

A Qualitative Evaluation of the Watford FC Community Trust 'Shape Up' Programme

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Introduction

The rising proportion of men and women who are classified as obese in the UK is of concern to public health stakeholders. Obesity in adults is defined as having a BMI of 30 or above¹. Data from the Health Survey for England in 2014 suggests that 23.4% of men and 26.8% of women are obese, an increase from 13.2% and 16.4% respectively in 1993². Men in the UK have one of the highest rates of obesity in Europe (OECD 2014). More than three quarters are overweight or obese when aged 35-64 and a third of UK men are obese during this stage of the life course (Gray and Leyland 2012).

Obesity is often associated with a higher prevalence of a range of long term or life limiting conditions including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. The rising numbers of obese adults in the UK could account for an additional 668 000 cases of diabetes, 461 000 cases of heart disease and stroke and 130 000 cases of cancer by 2030 (Wang, McPherson et al. 2011). The cost to the NHS of treating obesity is predicted to reach £9.7 billion by 2050 (Foresight 2007). Identifying effective ways to prevent or treat obesity is therefore a public health and health service priority and particular attention needs to be paid to the elements of an intervention that may attract or repel men from taking part.

Watford Football Club's Community Trust developed a 12-week nutrition education and physical activity programme aimed at men with a BMI of 30 or above³ and aged 18-60 years. The programme was developed in the light of positive evidence from interventions offered by other football clubs. For example in Scotland the Scottish Premier League fund a 'Football Fans in Training' (FFIT) programme. A randomised controlled trial of men taking part in FFIT showed that the programme attracted obese men at extremely and very high risk of developing type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease or hypertension, i.e. men likely to gain significantly from losing 5-10% of their bodyweight (Hunt, Gray et al. 2014, Hunt, Wyke et al. 2014). Notts County Football Club run a 15-week programme called 'Motivate'. Originally aimed at overweight and obese men the programme is now open to men and women of any

¹ BMI is an index of weight in proportion to height and is calculated by taking weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in metres (kg/m²).

² https://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity

³ The criteria is a BMI of 28 or above for men from black and minority ethnic groups, because of the higher risk of conditions such as type 2 diabetes in these populations.

BMI. An evaluation of the programme showed that it was effective in terms of weight loss for male as well as female participants (Rutherford, Gough et al. 2014).

Shape Up consists of 12 weekly sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. Sessions begin with 30 minutes of nutrition education delivered by Watford FC Community Trust coaches. The education sessions deliver nutritional advice, behaviour change strategies and active lifestyle explanation and motivation. Each week a different topic is discussed; topics include portion sizes; food preparation; snacking; reading food labels; the importance of breakfast; peer pressure and controlling cravings. Men are weighed each week and then undertake a 60 minute full body workout session designed to burn calories and improve fitness levels; sessions are tailored to the fitness level of participants (less intensive in week one, for example and building on improved fitness levels by week 12) and men are encouraged to rest and recover whenever they need to. Exercise sessions are led by the Watford FC Community Trust coaches and are usually based around circuit style activities and small team games such as 5-a-side football. The project is co-ordinated and delivered from Watford FC's Vicarage Road stadium as well as at a range of community venues across Hertfordshire. The programme is funded by Public Health Hertfordshire and is currently available free of charge to the men who participate. The programme is advertised through the Football Club's communication channels, community and business networks and on match days in the stadium. Men can also be referred to the programme by their GP.

Evaluation design

The University of Hertfordshire was approached to undertake an independent evaluation of Shape Up during 2015. The aim was to use a realist evaluation design to qualitatively evaluate men's experiences of taking part in Shape Up, their motivation to take part and also to sustain the changes to diet and exercise necessary to maintain any weight lost. A realist approach helps to determine not just whether a programme works, but considers for whom it works, how it works and in what setting/s or contexts it works best (Pawson and Tilley 1997). This approach goes beyond simply asking 'does this programme work' in order to generate findings that can help programme delivery to be enhanced. Our aim with this evaluation is to supplement the quantitative data collected and analysed by the Football

Club's Community Trust regarding weight change and participation rates for those taking part in Shape Up.

