



| leisure

Making a Difference

KA Leisure's Health & Wellbeing Service during the Covid-19 Pandemic

2020/21



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Who we are and what we do

The Active Lifestyles Team (ALT) delivers a Health & Wellbeing Service in North Ayrshire which offers a broad range of activities within local communities to support people to become more active and adopt a healthier lifestyle.

This report outlines our response to the COVID-19 pandemic from April 2020 to March 2021. It captures our pandemic experience and the impact on our service, reflects on our achievements, shares inspiring participant journeys and provides strategic direction for our future delivery.

As we move forward we will continue to strengthen relationships with North Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership and NHS Ayrshire and Arran to develop our Health & Wellbeing Service, to ensure that we can reach those most in need, improve people's health, reduce health inequalities and support communities to recover from the impact of the pandemic.



Our Health & Wellbeing Service has three key areas of delivery:

1. Active North Ayrshire (ANA)

2. Community Outreach

3. ACTIVATOR

We continually strive to deliver innovative programmes through collaboration with key partners who share the same outcomes which:

1. Engage with priority groups including those who are vulnerable, isolated and at greatest risk of inactivity
2. Prevention and early intervention. Offering the right support at the right time in the local community
3. Target specific health issues including long term conditions and mental health and wellbeing

The Health & Wellbeing Service aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Increased Self Confidence
- Improved Function of Daily Living
- Improves quality of life
- Increased Awareness of Benefits of Physical Activity Increased Physical Activity Opportunities
- Reduced Social Isolation
- Reduced Inequalities
- Self-management of Health Conditions

1. Active North Ayrshire (ANA)

Active North Ayrshire (ANA) is our overarching Physical Activity Referral Programme which supports people from North Ayrshire to become more active.

Physical activity is both a primary intervention to help prevent a number of long term conditions, or can be a secondary intervention to prevent a condition from recurring or becoming worse.

Participants can be either referred by their GP or health professional or if they don't have an underlying high risk health condition they can self refer.

Health professionals can refer patients to ANA with confidence as all activities and classes are delivered by members of our highly qualified team.

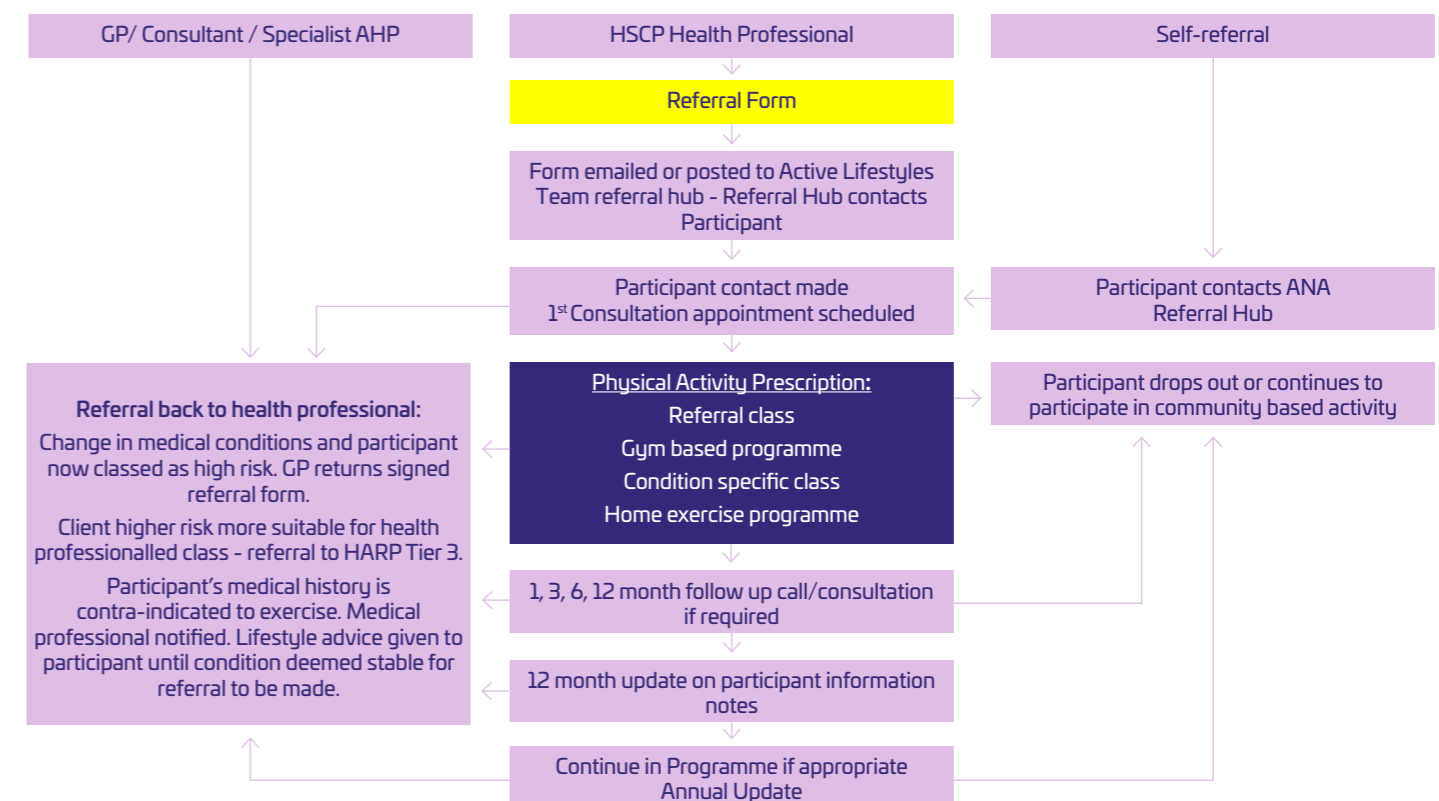
The team has specialist qualifications in physical activity referral, in addition to a range of condition-specific qualifications including cardiac rehabilitation, stroke, diabetes and obesity, pulmonary rehabilitation, falls prevention, mental health, ante/post natal exercise, cancer rehabilitation, MS, osteoporosis and hip and knee rehabilitation to name a few.

