

Tackling Inequalities through the MSP Together Fund Wirral Deen Centre



Wirral Deen Centre is a mosque and community centre open to everyone based in the Birkenhead & Tranmere ward, which falls within the top 4% of most deprived areas in England.

Having previously not run any projects relating to physical activity, the charity approached MSP for some funding through the Together Fund in order to encourage people from predominantly BAME backgrounds to increase their physical activity levels during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the charity's volunteers, Outreach Coordinator Piara Miah, explained how many women that are supported through the Wirral Deen Centre face inequalities and barriers accessing local services, "Most of the ladies in this group were not born in the UK, and if they missed schooling years their spoken English is weaker or non-existent. They didn't do PE, go on school trips; making it difficult to know/learn about and access services especially around physical activities, and if any did look into it then finding a suitable women's only gym or swimming session was difficult to access. Often on low incomes, buying appropriate clothing and footwear and spending money on travel is enough to stop participants being active. Other barriers also include not having role models, or having a friend who would support and go with them. Many are unable to drive and primary carer for children and the elders, some are working too, making exercise and looking after themselves last on their priorities."

MSP helped the Wirral Deen Centre to secure £3,126 of funding, which they used to subsidise transport and purchase gym clothing for participants as well as paying for

exclusive access for a group of their ladies to access the gym at nearby Tranmere Rovers Recreation Centre. As a result, 15 women from diverse backgrounds have participated in group sessions, 80% of whom had never previously been to a gym and some ladies are taking part in order to manage their diabetes condition having been encouraged to be more active via their GP.

One lady, whose first language isn't English and is a single mum of three children, described the impact of attending the sessions as "life-changing". Having previously experienced low self-esteem and having recovered from cancer, she has used physical activity as a way of building her resilience and supporting her integration in to the local community; she has now made lots of new friends, is completing an ESOL course and wants to take driving lessons, plus she is exploring volunteering opportunities with a view to working.

Even though many of the women had connected with each other using WhatsApp during the Covid-19 lockdowns, attending the gym sessions enabled them to meet up face to face for the first time, and many of them discovered how close they live to each other and have struck up new friendships. Two women in particular, both on benefits/low income, have put themselves forward to lead aerobics sessions for the other participants; the Deen Centre are looking to reimburse these ladies for their time to help boost their confidence and support their family lives. The Deen Centre have also built on their relationship with TRFC, who are now exploring ways to support this group and the wider community (facing barriers) into further activities like playing football, starting walking groups and play bowls.

Piara commented that she appreciates the support and patience that MSP were able to offer as part of the Together Fund opportunity, "The funding was a godsend, but the idea would not have come to fruition without MSP's flexible approach, patience, kind advice, support and words of encouragement. It was reassuring to hear that it wasn't supposed to be easy, and the setbacks only proved this is the group that needed the support. This has already made a huge difference in their lives, facilitated friendships, boosted their confidence, sense of wellbeing and led to further activities. I'm so proud of this lovely group of ladies for coming out of their comfort zones and staying committed once they signed up."