



AJANI
"It's Your Choice"

BETTER LIVES ISLINGTON/CAMDEN APRIL/MAY 2023

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BETTER LIVES EVALUATION 2023 AJANI

Who are Better Lives?

Better Lives is an integrated drug and alcohol service delivered by Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust in partnership with WDP and Humankind. They offer a free and confidential support service for individuals and their families affected by drug and alcohol problems.

Their specialist team includes substance misuse practitioners, doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists and pharmacists, as well as complementary therapists, volunteers and peer mentors.

Together they offer a high quality and professional service that supports individuals and their families who wish to receive advice, assessment and treatment for their drug and/or alcohol problems. Better Lives also offer advice and training to local community organisations.

AIMS OF THE AJANI PROJECT – (AJANI IS AN AFRICAN WORD MEANING “HE WHO OVERCOMES THE STRUGGLE”)

PROACTIVELY PROMOTING BETTER HEALTH AND FITNESS

ENCOURAGE A MORE PROACTIVE APPROACH TO LIFE

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO BE MORE ACTIVE, WITH FITNESS AND WALKS AND OUTINGS

CREATING AWARENESS OF WHY PEOPLE NEED BETTER NUTRITION

INSTILLING IN PEOPLE RESPONSIBILITY, THE NEED TO TAKE ACTION AND TO THINK ABOUT THE CHOICES THEY MAKE IN THE SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM.

CREATING A GROWTH MIND-SET MENTALITY.

WE HAVE:

- Built Confidence and Self-Esteem.
- Re-Energized people through fitness advice and classes, demonstrating simple ways to include exercise into their daily lives.
- Improved mental health, with awareness around a healthy lifestyle.
- Helped people understand more about how their bodies work.
- Provided ongoing classes and events to maintain improvement.
- Promoted a Growth Mind-set mentality.
- Created strong links with the service users, quickly developing trust.
- Built awareness of the importance of choices, action, perseverance, listening, and behavior.
- Developed connections with other groups that have helped our participants.

NUMBERS ATTENDING

Overall, we had around 10 different people attend the sessions at King Henry’s Walk. It was promoted internally by Better Lives, which at first proved to be slightly difficult. When we turned up to KHW they were unaware we were coming. HMHB were helped by a couple of members of staff and it was agreed that we would come and work with the Women’s Group. This turned into a fabulous idea.

With the help of Better Lives we completed our four sessions to great success. Some people came to all four sessions, others came when they could (because of the nature of Better Lives work with addiction, it meant that not everyone could attend every week).

HOW DID WE DO?

This course, held at King Henry's Walk, was very successful. Our contacts were Liam Pickford, Evet King, and Anya Howard. Anya, a trainee Psychologist, came into every session, and other staff would also attend, including Susan, the Education, Training and Employment Officer.

This was the feedback from Anya.

"The HMHB team were incredibly enthusiastic and engaging. There were four sessions composed of a mixture of information around nutrition, simple physical exercises and stretching, and activities highlighting the importance of mindset. The physical exercises could be adapted to people of all abilities, and it was great to see everyone giving it a go.

Another real strength of the group is that it promoted free and low-cost activities in the community. Over the course of the 4 weeks, several members of the group had already started to engage in these activities, highlighting the direct positive impact that the programme can have.

It would be great to see more clients attending, as I think many could benefit. There is definitely a gap in the Better Lives group programme for such a group. Moreover, it seems to be in line with alcohol and substance misuse recovery, since it highlighted the influence that eating and exercise can have on many different aspects of our lives (including mental health, relationships, motivation, routine, etc). I hope this programme can continue to help our clients feel inspired in working towards their goals."

She said she could see the difference our unique delivery was making on the different people who were attending. I think the clients were a little sceptical at first, which is natural. They did not know us or what to expect. I would say that they all threw themselves in enthusiastically into the course.

Here is some of the clients' feedback.

Feedback from Service User 1: AD

"I really enjoyed it. It made me think about what I was eating and what good fruit and vegetable can do. Since attending the exercise classes I am starting to really think about my morning routine. When I go for a walk or take a walk in the park it helps to keep me calm. I enjoyed the games and stretching and warm up exercises too.

