



Converge: educational opportunities for people who use mental health services

**Outcomes and evidence
2013-14**

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Outcomes and evidence 2013-14

Report summary

Converge offers educational opportunities to people who use mental health services. The following document sets out our outcomes for the academic year 2013-2014.

Converge offered 18 courses and provided 360 hours of direct teaching contact.

There were a total of 104 people registrations from 59 individuals for our completed courses.

We recorded 406 instances of support given to Converge students. ([Appendix 1](#))

We involved 57 university students in the delivery of courses and the support of participants.

Converge is committed to providing robust evidence for the efficacy of its provision; however, with such a varied and complex intervention, it is difficult to adopt one measure that would demonstrate its impact on the mental health and wellbeing of participants. Accordingly, we provide a range of evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, which suggests that Converge is having a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing.

The following is a summary of our findings:

Attendance and retention: 76.6% of people who started our courses completed them. We achieved 81% attendance to our classes.

NHS mental health service usage: we conducted a pilot study of six Converge students, which measured NHS mental health service usage over a period before and during involvement in Converge. Five of the six students have significantly reduced their use of NHS mental health services following involvement in the project.

My next step interviews: twenty-one Converge students participated in *My next step* interviews and were supported in achieving their personal goals in creative arts/education. Of these, 17 achieved their goals, three are in the process of working towards their goals and one was unable to continue due to personal circumstances.

Evidence of progression and enhancement: evidence of the progression and enhancement of Converge students.

Distance travelled interviews: six interviews with Converge students provide evidence for the impact of the project on the mental health and wellbeing of participants. ([Appendix 2](#))

Results of a Discover consultation event: Converge students contributed their views to the North Yorkshire CCG 'Discover' consultation initiative.

Evaluation of a course in sports exercise: this report provides compelling evidence for the impact of engagement in sports exercise. ([Appendix 3](#))

Highlights for 2013-14

- Converge was shortlisted for The Times Higher Education Award, *Excellence and innovation in the Arts*.
- We have conducted 21 *My next step* interviews this year.
- Six Converge students have moved on to higher education.
- Converge students now have library membership and Associate Student status through the Students' Union.
- Over 50 Converge students performed or exhibited their work at the York St John University *Create 14 Arts Festival* and the *Love Arts York Festival* to a combined audience of over 100 people, both on campus and at prestigious external venues (York Theatre Royal and The Guildhall, York).
- The Converge choir has performed at three public venues; The National Railway Museum, York; The Guildhall, York, and the Leeds and York Partnerships Foundation Trust annual members' meeting and Trust Awards at York Racecourse.
- *Out of Character* theatre company performed *More tales from Kafka* to a combined audience of 150.
- *Out of Character* theatre company performed at *The International Network towards Alternatives and Recovery Conference* at Liverpool University in June 2014.
- We completed and evaluated our first *Health body, healthy mind* course. Fifteen participants attended at least one session.
- We appointed Peter Byrom-Smith as our 'Composer in Residence'.
- Converge was awarded £8,000 by the Santander Trust to develop courses for mental health service users in 'Starting your own business'.
- Twenty creative writing students and staff attended a *York Literature Festival* poetry event, featuring Roger McGough, and they were given the opportunity to meet him before the event.
- NOISE (a charity for promoting work within the creative industries) has given tutorials to Converge students in developing on-line portfolios of work.
- Converge published its first newsletter (edited by a York St John University creative writing graduate) and it was distributed to over 100 NHS staff, key-workers, service users and their families.
- The Converge mentor scheme was set up in November and has nine Converge students involved. Mentors have promoted Converge to several local mental health organisations and acted as masters of ceremonies at Converge events.

1. Attendance and retention figures

Converge Course	AUTUMN 2013		SPRING 2014	
	Number of student places offered	Number of students completing	Number of student places offered	Number of students completing (university students)
Contemporary art	5	3	9	6 (1)
Fine art	12	11	15	13 (6)
Musical development	17	12	14	10 (2)
Communitas Choir	24	19	29	21 (14)
Dance	9	6	11	6 (3)
Creative writing	11	8	17	12 (4)
Theatre	14	10	16	14 (4)
<i>Out of Character</i> theatre company	14	14	14	14 (5)
Music - improvisation to composition/performance	10	8	14	8 (6)
Student numbers	116	91	139	104 (59 individuals)
Retention as a percentage	78.45		74.82	

2. *My next step* interviews

During the academic year, 21 students participated in *My next step* interviews and were supported in achieving their personal goals in the creative arts/education. Of these, 17 achieved their goals, three are in the process of working towards their goals and one was unable to continue due to personal circumstances.

Below are examples of Converge student achievements during the academic year (with the support of Converge staff, mentors and university student Buddies).

