



Cumbria LINK Visit report

**Barrow Community Gym
Hoops Basketball Centre,
Thorncliffe Road,
Barrow in Furness
LA14 5QA**

**Visit dates:
Wednesday 1st September 2011**

**Cumbria LINK Visiting team members:
Janet Pitman
David Stringer
Ruth Peter
Supported by Kay McGregor**

Thursday 2nd September 2011

**Cumbria LINK Visiting team members:
Evelyn Bitcon
David Stringer
Neil Hughes
Supported by Kay McGregor**

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Introduction

Through the Listening to Communities Project, Cumbria LINK became aware of ongoing concerns about the possible changes to Barrow Community Gym. Discussions have taken place with staff and members of Cumbria Mental Health group in Barrow, the Gym Steering group, and staff from Cumbria PCT.

The Cumbria LINK Governing Body agreed that it would be useful to carry out visits to the Community Gym on those days when it is really busy, and also when not too busy and talk to a range of service users. This would include some of the Cumbria Mental Health Group service users, and others who use the gym for different purposes, gathering their views about the service as it is now.

On Wednesday the 1st September Janet Pitman, Ruth Peter, and David Stringer interviewed a total of 17 individuals who were all present that morning to make use of the gym facilities for a variety of reasons. The team arrived at 10.00am and left the building when it closed for lunch at 12.30pm.

On Thursday the 2nd September David Stringer, Evelyn Bitcon and Neil Hughes attended the gym from 10.00am to 12.30pm and returned at 1.30pm to continue the interviews. Evelyn stayed later than others and spoke to more people who were using the gym later in the afternoon.

The following questionnaire provided the team with a good opportunity to gather the views of many of those attending the gym, with some interesting findings.

Cumbria LINK Visit questionnaire

Barrow Community Gym

1. Can you tell us how often you attend the gym?

We were told on Wednesday:

One person was attending for the very first time, and was well looked after. One person attends once a week, another was hoping to go three times a week, but was finding it hard as it was not easy to get to.

Three more people come once a week, and one twice a week.

One person would come every day if possible, and another comes every day it is open.

Three people come four days a week and five people come three times a week

We were told on Thursday:

One person attends once a week, six people twice a week,

Six people attend three times a week.

Two people four times a week and three people come every day

2. Can you tell us how were you referred to the gym, and by whom?

We were told on Wednesday:

Eleven people were referred by their GP for a variety of reasons including depression, physical activity, mental health problems, chronic back problems, physical disability, and weight loss. One client was referred to a counsellor who referred them to the gym, which added value to their treatment.

Two others were referred through pulmonary rehabilitation services.

Two clients were referred through First Steps.

One client wanted more advertising and information about the gym facilities to be given to others as they have gone from strength to strength since they were referred to the gym

We were told on Thursday:

Again most people were referred by their doctor, this includes referrals from other hospital doctors for various reasons, ranging from depression, stopping smoking to mobility reasons.

Jubilee House referred one client for mental health problems

One client told us they had been referred by a Paid carer for mobility and socialisation reasons

One person by an activity co-ordinator at a rehabilitation unit

One person from Furness Drug and Alcohol support referral

3. How long have you been coming to the gym?

We were told on Wednesday:

There was a wide variety of length of time attending the gym ranging from someone's first time that day, to twenty years.

One person had been going for one week, one for two weeks, two people for three weeks, one for five weeks, one for two months.

Then there were those who had been going for longer times like two and a half years, three people for 5 years, one person for 9 years, and one person told us they had been coming for twenty years. This included the different venues the Community gym has been placed in. One other client told us it was just a long time.

We were told on Thursday:

Nine people have been going from between two weeks and six months. Two people have been going for one year, one for one and a half years, and one for two years.

Then there were those who had been going for longer, two for six years, one for four years on and off, and two people have been going for seven years and highly value the service

4. What do you most value from your attendance at the gym?

We were told on Wednesday:

Some snippets and quotes from what we were told by service users:

'Helps mental well being'

'A struggle to keep going without the gym, can not sleep, find life hard'

'Getting out, company'

'Exercise, socialising'

'Likes showers after exercising, last gym didn't have them, more equipment now'

'Therapeutic because of exercise and comradeship, and a bit of a laugh'

'Mood lifting effects'

'Exercise while socialising'

'Keeps me active'

'Makes it possible for me to get out, meet people, keeps them mobile and creates better health personally'

'Having an aim in life'

'Help with a muscle problem and a breathing problem, was previously inactive'

'Loss of weight, confidence, now getting out and meeting people'

'Got health problems and overweight, carer for son, can't afford normal gym, doesn't want to be laughed at, this gym improving their personal health'

'Getting out, meeting people and exercising'

'Treatment of medical condition'

'To gain more self confidence'

We were told on Thursday:

Observation - There seemed to be a distinct difference between those using the Community gym, and those who are recently using the facility for physiotherapy which is different to what the Community gym concept seems to be.