Recruitment of participants

Whilst Shape Up is offered at various venues across Hertfordshire the evaluation concentrated on recruiting men attending sessions at a community centre in one town in the county, plus those attending sessions at the football stadium, so that we could assess whether men's experiences were different at the community venue versus the football stadium. Details of 11 men who had completed the 12-week programme were sent to the research team (with their consent) and they were emailed an evaluation information leaflet in July/August 2015 and invited to an interview at a place of their choosing. Eight of these men were interviewed; most came to the University but others were interviewed at venues such as cafes. Each of these eight participants was contacted again in January 2016 and given the opportunity to update the research team on how they were faring in terms of maintaining or changing their food and exercise habits since the formal end of their involvement with Shape Up. Two invitations for a follow up interview were sent to each participant and five men provided follow up information by email as a result.

In September 2015 the Shape Up facilitators gave out leaflets about the evaluation to men about to embark on the Shape Up programme at the community venues and football stadium. These men were invited to take part in two focus groups (one in week 1-2 and one in week 12-13⁴) as well as an individual interview during weeks 9-11 of the programme. The number of men who participated is shown in Table 1, below.

Two staff members involved with Shape Up were approached to take part in an evaluation interview and one gave consent to participate. Informed consent was obtained from each individual in writing before any data were collected.

⁴ It was not possible for the research team to conduct a focus group in week 12 with one group therefore the coach organised an extra physical activity session in week 13 to allow us to conduct a focus group then. These men were not the same ones who participated in the focus group in week 1.

Table 1. Summary of interview and focus group participants

| | Focus group participants | Follow up interviews |
|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Week 1 focus group – football stadium | 15 | 1 |
| Week 2 focus group – community venue | 9 | 1 |
| Week 12 focus group- community venue | 7 | 0 |
| Week 13 focus group- football stadium | 7 | 4 |
| Men interviewed who had completed Shape Up | - | 8 |
| Follow up interviews with ‘completers’ | - | 5 |
| TOTAL | 38 | 19 |

Methods

Focus groups and interviews

We used focus groups in addition to individual interviews as each method helps obtain different types of evidence (Michell 1999). Focus groups utilise the dynamics of a group; this means individuals challenge each other and critique what each has to say rather than statements being taken at ‘face value’ (Barbour 2008). Individual interviews were used to allow participants to talk in more detail than is possible in a focus group and also to enable individuals to talk about personal reasons for wanting to attend the Shape Up programme (health or family concerns, for example), which could be difficult to raise in front of other participants (Kvale 2007). Each focus group was facilitated by two members of the research team, to enable one researcher to ask questions of the group whilst the second made notes and spoke to individuals who arrived or left during the proceedings (ensuring written consent was obtained from latecomers, for example). This was necessary since the focus groups were organised during the Shape Up sessions so men came/went during the time before or after getting weighed and measured in another part of the room. This approach was taken to maximise the numbers taking part, rather than organising the focus groups after Shape Up sessions had ended, for example, as this was often quite late in the evening. Focus groups were audio recorded with the consent of those present and then transcribed.

Interviews were conducted face to face, by telephone or by email, to suit participant's schedules and preferences. Face to face and telephone interviews were audio recorded with each participant's consent and transcribed. Email interviews were only conducted with men who had previously been interviewed face to face; this meant rapport had already been established and the researcher could tailor emails depending on what was discussed previously (Ison 2009). This approach worked well and ensured follow-up details could be obtained from five of the men.

Notes were written up after each focus group or interview to allow the researchers to document observations not recorded by the digital audio recorder (e.g. non-verbal dynamics, body language and interruptions during focus groups).

Topics and questions

Focus groups and interviews were semi-structured meaning that the same questions were asked of each group or individual but follow up questions were dependent on the answers given by individuals or the group, to ensure that we probed for details that were pertinent to each participant.

Individual interviews with men who had already completed Shape Up when interviewed (Aug/Sept 2015)

- How participants heard about Shape Up/how they were referred
- Motivation for taking part in the programme
- Experience of the Shape Up programme (positive and negative)
- Personal changes since Shape Up ended regarding food practices (takeaways, food shopping, cooking, portion size etc), exercise habits, support from others (family, work colleagues, continued contact with the Shape Up team)

Focus groups week 1-2 (Sept/Oct 2015)

- How participants heard about Shape Up/how they were referred
- Motivation for taking part in the programme
- Expectations of the Shape Up programme (positive and negative)

Focus groups week 12-13 (Dec 2015)

- Experience of the Shape Up programme (positive and negative)

