



**Peer Support for those at risk of Type 2 Diabetes in the London Borough of Bexley**



# Peer Support for people at risk of Type 2 diabetes

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Mind in Bexley partnered with the London Borough of Bexley, Parkwood Leisure, Bexley Health Ltd and Charlton Athletic Trust to support delivery of Beat, a two year physical activity programme funded by Sport England which aims to prevent or delay the onset of Type 2 Diabetes.

Beat offers Bexley residents who are at high risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes one free physical activity each week for the duration of the project and the opportunity to work with a mentor for up to 6 months.

Mind in Bexley coordinated the peer mentoring element of the Beat programme. We recognise that making changes can be difficult without support and so the peer support programme matches participants with a mentor who can provide encouragement.

Mentors had previous experience of the risk factors for type 2 diabetes (e.g. high blood pressure and BMI >25) and have made positive changes to reduce their risk. Mentors understand the barriers to exercise faced by Beat participants and use their personal experience to support participants to plan and implement lifestyle related goals. Mind in Bexley provided volunteer mentors with training on communication skills, maintaining boundaries, motivational interview techniques and goal setting. Ongoing support and networking opportunities were also available to volunteers.

During the project we worked with 26 mentors and 34 mentees. Everyone who attended the project were invited to record an interview of the project. In total recorded 20 interviews which reflected a range of experiences of accessing Beat and participants reflected on the positive impact of peer support on their physical and mental well-being. This booklet represents the thematic categories obtained from the interviews and accompanies an exhibition which will be shown throughout Bexley in 2018.



# Matching Process

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*"... yeah it was really good, all smooth, went smoothly, pretty quick .. yeah, I was quite shocked at how quick I was paired up with someone so, I didn't have to wait too long, so I didn't get cold feet ..so.. yeah"*

The success of any mentoring program builds on the quality and durability of its mentor-mentee-relationships. To achieve a high standard in mentoring relationships, the process of matching mentors to their mentees plays a key role. When matching, the coordinator met individually with all participants and used criteria including gender, age, interests and experience to match mentors/mentees against the goals and criteria that each mentee/mentor had submitted. Individuals then met, agreed goals and clarified boundaries and timescales.

*"I asked her, you know, I said to her, I know we've been chatting I said, but are you happy with me? I said, I think I'm happy, I feel that I'm happy with you, are you happy with me? and she said yes, so that was it I thought it was really good I mean was quite excited by it anyway. We were well suited"*

*"It was, it was really quick, I think I met, I did the training and then it was within a couple of weeks that I was matched up so it was, yeah, it was good"*

*"I was listened to, my preferences were listened to... I think my only stipulation was, not someone young (laughs) so I've got someone in my age group that I can relate to"*

*"My fear initially was I would be matched with someone that perhaps I wouldn't feel I had much in common with or would be worthwhile but as I say I've been really fortunate"*

## Matching Process

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Once matched, the pairs would meet weekly for an hour to two hours for a period of six to nine months.

The first meeting – the mentees work with their mentors to look at their own development and work out objectives. This meeting also involves a discussion on the management of boundaries, setting meeting agendas and how to complete feedback forms. It is clear that the most successful sessions were those where the mentee plays an active, full role in setting their objectives and the agenda for subsequent meetings, thus having ownership over the process and the developing relationship. Both mentees and mentors also have three monthly evaluation interviews with the project coordinator and were able to get interim support from both the coordinator and from the supervision group.

## Referral

Referrals were made by health providers such as GPs, and specialist services and the voluntary sectors. Others came to the Beat after seeing adverts and posters for the scheme in local newspapers and in libraries.

