

An Evaluation of 'Strand 3' of the Clare Local Sports Partnerships' Older Adults Programme: - *Older Adults Group Support*



An Irish Sports Council Initiative
Thionscnamh an Chomhairle Spóirt

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John Sweeney

Executive Summary:

Since 2013/14, the Clare Sports Partnership (CSP) has been working in conjunction with the *North Clare Primary Care Team*, *HSE Health Promotion*, *Go for Life* and *Fitness 4 Fun* for the roll-out of an extremely successful and targeted older adults physical activity programme. The impetus for this intervention lies in the knowledge that compared to other counties, Clare has a relatively higher percentage of older people aged 65 and older (Health Profile for Clare, Dept. Of Public Health, 2015), and as reported by TILDA, older people's low levels of physical activity are very concerning. The aim of the programme is to get the older adults involved in regular physical activity. This programme forms part of the strategic action plan of the CSP, and it also feeds into the Clare Age Friendly County Strategy, of which CSP is a member of the implementation team. At present, there are 272 activity registered members on the programme across 13 communities in North Clare, Ennis and Shannon Area. In March / April 2016, an evaluation of the current outcomes of the programme was conducted by the CSP. The following are the highlights of this evaluation:

- 13 new groups established across the county with 272 active participants.
- The programme has had a direct positive impact on the lives of 90.6% of the respondents – Greater mobility, less pain, less medication.
- The majority of the participants (76.6%) reported that they are now exceeding the national guidelines for physical activity as a result of the programme.
- 57.3% have taken up additional physical activities such as walking / dancing and personal exercise at home.
- 71.5% rate their enjoyment of physical activity at 10/10 a result of taking part in the programme.
- Women are more likely than men to take part – 81.2% vrs 18.8%.
- Those that are married with children and between the ages of 55 & 75 are the most likely to join a group.

Acknowledgements:

Clare Local Sports Partnership would like to acknowledge the following for their valuable contribution to the development and success of the programme:

- Senior Health Promotion Manager HSE, - Geri Quinn,
- The North Clare Primary Care Team - Dr. Liam Glynn, Dr. Fergus Glynn, Monica Casey
- Mary Harkin - Go for Life
- Healthy Ireland
- Sport Ireland
- John Conroy - Fitness 4 Fun
- Clare Local Development Company Ltd (Leader Programme)
- Clare Sports Partnership Student Programme – Pat Sexton WIT, Monika Batya LIT, Magda Konczyk LIT

Context:

Clare Sports Partnership (CSP) is committed to supporting a wide range of national policies that seek to make impact on the nation's levels of physical activity and health and wellbeing. Among the principal guiding national policies that inform the overall strategic approach of CSP include the following;

Healthy Ireland – National Physical Activity Plan

As a supporting partner to existing projects and events in the county, the CSP promote the goals outlined by Healthy Ireland. These include:

- Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life;
- Reduce health inequalities;
- Protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing and
- Create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

Obesity Policy and Action Plan for Ireland 2015-2025

The CSP supports the government vision for an Irish society that enables people through health promotion, prevention and care to achieve and maintain healthy eating and active living throughout their lifespan.

The Health Promotion Strategic Framework, HSE 2011

As a key stakeholder in the delivery of sport and physical activity in Clare, the CSP support the HSE's strategic agenda to;

- Re-orientate health and other public services
- Create supportive environments for health
- Reduce health inequalities
- Improve health
- Prevent and reduce disease
- Reduce costs to the healthcare system
- National Positive Ageing Strategy 2013

CSP supports the **National Positive Ageing Strategy** which outlines Ireland's vision for ageing and older people and the national goals and objectives required to promote positive ageing.