'Exercise leads to 'well being'

'Great staff and run very well'

'Fitness and help'

'Socialise. Fighting depression, helpful staff'
'Getting fitness and mobility back (slowly) staff very knowledgeable'
'Expert advice from the staff – gradual lead into training, have never felt as well'
'Meeting people and getting fit'
'Friendly, small, equipment'
'Getting fitter, feeling good about achieving'
'Feeling good, feeling fitter, socialising'
'Movement of legs, have a good laugh, good atmosphere'
'Exercises for mobility, meeting other people very important''
'Loss of weight, leg muscle problem, increased mobility'
'Directly getting fitter'
'Feeling good about self -helps make effort about my own health'
'Meeting friends, feeling fitter, helps angina'
'Only place I get exercise'

5. What would you change if you could?

We were told on Wednesday:

More staff seemed to be a popular request, although there was nothing but praise for the present staff.

'Can't use much of the equipment'

Two people mentioned Pilates would be good

A number of people discussed they would like to see the return of the chair based exercises, and the tai chi as they were popular.

It was suggested by two people that it would be good if the gym users could have special times at the Pool

A bigger facility with more equipment as it gets very busy at times would be good.

Location, presently not very accessible, would be better nearer to the centre of town as some people don't come back because it is too difficult to get to.

Return of tai chi etc and seated exercises, were popular

Sauna, swimming pool, and Jacuzzi !! Joke

More space in reception area, for when you are booking in and when you have finished working out, somewhere to cool down.

Tea and coffee vending machines, or even cups for the water.

Better car parking as it is presently up a hill and not easy to negotiate.

Overwhelmed when outside on way to and from the gym by number of school children outside especially around lesson change and school breaks

We were told on Thursday:

It is evident that the funding is an issue, it would be good if that could be solved.

The Community gym has been moved many times, but it should be nearer to the centre of town and more accessible to others. Advertising it would increase use.

Weekend opening and longer opening hours during the week so people with child care issues can attend more regularly

Extra rowing machines, proper maintenance contract, open after normal hours for those who have family commitments, or are working
More personal attention (difficulty walking after stroke)

6. When you are attending the gym, what are the goals you have identified, and how is the gym helping you to achieve them?

We were told on Wednesday:

One person told us that they don't want other people to know they have depression and the gym helps them with that.

For one client it maintains their mental well being, and improves physical well being because of back injury (serious)

One client was very positive about Losing weight, and how that had made them feel better

Another client told us they use a lot of weights for their arms, and the treadmill as they would not normally run, and they can see the impact, and it also keeps their weight level

One person told us it was helping their diet plan.

We were told that other gyms are too competitive and too expensive, this gym helps them stay healthy

One client told us something incredibly significant, that since coming to the gym they haven't needed anti-depressants!

Others told us it helps to maintain a better sense of well being overall.

Other gyms don't cater for or appreciate people with problems, and they find they need the right support continuously to attend

One person was positive about achieving their goals and pain reduced
'Don't set goals as feel different every day, trying to lose weight'

'Yes, fitter, mentally active and have a positive outlook'

'Care plan helping to achieve goals'

'Better, weight loss, helping depression'

'Helping lung capacity'

'Motivation to walk more and more, and getting out of home'

'Getting better and fitter'

We were told on Thursday

One client told us their targets were set, and they were trying to improve reasonably

A set care plan with both the doctor and Dane Garth was really helpful in supporting a client to get fit.

Two clients told us they set their own targets Some but not all clients have work plans from the management at the gym, and find them really useful

The gym seems to be used by a few people for Weight loss because of health problems and the clients we spoke to seem to be succeeding.