*“I had a blood test and I had raised blood sugars...and my GP gave me a little form and said consider it, I did”*

*“Because I used Mind services umm someone recommended that I join Beat ...i’m in danger of succumbing to Diabetes so I thought, you know I thought I’d join”*

*“I saw it, umm, in the local the newspaper about the Beat project, ...I was new in the area and I didn’t know anyone so so that’s how I got connected”*

# Training

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Whilst the resources used to run mentoring schemes are justified on the basis of the progress that is made by the mentee and while this must be the correct focus, it is crucial that the motivation and needs of the mentor are also considered if programmes such as Beat are to be successful. The mentor training therefore aims to benefit the mentors in addition to ensuring the best possible outcomes for the mentees. The training was designed to increase awareness of how people are perceived, enhance listening skills, and included elements that encouraged mentors to evaluate their own position by looking back over their own life, particularly those experiences that may be similar to those experienced by the people they may mentor

*“Supervision get together was really good I liked the fact that the session was tailored, that we weren't just talked at, that we were actually involved in. I learnt a lot and gained much from that”*

In general, this self-reflection, proved in many cases to be helpful and therapeutic.

*“It is very essential and useful for everyone as it makes clear what need to be done and what is expected from both sides. It was really helpful, just to know what to expect, what was coming up, how you'd be partnered and things like that.. it was brilliant”*

*“Good explanation of the Beat. It was an interactive session – very helpful and interesting. I learnt a lot”*

The preparatory training and the act of mentoring presents people with challenges and encourages them to take time to reflect on new experiences and use the knowledge gained to plan the next steps. A range of other skills are also required such as patience, looking for the positive, and listening, and it is likely that these will not be switched on and off for the hours of mentoring each week, they will carry over into other aspects of the mentor's life, it was therefore important to ensure that the mentors had access to on-going support and supervision.



## Training Continued

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*“Oh good yeah... definitely when it came to the do’s and don’ts that the umm, the safety aspect of it and the do’s and don’ts where the boundaries are .... yes it was good”*

Training for the mentors was delivered by the project coordinator. Training sessions were also delivered to volunteer mentors at induction and throughout the programme. Training provided in-depth information on Beat, advice and case studies on boundaries, volunteering, goal setting and nutrition.

*“The training on boundaries was very useful and I learned a lot”*

*“I found the sessions (on boundaries) very helpful and yes... important in my future work”*

The Beat team also delivered practical sessions to mentors on mental health mentoring skills and active listening skills.

*“We did some motivational interviewing techniques, boundaries, challenges and... and learnt about diet and nutrition. It was really, really valuable”*

At the same time, a Monthly Support/Supervision Group was established to provide support, advice and encouragement to the mentors and to enable them to share feedback on their experiences.

All mentors are encouraged to refer difficult queries which arose during mentoring sessions to the group to investigate, using their combined areas of expertise. Evidently a great deal has been learnt from dealing with queries and sharing knowledge and this will help to support future pairings.





# Reasons for Volunteering

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Mentors participating in the Beat project have given altruistic reasons as the main motivation for wanting to volunteer. A strong desire to help improve the lives of others often led them to volunteer:

*"Sometimes you just need a person by your side, just to walk through the door and go and do something and this was the perfect volunteering opportunity"*

*"I'm in a position where my condition is managed well...I've lots of spare time and this seemed to tick all the boxes and I wanted to help others at risk from Type 2 diabetes"*

*"It seemed appropriate to come along and share experiences and being able to offer empathy"*

*"I was diagnosed as type 2 diabetic about fifteen years ago...I wanted to do something to help others in particular those that were in the same situation as myself"*

Others have themselves had difficult experiences in managing their diabetes and wanted to use that experience to support and encourage others through difficult periods in their lives.

*"I felt it was something I could do. I'd been there and I'd struggled... I'd benefitted from the scheme and felt this is something I could help somebody else could do"*

Others expressed a wish to improve their career development and enhance their skills, whilst at the same time helping others:

*"I wanted to get into a personal trainer and working with people, so it had two sides to it, one is to help people but one it was helping me as well. It was helping improve my confidence dealing with people, interacting with people"*



## Attitudes and Barriers to exercise pre Beat.

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*"It's was more just running around all day after the children up down, in and out"*

Understanding common barriers to physical activity and creating strategies to overcome them was a big part of the Beat mentoring role. The aim of Beat was to make physical activity part of daily life. Barriers to doing exercise pre Beat fell generally into four categories, either external (medical issues, time, work and environment) or internal factors (social and personal, psychological). Participants tended to cite a variety of external factors, with only a few discussing internal barriers.