National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2015

The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan sets forward the steps required to ensure progress is achieved in implementing the National Disability Strategy. Working with people with disabilities remains a key priority for CSP and commits to supporting all future relevant policy following on from the current National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan which outlines the following;

- Local Sports Partnerships will continue to assist in and support developments for the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity.
- Irish Sports Council will continue to support the **CARA Centre** in rolling out disability awareness training to mainstream sports clubs through the Local Sports Partnership (LSP) network in conjunction with disability sports.
- Sustain sports partnership programmes and resources appropriately in local authorities where funding allows.
- Continue to support sports partnership, Age Friendly and Social Inclusion programmes to assist people with disabilities to engage in activities, including through requirement of funding for programmes such as Sports Capital Grants.

National Women's Strategy 2007-2016

CSP supports the National Women's Strategy which addresses the key areas of concern for women in Ireland including increasing the number of women participating in sport and physical activity.

National Physical Activity Guidelines

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland 'Get Ireland Active' is produced by the HSE and the Department of Health & Children to promote physical activity in Ireland. The guidelines focus on the development of physical activity for children, young people, adults, older people and people with disabilities and are used as the benchmark for monitoring by Sport Ireland and Local Sports Partnerships.

TILDA

A recent report from *The Irish Longitudinal Study on Aging (TILDA)* reported that ~80% of people aged 50 and older are very overweight or obese. TILDA reported that one in two older people are physically inactive, which together with an unhealthy weight increases people's risk of developing a range of chronic conditions, including heart disease, diabetes and arthritis. The TILDA study found that 37% of older people had high blood pressure and 9% had diabetes. 40% of older people also reported having arthritis and this increased to one in two (50%) of people aged 75 and older (www.tilda.ie).

Locally, the CSP is a strategic partner in the **Clare Age Friendly County Strategy**. It is at the core value of this strategy that participation opportunities, in all activities, are readily available to those 55+yrs.

About Clare Sports Partnership:

Clare Sports Partnership were set up by the then Irish Sports Council (now Sport Ireland), as a non-profit company in 2001, with a role of enhancing sports and physical participation across a range of target groups within the county. Nationally, older adult have always been a priority area. As a result CSP have always had an extremely close and supportive working relationship with Senior Health Promotion Officer, Geri Quinn and Mary Harkin in Go for Life. Due to funding received since 2001, CSP have been able to set up a comprehensive programme of activities over five strands of work specifically relating to older adults, fig. 1.

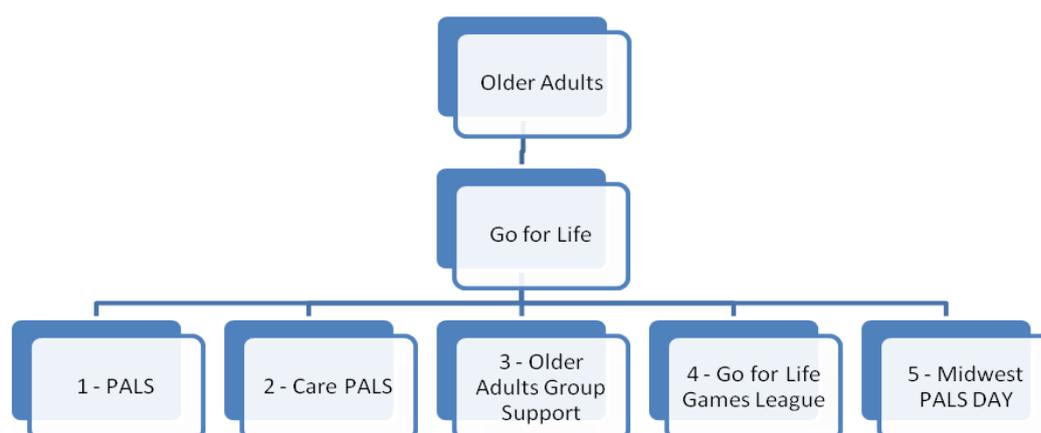


Fig 1. Clare Sports Partnership Older Adults Programme Matrix

Fig 2 highlights the communities in which CSP has worked directly with specific groups for the rollout of the Older Adults programme across all five strands. To date over 100 PALS (physical Activity Leaders) and Care PALS have been trained in Clare.