There are a number of strands of the programme which focus on specific conditions. These include:

- **Healthy Active Rehabilitation Programme (HARP)** is for people with multiple long term conditions. This provides a structured pathway of physical activity from physiotherapy led multi condition rehabilitation to longer term supported physical activity within the community
- **Mind and Be Active (MBA)** mental health referral programme aims to improve mental health & wellbeing through supported physical activity
- **'Weigh To Go'** weight management programme provides support for people who want to maintain a healthy weight through healthy eating and regular physical activity
- **'Move More North Ayrshire'** supports people who are living with or have recently recovered from a cancer diagnosis
- **Invigor8** is a falls prevention evidence based exercise programme designed to improve the participants mobility, strength and balance helping to reduce the risk of falls. Participants can take part in the class both seated and standing therefore the class is suitable for different ability levels

The condition specific rehabilitation pathway offers a programme of classes which are tailored for specific conditions such as a stroke, cardiac, bone health or respiratory illness.

Participant pathway



2. Community Outreach

The Community Outreach programme offers a diverse range of physical activity opportunities, early health interventions and promotes the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

We are committed to tackling health inequalities by providing opportunities that will contribute to improve the health of the people living within North Ayrshire.

A comprehensive programme of community based activities is delivered by the team with activities available such as Boogie Books and Fit Ayrshire Babies suitable for babies from 12 weeks, to classes and activities for adults and older adults which includes functional fitness MOTs, chair exercise classes and health walks within local communities.

The programme also delivers within sheltered accommodation and local care homes with many activities carried out in partnership with local community partners such as Opportunities in Retirement and Alzheimer Scotland. North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership operate a number of Community Social Hubs within sheltered housing complexes within the heart of local communities, where we deliver functional activity sessions for older people living in the community.



3. ACTIVATOR

The ACTIVATOR is our versatile, mobile, physical activity and health unit which provides a valuable service of health checks and lifestyle advice within the heart of local communities.

This includes an early intervention service which carries out health checks that frequently identify potential health issues which often result in a person being referred to a medical professional.

In some instances, a health condition is then diagnosed and medication is prescribed.

This service can have a tangible impact as the first point of contact and demonstrates the importance of early intervention to prevent further health complications.



Supporting health and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic

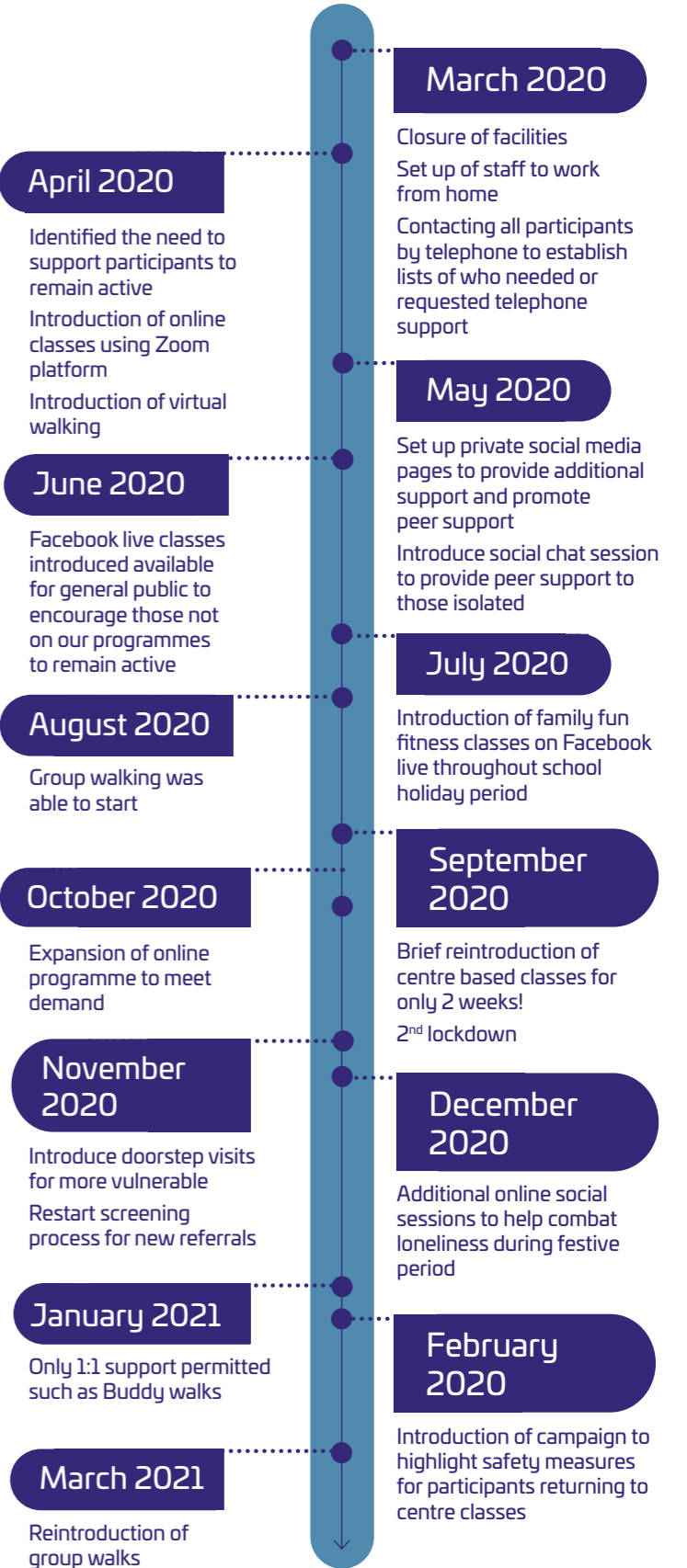
When the pandemic started in March 2020 we didn't press the pause button. Following the closure of facilities and community venues we developed a revised Health & Wellbeing Service to fit with lockdown restrictions and Scottish Government guidelines.

To allow participants to continue to receive support, remain physically active and access mental health support it was crucial that the Health & Wellbeing Service was adapted. This was vital particularly for those who were isolated or who lived alone. The revised service included support, advice and opportunities for participants to maintain functional strength and mobility, remain active and enable them to continue living independently.