Developing confidence as a writer and gaining qualifications:

Student number: 58 (creative writing student)

Personal aims:

The student's aim was to improve her computer skills and perform a creative writing piece at *Create14/Love Arts*.

How these were achieved:

Creative writing performance: On starting the creative writing course in January, the student had anxieties about being in a group and starting a subject she had not done since school. The Support and Progression Worker arranged for her to meet some of the mentors and York St John University student Buddies on the course beforehand for a cup of tea for the first few weeks to try to ease her anxieties. During the first sessions she hardly participated in the course, but after three or four weeks she began to participate fully and read some of her work out. Throughout the course, there was regular (phone/text/email) correspondence between her and the Support and Progression Worker and the Administrator to ensure that there was enough support and that the student was happy to continue with the course. For her performance at *Create14/Love Arts* in May, she met with an occupational therapy student on placement to rehearse her piece. The student also supported her on the day of her performance.

Improving computer skills: The student met with the Support and Progression Worker in April and was sign-posted to courses in the area. From this meeting, she decided to study a Computer Literacy and Information Technology course (CLAIT) with *Mind* (the mental health charity). The Support and Progression Worker arranged a meeting with *Mind* and accompanied her to the meeting at her request. She started the course in May and is still attending, having gained 100% in her first exam.

Next steps:

The student's next steps would be to continue participating in the creative writing course and to perform more of her own work. She would also like to continue participating in the CLAIT course and look into doing further courses with the long-term aim of gaining employment in this area.

Feedback from student: 'So, (giving you) the card was just a small way of showing my thanks. I won't say that accepting all your help has been easy, but you lot have made it easier. That takes some doing, believe me. You all do an amazing job.' (text message 13/06/14).

Applying to university and starting a degree course:

Student number: 8 (Converge mentor, art student, member of Communitas, actor with *Out of Character*).

Personal aim:

The student's aim was to apply to university as an undergraduate.

How this was achieved:

This student had previously begun a university course, but had left it because of ongoing mental health problems and a lack of financial support. There were several

meetings with the Support and Progression Worker where they had comprehensive discussions about course type, long-term ambitions, location, academic requirements, financial, social and mental health support and the realities of university life. She decided to apply for a BA (Hons) in Youth and Community Work. The Support and Progression Worker assisted her with writing a UCAS university application and sign-posted her to Student Advice Services in order to find out what support she was entitled to. Access to York St John University wi-fi was set up so that she could work online and check emails whilst on campus. When she received an interview date, an occupational therapy student on placement with Converge did a mock interview with her.

Next step:

The student's next step is to start her undergraduate degree in Youth and Community Work in September 2014. She has been given the option to continue with Converge as a Buddy.

Other achievements:

The student has performed regularly with *Out of Character* theatre company and Communitas Choir, exhibited artwork for end-of-term events and at York Theatre Royal for *Love Arts*, been master of ceremonies for end-of-term performances and visited local mental health services to promote Converge. She is also doing volunteer work for a local mental health service after being sign-posted to this by the Support and Progression Worker.

Developing skills as a composer and performer:

Student number: 1 (Music student)

Personal aim:

The student's aim was to develop his own guitar compositions and perform them in public.

How this was achieved:

Although the student had performed with Converge music course groups, he had never performed as a soloist and was particularly anxious since they were his own compositions. Through one-on-one tuition with Composer in Residence, Peter Byrom-Smith, he developed and rehearsed his compositions and performed them at *Create14/Love Arts*.

Next step:

The student's next step is to find other performance opportunities and record his work.

New aim:

The student's aim is to develop skills in music technology through courses and work experience with the long-term aim of working in this area.

Other achievements:

The student has performed regularly with Musical Development and Music Improvisation to... courses at end-of-term performances.

Work experience as a photographer:

Student number: 22 (creative writing student)

Personal aim: The student's aim was to work as a freelance photographer.

How it was achieved:

Whilst attending creative writing, the student mentioned that she was on a local photography course. The Converge newsletter editor, who was also a student Buddy for the creative writing course, asked her if she would take photographs of courses and events to be published in the first issue. She agreed and is now working for Converge as a photographer for special events.

Next step:

The student wants to develop a portfolio of work for potential clients.

Other achievements:

The student has performed a creative writing piece for an event, her work has been published in the Converge creative writing Anthology 2013 and she has written an article for the newsletter.

3. Evidence of progression and enhancement

Art:

Art students have exhibited work at York Theatre Royal for the *Love Arts Festival* and two works were sold to members of the public.

Two contemporary art courses have been planned and facilitated by second and third year university Art students as part of their Community Module.

Creative writing:

An anthology of students' work was produced and distributed in 2013.

Creative writing students attended poet Roger McGough's performance as part of the *York Literature Festival* and met with him beforehand to present him with a copy of their anthology.

Communitas Choir:

The choir performed at the NHS Annual Members Day 2013, several events by the Richmond Fellowship and Community Links and a York St John University concert arranged by the Faculty of Music.