- Personal changes since Shape Up week 1-2 regarding food practices (takeaways, food shopping, cooking, portion size etc), exercise habits and support from others (family, work colleagues)
- Perception of challenges ahead, in sustaining food and exercise habits

Individual interviews in weeks 9-11 (Oct-Dec 2015)

- Experience of the Shape Up programme (positive and negative)
- Further details about motivation for taking part in the programme
- Concerns/worries about taking part in Shape Up or sustaining new habits

Follow up interviews with men who participated earlier in the evaluation (Jan 2016)

- Personal changes since last interviewed in terms of changes to food practices (takeaways, food shopping, cooking, portion size etc), exercise habits, support from others (family, work colleagues, continued contact with the Shape Up team)
- Further reflections on the Shape Up programme (positive and negative)

Individual interview with Shape Up staff member (Jan 2016)

- Experience and perceptions of the content and delivery of the Shape Up programme (positive and negative)
- Perception of the men taking part in Shape Up (motivations, barriers to success, sustainability of changes)

Data analysis

All focus group and interview transcripts were subjected to a thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998) and this was managed using NVIVO software (version 10), a programme for the organisation of qualitative data. Emergent themes from focus group transcripts were used to develop an initial framework, which developed as the analysis proceeded, subsequently incorporating themes emerging from interview transcripts. The analysis was verified by a second member of the research team.

Ethics approval and preparation for the evaluation

Ethics approval to begin the evaluation was obtained from the University of Hertfordshire Health and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority in July 2015⁵. Whilst waiting for ethics approval the research team made two visits to Shape Up sessions, to observe the settings and to familiarise themselves with how the programme was delivered. This provided valuable background context prior to the data collection phase. In addition we consulted with members of the University's Public Involvement in Research Group, to fine tune the participant leaflets and consent forms.

Findings

The findings are presented around three main research questions with sub-themes included that relate to issues emerging from participant's accounts:

- Finding out about Shape Up
- Experiences of the 12-week Shape Up programme
- Motivation and experience of developing and sustaining new habits

The following theme is also presented as this was voiced by participants:

- Developing the Shape Up programme

Text in *italics* is taken verbatim from transcripts and the following ID codes/abbreviations are used to accompany quotes: 'completer' if an individual was interviewed after taking part in Shape Up; 'WFC' if an individual took part in Shape Up at the football club venue; 'com' if an individual took part in Shape Up at a community venue; 'F/G' if an individual took part in a focus group.

Finding out about Shape Up

Men mentioned finding out about the Shape Up programme through a variety of means. Some saw it promoted on social media, via Facebook and Twitter. If they did not see it advertised on social media themselves, friends or family members flagged it up as

⁵ Protocol number HSK/SF/UH/00116

something they might be interested in. Other men received emails from the Football Club or saw it advertised at the stadium, either via the 'big screen' at matches or in match programmes. The association of Shape Up with Watford FC was a draw for a lot of these men as they described themselves as fans of the Club.

Box 1. Comments about finding out about Shape Up

I went to Watford's last game of the season, which was a Sheffield Wednesday game, and I saw an advertisement about this Shape Up programme, well I thought, "That links in nicely with what I've been trying to do" [completer PP2]

I had an email from Watford football club, I am a supporter and my three sons are all supporters.... Enquired, I thought, it is free, try and do something about my health in general [completer PP4]

I follow [the Club] on Twitter and I saw it on Twitter, they just tweeted it and then they put a link through for the website, so I went onto the website and had a little look and, you know, and registered and then in the final home game of the season, which was Sheffield Wednesday, it was in the programme when they had the first candidates, went on the field. [completer PP7]

I don't know how you guys all were made aware of it, but I wouldn't have found that unless I was arguing with my doctor [about my weight] [FG wk13 WFC]

I would never have known without a text from my doctor and I think he must have done, he's looked at the people, their BMIs, I assume, and then generic text to everybody with a BMI and you go in and apply onto the course [FG wk13 WFC]

Facebook, my Mrs saw it. [F/G wk2 com.]