We continued to offer as many elements of the original Health & Wellbeing Service through the use of technology and ensured that it was responsive to emerging guidance. This included:

- Telephone Support Programme
- Home Based Physical Activity Programmes
- Active North Ayrshire Online
- Walking Programme
- Social support
- Mental Health Support
- Doorstep Visits

Pandemic Timeline



Supporting health and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic

April 2020-March 2021

Telephone Support

Many of our participants are vulnerable either due to their age or long term health conditions. During the pandemic this meant they had to self-isolate within their own homes.

For those who lived alone or if they were struggling with their mental health, particularly those within the Mind and Be Active programme, the past year has been a particularly stressful time, and many have found it difficult to cope with feelings of loneliness.

For some our support telephone call was their only contact and many received calls more regularly due to this isolation. Throughout the pandemic calls were made on a rotation of either 1, 2 or 3 weeks depending on both the participant's preference and the level of support required.

The call provided an opportunity to reinforce the importance of staying active and give advice on the best way to do this.

Our team continued to provide telephone support for vulnerable participants who were isolated at home and when doorstep visits were introduced this provided face-to-face contact. This gave those most in need something to look forward to and many of our recipients say it has been a lifeline for them.



661
people have received telephone support,
We made 7546 calls over 12 months



Physical Activity Consultant Lorna Harris shares her experience of working through the pandemic.

The closure of the leisure facilities happened very quickly and then we had to work from home. At the start it was a fear of the unknown. We all wondered will this last six weeks or six months? That made you feel quite uptight.

Before we started online classes we were initially phoning participants to check they were OK and encouraging them to still be active and not to sit all day, to get up and down and move a bit. We gave them a gentle prod into doing some exercise if they'd fallen out of the habit.

We also sent exercise booklets out to participants, so they had something to follow at home. This kept them ticking over because people don't always remember everything from the class. Throughout the pandemic we have continued telephone support to keep in touch with our participants.

At the start of the pandemic it became clear that online delivery was going to be the way forward to support our participants to remain active. Whilst being apprehensive about this I quickly found delivering classes in this way part of my normal week. I knew all the participants from our classes, and it was nice to see familiar faces enjoying being active. I also learned the best ways to move and position myself so that everyone could see clearly what I was doing.

I helped a lot of older participants who were struggling to set up Zoom and it's been really good to see how so many of them have taken to using technology. We have a 95-year-old who uses Zoom now! For many of them it's the only time all week they see people. I think it's amazing how easily we've all adapted to the online world.

Digital technology to stay connected

The Active Lifestyles Team provided support throughout the pandemic. Survey feedback from 849 participants found that:

- 45%** felt better and more positive after taking part in sessions
- 35%** reported improved mobility
- 26%** reported an improvement in their fitness
- 29%** took part in programmes to help support their mental health
- 35%** found they experienced less pain
- 50%** felt their overall health had improved
- 41%** reported one of the main benefits of taking part was social interaction



142
online social support sessions
595 attendances



We provided **674** people with email support and 32 people with text support

We supported **693** participants over the last 12 months



559
online classes

5608
total attendances

Walking into a better future

During the pandemic the Active Lifestyles Team (ALT) had to rethink methods of delivery to support participants to stay active. A successful community walking programme was already in place and delivered by a network of volunteers. When facilities closed in March 2020 this walking programme was developed and adapted to support participants to remain active within the Government guidelines.

When meeting in person was not permitted an innovative virtual walking programme using Whatsapp was created. Walks could accommodate up to eight participants who all walked within their own house or garden so they could still experience a local outdoor walk through a live video of a walk being led by a member of the Team. Virtual walks provided opportunity for connectivity between participants, and it was a great way for them to chat and keep in touch with others.

The Team also recorded a series of virtual walks that could be emailed to participants for them to enjoy in their own time. To keep the walkers motivated fun virtual group walking challenges were promoted, such as walking to the North Pole!

In August 2020 Government guidelines permitted group walking to recommence. Many participants were new to walking having previously been part of Active North Ayrshire and attending classes within facilities. During group walks participants could safely meet up and be active with others outdoors.

When restrictions changed again in January 2021 and group walks could no longer take place, the Team was able to offer support through one-to-one Buddy walks. These walks were particularly valuable to those who were isolated, experiencing poor mental health and in need of the additional support to stay active. The team also co-ordinated paired walks for participants that would normally attend group walks.

For more vulnerable participants who due to health reasons or limited mobility were unable to attend walks, doorstep visits were introduced. During a doorstep visit a member of the team supported participants to take a short walk in their local area or have a one-to-one fitness session on their doorstep or garden.

The programme that has developed during the pandemic has highlighted just how valuable walking is to keep our participants active and has encouraged new partnerships and innovative ways of working with our partners. Walking has helped maintain the activity levels of many people who would normally attend classes within leisure centres and who without the motivation to attend a walk may have experienced a loss in their physical and mental wellbeing.

Ronnie Graham from Irvine was referred to the Active Lifestyles walking programme by the NHS due to depression which got worse during the lockdown. Since joining he has lost five stone and his mental health has improved significantly.

Ronnie (63) was at his lowest point and contemplating suicide last March. He had been struggling with his mental health for several years after losing his job and this led him on a downward spiral. Unable to work, Ronnie grew increasingly depressed and started to shut himself off from everyone. He stopped answering the door and his phone because he didn't feel like speaking to anyone.

He was experiencing severe money worries, having difficulty sleeping at night, and eating all the wrong things at the wrong times which led to his weight reaching 24 stone.

Ronnie said: "Letters were piling up about the money. Sometimes I hoped I wouldn't wake up in the morning because I didn't know what the next day was going to bring. I was in a very dark place last year and had even decided how I'd end my life."

The turning point for Ronnie came last September when a friend urged him to come and stay with her. She also encouraged him to see his GP and as a result he was referred to KA Leisure's walking programme.

Ronnie gradually built up his fitness and now he does two eight mile walks a week. He's also started eating and sleeping better and has lost five stone.

Ronnie explains: "When you are in that dark place you don't realise there are people out there with the skills who are just dying to help you if you just put your hand up and ask.

"When you head down a downward spiral you just get worse and worse but when you start turning that corner all the good things feed in and things begin to come back the other way.