Scarves for the choir were donated by a local business and an information banner is currently in production.

A series of choir workshops called *Songs for the summer* are planned and will be facilitated by Communitas leaders.

Dance:

Dance students have participated with university dance students in workshops by the visiting performance company *Hagit Yakira*. They have also attended two performances by other visiting artists and taken part in the annual York St John University Dance Trail.

Music:

Music students performed off-campus at the Guildhall, York.

Composer-in-Residence

Peter Byrom-Smith, Composer-in-Residence, has given one-on-one tutorials to six music students. He worked with two students who performed solos at *Create14/Love Arts*. He and a music tutor are doing a short course in composition over the summer.

Theatre:

Theatre students have watched performances by *Out of Character* theatre company and will have the chance to audition for the company later this year.

Students have also watched a performance by visiting company *Ridiculusmus* called 'The Eradication of schizophrenia in Western Lapland' alongside university students and staff.

NOISE Festival:

Converge has an account with NOISE (a charity for promoting work within the creative industries) and they have given tutorials for Converge about how to develop portfolios. Fifteen students have signed up to create online portfolios with them.

Peer mentors:

The Converge mentor scheme was set up in November and nine Converge students are actively engaged in it. The role of the mentor is to support new and existing students individually and in course groups, to promote Converge to local mental health organisations and to act as student representatives. The mentors meet on a regular basis with the Director of Converge and the Support and Progression Worker.

Twenty-two students have been supported by mentors during the year. There have been promotional visits to five local organisations. Two extra-curricular groups have been set up by mentors. The mentors have represented Converge at the University of York St John for Mental Health Day and have been masters of ceremonies for two end-of-term events.

York St John student Buddies:

During the year, 51 York St John University undergraduate students have volunteered for Converge, assisting tutors in courses and supporting 42 students.

Newsletter:

Converge published its first newsletter, edited by a York St John University creative writing graduate. The newsletter will be published every term with a different editor. One of the mentors will be editing the next edition.

4. *Distance travelled* interviews: abstracts

El Stannage (PhD student with Converge and Arts and Minds) interviewed six Converge students in the winter of 2013. Each interviewee was given an invitation to 'tell the story of how you came to Converge and what the Arts and Converge have meant in your life.' With the exception of minor prompts, the interviewer asked no further questions and allowed the interviewee to speak as freely as possible.

Mary (pseudonym) is in her 20s. She has attended theatre, music and art courses and sings in our choir. She will begin undergraduate study this autumn.

"It's [Converge] helped me with my mental health recovery and it's also helped me to become more ambitious and pursue my dreams and work with people who really inspire me."

Steve (pseudonym) is in his 60s. He attends theatre, creative writing and sings in the choir.

"I feel I've really turned a corner ... I've found my voice and I'm really loving it, you know. I love it. Converge has really seen the flowering of my creativity, you know, in my writing, in my music, theatre. It's fantastic."

John (pseudonym) is in his 40s. He attends dance and theatre classes and sings in the choir.

"It's the biggest activity I do in the week. It's a big part of my structure, my week. [It] gets me out of bed, gets me moving, gets me out of depression."

Lawrence (pseudonym) is in his 30s. He takes part in our sports project and is a member of *Out of Character* theatre company.

“The Converge model should be put out to all the universities or colleges (for students) who are struggling as well. They need some sort of place they can go to which is, like, a safe haven for them which they can, like, get confidence from, meet new friends.”

[Please see Appendix 2 for more comprehensive information.](#)

5. Results of a Discover consultation exercise with Converge students on 9 June 2014 at York St John University.

A good mental health service:

- *Treats people as human beings.* A place where you can be yourself, where you feel accepted and loved.
- *Provides a feeling of belonging.* Belonging and acceptance are essential to being able to get out in the community. “Communities that help you recover”.
- *Makes you feel included.* It’s a place where you can have input.
- *Gives you the tools to make and achieve your goals in the wider community.* It enables people to access their own talents.
- *Provides hope, acknowledges strengths, helps confidence, aims for the future and new possibilities.* “It is good to concentrate on the positives, but there still needs to be someone to listen to problems.”
- *Is a safe place to build confidence.*
- *Provides opportunities to take risks.* “We need to be given a kick now and then.” “Gives a friendly push in the right direction with a friendly face. Gets me to widen my comfort zone.”
- *Offers support for friends and family who support us.* “The support of family and friends is crucial and there needs to be support for the supporters.”
- *Needs to be in a central and accessible location.*
- *Must have peer support built into the service.* Peer mentoring needs to be built into a supportive community. There has to be a place where people look after people and not just have “professionals dealing with people.” “Mentors are superb because they know how you are feeling. Being a mentor has made me feel human and useful for the first time in a decade.”
- *Needs to be flexible because we are.* The service needs to be responsive, quick, informal and accessible.
- *Is “careful with labels”.* Not patronizing. “We need staff who listen and who are patient.”
- *Is a place where you can “get things off your chest.”*
- *Offers high quality educational opportunities.* A place that creates opportunities, opens doors and gives people self-belief to walk through them.
- *Has opportunities for creativity.*

- *Is a place where they celebrate your successes with you.*
- *Is a place where you have direct access to people who already know you.*
- *Communicates with other services.* “We need a map of the services available – a map to recovery.”