In 2014 / 2015, Strand 3, *Older Adults Group Support*, has proved to be an extremely successful set of individual projects, which has resulted in the set up of thirteen new older adults groups that meet for an hour each week. These groups have physical activity at their core, through the roll out of activities recommended by Go for Life. There is also an opportunity for local services such as Gardai, GP etc to visit the groups to make an important connection with the older population. This is true with particular reference to North Clare, where a successful partnership (which has been the catalyst for the broader county success) has been established with CSP and the North Clare Primary Care Team. Initially, the North Clare PCT was involved in an EU Northern Periphery Programme called Implementing Transnational Telemedicine Solutions (ITTS Project number 7.13). CSP were approached by the PCT to partner with their project and to offer a sustainable solution for the continued roll-out of the older adults programme in their catchment.

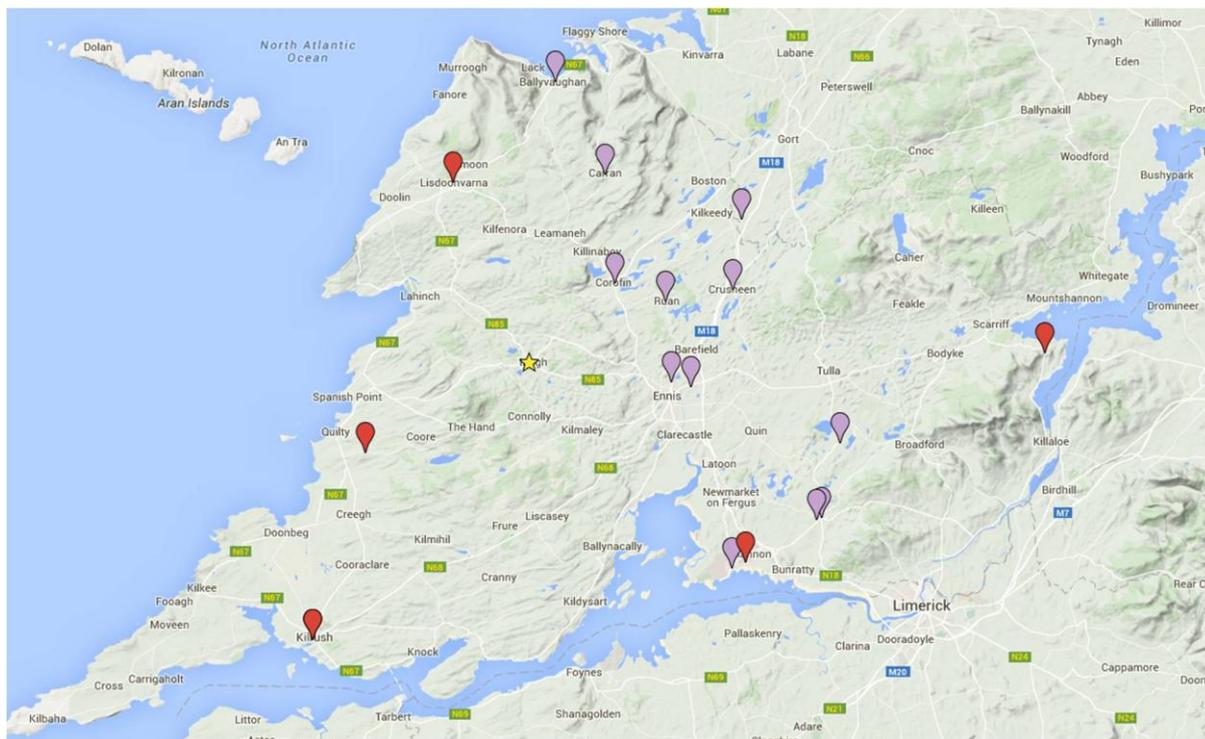


Fig 2. Clare Sports Partnership Older Adults Programme Location Map. The 'pink marker' indicates the areas that new groups established, the 'red' markers indicate the groups that are pre-existing and that have joined our Go for Life Games League.