"KA Leisure's walking programme came along just at the right time for me. I've walked 547 miles since the beginning of January this year and I'm down to 19 stone now, which is still heavy but I've come a long way."

During the lockdown walking programme participants were partnered with a 'buddy' so they could continue to go on walks safely. Ronnie is now preparing to do a 96 mile charity walk this summer along the West Highland Way (WHW).

Ronnie added: "These folk have been a blessing to me and it's time for me to pass that blessing on to others. I want people to know there is help out there for them, they just need to ask for it."



We organised

362

Group Walks

with 154 regular participants
and 40 virtual walks with
318 regular participants

Weigh to Go!

Weigh To Go is an adult weight management programme delivered in partnership with NHS Ayrshire and Arran. The programme is suitable for participants with a BMI of over 25. Participants agree small achievable goals to fit in with their lifestyle, helping them make lifelong sustainable changes.

It is important for people to combine healthy eating with physical activity to aid their weight loss so we encourage participants to be more active and keep a food and activity diary.

Weigh To Go participants receive six education sessions over a 12 week period covering a variety of topics including hidden fats and sugars, food labelling, eating out and portion control. The education sessions are tailored to the participant focusing on the most important issues to them and aiding them to overcome any barriers to effectively managing their weight. Diets are not imposed, but rather we support and encourage healthy lifestyle changes.

Online group education and exercise sessions were offered throughout the pandemic to provide peer support and encouragement to participants.



Combine healthy eating with exercise



Six **30** minute sessions over a 12 week period



Participants are encouraged to track food and activity



We've supported **28** people to lose or manage a healthy weight and achieved an average weight loss of 4% of body weight across the programme

High five Helen!

Since joining 'Weigh to Go' in September 2019 Helen Shield has lost nine stone.

Helen (65) had previously lost two stone through her own efforts so her total weight has dropped quite dramatically over the last two years from 24 stone 12 lb to 13 stone 8 lb. Her BMI has also reduced from 53.1 to 28 and her blood pressure has dropped into the healthy range.

Helen worked long hours as a headteacher and then as an educational consultant and she says the stress of the jobs combined with an underactive thyroid and a sedentary lifestyle contributed towards her weight gain.

She said: "I had no balance in my life, I was working all the time which meant sitting all day and some evenings. I wasn't doing any exercise and eating too much.

"I was very overweight and I knew the health risks. My blood pressure was borderline high and I didn't want to become diabetic so I had to do something."

After retiring from work in 2019 Helen contacted an old friend who encouraged her to come to an exercise class with her. Helen explains: "I stayed at the back of the first class and puffed and panted my way through but I did it"

"After the class I said to the instructor 'I'm probably the least fit person here but I am trying to lose weight' but she said 'it doesn't matter, you're here, you're moving and that's what matters'. She said 'we can help you' and told me about their 'Weigh to Go' programme.

"The fact that nobody was judgemental really helped me. I think if I'd felt that I was being told off for being so overweight I probably wouldn't have gone back but they were just so willing to help and non-judgemental."

She added: "Since joining 'Weigh to Go' I feel so much better, it's been wonderful for me. I'm making healthy food choices now and I'm more active.

"I had got into bad eating habits and exercising wasn't part of my life. Now I will take myself out on a walk, something I would never have considered doing before because I was so unfit and I just sat in front of a computer."

Helen had given herself a target of 180 minutes of exercise per week but now she is doing between 400 to 500 minutes a week thanks to a combination of walks, online classes, and hillwalking. Through the support from the team she has stayed active throughout lockdown which has kept her motivated to reach her targets. Helen has become so fit that her friends now struggle to keep up with her on hill walks!



Keeping active with Cancer



Move More North Ayrshire is delivered in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to support people who are living with and beyond a cancer diagnosis to do physical activity before, during and after their treatment.

This can help people to cope better with the side effects of treatment and aid their recovery. We also know that improved physical health can be beneficial for mental health and wellbeing.

We offer 'Move More' specific classes from Gentle Movement (Tai Chi based) to a Move More circuit, making sure all participants are supported and guided through their exercise regime.

Our team is highly trained and have specific qualifications in cancer rehabilitation which gives them the specialist knowledge to support participants from point of cancer diagnosis to rehabilitation following on from treatment. Participants are followed up regularly on the programme and physical activity is tailored to their needs.

More recently, we have started to deliver prehabilitation where we accept referrals from cancer specialist health partners for patients who are awaiting surgery or treatment.

The intensive physical activity programme in the preoperative stage focuses on increasing fitness and strength which has been proven to aid recovery. Prehabilitation optimises physical and mental health which can improve cancer treatment effectiveness and cancer survival.

Throughout the pandemic we supported Move More North Ayrshire participants with specialised home programmes, online classes and social sessions. Most participants within this programme shielded due to their cancer diagnosis and the online sessions enabled them to stay active and keep in touch with others on the programme and provided them with much valued peer support.

Supporting those with cancer:

There is estimated to be **5,200** people in North Ayrshire living with and beyond cancer

In North Ayrshire **893** people are diagnosed with cancer each year

453 people die every year from cancer

Move More North Ayrshire provides a variety of activities:

Circuits

Gentle Movement

Gardening

Macmillan Friendly walks

Jane's story

Jane Gibson (70) was referred to Move More North Ayrshire in November 2017 after she was diagnosed with uterine cancer. She also has high blood pressure and asthma.

She tells her story:

After recovering from the surgery and radiotherapy a member of the 'Move More' Team interviewed me to find out if the programme would benefit my recovery.

Following this, I was invited to the launch of the Move More Programme in Kilmarnock where I met the leader of the gentle movement class. I attended the Move More gym sessions and gentle movement classes at The Portal in Irvine and they helped me to feel better because cancer really knocks the stuffing out of you and it takes a long time to regain your fitness.

I made friends with lots of lovely people at the classes and we often went for a coffee in the café after class but that all stopped when the first lockdown happened last March.

I was feeling anxious at that time because doctors had recently found something of concern during an examination. However, they were unable to do any further investigation when the pandemic started and because I had been diagnosed with cancer previously I was worried. I was imagining all sorts of things and having trouble sleeping.