Setting aside time to exercise was viewed as a major challenge. Working full time, the type of work people did and shift work were all described as restricting people's ability to exercise. Added to this were demands in the home or caring for children or relatives.

*"The practice nurse at the doctors for my six month blood pressure check and she said do you do much exercise and I was laughing...it was so difficult to fit in"*

*"Umm, lots of barriers, time, confidence ... working long shifts, family commitments, they're all barriers but finding time definitely is an issue for me"*



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# Attitudes and Barriers

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Participants' anxiety, embarrassment and lack confidence in their ability to perform activities was a major factor influencing exercise levels.

*"I don't like going to places on my own...I just wouldn't go to a class on my own"*

*"I think it's just .... being on your own, like I didn't have anyone, any friends, to sort of, go out and get active with, or exercise with and it's quite hard to kind of make that change, make that first step when you're entirely on your own"*

*"I care what I looked like...I think it's an image thing.. I'm one of these that break put in sweat after ten paces and look a bright red like a beetroot within two minutes"*

Lack of motivation to exercise was described by five participants:

*"I found it boring... I had no motivation to get up from the sofa and go out for a walk. Particularly when its dark and cold"*

Access to a gym or swimming pool was raised as a problem by a few people, usually in relation to finance although several pointed out that there were a number of initiatives that provided reduced cost access to facilities. However, these concessions often applied during the day, not at evenings or weekends when some would prefer to use the facility.

*"Confidence and umm, I would also say cost, definitely cost would be another barrier because I think some of the activities end up costing a considerable amount"*



## Benefits for mentees: What's it meant to have a mentor

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*"It's having a cheer leader, somebody who encourages you..., I was able to have a say in what I do and it worked... it just makes such a difference you know"*

Participants (mentees) consistently reported feeling at ease and relaxed with their mentor, which enabled them to develop an open and trustworthy relationship. The mentors' person-centred and non-judgemental approach and in many cases 'an expert by experience' facilitated trust and a readiness to engage with the overall project. A central part of the Mentors role was to encourage and facilitate engagement with activities. Mentees appreciated just having someone to help them engage and makes changes at their own pace. Narratives indicated mentees also experienced a considerable degree of control which helped them to engage in activities

*"Umm ... as far as I can recall, is just to meet someone, someone to give you that little bit of confidence to join in with like groups, because I am very, err, reserved I suppose in meeting other people, so I do keep myself to myself a lot, so I think it's helped me"*

*"Well first of all I can't swim properly and I said but I wouldn't want to be seen in a swimming costume because I'm so huge and she's saying don't worry we don't I have to look at you. We are all different shapes and sizes. Don't worry. I just hadn't the confidence"*





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## Improved wellbeing and confidence

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Interviews from the mentees points to improved wellbeing and confidence which allows them more inclined to undertake physical exercise and activity:

*"I have got a mentor, which I've found has given me more confidence to go to places like this because I'm not very good in big groups umm, so I think that's been really helpful"*

*"Meeting and attending with me to go to sports activities which, as I said I probably wouldn't bother going on my own has really helped me... it's given me confidence to do things"*

*"I think it makes me more determined and it also makes me more confident to access other things ...It helps to strengthen my joints"*

*"So she checks on me...and say that oh how are you doing, and she was the one that link me up to the swimming – c'mon let's do she said –we can do it and of course we did together to it"*



## One to one support and encouragement

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The one to one support and encouragement of a mentor was cited as a catalyst to access activities. Interviewees reported positive effects of the mentor involvement and encouragement. Through mentors' communications and encouragement and attitudes, mentors often had a significant impact on a mentees' psychological well-being ability to encourage changes in diet and exercise.