One client with mental health problems was exercising and obvious it was benefiting her well being as she was smiling while exercising

Routines are important and given, this offers support to improve

'Feeling much better and more in control, anger issues far more in control

Improve use of my legs and increased my activity level'

'Have a deteriorating condition for 25 years, this gym helps maintain my mobility and my personal and social wellbeing, very important'

'Came 4 years ago, returning recently for further help with leg muscle pain and mobility problems'
'Fitness programme from management, working towards improvement'
Set my own goals and it is working'
'Try to build up time I can stay on machinery'
'Gradually build up stamina which I lose when I can't attend'

7. Do you have a care plan at the gym and do you feel you are achieving what you are meant to?

We were told on Wednesday:

'Not here, but do have at GPs'
'Not sure'
'Yes with staff, pleased to be here'
'Not done yet at the gym''
'Yes and doctor very pleased with progress'
'Yes, and the staff at the gym are monitoring my progress'
'No care plan, given a routine originally, but now finds own level'
'Care plan given and am achieving'
'Yes, feels positive about achievements'
'Yes – off anti-depressants'
'Did at first but not now, just keep going'
'No never.'
'Yes from staff, feels it is working'
'Not at gym but at hospital'
'Yes'
'Difficult to think beyond one day at a time, so no care plan'

We were told on Thursday:

Nine people told us they have a care plan and nine told us they did not have one.

'No longer, due to amount of time I have been attending, maintaining fitness level'
'See therapist but no care plan, would like one'
Yes
'Outside care plan includes coming to the gym'
'Care plan is helping a lot'
'Have a care worker, but don't know if have a care plan'
'At Jubilee House'
'Have feedback meetings with nurse'
'Yes I have a care plan and the staff are very helpful'

8. If you had a magic wand and could make this into the ideal service: What 5 things would you like to change?

We were told on Wednesday:

Move the gym to a more central, larger venue more accessible for more people to benefit from its use.
More money available to support the gym
Longer opening hours
Refreshments available, tea, coffee vending machine, cups for the water
More staff

Longer opening hours
A swimming pool
Better social area to relax after workout
More varied machinery and not so close together
Faster repairs for gym equipment when it breaks down
Better access and better car parking facilities.
Other activities like walks
Loo roll.
Stretching machine

We were told on Thursday:

Occupational therapy
Physio, steam room and sauna
(Wheelchair user) 'have the equipment I can use nearer together'
' Equipment that is safe to use for my disability'
Room back for chair based exercise now used by physiotherapists
Gentle exercise
Access to Child care (crèche) for those who have children x 2
Would like a punch bag
Would enjoy cycling as a group
Computer readings from machines
Feedback to GPs on progress
Gym to move to a good venue then stay in one place instead of being moved about
Proper funding
Other activities
Holistic therapies
Reflexology etc
Access to information and relevant Leaflets(more use of notice board)
Healthy eating advice
More equipment
Access to swimming pool
Better changing rooms, more private showers
Bigger building
Nutritionist access
Mix of physical and mental conditions useful as nobody is judged at this gym

What 5 things would you like to keep?

We were told on Wednesday:

There was overwhelming request to keep staff who are very well thought of, especially Matt, the Manager. They make you feel welcome and at home.
All the machinery seems to be popular and would be kept.
The wonderful supportive Atmosphere, that seems to be different to that in other gyms and the relaxed attitude.
Weight machine, improvement on doctors charts very helpful
Keeping the equipment in top condition
It was felt important that the gym could not afford to be reduced anymore!!

'Brilliant staff, camaraderie, the place attracts pleasant people, appreciate it very much'

'Showering facilities'

'Keep it all and expand it'

'Would like to bring back the things that have been taken away, tea and coffee, (even pay for it), Chair based exercises, including tai chi'

We were told on Thursday:

Once again, maintaining the present staff was very high on the things to keep, and appeared on most of the completed questionnaires, as was keeping everything as it is. The camaraderie and the tolerance levels created throughout the gym for all service users by the staff, and their help in raising awareness of other people's conditions and supporting them to achieve as best they can without being judgemental

Treadmills seem to be popular as are the other pieces of equipment.

Further comments and observations:

Access to the gym:

- The team found the gym not easy to find. The car park is situated on a steep hill and will be, for some people difficult to negotiate. The walk from the car park is down a steep hill on uneven ground, so adds to the difficulty of actually getting to the gym.
- The walk from the nearest bus stop is a long way. The narrow road passes the school and when the school is active with lots of children, we were told it can be quite threatening and difficult for some people to negotiate. This could also stop some people from attending.
- The disabled car parking situation is not ideal or big enough and could be better planned. There is room for more parking spaces as there is a grassed area that could be used.