I'm actually a Watford season ticket holder and last year there was a lot of press I think in the, around the ground and things like that so I saw it last year and I happened to be having a, I think it was a blood test or something, with the nurse in my local GP surgery and I was talking about, you know, the best ways to lose weight and things like that with her, just generally talking and she goes "Oh there's this course that you can join", so she referred me [interview wk11 WFC]

The other main route to finding out about Shape Up was via local GPs. Participants either asked their GP about Shape Up after seeing a poster or flyer; participant's friends or family saw the programme advertised at their GP surgery and passed on information or GPs suggested to men that Shape Up was something they might consider trying. This was based on GP knowledge of a patient's attempts or desires to lose weight or because of associated health issues such as type 2 diabetes or a risk of developing diabetes. All the men spoke

positively about finding out about Shape Up⁶, saying that it came at the ‘right time’ or felt like it would be the ‘right’ type of programme for them.

Experiences of the 12-week Shape Up programme

All participants talked at length and with great enthusiasm about Shape Up – its content, delivery and format. Few participants had many negative things to say; the negative comments that *were* made are drawn on in the section on participants’ recommendations for future Shape Up programmes but some points are also covered here, where relevant.

The overriding factors that made Shape Up a successful programme were, in the eyes of the participants in the evaluation, the ‘male only’ aspect and group camaraderie of the experience plus the knowledge and personal skills of the head coach and his team.

Secondary to these aspects were the format and content of the different components of Shape Up (education, exercise, getting weighed) and, for those attending programmes at the football stadium, the inspiration of attending groups at this venue. The football stadium also had a negative impact for some, however, and this is also discussed below.

Male group camaraderie

All the men who took part in the evaluation commented positively on the group nature of Shape Up and the advantages of it being male only. A few men said they would not mind if women (and also children who are obese) joined the programme, as they felt it would be of benefit to them, but these comments were not made by most of those we spoke to therefore they are not covered in any detail here. Some participants commented on individuals who did not complete the 12-week programme, viewing them as not attending at the ‘right’ time for them personally; men who were particularly ‘large’ were seen to disproportionately drop out of the programme. The staff member we interviewed agreed that the programme was not right for some men but he also acknowledged that coming to the sessions after a long, tiring day at work could be a barrier for some. Conversely though

⁶ Men with more negative feelings would perhaps not come forward to take part in the evaluation or dropped out before the evaluation took place.

he reported that some men “*really shine*” on the programme and many of those also have busy jobs and lives.

Many participants spoke about the male ‘banter’ that ensued in group sessions; this was seen as a way of building relationships within the group but also, importantly, of ensuring that the group setting developed to feel ‘safe’ and supportive. Men said they could ‘confess’ to difficulties in changing their eating habits (continuing to buy kebabs was one example given) when the coach was delivering the education component of a session, for example, without fear of this being looked down upon by the coach or the rest of the group.

Box 2. Comments about the male camaraderie at Shape Up

My wife goes to Slimming World and Weight Watchers and things like that, and they kind of really encourage each other. This was similar, but it also had the, it was a good, like, team spirit, but it was blokes as well, it was people like me, really, I suppose, you know [completer PP3]

I’d say one of the things I find very useful is the men only aspect of it, and it’s not as if we’re, I don’t know, I don’t know, all lude comments or, you know, it’s not like that, but it’s just having a men only situation [F/G week 13, WFC]

I think you get a feel good factor from the exercise, and I get the camaraderie and the mental side of it being part of a group, has helped me as well [interview wk11, com.]

When you’re just looking around on the Internet or wherever you’re looking, there’s a lot of classes for women, and there’s not much for men, like just men [F/G week 12, com.]

I think everyone felt fairly comfortable straightaway and that’s kind of gone on for about ten weeks to be honest. A couple of friendships forming with people, so it’s been good [interview wk11, WFC]

I think the fact it’s a single sex class is actually probably quite good and the sort of, the exercise and that, so blokes are not trying to show off in front of women or they’re not embarrassed for whatever reason, I think it’s quite a good class [interview wk11, WFC]

Knowledge and skills of the Shape up coaching team

All the participants spoke extremely positively about the coaches who deliver the Shape Up programme. The head coach in particular was unanimously viewed as a key asset,

influencing the popularity and successful delivery of Shape Up. This related to the coach's knowledge of nutrition and his ability to deliver the education sessions in a way that 'made sense' to those taking part. He used Powerpoint to deliver the sessions each week but many men commented that the coach's knowledge was deep and extensive and that the Powerpoint slides were used as a visual aide rather than being the lynchpin of the presentations. The participants had a deep respect for this knowledge and also the coach's understanding of how nutrition education is not always easy to implement in everyday life. The coach did not castigate individuals who were failing to implement the dietary changes he suggested and many participants said they were happy to hand in their completed food diaries each week and take on board the feedback given, even when they had not eaten particularly healthily or received extensive comments from the coach on their diary entries.