*"More encouragement to come to classes because you have someone to meet and give me more confidence of going into classes having someone to go in, especially at the beginning. I wouldn't have go in myself"*

*"I think motivation would be the biggest one and she helps to motivate me in all ways, you know with eating and she'd make suggestions of you know recipes and things that I could eat. It just makes you feel you are not on your own"*

## Healthy eating and diet/nutrition advice

Mentees who received healthy eating and diet/nutrition advice from their mentors recounted in some detail how they had reduced their intake of unhealthy food and how they were equipped with practical skills to incorporate healthier foods into their diet. The support and encouragement of a mentor can also be a catalyst to do other things:

*"I, very much aware of things that I eat now and things are not good for me portion control and drinking a lot of fluids or water"*

*"I'm now eating fish and salads and my mentor is helping me find a cooking class. It's about what we should be eating and portion sizes. She's pointing me in the right direction"*



## Building self-confidence, self-reliance and independence

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Building self-confidence, self-reliance and independence was a major facet of the mentors' approach in finding the right motivational tools for the individual, while conveying the need for person responsibility and resilience. These enabled mentees to make changes to their lives and take part in activities.

*"I mean she's someone who like encourages me...empowers me...she says we'll give it a go, come on... and we do"*

As a result of engaging with a peer, mentees took part in a variety of physical activities including walking, running and swimming specifically tailored to their health needs, helping them to incrementally build confidence and strength to improve their physical health. Mentees noted that as a result, their level of fitness had improved. Weight reduction and increased fitness helped participants better manage pain and tiredness and some participants noted being in better control of their condition due to reduced sugar levels.

*"Its definitely made me feel better, definitely feel better within myself, I feel a bit, .. I've got more energy, umm .... a bit more optimistic, I think, it does, I think it's very good for your mental health as well as your physical, so it has made me feel, more positive in a way ... like I can cope with things better"*

*"And like I did this morning and now I feel fit and fine and bomb down the Broadway this morning, and great, it makes me feel great"*

*"Well it helps me manage my diabetes as I say im now taking a quarter of the insulin that I was.. I was at my heaviest"*

## Meeting and socialising with others

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Social isolation, low mood and depression were commonly experienced by participants. For some this was related primarily to physical ill health but for others this was compounded by life events including unemployment, family break up and bereavement. Offering opportunities for activities, which allowed mentees to meet and socialise with others reduced loneliness and positively impacted on self-confidence, self-esteem and mental well-being.

*“Cause it’s the social side of it as well, I think it’s handy getting out and meeting others , cause I don’t get out to talk to people very much, so it’s helpful to get out and just see someone and to go for a walk”*

*“It’s really positive. I am now socialising. I am not now all the time in doors. It is helping me to focus on my future. We go walking in Danson. I feel more secure in myself ”*

*“We have gone walking and swimming sometimes and sfter we chat and sit in coffee shops. We did activities like swimming. It’s helped me with confidence, being more assertive and it took me out of isolation”*

Mentees reported that the mentoring project has had a positive impact on many different aspects of their lives, helping them in their personal lives, whilst improving their ability to interact with people and supporting them in their ability to make improvements. Mentees reported improved social connection and reduced social isolation

*“I thoroughly enjoy the group activities; I now love going out and group sports. I not get out there ..i do enjoy swimming and tennis and say netball. I tried a netball team in Thamesmead which I really enjoyed...I haven’t played netball for 15 years”*

*“I was recently widowed, I didn’t have a lot to do ... err I had a hip complaint, I had a hip replacement, I had two knee replacements, so I thought getting into some kind of exercise would be good for me, ... which ..umm.. which has been great, absolutely brilliant, it’s got me out”*

## Benefits for mentors

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*"Well its rewarding isn't it its nice to give something back to your community ..i think it helps makes you feel part of a community"*

Although mentoring is conceptualised as a mutually beneficial relationship involving reciprocity between the mentor and mentee, most studies has focused on outcomes for mentees rather than for the mentors, leading to comparatively less understanding of mentors' experience's.

The benefits of the mentoring project for mentors are evident from the interviews. The impact of the scheme is apparent on different levels including acquiring new skills or information (e.g. developing communication skills), or gaining experience in skills the mentors already had, thus enhancing them.

