

Social Exclusion/Inclusion

Drug problems are most serious in those communities where SOCIAL EXCLUSION is greatest, where people have limited choices, no vision that things could be better and little hope for the future.

“In social exclusion we are talking about people who either may not want to engage with services or do not know how to. Our universal services are all predicated on the assumption that people want them and know how to get them. It is not always a safe assumption.” Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, 2006.

Where people are grouped together in areas of social exclusion with high unemployment, crime, fractured families and poor housing, drug misuse grows and its effects are magnified. (Updated Drug Strategy, 2002)

There are an estimated 16,000 problematic drug users in NE England, the majority of whom live in poor neighbourhoods and have low educational attainment.

“I am convinced that engaging offenders in sport can have a number of positive outcomes. The individual gains from a physical improvement, their self esteem increases along with their self confidence and members of their immediate family see them, often for the first time, as a healthy and normal person. With the growth in the leisure industry, sport can also act as a vehicle for regular employment or at least provide the individual with a healthier and more stimulating lifestyle.” Prison Governor

“We don’t get invited to a lot of places and that and there’s never been anything like this before – specifically for our type.” Service User, Teesside

SOCIAL INCLUSION means ensuring that everyone has the means and ability to access the services they require to participate fully in society. A socially included person will have adequate housing, health, employment, educational attainment, transport, community involvement, sport and leisure activities and live in an area of low crime.

Throughout the seven programmes over 400 service users have taken part in the sports initiative. The vast majority of these individuals had limited education, and similarly the majority have experienced living in care.

“We are planning on continuing with the training – doing it on a Sunday and through the week going swimming and that to try and build up our stamina – there’s a lot of us wanting to do that.” Service User, Teesside

Many clients began engaging in sports outside of the programmes, such as the gym and smaller football teams, while others reported improvements in their eating habits and some gave up smoking.

The initiative has allowed for a broadly marginalized and socially excluded group to mix with a socially privileged group, resulting in a breakdown of social barriers.

“The project gains real benefit from the support of the universities and I am sure that the student coaches who become involved are also benefiting from the experience as they rub shoulders with people from less privileged backgrounds and begin to appreciate how diverse society actually is.” Prison Governor

Through working together in the universities, the student coaches and the service users have begun to develop cohesion in the community, and significantly broken down barriers of misconception for all those involved.

The programmes gave a socially excluded group used to failure the opportunity to succeed at something, with the attendant feelings of achievement and self esteem.

Completing the programmes and receiving medals and trophies in recognition reinforced the positive experience for the service users and the overall feeling of inclusion in the community.

“Through the inter-agency work of the DIP across the North-East, this is also contributing to the wider social inclusion agenda and working towards raising aspirations of those for whom continuing in any form of education was not something they considered as an option. Working with Aimhigher, it also helps to contribute towards the wider issue of extending participation amongst groups currently underrepresented in Higher Education.” Aimhigher NE Regional Director

Prior to the initiative many service users reported that they felt excluded from using public gyms and swimming pools in the community. Following the programmes service users reported feeling more at ease and confident about using community facilities. The Sunderland sports post offer their clients free membership, and this has been very popular with service users.

Through being involved in the sports programme drug users experienced life in a normal social setting outside of the usual ‘drugs context’.

“I wasn’t on the winning team but I wasn’t bothered one bit – I was still a winner in my eyes because I stuck it out for twelve weeks – and really enjoyed it. The best bit of the project for me is just knowing that I can see something out without messing it up basically – just the fact that I finished it. What’s next for me now? To get me detox over and done with at hospital, and I’m gonna go to college....seeing the football course through, you know, it just shows to me that I can achieve something more in my life than what I achieved in the past. I’m heading in the right direction. And I hope I can just stay in the right direction – you know?” Service User, Durham