Learning and exercise at the same time was fun. It was good to see how strong I was and that I could manage different parts of my body, especially my arms and legs.

It would be a good idea to have more sessions. When Susan told me about the activities that Better Minds organise in Islington, I feel happy to know that I can join people and get out more in the mornings."

Feedback from Service User 2: DA

Personally, I liked to attend because I feel the activities were especially tailored so that Lawrence and Dean were able to make sure that everyone was able to take part if they wanted too. For example; there at least three different ways to complete an exercise based on peoples physical abilities...standing or chair based interpretations. Lawrence made the nutrition learning part of the lesson engaging; and he challenged us about the way we think about food.

The best aspect of their sessions were the quizzes and the opportunity to reflect on our mindsets."

This was the overall take we saw from the course. Clearly our delivery style means that people feel comfortable and involved, and can interact well. Our style is engaging and friendly, and we are really good at bringing people into the conversation. We also stress it has to be fun.

Finally, here are two pieces of feedback from Better Lives staff.

The first is from Evet King, WDP Team Leader for Better Lives, in regards to one of the attendees called Anne, who now walks with us and has also attended a couple of outings we have organised too.

“I am really pleased to hear that Anne followed through with her plan to join the walking group. This intervention is really positive in supporting her in her recovery journey. She has done really well since our last meeting at the Women’s Group.”

This second is by one of their Education, Training and Employment Practitioner (ETE)

Feedback from Susan B (ETE Practitioner)

“I welcome the intervention from Healthy Minds-Healthy Bodies (HMHB) as it provided a source of inspiration for the people in the group to explore and challenge their current thinking about food, nutrition and habits.

BLBB inspirational way of mixing learning with quizzes and physical activity kept the attendees engaged and maintained their enthusiasm throughout each session.

I believe Lawrence’s strategies are useful for people in recovery because the insights into mindsets can be applied to life and management of one’s emotions across all aspects of living.

Breaking up each weekly sessions with 2 separate 15 minute breaks, filled with physical exercise, is a fun and effective way to deliver wellbeing information to participants who are experiencing mental health challenges.

In addition, Lawrence and Dean run low-cost and free activities throughout Islington boroughs parks and open spaces. The participants of the Better Lives Women’s Group are keen to join the external exercise group and two members are already committed walkers since attending HMHB.

Overall BLBB 4-week course is recommended.”

Plus – extras: HMHB provide three Free exercise sessions a week, two Free health walks per week, a Free Zumba session every week. We also provide outings, and people on this course were invited to a Canal walk, a trip to Emirates Stadium (Arsenal FC) and a local history walk with Islington Walks, which we attended. We also have ongoing outings – in June we have a couple of theatre visits, a museum visit (Bank of England), and a comedy night. Our outings will continue over the summer.

Plus – evaluation: As we were working with Better Lives clients, they preferred for us not to be contacting their users directly, and instead they would collate the evaluation feedback and pass on to us. All the above feedback was passed to us by Evet King, and Anya sent us a separate email with her comments.

Plus – social media: HMHB promoted our social media to all participants. We asked them to join our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and maybe connect with our YouTube and Blog. We also discussed our 40-page Health Pack – and that we have PDFs for each of them online – and they can look back at previous copies. As HMHB, we promoted other organisations, such as Healthy Generations, who have over 60 local FREE exercise sessions of all kinds.

Finally, we also talked about mental health, stressing that if people are concerned about any issues to talk to medical professionals, such as their local medical practice.

THE FUTURE

HMHB felt delighted with the feedback and success of this Ajani course – as always, we learnt more about ourselves, as well as the needs of service users. It was an interesting dynamic to have a large number of people attend, and we were proactive in keeping the sessions positive, but also compassionate about the desire of some of our users towards information they need.

It demonstrated to us that we could not just deliver a professional quality course, but that we were able to handle multiple courses at the same time – as we were also working with other groups on different days.

It excited us even more to the potential of HMHB, Ajani and our ambitions. There must be space for smaller projects like us to work alongside people like the NHS and larger companies. Funding needs to be made available. HMHB has quite a unique delivery, which has garnered terrific feedback. And our course can work with mental health clients, unemployed clients, older clients, people in work, and more.

We hope we can do more work with Better Lives in the future, and they have asked us to do that.