The head coach was also seen as someone who knew how to tailor the exercise component of Shape Up to individuals with differing fitness levels, health issues and motivation. Participants said the coach knew how to push them beyond what they thought they were capable of yet still ensured that exercise sessions were safe.

The interpersonal skills of the head coach were also seen as being exemplary; he was able to get the best out of participants and this was reported to be a critical factor in motivating men beyond the end of the Shape Up programme. Almost all the participants commented on support the head coach continued to give them, beyond the 12 week programme. He liaised with them via text message, phone or email and suggested ways they could continue with the exercise habits they had developed.

The head coach was therefore an essential pillar of support during and after the end of Shape Up. The staff member we interviewed agreed with the men's evaluation of the head coach, reporting that the way he delivered the courses and the rapport he developed with the men made a big difference to the way Shape Up worked.

The assistant coaches were mentioned less extensively during the evaluation but were very much viewed as part of the Shape Up team and were liked by participants. A few participants mentioned that some assistant coaches from the Community Trust were not as skilful at motivating participants and did not always exhibit the same level of knowledge or understanding as the head coach; this is perhaps not surprising given their more junior

status. This perception was not universal (see comments in Box 3) but the issue is returned to in the final section of the report.

Box 3. Comments about the knowledge and skills of the Shape Up team

[The coach] made himself available to us well beyond the once a week sessions, and I was so impressed [completer PP2]

The coach himself was very good, the guy who ran it was very good so it was that right balance of kind of understanding but actually pushing people and not letting you get away with too little which was good and he did that with a light touch which was good [completer PP8]

my interpretation is that [the coach] has written the course, because he's passionate about it and you know, he puts a set of slides up on the screen but he's not reading the slides, he's, he's using them as a prompt and the other course, the guy was reading it word for word and I think hmm, I'm not sure if I believe that. It doesn't really reinforce the message [completer PP1]

These two [coaches] have been good that way as well, in that if they've seen someone who struggles in a certain exercise, they'll give them a little bit of personal training to one side, which is good [F/G wk12, com.]

Because a lot of these courses I've heard about, and a few of them I've done, and they're always, you know, not well organised, not well run and they don't know what they're doing. This was different, [the coach] knew what he was doing, he's a confident guy, he listens to your concerns, answers any questions, and the way that it was run, even his assistant, I can't praise enough, he's very good and he's there motivating, and even when he sometimes takes over the classes...he's telling us, oh, do star jumps or run on the spot and all that, he's very good, he helps with the technique, I struggled with the complex stretches and stuff like that, and he will happily explain it to me again, and he'll get me to improve my technique, so I'm very happy with that.

Format and content Shape Up sessions

Each Shape Up session consisted of a nutrition education component, a weekly weigh in and then a full body workout. The nutrition education sessions were seen as informative, practical and accessible. Whilst some men commented that they felt the information related to things they 'already knew' they also added that they usually came away with new knowledge and a better understanding of how diet can make a difference to health and wellbeing, as well as to their weight. Some men reported that they learnt a great deal that was new to them during Shape Up. There were no negative comments made by participants

about the content of the nutrition education delivered through the programme. Completing food diaries, whilst seen as challenging to do by some men, was viewed as a useful exercise. The staff member we interviewed said he felt the nutrition education was not about preaching a “*weight loss diet*” but about giving the men tips on how to make better decisions in the longer term about what to eat. He felt the sessions were pitched such that when motivation to change was waning, in the middle of the programme, hearing about the medical consequences of obesity, for example, helped many men to keep attempting to improve their diet. The structure and delivery of the nutrition component of Shape Up was therefore well received.

Putting the nutrition knowledge into practice was viewed by some participants as being made a little easier because of the weekly weigh in. Knowing they would ‘face the scales’ each week meant being more prepared to avoid dietary temptations in order to see a loss, or to maximise the weight lost each week. The staff member we spoke to added that some men expected to see dramatic results each week in terms of weight loss but this was only possible if they made significant changes to their eating habits and many were unable to achieve this on a weekly basis.