It made things worse that I was unable to see my children and grandchildren due to Covid regulations and I felt a bit lost and very alone. I'm lucky to have my husband Tom and without him I would have really struggled, but my mental health suffered and some days I felt very down.

The Active Lifestyles Team phoned me every week during the lockdown to see how I was doing. They also organised an online chat for the participants of gentle movement classes.

When online Zoom classes started last July, I was thrilled because they gave me something else to focus on. It's not much fun when you are stuck in the house every day, there's only so much reading, housework and knitting you can do!

I did three classes a week and they always lifted my mood. They gave me something to get up and organised for and it was great to see my friends, even if it was virtually. The deep breathing and mindfulness also really helped my anxiety. These classes were my saving grace through the lockdowns.



When my classes resumed again at the Portal last July I tried the circuit class. I was a bit apprehensive at first because my fitness levels had dropped but it was really good because I was encouraged to go at my own pace. The class leaders were very supportive and encouraged everyone to do what they could, and the music helped.

I also joined KA Leisure's walking group in October last year when restrictions lifted a bit. This was the first time I'd done something outside since the lockdown and it was wonderful to get some fresh air and have a blether with my friends again!

When I eventually attended a hospital appointment for further investigation in January this year the doctors unfortunately found a tumour and I was diagnosed with bowel cancer. I had surgery the following month and they successfully removed all the cancer. I was offered to join 'Move More' again to aid my recovery, but I told them I was already on the programme and I couldn't wait to get back to it again!

I returned to the walking group seven weeks after my operation and I'm gradually building up my strength and fitness. It's great to be socialising with my friends again, we're all in the same boat as cancer patients so we know what everyone is going through and give each other fantastic support.

The leaders are also very well trained and knowledgeable about different medical conditions. I can't praise the Team at KA Leisure highly enough, they've been really tremendous throughout the pandemic.

Staying connected

Social isolation is a priority in five of the six localities within the North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Bridging Strategic Commissioning Plan 2021-2022.

Isolation has been an issue for many people during the pandemic as people missed the social contact they'd normally get from attending classes. As time is restrictive in a virtual class we set up online social sessions to allow class participants to meet and just chat.

We also introduced doorstep visits to support our more vulnerable and frail participants and provide some social contact.

These are particularly beneficial for people who are socially isolated, have poor mental health or who have been identified as being at risk of a fall. During the visit staff complete an Invigor8 falls screening assessment and then prescribe a home activity programme such as taking them on a short walk from their house or doing exercises in their garden to improve mobility, flexibility, strength and balance.

The progress of participants is reviewed after 12 weeks and often an improvement is seen in their fitness, confidence and mental health which then enables them to go along to a class or supported session in the community. Each participant will be followed up with further doorstep visits or telephone support.



Doorstep visits:

22 people have been supported through 1:1 doorstep visits

127 visits have taken place

Visit includes doorstep walk or doorstep exercise session

After six visits:

45% reported an improvement in their mobility

29% said their mental health had improved

28% reported they were finding daily living activities easier

21% felt their overall health had improved

Anne's story

Anne Bowden had a severe stroke in 2019 and lost all the feeling down her left side. She also has diabetes and high blood pressure. Since the lockdown last year, she has been receiving doorstep visits once a week from Marianne Baird, a physical activity consultant with Active North Ayrshire.

Anne's physical and mental health has improved so significantly since these visits that she can now sit up in bed on her affected side, something she thought she'd never be able to do again.

Prior to the pandemic Anne (79) attended Aqua Fit and Falls Prevention classes at The Portal in Irvine.

And although Anne lives alone after her husband Billy passed away six years ago, her house was always busy with friends and family visiting but all that changed overnight last year when social distancing became the norm and Anne had to shield.

Anne's family continued to visit her through the pandemic, but they couldn't be there all the time and they were worried about her mental well-being. The doorstep visits gave them some peace of mind and took some of the pressure off them.

Anne said: "I was feeling very low and isolated during the lockdown, I was doing next to nothing and barely going out on my own.

"I was really down on my knees and losing interest in life when Marianne phoned to ask if I'd like doorstep visits. I was thrilled, her call gave me such a boost."

Anne continues: "I had fallen into a rut but her visits gave me something to look forward to and motivated me to do things again. I can't tell you how much I appreciate her visits, they give me the kick I need!"



"Although my family is a great support, it's so nice to see someone else too. It helps to fill my day and provides a bit of structure to my week."

As well as doing socially distanced chair and stand-up exercises with Anne, Marianne also accompanies her on walks in the local area. As a result, Anne's less frightened about falling and has become more confident to go out on short walks alone. She also finds it easier to get dressed and undressed on her own.

Anne said: "I rely less on my grabbing device to step into and pull up my clothes, I can even reach round to my back now. I can move position in bed now, something I have not been able to do since my stroke.

"Previously if I fell asleep on my left side, I would get stuck, but now I have the strength to move myself. I can also sit up in bed on my affected side now. It's really incredible.

"I've made such terrific progress in the last year, I would never have imagined it. I really can't thank the team enough for all their help."

Mind and Be Active



The Mind and Be Active (MBA) project provides support to help improve participants mental health and wellbeing through supported physical activity. A single bout of 40 minutes of aerobic exercise is enough to increase 'feel good' chemicals and improve mood in the short term. Due to this the body can respond better when placed in situations of stress.

The team has completed a specialist qualification in Exercise and Mental Health to enable them to effectively support MBA participants to increase their activity levels and improve their mental health. The team is able to support participants with mild to moderate through to severe and enduring mental health problems.

The team has been working throughout lockdown to continue to provide support and encouragement to participants to help them stay physically active and socially connected. They created a closed Facebook group to enable this social connection which has been a great success and a lifeline for many. They also delivered specific online fitness classes, chat sessions and virtual walks open only to those on the MBA programme. Participants have shared their amazing stories of success on the Facebook page which has inspired others.

One participant wrote on the Facebook page: "Thanks for creating this, it is great and just what I need for the support."



