HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

SUBMISSION FROM Vivian Wallace, Ageing Well coordinator Midlothian. Physical activity for the over 50s

1. Social prescribing is a very important method of reaching those people who would benefit most from physical activity, better health and wellbeing. We have over 600 people each week engage with our programme and most, 70% heard about the project through word of mouth but this only works with people who are still connected to their local community and engage with friends, family and neighbours. Harder to reach people may be attracted to a professionals opinion on how to improve their lives and may take action if it is “prescribed” to them rather than told by a friend. As for sustaining participation that has to come down to the welcome they receive when they attend a physical activity group. Our groups feel the social aspect is just as, if not more, important than the actual exercise. A welcome smile at the start, a cup of tea and chat at the end is where the friendships and feeling of belonging comes in and will encourage them to come back each week.

2. Social prescribing should be something we should all be doing. Family and friends do it by “word of mouth” but health professionals have the opportunity to use their knowledge and status in the community to recommend activities in a bit more of a formal way. These conversations only take minutes, how often are you active through the week? Do you go to any clubs or groups? Do you know about the Ageing Well project, they offer something for everyone from walking to badminton, dance to walking football and all abilities are catered for. Here’s more information …. 

3. Here in Midlothian we have recently developed a Fitscription which is a quirky idea based around giving out a prescription for activity. It comes in pads and advertises times and places for Ageing Well walks in Midlothian and also lists all the other activities available and a contact number, email address etc for them to get in touch to find out more or to just turn up. Two of our GP surgeries have just started to use them but we are still dealing with health professionals who say they are not in a position to prescribe or recommend activity as they would need to be sure the person is fit enough to attend or they may be liable. Ageing Well Midlothian have just celebrated 20 years of working in the community and this has always been on our agenda. How do we convince Doctors and health professionals to come on board and recommend patients come along to an activity? There needs to be some sort of reassurance and encouragement from higher levels that the benefits of moving more far out way the risks of being sedentary. We also need to make sure the actual social prescribing is not time consuming or a further administration burden to already busy health professionals. Let’s get round the table and discuss this at a practitioner’s level. Both health professionals and sport and leisure professionals who actually deal
with the public at ground level need to find ways to work together which will benefit all parties involved.

4. Some organisations who offer physical activity are already evaluating and monitoring their programmes due to funding requests and those who don't can be steered towards the evaluation section of the website recently created with Spirit 2012 funding on assisting organisations to set up physical activity groups. www.thrivetoolkit.org.uk. We all need to be working together to encourage our nation to get more active. It's never too late to start and moving a little is better than not moving at all. We recently offered our MOT health checks in the community which are functional fitness tests for the over 60s to see how well they are doing compared to others the same age. One lady in her 70’s completed the tests and was delighted with her results compared to two years earlier when she had just joined Ageing Well. She has lost weight, gained muscle strength, increased her flexibility and made a close friend who she now exercises with making them both feel younger and happier. Monitoring can be time consuming but necessary not only for funding applications but for development and improvement within groups/organisations. If we have an increase in older people being active, we should see a reduction in falls as well as older people being able to live independently for longer. A good active social life enables us to cope better with long term conditions and thus reducing the burden on the NHS and social care.