The exercise sessions, being a mix of team games and individual activities, including 5-a-side football and workouts based on circuit training, were viewed by the participants as challenging but enjoyable and worthwhile. The men said that they were aware how far they had progressed and several commented that the coach informed them that what they were capable of in week 1 of the programme became just the warm-up part of the final sessions of the programme, which made them feel proud of what they had achieved. The group dynamic worked to make the sessions competitive, which most men said they enjoyed. A small number said the competitive element concerned them, in terms of the potential to lead to injury when men got ‘carried away’ with wanting to win/beat others in the group. The staff member interviewed said the competitive element really helped some men to push themselves and that many saw good weight loss as a result, he felt.

In summary, the nutrition education was seen as accessible and worthwhile but sometimes the knowledge gained was viewed as difficult to put into practice. The weekly weigh in worked as a motivator for many men, in terms of helping them to make dietary changes.

The exercise component of Shape Up was viewed by all as challenging but enjoyable and therefore easier to sustain than changes to eating habits.

Box 4. Comments about the format and content of Shape Up

I would say the quality of the presentations and the handouts here, because they give it to you in such a usable fashion [F/G wk13, WFC]

I think, as it was the first one, I enjoyed every aspect, I don't think I would change anything [completer PP4]

I think that does focus you, the weigh in as well, does sort of, you think, yeah, if everyone else is losing weight and then if you have stayed the same or you've gained two weeks running you think that's not good, so yeah [F/G wk 13, WFC]

I did enjoy it until we come up against a team that was a bit serious one night, and I got deliberately elbowed in the chest...and I had a great big bruise about that big, and that put me off a little bit, because I love my football [F/G wk12, com.]

The guy who introduced the session would kind of give you the theme....the focus on the session, then you'd do a weigh-in, then you'd do some food education that was the focus of the session, then you would tend to do some stretches to kind of get you warmed up and maybe some sort of circuits and then they would either intersperse the circuits with basically a kind of five-a-side game, so it was inside and I thought it wasn't going to work actually because it was inside but it was fine, it was in a kind of community sports hall and you know, so you would just play against each other and it worked really well actually [completer PP8]

I mean that's the other thing obviously I think that hopefully we'll learn from the course is when to eat and what to eat before you exercise and afterwards as well, you know, so I'm looking forward to it. It's arming us with knowledge we can take away [F/G wk1, WFC]

The influence of the Vicarage Road football stadium

For Watford FC fans, training at the football stadium during the Shape Up sessions was reported as being inspirational. Being at the stadium on a weekly basis, seeing changes made at the ground during that time, running up and down the steps of the stands as part of circuit training were all cited as positive factors.

For some participants, however, the areas of the stadium used during the exercise sessions were viewed as inappropriate (*"it's not really built for training"* [completer PP2]). The space was seen as quite narrow and the floor was made of concrete and therefore games of 5-a-

side football were sometimes seen as physically demanding, resulting in men being pushed into walls, for example when the game became competitive or heated. Some participants said they held back during team games due to fear of injury at the stadium sessions.

Motivation and experience of developing and sustaining new habits

As men went through and completed the Shape Up programme they talked about how they were putting into practice what they were learning during the weekly sessions, both in terms of the nutrition education and the physical activity sessions.

In terms of physical activity many participants told us what additional exercise they were building into their lives, outside of Shape Up, either alone or with other men from the programme. Some participants mentioned walking more, or starting running, cycling or attending a gym. Others had booked local venues to organise 5-a-side games. In some cases the head coach had helped make such arrangements; he had also set up 'follow on' sessions for some participants, so that they could continue to have a structured workout together on a weekly basis. A small fee was charged for this. The staff member we spoke to said he felt the men supported each other to achieve their goals through continuing to meet up or to try new physical activities together.

Many men felt motivated to increase their physical activity levels because of improved wellbeing, fitness, confidence in their abilities or because of weight loss. Others were regaining enjoyment of being active, after years of inactivity. Participants often spoke about wanting to be a good role model to their children or grandchildren and being motivated to find new activities to undertake with their families as a result of the Shape Up programme.

Making and sustaining changes to eating habits were often reported by participants to be more difficult than sustaining physical activity. Some men felt that their diet was relatively 'healthy' and therefore there were few substantial changes that they could make, in their opinion. Others made changes to their diet in the earlier weeks of Shape Up but some less than healthy habits were reported as creeping back in. We talked to participants about how their work and home life impacted on dietary change and some felt that their families or work colleagues offered tremendous support. Others reported that support was less forthcoming. For example some spouses were reported as not wanting to reduce availability

of higher fat, higher sugar foods because they did not want to deprive children of these items. Some men found this difficult as temptation was always present at home.