236

people have received support through MBA over the last 12 months



32 new referrals



93 MBA specific online classes

435 attendances



87 social support sessions

385 attendees



141 people received telephone support

92% were supported to remain active at home



253 1:1 Buddy Walks

61 Participants supported

Five super stats about our Mind and Be Active Facebook support group

140 members

1171 posts

3012 comments

8686 reactions

53 live support sessions for physical activity, social support and healthy eating which received 2061 views



Gemma's story

Gemma Gilfillan (29) who is part of Mind and Be Active received support from the programme to help with her recovery from alcohol dependency

Gemma started drinking heavily when she was 22 and her drinking got worse after she lost her mum to lung cancer in 2017 when Gemma was 26. She was depressed, self-harming and feeling suicidal. She was placed into a rehabilitation programme and attending the gym was mandatory. This was the first time she had ever been to a gym and she discovered she loved it, especially running and lifting weights and that's when she met Celina from the ALT.

Gemma recalls: "I hardly said two words at first because I'm quite shy but we got to know each other, and I looked forward to our chats. Sometimes I had a rant with her, I was angry with the world that I'd lost my mum. But no matter how bad I was feeling my mood always lifted after the gym and it kept me occupied and took my mind off drinking.

Two or three months after finishing rehab Gemma started drinking and self-harming again and Celina could see she was struggling to cope. Gemma explains: "I felt suicidal and Celina sat me down one day for a serious chat. She said I had to do something before things got worse and suggested I attend AA sessions to keep myself on track. I went to AA in 2018 and I've been going ever since. If I hadn't joined MBA I don't know where I would be by now. They have been absolutely fantastic. It's just so good to know that someone cares about you. The team saved my life."

Gemma has tried aqua classes and loved them so much that she also learned to swim and dive!

Gemma has been an active participant throughout lockdown on the MBA Facebook page. She posted on the page "Just want to write a wee post to thank MBA for basically saving my life. Today at nearly 29 years old I celebrated being 23 months sober today! I came to MBA straight out of rehab back in 2017 to get some fitness and boost my mental health. With encouragement I got help with my drinking and I started gym sessions with Celina and haven't looked back since. The activities and support throughout lockdown have been great. It's given me the encouragement that I needed to continue with my fitness. I have been walking at least 6km a day and taking part in the classes on the group page when I can. I join in the social chat sessions during my break at work which helps keep me motivated and it's lovely to see the team and others from the programme. My eyes are bright and I'm loving life, so, thank you MBA!"



69% of participants reported improved mental health

58% said their overall health had improved

Getting stronger every day



Marjory Orr was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) seven years ago and has attended KA Leisure classes for ten years. When these stopped during the pandemic she started doing 1-2-1 walks with a member of the team and online classes.

Marjory has attended classes at Vikingar for ten years, she especially enjoys Keep Fit Low and aqua classes in the swimming pool and says she made most of her friends through attending these sessions.

Marjory said: "We do a bit of aerobics, stretching, weights, steps and dance which I find quite difficult as my coordination and balance isn't great, but I'm working hard to improve this.

"I really enjoy the companionship of classes. For me it's not just about the exercise, it's very sociable as well."

While these classes have not been available due to the pandemic, Marjory has been going on one-to-one walks, with members of the Active Lifestyles team.

Marjory has known the team for a number of years as she previously attended classes and they supported her recovery after she had a fall and fractured her hip. Marjory said: "The team are all so supportive and very good with people like myself who have disabilities.

"I have benefited considerably from walking with them, I am stronger and faster.

"My confidence has been boosted because I'm less worried that I may fall over. This helps with daily living tasks and enables me to do so much more which improves my quality of life.

"Everyone in the Active Lifestyle Team has been a great support through the pandemic. They've always thought about what they can do and opened up online classes so that we can have them again."

Marjory has also embraced technology and participated in online classes when the weather's not been suitable for outdoor activities. These include gentle movement, strength and balance, yoga and neuro rehab.

She explains: "The classes have aided with my rehabilitation and have benefited me both physically and mentally. They always boost my mood.

"My endurance and strength, specifically in my arms and legs, has vastly improved. As a result, I suffer less from fatigue and back pain. I am grateful that I have been able to take part in so many activities, as well as being able to get out and enjoy nature."



Lynn

Lynn Mathew, Couch to 5K participant

I just want to say a great big thank you to all the team at KA Leisure for setting up and running the Couch to 5K programme during the last few months. I really can't believe that I have run a full 5K (I have one final one to do). I would never have done that without your motivation and support.

I hit 60 in December, my waistline and weight were the highest ever and I was experiencing the occasional hip niggle and my face starting to look pasty. I knew I needed to get a grip before I became an 'old' 60 year old letting my health and fitness slide because of my own laziness. And I certainly want to be fit and active when I'm 70 and beyond.

So, when I saw this programme I thought I would give it a go as I couldn't go to the gym. But I'm a bit of a wimp and I like the cosy warmth, so when it was rainy or windy or cold (as it was in February and March) I was perfectly happy sitting in bed in the morning with a cup of tea browsing Facebook.

But then I'd see your morning motivational post or read posts from those who had already got out of bed really early and run, or run late at night after a day's work, and it made me get out of bed to run. My husband thought I was crazy!

I'm also bad at telling myself I can't do something, so the ongoing motivation has been superb.

I struggled particularly in week four and at the start of week eight, but the support available made me determined to succeed. The whole experience encouraged me also take up the KA Leisure online kettlebell classes, and I changed my diet (I still like my wine though!)

So, thank you very, very much. You have helped me change my whole outlook. I have run 5K, lost 10lbs in weight and 2 1/2 inches from my waist and feel great! I will continue to run three times a week as well as do various classes and get back to the gym.

A big shout out to all the KA Leisure team, both the instructors and administrators, who have kept things going under very difficult circumstances, and a special shout out to the Couch to 5k team. xx



Sharon McIntyre is a physical activity consultant and usually leads a weekly aerobics class for 50 to 80 year olds at Whitlees Centre in Ardrossan. Her classes stopped during the pandemic when the community centre closed but she continued them online.

I had a regular attendance of around 20 women of all shapes and sizes with a range of abilities but the one thing they have in common is they love mixing exercise with fun. Generally after class we all support the cafe by buying their teas and coffees and catch up on all the latest gossip.

Then Covid struck, life ground to a halt and we asked, 'what are we going to do?'