Evidently the mentoring relationships, supervision and training has increased their confidence and emotional wellbeing, and also improved their own activity levels.

*"Yeah I have got more active, I've joined the gym, try to go about three times, four times a week if I can, but yeah I've definitely made improvements, definitely yeah "*

*"I've learnt a lot, gained new skills and met some lovely people and I'm definitely better and more confident now No doubt about it"*



## Opportunities to develop and diversify skills

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Another interesting aspect has been the opportunity to develop and diversify their skills, which has inspired many of the mentors to look to a future within the field physical activity. Interviewees related to self and personal development (e.g. developing confidence; gaining a sense of pride or responsibility; developing empathy).

All reported increased confidence, self-respect and self-worth.

*"From my personal point, the project gives me an opportunity to develop through the learning experience and through communication. The listening skills course provided was so enriching and encouraging. I learned a lot about how to be a good listener, how to reflect, how to empathise, how to build trust in others in orders"*

*"I know more people now than I've ever known, I've got more friends than at any point in my life. I'm just constantly involved in helping other people, answering their questions on their nutrition you know, their mental health, their training programme .. what clothing they should be wearing, it's just got to the point where I've ....also been called a running guru, .. I just love passing information on...Its improved my confidence so much"*

*"I feel useful. I have much more confidence and motivation. It feels good to give something back"*

## Nutrition Courses

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Mentors also benefited from the training provided by Beat including the courses on nutrition:

*"I have attended one of the Beat nutritional courses and I really do make an effort daily now...to make sure I eat a lot more protein, especially eggs and nuts which I never really ate before"*

*"I did the Eat for Beat course yeah that was good I learnt a lot from that. Ive definitely improved my eating "*

The training provided much useful information and support; in particular, it provided the mentors with the opportunity to improve their listening skills which is of benefit both personally and professionally. This will assist them not only when working with their mentee, but also in all aspects of work settings:

*"The sessions were a new learning experience for me. It will be beneficial not only in my working environment but also in social environments"*

## Social benefits

Many participants mentioned social benefits such as interacting with mentees or developing friendships with them. Networking with fellow mentors and 'being part of' the Beat was also mentioned.

*"Oh just huge confidence building, knowing that im I feel good with other people and meeting others. It's a nice feeling and using my story and my own anxieties and I can pass information on. It really enjoyable being part of such an exciting project."*

*"cause it's the social side of it as well, I think it's quite handy getting out, 'cause I don't get out to talk to people very much, so it's quite helpful to get out and just see someone and to go for a walk"*

# The future

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*"It has changed my life...ok I won't be doing the London Marathon but its umm having something to get up for and go and do...something to look forward to. I hope it continues"*

The strength of the mentoring project lies in the depth and consistency of the accounts from the mentor and mentees. Supporting people to make meaningful and sustainable lifestyle changes is complex. It is unsurprising that that peer support element of the Beat helps facilitates and maintain behaviour change. Peer Support is becoming increasingly recognised as an important means of harnessing the resources of the voluntary and community sector to improve the health and wellbeing of the public. It provides GPs and health professionals with a non-medical referral option that can operate alongside existing treatments to improve health and wellbeing.

There was a broad consensus that the Beat peer support project helps individuals to improve activity levels and access non-clinical sources of support, predominantly in the community. All participants wanted the project to continue.

*"I feel quite gutted its ending because its something so positive in my life its like a reason to leave the house and go to aqua fit class and get out of the four walls that I spend a lot of time in "*

*"I would hope it would continue ...because its helped me more than one level it's not just about physical exercise its about my state of mind, it's about my isolation it's about my confidence, its improved my life on more than one level"*

*"If it hadn't been for Beat, I dread to think id probably be, be on the, locked up somewhere because that was my whole life, was getting up, showing my face full of food, watching lots of day time rubbish, umm...even my grandson came and I wasn't really that bothered and that was a really awful attitude"*

We would like to thank everyone who so generously contributed their story to this project. The extracts represent a small proportion of the interviews we collected and were selected for their relevance to the project's theme.

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