

Edinburgh Leisure's programme – Be Strong, Be You

Edinburgh Leisure is using the power of physical activity to improve young people's mental health.

Young people's mental health is in crisis, with 20% experiencing a mental health problem each year. As demand for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) rises, waiting list times continue to increase and many young people across Edinburgh are unable to find the mental health support they need until they reach crisis point.

Tackling mental health issues early is crucial

As much of our mental health takes shape in childhood and adolescence, tackling these issues early is critical. Failure to do so can lead to social isolation, disrupted education, difficulties finding and sustaining employment, poor physical and mental health, and limited ability to fulfill potential in later life.

Physical activity can have a positive impact on mental well-being. Benefits include helping to create social connections, reduce stress and anxiety levels, improve mood, improve self-esteem, and encourage clear thinking. For many people experiencing poor mental health, being active is an effective way to stay well and manage their condition alongside treatment.

Edinburgh Leisure is a charity committed to creating opportunities for everyone in Edinburgh to stay active and

well.

Our Active Communities programme uses the power of physical activity and sport to tackle inequalities and combat the effects of inactivity. Each year we support over 10,000 people affected by health conditions, disabilities, inequalities, and poverty to improve their health and well-being.

Be Strong, Be You, a pilot project initiated by Edinburgh Leisure has been working with young people

Be Strong, Be You, a pilot project initiated by Edinburgh Leisure, has been working with pupils from three Edinburgh high schools. It's aimed at young people aged 12-18 years experiencing mild to moderate mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and stress, and uses the power of physical activity and sport to help them improve their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

An intensive, person-centred, and preventative project, it enables young people to access support before their mental health reaches a crisis point and they needed more specialist support.

We provide young people with a range of resources that they can draw on to build strong mental health, develop resilience and feel better equipped to cope with the challenges life throws at them. This includes an initial consultation with a Specialist Instructor and a Pupil Support Teacher within the school setting; 1:1 motivational support from a specialist instructor to be active for 16 weeks, followed by regular follow-ups; and 1:1 physical activity sessions.

Be Strong, Be You has made a huge impact on the 40 young people referred to the project. One hundred percent of completers felt healthier, felt better equipped to protect their future health and wellbeing, and their confidence had increased, with 70% feeling their social life had improved. Sixteen of the participants are also now 'gym-accredited' – a

certification that a young person under 16 has the skills and knowledge to attend the gym independently.

To help us, help more young people we need to secure funding to continue and grow the project.

If you or any organisation can support us in our ambitious plans, please get in touch with me stuarthamilton@edinburghleisure.co.uk

Stuart Hamilton is an Active Communities Development Officer at Edinburgh Leisure



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