



AJANI
"It's Your Choice"

FINSBURY PARK JOB CENTRE

SPRING 2023

PRESENTED BY: LAWRENCE CURTIS

FINSBURY PARK JOB CENTRE EVALUATION 2023 AJANI

Who are Finsbury Park Job Centre?

“Provides services to people of working age, and a vacancy filling service to employers. Provides advice on work, training and benefits; help with claiming benefits and extra support; advice on work and benefits; touchscreen Jobpoints with job vacancies from the UK and Europe; support from Personal Advisers by appointment; and additional help to the newly unemployed.”

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

PROACTIVELY PROMOTING BETTER HEALTH AND FITNESS
BUILD CONFIDENCE ABOUT FINDING WORK
PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES TO BE MORE ACTIVE
CREATING AWARENESS OF WHY PEOPLE NEED BETTER NUTRITION
INSTILLING IN PEOPLE RESPONSIBILITY, THE NEED TO TAKE ACTION
DIRECTING PEOPLE TO THINK ABOUT THE CHOICES THEY MAKE.
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

HMHB have had regular chats with the Department of Work and Pensions Borough Manager for Islington for some time – previously being Ian, and now Geoffrey Taylor Meade, who were very encouraging in regards to our course. We had also previously met with Laraine and Shantanu, who were Disability Officers. We had previously done courses with Finsbury Park and Barnsbury Job Centres in Islington, as well as others in other boroughs, and knew the need is there for this kind of intervention.

This time we dealt with Barbara Elliott – Disability Officer at Finsbury Park. We came in and spoke with her before providing the Job Centre with a Poster and a Flyer. I, Lawrence, even came into the Job Centre to promote the course to people too, but it was up to the client supervisors and case workers to promote the course. Barbara very quickly realized the potential for the course and was very enthusiastic for us to come and work with their users.

Despite all this numbers were low. HMHB totally understands the massive constraints that the Job Centres are under at this time, but we felt there was an apathy and lack of effort on some people at the centre – this certainly did not include Barbara who was championing us very well. In fact, Lawrence was told that they thought he was going to come in a few times to talk to people about the course – something which was not discussed, and certainly HMHB would not have done. This was the quote from Barbara. It was never discussed we should come in multiple times.

“I think you needed to come into the job centre more to recruit for the programme. Work coaches have so many different programmes to refer to.”

This though has opened up the question of what the Job Centre does do around mental health. HMHB has contacted their local councillors to talk about the matter. We feel this type of intervention should be available to all on Universal Credit, and it needs to be promoted from within.

It should also be noted that, originally, we were also going to be completing a course with Barnsbury Job Centre, and this had been agreed with Geoffrey Taylor Meade. HMHB even met with the Disability Team who were delighted we were going to be coming in with this course. However, a senior executive, that we had never met or talked to, decided that we were not going to work with Barnsbury users this time. It was very strange.

HOW DID WE DO?

Despite all the above, this course, held at Sotheby Mews Day Centre in Islington, N5, was a success. We ran four sessions, and the overall consensus was that it was enjoyable, informative, and interesting.

This is feedback from Barbara Elliott:

“I am a Disability Employment Advisor at Finsbury Park Job Centre.

I believe that the Healthy Minds Health Bodies programme fills a gap in the current services available for people with mental health issues in Islington. Research on how exercise positively affects our mental wellbeing is abundant however there seems to be no provision that specifically targets this area. Although GP’s can refer people to the local gym many people with mental health issues may find walking into a gym intimidating and unsafe. The fact that Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies meet people beforehand and create a supportive and nurturing atmosphere removes this barrier so that people feel safe and included. The service offered is unique and I fully believe it is beneficial for individuals and the local community.”

This is feedback from Saxana, who was on the course.

“The informal setting made it easier to interact with everyone. I felt very comfortable. Lawrence and the other volunteers kept a fun atmosphere in which we all enjoyed taking part in all the activities.

I have always been very health conscious and have done my research throughout the years. However, after being affected by depressions and anxiety I felt like I lost my path and it was difficult to motivate myself and to get back to a semblance of normality, or what normality seems to me.

The course offered me a chance to reconnect with all the previous knowledge I had and to apply it to my day-to-day life.

It was very reassuring to know that I can apply some of the changes I practiced in the course. It whetted my appetite for physical activity, which at this moment was lacking in my life. In fact, I have started doing Yoga and am enjoying it very much.

Thank you, Lawrence, for your care. I hope your other group meetings go as well, with lots more participants.”

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 Finsbury Park Job Centre 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.

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 really want to work more with Job Centres, but it is clear that there need to be discussions at Central Government level of what help should be made available to the unemployed.

HMHB stress that it is a period of time in people's lives that can be highly stressful and full of doubt and anxiety, and that can lead to unhealthy behaviours that can have a knock-on effect into the NHS and beyond. It is a realistic and appropriate time to look at how we are living our lives and what we can be doing better. HMHB is trying to lead that discussion.