This was a perfect fit and continuation of the work of the CSP, as they had just completed an animation project, funded by Clare Local Development Company Ltd Leader Programme. Part of this project looked at a model for good practice for the implementation of older adult activities within communities.

The current programme is rolled out in the community settings through 'Fitness 4 Fun', a Clare based company that specialises in participatory physical activities for older adults. Classes last for 1 hour, and there is a strong social emphasis to ensure that at the end of the class the participants have a cup of tea and a chat. In North Clare, the PCT actively promote the programme to their service users. Local services such as the Community Gardai, doctors etc are also invited in to meet and greet the participants.

Since 2014, the programme has been funded through HSE and Go for Life and the remainder from participant contributions to the classes. Further Funding for 2016/17 has just been secured from the HSE.



Community Garda Deirdre Scanlon and support tutors presenting the cup to the winter Go for Life League winners from West Clare.

To date, in Strand 3 'Older Adults Support', HSE funding has meant that we, at present, have 272 older adults registered on our weekly programmes, in thirteen new locations. Table 1 highlights these areas and the registered numbers.

Area	Numbers of Actively Registered Participants	Year Established
Carron	20	2014
Ballyvaughan	12	2014
Corofin	25	2014
Kilkishen	30	2014
Ennis (Fahy Hall)	25	2015
Ennis (Cois na hAbhna)	40	2015
Tubber	18	2015
Killmurry Mc Mahon	17	2015
Crusheen	15	2015
Ruan	20	2015
Kilmurry	30	2015
Sixmilebridge (Mens Shed)	20	2016
Total Numbers Registered	272	

Table 1. The areas that are covered by the Clare Sports Partnership Older Adults Programme, Strand 3. It should be noted that numbers fluctuate weekly and it is estimated that the weekly average is 200 adults taking part in the groups.

60% (n=150) of registered participants were surveyed as to the impact that the programme has had on their lives since the programme commenced. The study was carried out using a questionnaire (appendix 1) that contained both quantitative and qualitative questions.

Participants were offered a scribe to help fill out the questionnaires. No leading answers were offered by the scribes when giving assistance. Questionnaires were completed during class time. 24 of the respondents agreed on completion of the survey to take part in a research panel that will follow up on the initial findings in a more qualitative way. A further 10 participants, (not surveyed) offered their experiences, through a focus group, when the results of the survey was presented to them. This focus group took place following their Go for Life activity class, over a cup of tea / coffee.

Results:

Of the respondents, 81.2% were female and 18.8% were male with the majority (56.4%) of the respondents being in the 66-75 yr old bracket. The next highest participant groupings are those in the 56-65 age brackets (20.1%) and those aged 76-85 (17.4%). These figures may suggest the participants that are most likely to take part in the programme are female and those that are pre-retirement and those that have recently retired.

As regards the participant's marital status, 54.4% are married with children and 6.7% are married with no children. At this stage of life, it is presumed that the children of the participants have moved away from home and now perhaps the participants are joining the groups as they may have extra time or their hands or the monotony of the 'quiet' home may be too much. This ought to be a topic for the follow-up research.

58.4% of the respondents have been taking part in the programme for greater than 6 months, 34.2% between 1-6 months and the remainder (7.4%) have only been in the programme for less than a month. 91.2% of the participants participate in only 1 class per week, with 91.2% only travelling up to 5km to get to the class. This finding suggests that in order to get maximum participation in future groups, a catchment radius of 5km seems to be the prime distance.



Members of the Corofin Go for Life Group enjoying 'Sit Fit' Exercises.

