

# CHAPS Gym Takeover

August 2019



## T.E.D.

Ageing Better  
in East Lindsey

### CHAPS Platform 50, Men's Gym Takeover Sessions in Mablethorpe



This report highlights learning from the TED programme on Magna Vitae's CHAPS (Community Health Activity Project for men) Platform 50, Men's Gym Takeover sessions at The Station Sports Centre, Mablethorpe. Data has been collected via the Common Measurement Framework (CMF) forms, detailed written field notes, semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations with delivery partners and service users. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect anonymity, unless participants explicitly stated that they were happy for their name to be used in the report.

### About TED

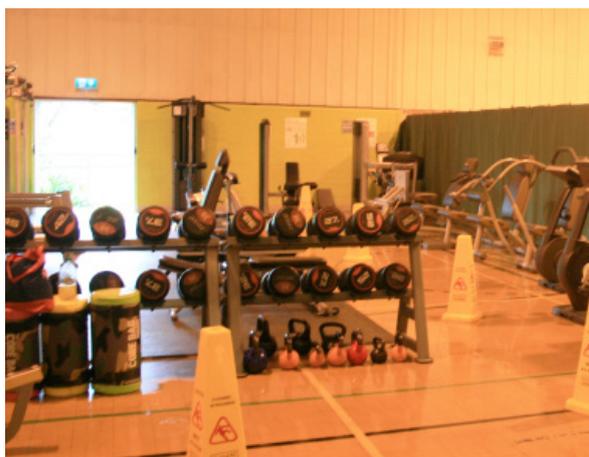
Talk Eat Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.



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TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by YMCA Lincolnshire



## The CHAPS Project

CHAPS is a Community Health Activity Project for men aged 50 and over. The project was designed by Magna Vitae and commissioned by TED to:

- 1) reduce social isolation and loneliness across East Lindsey.
- 2) empower and connect individuals, helping to create sustainable change in communities. To date, CHAPS sessions have included cooking workshops, wellbeing sessions, badminton, indoor bowls, walking football, and the Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover.

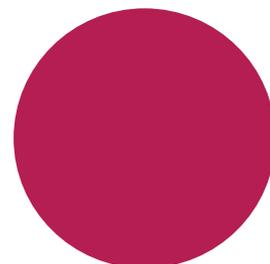
## Research Methods

In March 2019, the TED team attended one of the Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions and collected learning and evaluation data via detailed written field notes, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. Findings from the CMF data were also used in this report. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, interviews were digitally recorded on a Dictaphone and all interviews took place at the sports centre. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect anonymity, however, some participants asked for their actual name to be used as they wanted to openly share their story.

## Findings and Discussion

Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions were commissioned for 12 weeks (10th January – 28th March) and were held at The Station Sports Centre in Mablethorpe on Thursday afternoons between 2:00pm and 4:00pm. Men aged 50 and over were invited to attend guided sessions where they had full access to the gym, badminton and table tennis equipment.

Key themes identified through data analysis included: the increased bodily vulnerability that participants' reported experiencing in their older age; the age friendly, accessible facilities offered at The Station Sports Centre, Mablethorpe; the health and wellbeing benefits TED service users associated with CHAPS gym sessions; the importance of past experiences in regards to engaging older men; and the sustainability and legacy of CHAPS Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions.



## Increased bodily vulnerability in older age and the age-friendly, accessible facilities on offer at The Station Sports Centre, Mablethorpe

Discussions with TED service users reminds us of the increased bodily vulnerability that many older adults report experiencing, and 'place' encounters can often heighten this sense of vulnerability (Bell and Wheeler, 2015; Williams et al., 2018). For example, Bernard and Arthur explained that due to mobility issues and declining energy levels, they often find walking up and down stairs difficult, especially after a gym workout. Having access to the lift is very important to both of them, and not having to negotiate the stairs provided an element of reassurance and made them 'feel more comfortable' about attending and taking part in the CHAPS gym sessions, as Bernard noted:

**'The lift makes me feel more comfortable, knowing I can get up and down if I've overdone it [in the gym session]. I'm not good with stairs and I wouldn't have been able to come otherwise [if the gym did not have age-friendly facilities].'**