The men who were followed up around six months after completing Shape Up had all continued being physically active. Many had added in additional activities such as spinning classes at the gym, local 5K 'park runs' or further 5-a-side football games. All said they enjoyed exercise as part of their lifestyle and none wanted to stop being active. Sustaining the weight lost was seen as challenging by these participants. Some had gained a few kilos and none reported losing substantially more weight since Shape Up ended. Most felt this was related to the difficulties of sustaining dietary changes. They were aware of what they needed to eat to lose weight but could not quite continue to put this into practice in a way that resulted in weight loss. Participants were in touch with the head coach who ran Shape Up and still appreciated his input and support.

Box 5. Comments about motivation and developing and sustaining new habits

Well I've just got to, really got to keep myself disciplined, you know, I've made some changes that I'm committed to really, I've just got to stick to it and not lose sight. I really want to get the weight off this time [completer PP1]

I must admit, I don't think I've lost a lot of weight actually to be honest, but I've been going through the exercises, and you know, I've been riding my bike, but I don't think I've been quite as serious [F/G wk12, com.]

My physical activity levels have gone up, I mean in my job I used to do a lot of walking anyway but now I attend the gym, I'm inclined to run places, I attend those classes, go to the gym two or three times a week, I've got a personal trainer at the minute [interview wk9, WFC]

I've still got cans of lager sitting in the fridge, every time I open the door and I look at them, [my wife], now and again will put a couple of chocolate sweets in because I don't, I like chocolate but I'm one of these people that if I break open a bar I'll have to eat the lot. So what [she] will do is, if I treat myself now and again, she'll take it off me and hide it, and put a couple of squares in the jar. So that way, you still feel as if you're not going without, you've still got a little treat [interview wk9, com.]

My problem is with my weight. I find it hard to cut down on eating. A lot of what I eat is healthy but I need to cut out the unhealthy stuff as well and plan better. I have lost a few pounds but not enough [follow up interview, PP3]

The development of Shape Up

Whilst later in the report we make recommendations drawing on the evidence gathered and analysed for the evaluation overall, here we present findings drawn directly from participant's accounts of what future Shape Up programmes could consider or could 'look like'. These views are important, given the participants have direct experience of attending all 12-weeks of Shape Up and have the task of sustaining new habits when the programme ends, which many find challenging, as reported in earlier sections.

Overwhelmingly participants wanted Shape Up to last longer than 12 weeks. Many felt that the programme was 'just the beginning' but that 12 weeks is not long enough to develop new practices that become sustained habits over a long period. Some men said the programme should last for 6 or even 12 months in order to more significantly address public health in Hertfordshire. We discussed the issue of whether Shape Up should or could be paid for by men themselves, rather than by Public Health Hertfordshire or other funders. Most participants said they would be happy to pay – particularly after the initial 12 weeks ends, for follow on programmes to help sustain changes that support weight loss.

Participants did not, generally, have suggestions for changing the content or format of the 12-week Shape Up programme as they were very satisfied with it as it is currently delivered (see quote in Box 6 about not 'tinkering around the edges'). As mentioned earlier, a few men felt the programme could be broadened so that women and obese children could benefit from attending.

The Vicarage Road training facilities (particularly during the winter months and poorer weather) were seen by some men as inadequate and some suggested using a sports centre instead, or using the Watford FC training ground rather than the stadium. A few men said the start time of the groups did not suit them particularly well; many men did not work locally therefore struggled to get to the group on time some weeks.

Another suggestion put forward was the setting up of a shared Facebook group or other social media page for those taking part in Shape Up, so that the men could support each other in between groups and could offer suggestions and support to their peers.

Some men who took part in the evaluation were so supportive of Shape Up continuing in their local community that they showed us written endorsements and reflections that they had written about their experiences and copied us into or sent us correspondence with their local MPs, elected councillors and GPs, urging them to support the continuation of funding for Shape Up. Participants expressed strong views about the value of Shape Up for the local community and wanting as many people as possible to benefit from future programmes

Box 6. Comments about the development of Shape Up

These guys are exceptional, so if [the coach] is the man who's made the structure of this design of this programme, well they've got to make sure they replicate a lot of [him], but they really seriously ought to be able to get Jeremy Hunt down here, if they want to do something really, instead of all this tinkering around the edges stuff, do this, would be my message to them [F/G wk13, WFC]