The second half of the survey was concentrated on the impacts that the programme has on the participant's lives. When asked to rank the top three reasons that the participants take part in the programme, the responses were:

- *Improved Flexibility / Mobility* (77.9%),
- *Improved Health & Wellbeing (prevention / management of arthritis, osteoporosis etc)* (69.1%)
- *Social Aspect* (51%).

When asked to state the most important of these, the top two were inverted:

38.9% rated *Improved Health & Wellbeing (prevention / management of arthritis, osteoporosis etc)*

whereas:

29.5% rated *Improved Flexibility / Mobility* as their most important outcome from the programme.

One of the positive findings from the study where the positive impact that the programme is having on 'other physical activities'. 30% respondents reported that they have not taken up any new pastimes and 7.3% have said that they are already active. However, 57.3% stated that they have taken up an additional physically active pastime as a direct result of the programme. From this 57.3%:

- 52.3% have taken up walking
- 17.4% have taken up dancing
- 16.2% had taken up exercising at home.

Swimming, gardening and cycling make up the remaining 13.9% of activities. These figures tally with the Irish Sports Monitor (2013) that shows that personal exercise like walking, dancing and swimming are the most popular exercises that the Irish adult takes part in order to meet the physical activity requirements of 30 minutes a day or 150 minutes (2.5hours) over a 7 day period. When asked about the extra hours exercise that they complete per week outside of the intervention, 46.6% reported that they take up to an extra 4 hours per week, 30% reported that they take up to an extra 10 hours. 8% reported that no additional hours are undertaken.

There are signs that the programme and the extra hours generated are having a positive effect on the lives of the participants. At the time of survey, 94.6% of the respondents ranked their health and wellbeing (on a rising scale of 1 – 10) in the 6+ category, with 36.5% scoring 8 out of 10. This is a marked shift from the question relating to pre-programme perception of health and wellbeing, where 54.6% were in the 6+ category. See figure 3 below.

Overall, how would you have rated your Health & Well-being before the Go 4 Life program started in your area? Rate on a scale of 1-10, 1 being very poor and 10 been excellent.

Overall, how would you rate your current Health & Well-being since the Go 4 Life program started in your area? Rate on a scale of 1-10, 1 being very poor and 10 been excellent.

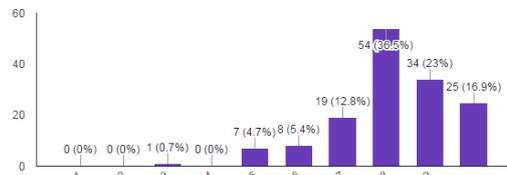
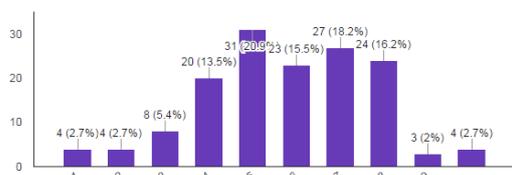


Fig 3: The perceived change in health and wellbeing before and after start of the programme. Note that the pre-start question was asked at the same time as the post-start question and therefore may not be a true representation.

When asked what positive changes had occurred as a result of the programme, respondents reported improvements such as –More Flexibility (23.3%), Feeling Better (14.6%), More Energy (12.4%), Better Balance (15%), Better Mobility in Hips & Shoulders (8.6%), More Strength (6.6%), Better Breathing (4.6%), Less Pain in Joints (4.6%), New Friends (4%). A further 4.6% reported that no positive change has occurred. This may be due to the length of time that they have been involved in the programme.

The resulting effect of these changes has also had a direct impact on the quality of life for 90.6% of the respondents. There were varied responses to this including: *more energy, easier to complete housework, easier to play with grandchildren*. One respondent reported that they *now find it easier to reverse the car as they can turn their neck and body*, and another reported that they are *back on the motorbike*. A further respondent reported that *two months ago my wrists were in a lot of pain and it was very limiting. Today I can now take the Sunday roast out of the oven, by myself*. As regards to improvement in mental health, one respondent noted that now they have become more *outgoing and meet new people*.