To begin with we phoned participants to check everyone was safe. They all said all they wanted to do was exercise. Eventually when we realised that there was no hope of getting back into the centre and life would not go back to normal immediately, I braved the internet and worked out how to take classes online. I knew it was the only forward to help our community while this pandemic continued.

After some trial and error on a regular basis, not only from myself but the women too, we got there in the end and everyone was happy to be able to dance around whatever room was tidy in their house. They managed to have a little chat either before or after class, and we even held a Christmas party after one of our sessions and celebrated by wearing festive attire.

There was a light at the end of the tunnel when we eventually were allowed back into the centre, but it was short lived for only two weeks. The look of despair on their faces was heart-breaking. The classes are a lifeline to these women for freedom, healthy living, social engagement and to get peace from their other half for at least two hours.

We introduced Move GB, which was another new IT device to learn but I managed, and to date these women still continue to greet me twice a week with their cuppa in their hand, ready for me to energise them until we can get back to exercising in the centres again. None of us like change but it's surprising how quickly we adapt to be able to enjoy the things we love most.

Looking back

The impact of the Coronavirus has been profound. The last year has presented major challenges for the entire organisation, both operationally and financially. We have overcome many obstacles and introduced new working practices to maintain the delivery of the Health & Wellbeing Service.

The Active Lifestyles Team has provided vital support to people in communities across North Ayrshire, giving people encouragement and reassurance when it was needed most.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic during the past year our innovation and ability to adapt fast to changing circumstances has added real value to our service and we have learned so much to help us in the future.

We've identified five key areas of focus that contributed to the positive impact of the Health & Wellbeing Service during the pandemic

COVID-19 immediate response	Adaption and innovation	Continued service provision	Support for participants	Collaboration with partners
Being agile enabled us to offer a quick, effective response to the immediate impact of the pandemic and ensured continuity enabling us to engage with participants to maintain activity levels and support vulnerable participants	We worked creatively to adapt existing modes of delivery and developed new programmes to support the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our participants	When the pandemic started we didn't press the pause button. We developed a revised Health & Wellbeing Service to fit with lockdown restrictions and Scottish Government guidelines	The support we provided was designed around the needs that emerged due to nature of the pandemic and the adaptability, dedication, and commitment of the Active Lifestyles Team	Partnership working is at the heart of all that we do, we strengthened our relationship with existing partners to ensure we were providing support to those who needed it most

Key Learnings

1. The Health & Wellbeing Service was deemed essential prior to the pandemic emerging, and now a year on its importance has been reinforced. We know that prevention, early intervention and enabling people to access the right support at the right time is critical.
2. Partnership working is embedded in our approach, but by deepening partnerships we were able to focus more on outcomes, creating more opportunity for co-production to ensure we were targeting the most vulnerable and isolated people within our communities and in doing so tackling the inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic.
3. The development of a performance management framework has enabled us to continue to support people and respond better to outcomes we share with North Ayrshire Community Planning Partners.

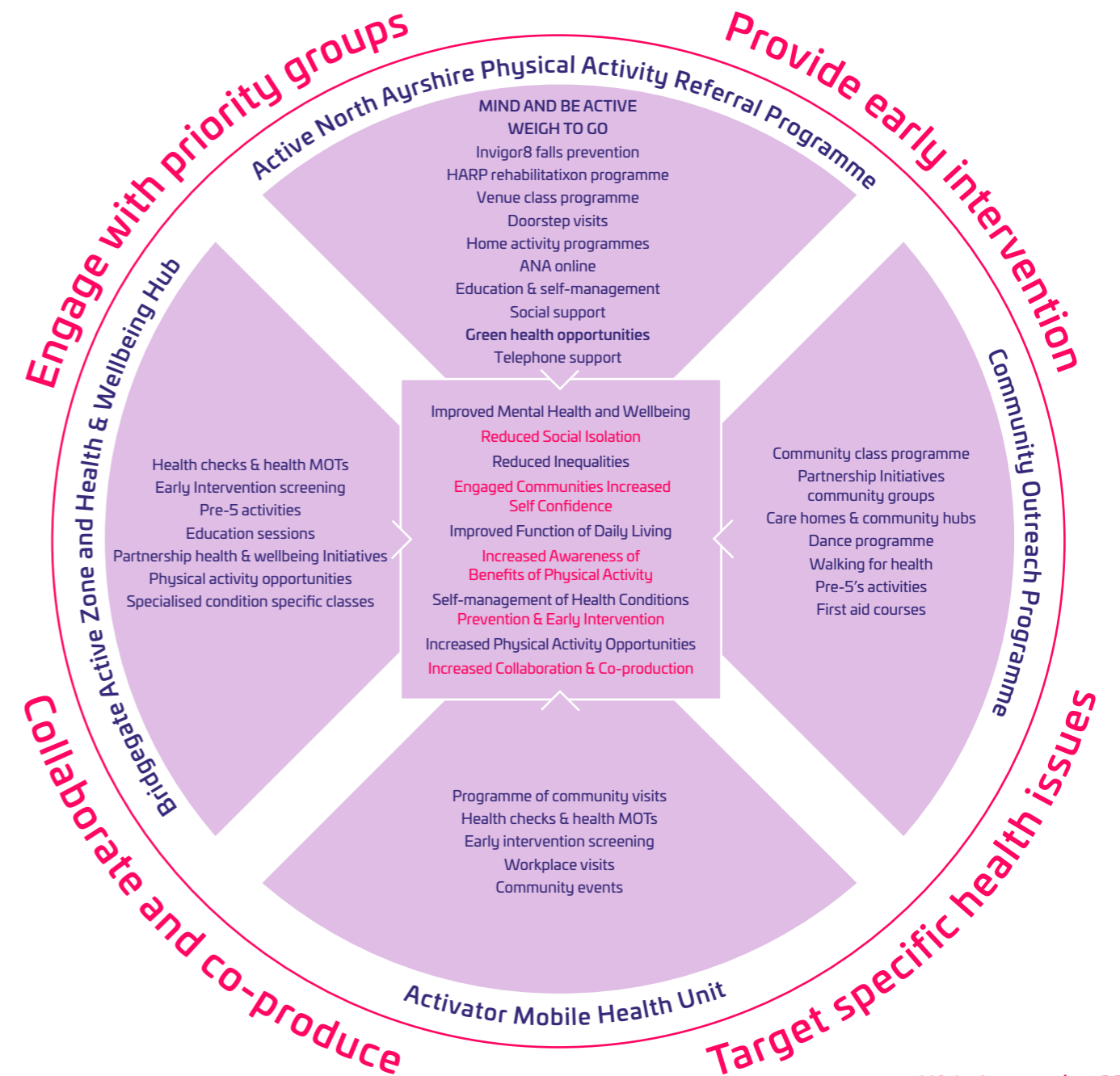
Fit for the future

The Health & Wellbeing Service is one of the key ways we'll support people in North Ayrshire to move forward from the pandemic. It's a critical part of delivering our organisation's recovery and renewal programme and will help respond to the collective challenges we face as a Community Planning Partnership.