In response to the question:

Could you commission your own care?

“Yes, when I am in recovery.”

“Patients are experts on their own mental health.”

About Converge and *Out of Character*

- Converge is a safety net.
- Converge helps and encourages me. It makes me want to live and want to give.
- Converge gives me the freedom to create and to ‘play’.
- Converge has definitely supported me. I started the choir whilst still in hospital and it supported me to come home.
- Occupational therapists helped me to access Converge.
- Converge has been the best thing to support me. It has helped me to stay out of hospital by providing activities which engage me as a whole person. It also gives me a community to be part of.
- Converge is a ‘strong island’. There is no judgment and therefore you can be open and safe.
- *Out of Character* gives me a feeling of belonging.
- Converge helps to build community. I feel more human and myself, more able to express myself and find interesting and loving people.
- Converge helps me to build an appropriate social network of friends and people to contact.
- I have found that I have come out of my shell due to the considerable skills of the staff.
- Now I know when I am wobbly and I can catch myself.
- Converge treats you holistically and as a whole person, engaging all of you, so I feel more of a human being.
- Thank you, Converge, for seeing me as a man and not just a statistic.
- What has aided me in finding some sort of peace for myself is the work I do with friends involved with *Out of Character* and its directors.
- I would not be as well as I have, had I not been in *Out of Character* theatre company, with the friendship and knowledge of the group as a whole.

- I have been able to do things I didn't think I could do. I have been encouraged, not pressurized, and it's been a revelation.
- My main help has not been doctors; it has been the fantastic help, advice and friendships made possible by *Out of Character* and staff alike. Let's do more, PLEASE!
- Converge reduces stigma and it doesn't go on doctors' notes.
- Converge is a safe place to build confidence.
- I believe that I am in a lot better place now than I have been for years with the help of my theatre work with *Out of Character*. Members and staff have helped me to become a more open and social person who has the permission to be me, and it is both a strange and wonderful experience.

The Assertive Outreach team

- There was fantastic support from the Assertive Outreach Team. This has reduced my need for hospital admissions from four or five times a year to once a year.
- The team gave me a sense of worth and a structure and this helped me to access Converge.
- The team are flexible as they fit opportunities around how you are feeling and your lifestyle. And they are contactable 24/7.



***Health body, healthy mind* evaluation**

Martin Bond, M.Sc. – YSJ Active instructor;
Adam Senior, B.Sc. – Sport development officer for Converge;
Dr Nick Rowe – Director of Converge

Report summary

Healthy body, healthy mind is a community-based physical activity course which caters for adults who use mental health services. The course is run by YSJ Active in partnership with Converge at York St John University. The scheme was designed as a pilot, with sessions being facilitated twice weekly for a six-week period. Participants received free gym membership for three months, with the option of extending membership at a reduced rate. Four exercise buddies, who are students or graduates of York St John University, supported the participants during the course.

The course recruited to capacity with 12 participants, 11 men and 1 woman. Three further people joined the course, their names being drawn from a reserve list (n = 5). The attendance rate ran at 72.92% with five participants achieving 100% attendance. Retention rates ran at 66.67%. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 52 years and the average age was 35 years.

When asked ‘what impact has this programme had on your life?’ one participant reported, ‘An improved mood, feeling happier and more confident, as well as having increased my levels of fitness’.

The report identifies areas for improvement and development. The course was over-subscribed and there was a considerable ‘reserve list’. There was a lack of female participants, and there are practical issues that need addressing. However, attendance, retention rate and feedback indicate that the course was very well received. It is encouraging to see that 12 participants have taken up the free gym membership.

Appendix 1

Support provided.

Converge is able to draw on a range of people to support our students:

Support and Progression Worker (full time)
Occupational therapy student Buddies
Course facilitators (11)
Peer mentors (Converge students who have taken on a role as a mentor)
Converge and University staff
Arts student Buddies.

The following tables analyse the report given. It is important to stress the following:

- This is only a report of support that was actually recorded. There will be many informal instances of support not represented here.
- The duration of each session of support is not recorded.
- There is a distinction between *packages of support* which will contain a number of individual *instances of support*.