**(Bernard, Service User)**

**'You know I didn't think I would find myself back in a gym again, not with my knees. Then I came here and what do you know I'm doing it again. I've even worked up to using the running machine...Arthritis in my knees, it's what getting old does to you. It's good here because we can use everything [all the facilities] and it's not busy and we can take our time about it. And there's people about to say hello and help you if you need it. Some [service users] just come and get on with it [their gym workout], but I like to say hello to people and see how their weeks gone and what they have been doing... There is a lift that I use sometimes to get up and down to the entrance if my knees are playing up. The sauna, I like going in there.'**

**(Arthur, Service User)**



## Health and wellbeing benefits

With an ageing demographic profile in the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics 2018), there is increasing pressure on healthcare services to manage age-related health and wellbeing challenges (Ashby and Beech 2016). Prolonged sedentary time and inactive lifestyles that predominate in older age can result in deleterious effects on health and mobility, and over the last couple of decades engaging older adults in regular PA has consistently been promoted within health policy (e.g., World Health Organization 2002). Physical activity helps to improve both physical and mental functions as well as reverse some effects of chronic disease, and here our TED service users, who regularly attend the CHAPS Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions, reported several benefits to their mental, physical and social health and wellbeing:

'Well I do suffer with anxiety. Sometimes I'm not too bad but sometimes I have a really low time. The anxiety started when me and my partner separated and that hit me in a big way, and then of course I retired. But these [CHAPS] sessions have really helped. Today I will probably go on the treadmill and the rowing machine and I might try the cross-trainer again. I think the main thing is just trying to keep myself occupied. It is amazing how it [anxiety] can affect you and the things you liked to do. The anxiety I mean. It's good to talk to people with different experiences that have gone through things and whatever you do it's best not to sit in the house; try and do something or try and go out. I feel a bit better after I have been to the [CHAPS] sessions. I have made a few friends and I speak to a few people. I'm a bit timid sometimes, talking you know. One of the guys [a TED delivery partner] has shown me how to go on them [the gym machines]. They said start off gradually and then work up because I said I wasn't quite sure of the cross-trainer one because I went on one and started doing this and that and it felt strange. And he said: "well don't do that then, just hold onto the bars and focus on that and then try this bit and then you'll get the coordination right". I would say to others that are thinking of coming here that it is a good idea, because if anybody has got poor mental health then it gives you something to come out for as well. If you say you're going to the gym then you push yourself and it probably helps you out in other things as well. It helps with anxiety and it has helped me build my confidence up - it's been a good experience. I would feel more confident going to other groups now, I think I'm building up gradually. People that come to these groups have the same sort of things. One man that goes to the healthy foods was on a real downer, really, really down, and then he pulled through and he is going to the healthy eating on Mondays. After the sessions end I would hopefully like to carry on doing it [CHAPS gym training at Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover] and it will probably help me more with my mental health. It really helps and I also go to TED at Louth where we do healthy eating and that comes in handy.'

(Cyril Blanchard, Service User)

'The equipment is good and you have time to get on most of them [gym machines]. It's socialising with people whilst keeping yourself healthy. Now I'm not going to be running a marathon anytime soon but that's not what it's about is it.' (Frank, Service User)

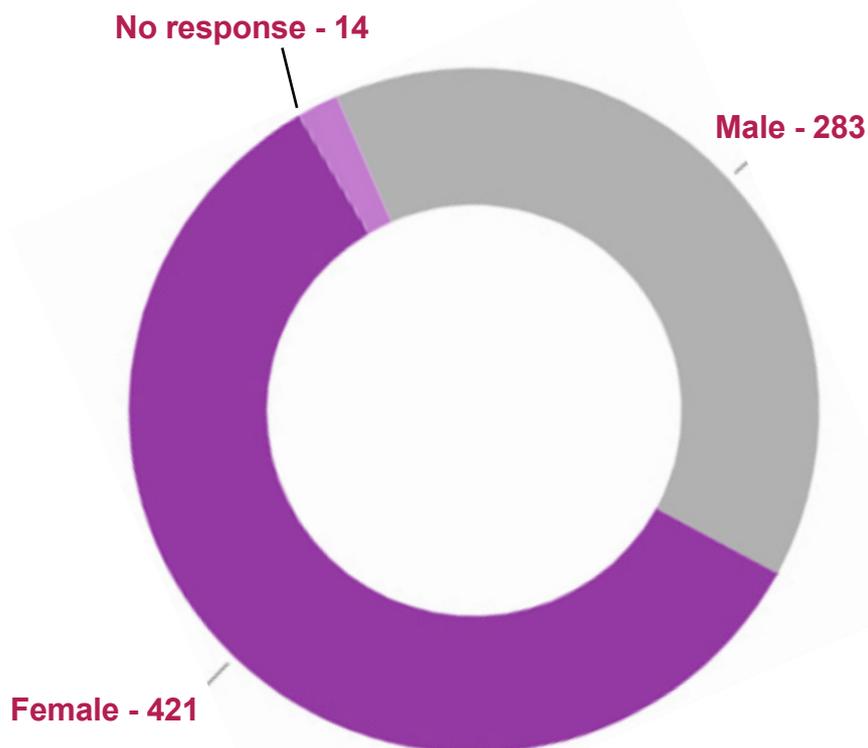
Since separating from his long-term partner, Cyril has lived with mental health issues such as anxiety and he discussed how his involvement with CHAPS and the Platform 50 men's gym sessions really helped him with his confidence. The gym sessions provided a safe space for Cyril to meet new people, make friends and learn about the importance of taking part in regular physical activity. Delivery partners supported Cyril over the 12 week commissioned period and he is now familiar with all the gym equipment and his coordination has improved on the cross-trainer.