To do this, we will reflect on our learnings during the last year, work with our partners, and deliver opportunities for co-production to ensure our programmes are responsive to the needs of our communities. In doing so we will also achieve our organisational ambition of a North Ayrshire that is more active, more often.

Going forward, our Health & Wellbeing Service has been developed and will focus on four key areas of delivery:

1. Active North Ayrshire (ANA)
2. Community Outreach
3. ACTIVATOR
4. Bridgewater Active Zone and Health and Wellbeing Hub



Future plans

The positive impact of the Health & Wellbeing Service during the pandemic has given us a strong foundation on which to develop and shape our future delivery. The following development areas are underway;

Bridgewater Active Zone and Health & Wellbeing Hub

Our new innovative venue in Bridgewater opened in May 2021. Located in the heart of Irvine, it offers a range of physical activity opportunities and health and wellbeing initiatives for all ages. The venue will provide an opportunity for partners to offer accessible services to specific target groups and support engagement with individuals who traditionally may not have accessed our leisure venues and activities.

Outdoor Activity Programme

We are fortunate to have some of the best outdoor spaces, beautiful beaches and countryside in North Ayrshire and future projects will develop outdoor activities and opportunities to encourage use of these green spaces. This will include family physical activity sessions, outdoor community wellbeing initiatives and gardening growing opportunities. The development of these initiatives will enable more people to access the outdoors and help improve mental health and wellbeing.

Walking for Health

The development of the Walking Programme highlighted the need to offer alternative methods of support to enable people to remain active. Supported by North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership and the North Ayrshire Green Health Partnership we secured funding from Paths for All to appoint a "Walking for Health Coordinator" to develop walking opportunities across North Ayrshire. The programme will prioritise supporting existing walking opportunities and developing new walking opportunities across North Ayrshire.

Engaging Vulnerable & Isolated Groups

Two innovative service features which were introduced during the pandemic will be continued following funding received from North Ayrshire Council's Addressing Future Needs Fund.

- One to one support was introduced for our more frail and vulnerable participants who were at high risk of experiencing a fall and losing confidence in functional capacity. Doorstep visits offering functional assessments and tailored physical activity sessions to increase strength and balance were provided.
- One to one Buddy Walks using the 'Walk and Talk' initiatives provided individual support for participants with mental health issues such as depression and social anxiety. Participants were supported to progress to attend group walks to benefit from social interaction and peer support.

Previously, the Health & Wellbeing Service would not have been able to accommodate this individual mode of delivery.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

We are dedicated to promoting the positive benefits that physical activity has on mental health and wellbeing. As part of our future developments, our innovative programme, 'Mind and be Active', will be developed to accommodate children and young people. We will work with health partners, young people and their families to co-design and pilot physical activity interventions to support mental health and wellbeing. Key features will include digital peer support, outdoor physical activity interventions and enhanced social interaction opportunities.

Moving forward

As a committed member of the North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, we are dedicated to working collaboratively with our partners and like-minded organisations to increase activity levels, reduce inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities across North Ayrshire.

Encouraging and keeping people active remains our primary goal, however, the pandemic has presented new challenges in how that is achieved. In addition, it has brought into stark focus the importance of using physical activity as an intervention to address public health, support underlying health conditions and engage with communities.

We are recognised for our approach and so funders and partners can be confident in our ability to adapt and evolve. To remain successful, sustainable and continue to support more people on their own journey to become healthier we will focus on the following:

KA Leisure Health & Wellbeing Service Strategic Partnership

We have demonstrated our commitment to partnership working and to respond dynamically. Nurturing existing, and developing new partnerships will be crucial to ensure we can fulfil and achieve our future goals. We will establish a strategic partnership to allow us to have both a strategic and coordinated approach to future delivery.

Evaluation and Social Return On Investment

We are passionate about using social physical activity opportunities as a mechanism to engage and empower communities across North Ayrshire and will continue to include process and impact evaluation activities from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective to guide strategic direction, improve service delivery, maximise resources, communicate with key partners and demonstrate impact. We will undertake a Social Return On Investment to demonstrate the impact our service has on the quality of people lives and the social and financial value that the project has to our partners.

Health Inequality Impact Assess

Responding to the direct impact of COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of our contribution to improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. Our future developments will include concurrently implementing a health impact assessment process, to provide a mechanism to ensure that any potential negative impacts are minimised and that opportunities are taken to improve the health and wellbeing of further vulnerable population groups.

Future Funding

The Health & Wellbeing Service relies on external funding to provide person centred physical activity interventions through a multi-disciplinary, holistic approach. This ensures we can effectively contribute to local and national outcomes. Securing external funding will continue to be essential for the sustainability and development of the Health and Wellbeing Service.

We've strengthened partnerships and increased our resilience to ensure we can be more responsive in future. Our confidence to engage with more people and respond to local priorities is here to stay. It's the combined effort and impact of all our individual projects that make us determined to keep improving our services and to reach even more people to reduce health inequalities in the future. We also have the confidence to persist with our approach and an appetite to do more where there are still gaps. We will continue to learn from existing evidence, insight and experiences, as well as lessons that we learned during the pandemic and creativity and innovation will continue to be key in our approach.

We are very grateful to all our partners for their continued support and funding, without them we wouldn't be able to continue to offer these valuable services. We are continuing to explore new opportunities to secure funding and partnerships to further our ambitions to achieve our organisational ambition of: **North Ayrshire, More Active, More Often.**



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| leisure