HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

SUBMISSION FROM; Kate MacLean

Community Development

I have worked for 10 years in community development (activities for Older People) first for Highland Council and now NHS Highland (after integration of adult services).

I quite understand that CD is trending just now, and I might claim that is partly to do with the work myself and colleagues have done!

However there is a fashion which continues: identifying a challenge or gap, throwing money at it, and hoping for transformational change. It just doesn’t work. I was involved with developing what is applauded as great solutions for local care at home shortages - the Boleskine project. The NHS involvement was over the final 6 months before launch, but I can assure you that the build-up took 6 YEARS! Continuing 3rd sector funding is important, and a long lead-in before launch. People will join something NEW, but are afraid to join something that has been running for a while (everybody already knows each other, but I don’t know anybody). A buddying system might work.

Link workers in GP surgeries is a good idea - anything that helps reduce waiting times and unnecessary visits has to be a good thing.

In my opinion, their efficacy will entirely depend on their local knowledge, and a certain amount of ‘sales’ experience. If patients get the idea they are being fobbed off, their resolve will harden. Usually what works best is actually accompanying people to a community activity - as did Arthritis Care (now Versus Arthritis) recently in Nairn, and Befrienders Highland continuously. We all know that isolation and exclusion leads to depression and other illness. The challenge is persuading people to take the first step over the door - as humans we fear change, and often people retain a lack of self-confidence, particularly if they have never been part of the workforce for whatever reason (parenting, illlness etc)

But handing over a list of what is available locally won’t work : they will nod and agree, and then not show up for the activity. I arranged lunches in hotels for people from Hanover Housing complexes in Badenoch, both less than 250 meters from their homes. Despite posters, meetings, press and radio announcements, no-one came. When I asked why, afterwards, they answered that they had expected someone to bang on their door, and provide transport to and from the venue! Community transport as a sideline to this conversation, depends very much on actually meeting people at their front doors (and sometimes pointing out that outdoor shoes need putting on). Even if the bus stop is 50 meters from the house, people won’t go out in the evenings. This needs addressed, as not all activities are daytime.