A breakdown of *packages of support* offered

Support provider:	Packages of support
Support and Progression Worker	78
Occupational therapy student Buddies	25
Course facilitators	26
Peer mentors	22
Converge and University staff	37
Arts student Buddies	17
Total	205

A breakdown of *instances of support*

Support provider	Recorded instances of support
Support and Progression Worker	111
Occupational therapy student Buddies	35
Course facilitators	120
Peer mentors	45
Converge and University staff	56
Arts student buddies	39
Total	406

Types of support

Type of support	Totals
During course	49
Help with attendance	28
Outside of course	101
Performance/ exhibition	27
Other	1
Total	206

Appendix 2

Distance travelled interviews: abstracts

El Stannage (PhD student with Converge and Arts and Minds) interviewed six Converge students in the winter of 2013. Each interviewee was given an invitation to 'tell the story of how you came to Converge and what the Arts and Converge have meant in your life.' With the exception of minor prompts, the interviewer asked no further questions and allowed the interviewee to speak as freely as possible.

The following are shortened abstracts of these interviews.

Mary (pseudonym) is in her 20s. She has attended theatre, music and art courses and sings in our choir. She will begin undergraduate study this autumn.

I first heard about Converge when I was taken ill into hospital ...to Bootham and ... I was there for some time and I felt very frustrated because I'm a very creative person and I felt like I was going nowhere with it; that I wasn't able to express myself, that I wasn't given any opportunities to...be creative. Then I saw a poster on the wall in Bootham which was promoting Converge, and it said, 'Short courses in the Arts', and I saw the singing, I saw the painting, I saw the theatre and, instantly, I just thought, 'That's for me, that's exactly what I need, that's exactly what I want to do, please can you tell me more about it'. So, for weeks and weeks and weeks I was asking, 'Can I do this? Please can I go there?'

Once I was finally discharged from hospital and saw my CPN, I was asking her about it. That's when I made the first steps to coming along to Converge, and the impact that it's had on my life has been extremely positive. I feel like I'm a different person to how I was when I first left hospital, you know. I've learnt a lot of skills along the way that I feel have really helped me, especially getting out into the community and feeling less isolated, because part of my problem was that I had nobody to speak to about anything and I was extremely isolated. I'd been cut off from my family...and I was feeling very lost, but as soon as I found Converge, I began to feel accepted again and I began to feel that, despite my mental health, people would still listen to me and that I could be valued as a person.

It has also given me the opportunity to be creative, which is what I always wanted. So, I feel like it's helped me with social skills as well, because before I went into hospital I found it very difficult to maintain friendships. I found it very difficult to interact with others, sometimes because of my strange thoughts or my behaviours that were not quite normal. So, I feel like it's helped me with my mental health recovery and that it's also helped me to become more ambitious and pursue my dreams and to work with people who really inspire me. So, that's how much it means to me.

I've been able to work with some really great professionals who are very inspiring, kind people and since then I've been so happy, it's made me ... it's improved my quality of life. It's given me a sense of well-being and a sense of pride, that I can be part of something like that.

Mike (pseudonym) is in his 60s. He takes part in music classes and is a peer mentor.

My CPN came and was trying to talk to me and I wouldn't talk to him. I used to have my guitar at the side of the chair and I used to pick it up and just play away to myself ... until he disappeared. Anyway, he found out about Converge and he'd seen me and heard me playing the guitar, and arranged for me to come to Converge. I was a little bit sceptical about it and, when I first came, I thought, 'College is for young people. It's not for people of my age'. When I came it was very, very good because I wasn't classed as an old person and they did have time for me.

I was asked to be a peer buddy and that's a very, very big feather in my cap.

I find concentrating on the guitar took away my depression and it made me feel better; just watching the television or listening to music, doesn't do it but physically playing the guitar, it does.

Matt (pseudonym) is in his 40s. He takes part in music classes.

Simon (music tutor) showed us a picture [in class]. It was like in a cave with a beam of light coming down through the middle of the cave and you had to interpret it. When a person has a breakdown they think, 'I could go there, I could find that and I wouldn't be any nuisance to anybody and nobody could find me and that'd be great'. This is the way that people with mental problems think – well, I'll commit suicide or whatever. Now, after coming to Converge and everything, I know it's not the correct thing to do but it still doesn't stop thoughts like that being in your mind and I don't think rational people think that way. But there again, what is rational? I would like to continue with Converge because it's so much a part of my life and I don't know what I'd do without it.

Steve (pseudonym) is in his 60s. He attends theatre, creative writing and sings in the choir.

I'm very pleased I came [to Converge] because it's given me a focus and a place to come to. It's great because I've made a lot of friends here and I've been able to spend time with them and work with them on different courses.

I suffer from very severe depression and, slowly but surely through treatment and help that I've had, I've managed to tap into my creativity and develop that. And Converge has helped with that enormously. Since I've been with them, I haven't stopped really. I've just been producing a lot of work, really enjoying expressing myself through my writing and through music. There's a lot of stimulation there, in the environment that I'm in, and that's been a tremendous help.