I would love it to have gone on, I would love to, you know, be able to do it permanently, but I understand that, you know, finance is an issue and, you know, it's really to kick start things, but you know, I would have been happy to pay. The other thing I would suggest, maybe, is if they set up, like, a closed Facebook group or some kind of social media where we could kind of encourage each other. I think that, kind of, works quite well as well [completer PP3]

I don't think 12 weeks is long enough, I really don't [completer PP5]

The actual programme, the actual 12 week programme, I think is really well thought through and works out quite well, I think, you know, like I say you could add stuff to that, you could probably set up some sort of online support group to help people through and all of that kind of stuff [completer PP8]

I think if one, two things we take out from this programme, is that it needs to be expanded, continually expanded into schools and other places, accessible for everyone, and the ability to, for people that want to increase it from 12 weeks to longer there should be that option where you can continue doing it [F/G wk13, WFC]

Do you think maybe that they should make these courses more accessible to carry on with them for middle aged men? Because my train of thought is, I know how it's made us feel, but surely NHS, wouldn't they benefit from this sort of thing as well, if people were encouraged to eat more healthily, exercise more, with these sort of courses going on? [F/G wk12, com.]

Discussion and conclusion

This evaluation has explored the views and experiences of men who took part in Watford FC's Community Trust Shape Up programme. Whilst fewer than 60 men participated in the evaluation and we were limited in the number of programme venues we could observe or include, the views expressed by participants clearly show overwhelming support for a men only nutrition education and physical activity programme to help them achieve a healthy weight. We did not include the views of men who joined Shape Up but did not finish the 12 week programme and it is possible these men could hold different perceptions about the scheme.

Nonetheless, like the Scottish Premier League Football Fans in Training (FFIT) programme (Bunn, Wyke et al. 2016) Shape Up is enjoyed by the men who attend and they rate it highly. The positive comments of those evaluated show that the content and format of Shape Up is appropriate and many men say they benefit from a weekly weigh in. They gain new knowledge and understanding about diet, behaviour change and the consequences of obesity and most find or rediscover that they enjoy being physically active. The fuelling of an enjoyment of exercise is a notable outcome among the men taking part in the evaluation.

Recommendations for Shape Up

Shape Up is delivered by a skilled and knowledgeable team of coaches; the head coach is highly regarded and is a key asset for Shape Up's continued success. The importance of this as Shape Up develops cannot and should not be underestimated especially as some junior coaches were viewed by participants as less knowledgeable and not as adept at motivating participants compared with more senior members of the team. We recommend that as more coaches are trained to deliver Shape Up they are taught to a high level of competency in terms of knowledge of nutrition, behaviour change and personal training as well as in inter-personal and communication skills. Less experienced coaches may not achieve as much as more experienced personnel and this could be detrimental to Shape Up's success in terms of weight loss outcomes.

The strategy for publicising Shape Up, using the Football Club's communication channels, community and business networks, in the stadium and via GPs is effective but we

recommend that more GPs are made aware of the programme. This would mean more GPs can target men with a high BMI and other conditions such as type 2 diabetes as these men have the most to gain from Shape Up, in terms of improvements to health. Ensuring men with a very high BMI are motivated to complete Shape Up needs some attention as these men were perceived as being more likely to drop out than men with a lower BMI.

There is a need to identify continuation programmes for men who have participated in Shape Up. Follow up opportunities should not, however, solely focus on exercise and physical activity; important as these are for health and wellbeing the evaluation highlights that helping men to sustain dietary change and achieve further weight loss requires some thought. Continuation programmes could be developed by the FC's Community Trust or by other providers and could be paid for by those attending. The evaluation findings suggest that including weekly a weigh in would be beneficial for participants.

In conclusion, the evaluation shows that a programme such as Shape Up works for those men who attend it for 12 weeks, in terms of enjoyment, engagement with health behaviour change and lifestyle modification. What is needed now is a longer term evaluation involving both qualitative and quantitative components to assess whether men sustain (or improve on) their weight loss and changes to a healthier diet and whether improvements in health and wellbeing are discernible over a 12-24 month period, or longer. There is also a need to further explore how men who drop out of Shape Up could be better supported to complete the programme, in order to achieve better health outcomes. Collecting such evidence would clearly show the longer term benefits of Shape Up as part of the strategy for improving public health in Hertfordshire.

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