Social
Whānau

SHAPING HEALTH

“When you’ve got someone who’s lost weight, quit smoking, wants to go back to work, their faculties all back and is inspired again to start working for herself, you’ve got a win”

“Not only for me, for my kids to see me doing something positive... you can’t buy that”

Behavioural
Whanonga Physical
Tinana

“Instead of walking once around the block, I could walk four times around because of the swimming and it increased my strength in the back...that’s the best bit actually”

“Walking down to the swimming pool on the concrete...it’s very painful, so when I get in the water it’s a relief... swimming has been a Godsend”

Positive outcomes that were transferable to other life areas

Opportunities to role model positive behaviours for tamariki

Improvements in physical fitness

Management of chronic physical pain

CONCLUSION

By providing access to physical activity opportunities, Wellington City Mission have empowered people to positively shape their own health and lives and increase social capital within marginalised communities.

The results closely align with several models of well-being, including the pillars of **Te Whare Tapa Whā model** (including Hinengaro/mental, tinana/physical, and whānau/social) (Durie, 1985) and the psychological needs (autonomy, competence, & relatedness) outlined within **Self-Determination Theory** (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

From a wider societal context, these physical activity outcomes also aligned with tenets of Bailey et al’s (2012) **Human Capital Model** (e.g., physical, social and individual capitals).

RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

There were some challenges in terms of securing interviews, due to the fact that participants often had competing priorities. However, this resulted in feeling privileged to have heard participants’ stories.

THE FUTURE

Supporting marginalised communities to undertake physical activity can reap many benefits. By ensuring ongoing funding to support physical activity subsidies, organisations such as Wellington City Mission are in a strong position to uphold and improve the social capital and the health and well-being of the people in these communities.

“I can feel the aroha in this building and it definitely, you know, what you give is what you get back, so it’s helping to build everyone in the community to become better and stronger as a unit.”

RESEARCH IMPACT

Brings scientific inquiry and rigor to a community setting



Giving communities a voice to be heard



Highlights the social impact of the work of organisations such as Wellington City Mission



Provides an evidence base for the purpose of future funding for physical activity



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WELLINGTON