Reception area to the gym:

- The large Notice Board & Information Rack inside the Gym are unusually bare except for a couple of NHS Notices.
- Signing in forms, showing between 50 and 70 people per day attend the gym, were placed on a small table near the hatch to the office.
- Members of the Visiting Team noticed the only fluids available are from the water machine that is placed in a non prominent place in reception but surprisingly there were no cups available. We were told all gym users have to bring their own water bottles because of the risk of cross contamination, and the problems they had with people taking drinks into the gym. It would seem sensible to offer paper cups, with a disposal box for used cups, and restrictions in place as to where people can drink the water to ensure they don't take it into the gym to protect the machinery and prevent slips from spills.
- It was quite difficult for new clients when they first arrived when the shutters were down to the office in the reception area, making it look as if the gym was closed. Apparently this happens regularly if someone is being interviewed in this office space.

Key points from attendees:

- We attended during the school holidays and were told that some people were finding it hard to attend because of child care challenges
- Attendees very much appreciate the fact that this service is free, they couldn't attend if it cost, and other gyms are too expensive and less friendly
- Many service users were asking for a variety of information and this would seem a good use for the notice board space. The team were told by some of the service users that they had been told they were not allowed to put any notices up in the gym
- One of the visiting team did express her concern about how some ladies may feel unsafe approaching the gym, because of its location and the isolated entrance, which may account for some ladies not continuing to attend.

- We did visit through the summer holidays so attendance would be affected. However, we were told by one client that they thought there were about 700 people a week using the Community gym

Community gym concept:

- The Community gym concept seems unique, and a couple of the visiting team suggested there should be one in every area, looking from the Prevention agenda and maintaining social inclusion perspective, as just from those people we spoke to, it is a highly valued service for some very vulnerable clients
- It was good to see that there was a wide cross section of ages of people using the gym
- Not all those using the gym come from Barrow.
- There was a wide age range of people using the gym

What clients want:

- A priority seems to be to keep the fantastic staff. The team heard nothing but praise for the few members of staff who seem to work tirelessly to maintain a good environment for vulnerable clients.
- Many clients would like to expand the activities offered by the gym, such as cycle riding and walking with others.
- Some mentioned usage of the swimming pool, but with other members from the Community gym. It would seem reasonable, if some vulnerable people feel safer or more confident in the presence of others who may have similar problems to themselves, or if they feel they initially need support from the staff at the gym.
- Some would like to see the return of those services that were popular, but have been removed, such as the chair based exercises and Tai Chi seemed very popular.
- It seems that the Community gym concept is different to that of Physiotherapy, where there is a time limit, and clients are expected to be better after a set amount of time. For those with mental health problems or long term deteriorating physical conditions the unique opportunity this facility provides means they can maintain or even improve their conditions.
- The gym seems to fit a lot of the health and wellbeing criteria, helping clients to lose weight, boost confidence, and generally increase awareness of looking after 'themselves'.
- We were quoted 'No decision about me, without me', and asked that their opinions about how useful the Community gym is to so many people be properly taken into account when making any decisions about the future of the facility they value so highly
- We were told that there is a concern about those people who used to be able to use the Community gym only to take part in chair based exercises that have been stopped. What has happened to these people who are now excluded from using the gym, and can they be found and their opinion asked for?

- The Community gym users would like some openness, honesty and feel included in any process that makes decisions about the future, or development of this, to them, significant service.
- It would seem that there are many problems with where the gym is presently located, however, it is still well attended, and it would seem others would attend if access was improved.
- We were told that the gym users are aware that the contract for the gym in its present location is presently under review as it runs out in January. The gym has been placed in other locations previously.

Key Recommendations

- Clients want to keep the staff and the services they presently have, but not necessarily in the same location
- Clients want to expand the services to include walking, cycling and use of the swimming pool as a group.
- Clients would like to see the return of the chair based exercises and Tai Chi.
- The Community gym concept is unique, and different to physiotherapy, clients want no time limits placed on the number of sessions people need to benefit from this service.
- Clients are meeting Health and Wellbeing targets by losing weight, boosting confidence, and generally increasing awareness of looking after themselves, therefore recommend this service is maintained and expanded.
- 'No decision about me without me' was quoted by clients who strongly stated that their opinions should be taken into consideration when making decisions around the future of the gym and that they want to be kept informed truthfully about the process of considering the future of the gym
- Contact to be made with those people who no longer use the gym to find out why.
- It seems, from what we were told, that there is a lot of inconsistency about where gym attendees have their Care Plans kept, some are at the gym, some at GP's, hospitals and other places. It would seem to be sensible to have a plan of action around all Care Plans of some kind at the gym.

Those members of Cumbria LINK visiting team involved with this particular visit would like to thank all those who took the time to answer the questionnaire, and the staff at the Community Gym for allowing the team to go in to the gym to talk directly to their attendees.

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