This was also corroborated by responses from the focus group. One lady explained that:

‘Before taking part in the classes here, I could not make a fist. I was on painkillers every day. [Then making a fist] look at me now. I have not had a tablet in months.’

An 84yr old participant noted that:

‘I was in visiting my sister in Salthill a few weeks ago, and she just commented that how supple I was. I explained to her that I have been going to the activity classes here in xxx and that this is the reason. As a result of this, she gathered a few of her friends together and now have a group established in Salthill.’

More importantly, some respondents reported that their strength and balance is improved as a result of the programme. This should lead to reduced risk of falls within this population, but more research will be required to verify this. These are important findings as they would suggest that the participants may have some more independence and confidence, which in older age is extremely important. Further research is required to here, with the help of the GP’s etc, to assess the true outcomes locally of our programme.

71.5% of the respondents now rate their enjoyment of physical activity 10 out of 10 as a result of the programme. This enjoyment may be a reason behind why there is such a positive take up in extra physical activity across the group.

In the focus group, one participant said that:

'I would not miss it for the world. It is a pity we don't have 2 or 3 classes a week. It is just brilliant.'

Finally, as the current programme stands, all participants are asked to make a weekly contribution of €5 towards the sustainability of the programme (one group pays €6 due to higher venue costs). This contribution goes towards items such as tutor / tea / coffee / venue / insurance etc. When asked about the pricing on the survey, 57.1% stated that the maximum they would pay is up to €6, with the majority of these (55%) saying they would be will to pay €5 or €6. 42.9% said that they would pay from €7 to €15. The findings here show that we have priced the programme correctly for the socio-economic situation of the participants. Further research will highlight the Social Return on Investment that the programme has generated.

Conclusion:

From the evaluation, it is evident that the main outcome of the Clare Local Sports Partnerships' Older Adults Programme is having a positive impact on the quality of lives and health of the participants. Change has occurred on everyday life tasks such as driving a car, farming and gardening. It can also be surmised here that, if the programme continues in its present form and is expanded into more communities, there will be a positive effect on the healthcare system, as GP and hospital visits should be reduced due to improved balance and strength that will lead to reduced falls. NCD's may also be reduced due to the positive effects that participating in physical activity has on the body and medication costs will be lowered as joint mobility, arthritis, osteoporosis is positively affected .

The results have shown that there is also a positive impact on the social interactions that the participants are having within their communities. This can only lead to improved mental health and inadvertently lead to greater community or neighbour awareness. The report highlights the importance of peer and social support in establishing and sustaining health and wellbeing programmes/ groups for people of all ages and in particular older people; this is consistent with the findings of other research programmes (www.peersforprogress.com www.realisingthevalue.org.uk www.nesta.org.uk).

The programme of work carried out satisfies all current and relevant national strategies and policies relating to physical activity and health. Due to public investment, it is important that this programme is evaluated and this report is an accurate reflection of the data collected. However, like all evaluations, there will be limitations. In the case of this piece of work, the limitations are evident on the extent that the long-term (2-5yrs) outcomes will be. Further research will be required, along with healthcare professionals to fully asses this.

Future programme development within the county for older adult initiatives, may wish use the learning obtained from the data when considering setting up new initiatives. This is especially true when it comes to considering distance to travel to the initiative, costing etc. It may also be noted that employers may need to consider advocating to their 'pre-retirement' employees, on the importance of considering joining a local Go for Life / older adult group.

Future Challenges:

In its current state, the programme of work is working at capacity, but in a sustainable manner. To ensure that there is longevity in the programme in its current state, it is essential that multi-annual funding can be secured in order to ensure that the Human Resource can be offered to the groups into the future. In order for the programme to expand, it will be important that the CSP can secure additional dedicated staff members to work in conjunction with *Fitness 4 Fun*, to identify and support new communities.

There is a need to have a targeted approach to try and get more males involved in the programme. This is especially important due to the WHO forecasts that put the Irish male (89% of all Irish males) on top of the obesity rankings by the year 2030.