## Engaging Older Men

The National Lottery Community Fund's Common Measurement Framework (CMF) data (see Figure 1) suggests that we have more women involved with the TED programme compared to men, with 59% of people identifying as female and 39% male.

In relation to engaging older men, Frank regularly attends the CHAPS Platform 50 gym sessions and despite corporeal challenges and difficulties, he still endeavours to stay physically active. During an informal conversation with the researcher, he explained that, for him, the CHAPS gym sessions were similar to the running activities he used to do in his younger years:

When considering, therefore, how our TED services can better reach and engage older men, it seems that taking into account their past and lived experiences may be important and we intend to explore this further in future TED learning reports.



**'Now, I don't want to seem rude but sitting around drinking tea and coffee is just not for me. This [Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover] is perfect really, just the job. It has to be things [activities] that people want to do and it has to come from the people. I used to do a lot of running'. (Frank, Service User)**

## Sustainability and legacy of CHAPS Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions.

There is a strong focus on sustainability and legacy as we come to the final two years of the TED programme and it is excellent to see that our services are striving to ensure that the work they have been doing in rural East Lindsey communities will be sustainable for many years to come. For instance, here Elizabeth Atkin (Delivery Partner, Magna Vitae) shares the sustainability plans that have been put in place for the CHAPS Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions, to ensure that service users will be able to continue taking part in their weekly social, physical activity sessions in a safe, accessible and age-friendly environment:

'Okay so it's the last session today and fortunately the guys at the gym are going to keep the session on. So it's gonna be from the same time, so 2:00pm to 4:00pm on a Thursday afternoon. And it has been free for the last 12 weeks as part of the TED project. However there will be a small charge of £4.10 for two hours which is the same price usually for one hour so they can use the gym, sauna and steam room and the lifestyle consultants will be able to show them the equipment and things like that. So it's great that it has stayed sustainable. And we've been having six [regulars], but we have had up to 12 people at once and I think there's been about 21 [men aged 50 and over] through the project in total, so 21 different individuals. It's definitely been worth it - absolutely.

(TED Delivery Partner, Magna Vitae)



## Summary points and key learning messages



'Place' encounters can heighten the sense of bodily vulnerability that many older adults experience. Age-friendly facilities were important to participants and the lift at Station Sports Centre provided service users with an element of reassurance that they would not have to negotiate the stairs, especially after a gym workout!



Physical activity helps to improve mental and physical functions as well as reverse some effects of chronic disease, and TED service users, who regularly attended the CHAPS Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions, reported several benefits to their mental, physical and social health and wellbeing.



Plans have been put in place by delivery partners (Magna Vitae) to secure the legacy and sustainability of CHAPS Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover sessions. TED service users continue to enjoy taking part in weekly social, physical activity sessions at Station Sports Centre (Mablethorpe), which has been deemed a safe, accessible and age-friendly environment.



According to CMF data, more women are involved with the TED programme compared to men, with 59% of people identifying as female and 39% male.



We must take into account individuals' past, lived experiences when designing services for older people and the topic of engaging older men will be explored further in future TED learning reports.





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### Further information...

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TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by YMCA Lincolnshire