I feel I've really turned a corner because I've suffered for years from isolation and always having to rely on my own strengths to keep body and soul together. By writing I established a dialogue with myself and that really kept me together, because when ... when you don't have any friends, which I never really had any friends. I've had very few friends in my life. Since I've come here I've got ..., I've lost count of how many friends I've made. I've made lots and lots of friends and that's really been a big change for me,

I've found my voice and I'm really loving it you know. I love it. Converge has really seen the flowering of my creativity, you know, in my writing, in my music, theatre. It's fantastic.

John (pseudonym) is in his 40s. He attends dance and theatre classes and sings in the choir.

It's the biggest activity I do in the week. It's a big part of my structure, my week. [It] gets me out of bed, gets me moving, gets me out of depression. If I don't see anyone for a day or two, I get really low and that affects my mood. Without Converge, I'd really have to have another big chunk of stuff to do.

I'm bipolar ... the manic episodes are really intense and they're really vital and full of life. To capture some of that through the arts meant that I didn't have to go to a place to actually get it, even though there's a real addiction to kind of going for the highs. Through the art, I can actually access them without going all the way.

Converge dance has been the biggest confidence boost for me to actually create dance. Now I feel confident to go into a classroom and actually direct people how to dance and how to make things look good and actually do a performance. I didn't have that before doing Converge. That's been great and that's sort of me moving on from just being a recipient to being a ... a workshop leader.

Lawrence (pseudonym) is in his 30s. He takes part in our sports project and is a member of *Out of Character* theatre company.

I was really scared at first. I got gradually into it and then my confidence got better and better. It has changed me to make me stronger in myself and not to worry about things and what's happened in the past.

The Converge model should be put out to all the universities or colleges [for students] who are struggling but need some sort of place they can go to which is, like, a safe haven for them which they can, like, get confidence from, meet new friends.

I can't really believe I have got to this point. When I was at home, I couldn't get out of the house. Now I have been on stage in front of 60 people for three nights. That's amazing to me.

Converge is like a stepping-stone into health, well-being and meeting new friends.

I still haven't got to my ultimate job [which] is maybe a support worker but ... I will pursue it and pursue it, 'cause nowt's gonna stop me in my life again. So, and I won't let it.

Appendix 3

Healthy body, healthy mind evaluation

Martin Bond, M.Sc. – YSJ Active instructor;
Adam Senior, B.Sc. – Sport development officer for Converge;
Dr Nick Rowe, PhD. – Director of Converge

Introduction

Healthy body, healthy mind is a community-based physical activity course which caters for adults who use mental health services. The course is run by YSJ Active in partnership with Converge at York St John University. The scheme was designed as a pilot with sessions being facilitated twice weekly for a six-week period, with an equal split of gym-based and sports hall-based sessions. Thereafter, supported gym sessions were provided on a weekly basis for a further six-week period. During this period, the participants received free gym membership for three months, with the option of extending membership at a reduced rate. Four exercise buddies, who are students or graduates of York St John University, supported the participants during the course.

This paper aims to evaluate the scheme, in particular:

- Attendance, adherence and retention
- Participant feedback
- Areas for improvement and development
- Areas that worked well
- Future plans

Attendance and retention

Capacity at each of the sessions was pre-determined at **12** participants. Prior to the scheme commencing, **12** participants were recruited, along with **3** reserves. All **15** participants attended at least one of the sessions. NB: Several potential participants enquired about the programme after entry closure.

- Total attendance = **105/144** (72.92%)
- Gym attendance = **53/72** (73.61%)
- Sports hall attendance = **52/72** (72.22%)
- Average attendance per session = **8.75**
- Average gym attendance per session = **8.83**
- Average sports hall attendance per session = **8.67**
- 100% attendance = **5** participants
- 50-99% attendance = **5** participants
- 0-49% attendance = **5** participants
- **10/15** (66.67%) participants attended **≥ 50%** of the sessions

NB: At the time of writing, the scheme was currently in its third week of supported gym sessions. Data on the supported sessions and information relating to retention rates will be presented within an updated version of this paper.

Physiological parameters

The current project was not designed as a scientific research study. However, physiological measures were taken at baseline and again after six weeks.

Anecdotally, favourable outcomes have been observed in terms of height, weight, blood pressure, resting heart rate and perceived level of fitness. Raw data can be found in table 1.

Demographic information

Age range = **18 to 52 years**

Average age = **35 years**

Number of participants = **15**

Female participants = **1**

Male participants = **14**

Participant feedback

After each session, participants were offered the opportunity to socialise amongst the group with tea and coffee provided by Converge. This enabled participants to share their views on how the course was being delivered and make suggestions for improvement. In addition to this, participants were invited to attend a semi-structured interview at the end of the project. In general, the feedback was very positive with the majority of participants stating that they would like to take part in similar schemes in the future.