Finally, for greater community buy-in, it will be essential to work with all PCT's in the county to agree a model of prescribing the physical activity classes to their patients and potential patients.

Potential areas for further evaluation:

- What impact does the Go for Life activity programme have on the Biomarkers (BP/wt/lipid profile/insulin resistance etc)
- What impact does attending the Go for Life activity programme have on the prevention of falls amongst the participants?
- What are the effects on the mental wellbeing of the participants whilst taking part in the Go for Life activity programme?
- Why do men not take-up the Go for Life activity programme to the same extent as women?
- What is the SROI (Social Return on Investment) generated by the programme?

Appendix 1

Survey

Go For Life - Program survey

Form description

Gender

- Female
- Male

Age Bracket

- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-75
- 76-85
- 85-100

Marital status

- Single
- Single with child/children
- Married no child/children
- Married with child/children
- Widowed
- Divorced/Separated

Estimate how long you have participated in Go For Life program?

- First week
- 2-4 weeks
- 1 - 6 months
- 6 -12 months
- Greater than 12 months

Number of Classes attended per week?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

What is the maximum distance you travel to get to your class?

- 0km - 5km
- 6km - 10km
- 11km - 15km
- 16km +

What are the THREE most important aspects for you of the Go for Life Program?

- Social aspect
- Weight loss
- Improved Health & Wellbeing (prevention/management of arthritis/osteoporosis etc)
- Improved flexibility / mobility
- Improved balance / coordination
- Improved strength
- Psychological benefits of taking part in regular activity
- Other...

Please select the SINGLE most important outcome?

- Social aspect
- Weight loss
- Improved Health & Wellbeing (prevention / management of arthritis/ osteoporosis etc)
- Improved flexibility / mobility
- Improved balance / coordination
- Improved strength
- Psychological benefits of taking part in regular activity

...

Since Go For Life program started, can you estimate the number of extra hours exercise you now complete per week outside of Go For Life?

Short answer text

Have you taken up any new physical activity pastimes as a result of the involvement with Go For Life? (eg walking, cycling, dance etc) Please describe

Long answer text

Overall, how would you have rated your Health & Well-being before the Go 4 Life program started in your area? Rate on a scale of 1-10, 1 being very poor and 10 been excellent.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very Poor	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent									

Overall, how would you rate your current Health & Well-being since the Go 4 Life program started in your area? Rate on a scale of 1-10, 1 being very poor and 10 been excellent.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very Poor	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent									

Please describe any positive changes that have occurred health and well-being since the program started?

Long answer text

Has your involvement in the program had an impact on the quality / functions of your every day life?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

If you answered Yes to question 14, please describe below.

Long answer text

If you answered No to question 14, please describe below.

Long answer text

Overall, how would you rate your enjoyment of physical activity since the Go For Life program? Rate on a scale of 1-10, 1 being very poor and 10 been excellent.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Very Poor	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent									

Overall, how much more physically active would you say you are now as a result of taking part in the Go For life program?

- Not any more active than i was
- 1-10% more active
- 11-20% more active
- 21-30% more active
- 31-40% more active
- 41-50% more active
- 51-60% more active
- 61-70% more active
- 71-80% more active
- 81-90% more active
- 91-100% more active

Have you any suggestions on how this program could be improved or elements that could be included into the future?

Long answer text
.....

Which of the following prices is the closest match to what you would be willing to pay for one hours exercise under the Go For Life program that provides you the benefits you highlighted above. (If it was compared to an exercise class that costs €8, a cinema ticket that costs €10, pilates class that costs €12 etc.)

- €3
- €4
- €5
- €6
- €7
- €8
- €9
- €10
- €11
- €12
- €13
- €14
- €15

Finally would you be willing to take part in a panel for researching the longer term impact of taking part in regular exercise? - please add your email address below

Short answer text
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