When asked which aspects of the project the participants enjoyed the most, the responses were mixed between gym-based and sports hall-based sessions. In contrast, there was very little feedback when participants were asked what the least enjoyable part of the project was, with the only suggestion being to reduce the number of activities during the sports hall sessions, so that they had more time for each activity. This was implemented at subsequent sessions. Similarly, when participants were asked if there were any changes they would like to see made, many suggested that they would like more time on each station in the gym. Again, this was implemented at subsequent sessions.

Selected responses to the question, 'What impact has this programme had on your life?' include:

- 'An improved mood, feeling happier and more confident, as well as having increased my levels of fitness'.
- 'Feel a lot fitter and better in myself – mind, body and soul all feel healthier'.
- 'Made me see life for what it really is'.
- 'It has given me a fee-good factor and is a great coping mechanism'.

Areas for improvement and development

The following have been identified as areas for improvement and development:

1. Supply and demand
2. Lack of female participants
3. Longer term project / research / education
4. Miscellaneous - access to water, gym space and incentives

Supply and demand

The programme was over-subscribed and the supply could not meet the current demand. Gym capacity was the main contributing factor to limiting numbers to 12 participants per session. Potential solutions to this include, having multiple projects running alongside each other and changing the environment from the gym to the sports hall.

There are several pros and cons associated with facilitating multiple projects at the same time. The advantages are that supply can meet demand and more people benefit from this type of scheme. There is also potential for participants to pick and choose sessions to meet their individual needs. For example, if a participant is due to attend at a specific time but cannot make it, they could attend a session at another project. The disadvantages of this include group dynamics and monitoring capacity. Cost and capacity need to be fully considered before this is implemented. Regarding capacity, the delivery arm of the project needs to ensure that they have staffing capacity and room availability to be able to deliver a high quality service.

In addition to this, there are people who could benefit from this type of scheme who have been excluded, as they are unable to leave an in-patient setting. One example of this is Clifton House, York, which provides a low secure controlled environment for psychiatric care. Staff and patients from Clifton House have identified a lack of physical activity opportunities and would welcome a similar programme to *Healthy body, healthy mind* being facilitated at Clifton House, as opposed to at the University.YSJ Active's ability to deliver this type of project would be subject to the appropriate funding and risk assessments.

Lack of female participants

During the current project, there has only been one female participant. The reasons for this are unknown. Participants were recruited on a first come first served basis.

It is possible that the target population was predominantly males, which reflected on the number of female participants. It might be the case that females generally do not favour this type of scheme. Alternatively, there may be other reasons not considered. Without conducting a full needs analysis, it is impossible to provide a definitive reason as to why the female population appears to have been significantly under represented.

Longer term project / research / education

The current project was only facilitated for six weeks, with a further six weeks of weekly supported gym sessions. Whilst there has been some positive outcome measures observed from the current project, the longitudinal outcomes are not known. It should be noted that the current project was not designed as a research study and, as such, measures were not conducted in a controlled fashion. However, the anecdotal evidence would suggest that a full research study would be feasible and worthwhile.

The current project focuses on exercise and mental health. Further developments could include education e.g. nutrition and the benefits of exercise. Cost and delivery capacity would need to be assessed before implementation.

Miscellaneous

A common side effect of anti-psychotic medication is dry mouth, which increases the need for water, especially during exercise. However, at the current time, drinkable water is not available within YSJ Active's fitness suite. Water is available to purchase from a vending machine. Alternatively, there is a water fountain available in the library. Neither of these was viewed as being practical to the project's population. Therefore, Converge took the decision to purchase bottled water for all of the participants. This was an added expense for Converge. It could be argued that YSJ Active's fitness suite would benefit from having accessible drinking water e.g. a water fountain.

The gym space limited capacity to a maximum of 12 participants at any given time. Whilst it would be impractical to suggest having a larger fitness suite, it is possible to provide a 'circuit-based' session to approximately 24-30 participants within the sports hall.

Participants from the current project received free gym membership for three months and membership at a reduced rate thereafter as an incentive to continue to participate in physical activity. Further incentives could include free towels, t-shirts, bags etc. This would need to be factored into any cost analysis.

Areas that worked well

The following areas have been identified as areas that worked well within the project:

1. Attendance
2. Participant feedback
3. Exercise buddies / student placements
4. Observer feedback

Attendance

In general, the project has been well attended, with total attendance amounting to 73% and average attendance just shy of nine out of twelve per session. Ten participants attended over half of the available sessions.

Participant feedback

The project has been well received by the participants, which is reflected in the high attendance and adherence rates. In general, the feedback was very positive. There was an equal split of participants preferring either gym-based or sports-hall sessions, which suggests that the current format meets the needs of this cohort.

Exercise buddies / student placements

A multi-disciplinary approach was used throughout the project with YSJ Active leading on the delivery and Converge leading on recruitment and funding. The project used student placements and volunteers to act as 'exercise buddies' and provide additional support. These staff were from different disciplines, including: Sports science and injury management, Occupational therapy and Sports science and exercise referral.

This approach ensured that the skills, knowledge and expertise of the team could be pooled to provide a more professional service. Several of the participants were noticeably anxious at the commencement of the course and the use of exercise buddies helped to ease their anxieties. Finally, the use of volunteers and student placements will aid the development of the future generation of staff working within exercise and mental health.

Observer feedback

Despite not being an observational study, the authors made several observations regarding behaviour. Many of the participants displayed introverted and anxious characteristics at the start of the programme, with some lacking the motivation to attend. However, these participants developed their confidence and many now visit the gym on a regular basis and have enquired about other exercise-related sessions. Group camaraderie has developed with several of the participants arranging times to meet to attend the gym outside of the supported sessions.

Further data will be available within the updated version of this paper.

Future plans

Building on the success of the current *Healthy body, healthy mind* project, there are several ideas for future development, including:

- Conducting a full needs analysis in partnership with key partners running alongside the provision of future courses
- In-patient setting/diversify target populations (e.g. female only)
- Research study

Conclusion

The *Healthy body, healthy mind* project aimed to educate and inspire mental health service users to take part in physical activity. Overall attendance was high (73%). It has been observed that many of the participants have improved their self-confidence and exercise independence, which is evident in the participants attending not only the supported gym

sessions, but also using the gym during commercial hours as an active member of the larger community and therefore breaking down the barriers of social exclusion.

Future plans include: conducting a full needs analysis, diversifying target populations and possibly conducting research study.

Final thought

The authors would like to end this paper with the following comments made by one of the participants, which provide a fitting end to the project:

“The gym and activity sessions were all explained/taught in a professional capacity and easy to understand. Instructors were always at hand if any help or further explanation was required, or if any additional support was needed. There was always a kind of fun element at each session which I think really helps in mental health because it makes you much more relaxed and comfortable. Although there was a fun factor present at each session, it never took away what we were learning each time e.g. warm ups before and cool downs after each session and how to use the gym equipment safely.”

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Table 1: Raw data pre and post programme

Participant	Weight		Height		BMI		RHR		BP		Perceived fitness		Attendance	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Actual	Potential
1.	99.3	98.0	183.5	184.5	29.49	28.8	74	74	132/88	118/79	1/5	3/5	12	12 (100%)
2.	85.4	84.9	181.5	182.5	25.92	25.5	92	90	143/91	140/90	4/5	4/5	12	12 (100%)
3.	64.0	64.8	181.0	181.5	19.54	19.7	77	74	119/67	110/70	5/5	4/5	12	12 (100%)
4.	106.5	103.6	176.5	176.5	34.19	33.2	108	100	133/101	128/90	4/5	5/5	12	12 (100%)
5.	94.6	94.4	185.0	185.0	27.64	27.6	87	85	159/93	133/84	2/5	3/5	12	12 (100%)
6.	90.6	X	172.0	X	30.62	X	84	X	141/84	X	4/5	X	2	12 (16.67%)
7.	111.0	X	178.0	X	35.03	X	73	X	151/88	X	4/5	X	2	12 (16.67%)
8.	73.0	X	175.0	X	23.84	X	63	X	121/95	X	4/5	4/5	8	12 (66.67%)
9.	107.7	109.7	181.0	181.5	32.87	33.3	69	66	125/75	127/81	4/5	5/5	9	12 (75%)
10.	80.7	X	184.0	X	23.84	X	68	X	137/79	X	2/5	X	1	10 (10%)
11.	57.7	X	168.5	X	20.32	X	75	X	135/92	X	2/5	3/5	6	10 (60%)
12.	83.5	X	174.0	X	27.58	X	92	X	144/86	X	2/5	3/5	7	8 (87.5%)
13.	103.5	X	173.0	X	34.58	X	64	X	133/81	X	2/5	X	1	8 (12.5%)
14.	89.9	90.0	179.5	181.0	27.9	27.5	77	66	151/110	127/81	2/5	4/5	6	9 (66.67%)
15.	97.5	X	180.0	X	X	X	95	X	130/88	X	3/5	4/5	2	6 (33.33%)

Key

X = follow-up data not available

For weight, RHR, BP and perceived fitness

Green = positive change

Yellow = no change

Red = negative change

1 = Highly inactive
4 = Active

2 = Inactive
5 = Highly active

3 = Neither active nor inactive

For BMI

Green = healthy

Yellow = overweight

Red = obese

For Attendance

Green = 100%

Yellow = 50-99%

Red = < 50%

