

Case Study

**Golf Clubs can be a Community Hub for
Mental Health**

October 2018



Introduction

October sees New Zealand recognise Mental Illness week. Figures related to New Zealand and mental health do not paint a positive picture. We have the second highest rate of bullying in schools in the world, we are rated 4th in the OECD for rates of suicide, and we have just recorded our highest rate of suicide in our history of 668 deaths. The number has increased four years in a row. The percentage of people seeking help for

mental illness has continually increased over several years. Sports and, by extension, sports clubs have played a role in helping to bring the mental health discussion into the public sphere as well as providing a way to help with some of the effects of mental illness and mental wellbeing. Golf clubs could be sitting as the centre of promoting positive mental health within our communities.

Knowing your core members

Sir John Kirwan's public admission of battling depression brought the mental health conversation into the open and the benefit he gained from using physical activity as part of his programme to keep his depression under control. In the New Zealand Herald Kirwan said that sports clubs were the key to keeping depression at bay and that sports clubs could be "fundamental to wellness."¹ He went on to say that sport centric community centres could become the hubs of community where all members of the community could come together. With the number and placement of golf clubs around the country there is no reason why golf could not become the community hub the Kirwan talks about. Golf clubs provide the perfect opportunity to meld the physical as well as the social aspects that promote healthy mental being. Some clubs open their doors to the local community for bridge groups as well as for retirement home residents to get out and about. During the week most of our golf clubs are empty and providing a space for diverse groups to aid in social interaction will benefit both the golf club and the community. There is extensive research that shows that good social relationships and networks help in positive mental wellness. There is more and more evidence coming out that walking and more generally physical activity can be an effective way to enhance positive moods. People with elevated levels of regular physical activity have been shown to have higher levels of positive emotions such as interest, excitement, enthusiasm and alertness compared to people with moderate and low levels of physical activity.² It has also been shown there is approximately a 20-30% lower risk for depression and dementia for adults participating in daily physical activity.³ Golf, as an activity, fits squarely in this area. The benefit golf has many other activities is it is a game that can be played for life. Besides the physical aspect of the game is the interaction that occurs with the other player on and off the course. If anyone wants to debate golf being a physical activity than the definition of a physical activity as "any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure"⁴ suits golf.

1 New Zealand Herald 11 October 2016

2 Pasco JA, Jack FN, Williams LJ, Brennan SL, Leslie E & Berk M (2011). Don't Worry Be Active: positive affect and habitual physical activity. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 45(12) p. 1047-52

3 Department of Health PA, Health Improvement and Protection (2011). Start Active, Stay Active: A report on physical activity from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers. London: Department of Health

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Not only does New Zealand have disturbingly high rates of suicide but a recent W.H.O study said that New Zealand was the 14th laziest country in the world with 42.4% of our population failing to hit recommended physical targets. Even after being told constantly that physical activity helps control weight and prevents chronic illnesses like type 2 diabetes we are seeing a falling rate of those participating in physical activity.

Physical activity can be used as an alternative non-medication treatment for depression as well as also being used in combination with medication and/or psychological therapy. It has few side effects and does not have the perceived stigma that some believe are attached to taking antidepressants or counselling. Physical activity also provides the opportunities for social contact and social interaction. There is extensive research that shows that good social relationships and networks promote are a protective factor for wellbeing and mental health.⁵ These aspects are especially important for those who are isolated. Building these relationships helps with social inclusion by improving people's confidence and competence in interacting with others. This can lead to friendships which may be particularly important for older people. The Mental Health Society of New Zealand's 2014 Research Report defined social inclusion as "the extent to which people are able and confident to exercise their rights and participate, by choice, in the ordinary activities of citizens. Social inclusion implies full participation in society, with no constraints or conditions placed on a citizen's status." As can be seen by this statement by the Mental Health Foundation, social inclusion has a major impact on people's lives.

Many of us have had experience with a friend, workmate, or family member who has battled mental illness. We would have also felt the emptiness and feeling of powerlessness of seeing someone close to us battle an illness that changes the person we knew in front of our eyes and not knowing how to help or support them. There is no one answer to treat mental illness and the more options we have the better the chances of keeping it under control. Golf could be, and maybe should be, at the intersection of both the social and physical options for treatment. Mental health issues are not going away and what the figures are saying is that it will continue to get worse within our communities. We all can do more to help those suffering by breaking down the stigma of the illness and including those suffering in our community daily activities. Being there for someone is the best thing we all can do and golf gives us the opportunity to be there for people both physically and socially.

London: Department of Health

5 Heaney CA & Israel BA (2008) Social Networks and Social Support. In: Glanz K, Rimer BK, Viswanath K, editors. Health behavior and health education: theory, research, and practice. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. P. 189-210

Where to get help

If you are worried about your or someone else's mental health, the best place to get help is your GP or local mental health provider. However, if you or someone else is in danger or endangering others, call police immediately on 111.

Or if you need to talk to someone else

- DEPRESSION HELPLINE: 0800 111 757
- KIDSLINE: 0800 543 754 (available 24/7)
- LIFELINE: 0800 543 354 or 09 5222 999 within Auckland (24/7)
- NEED TO TALK? Free call or text 1737 (24/7)
- SAMARITANS – 0800 726 666
- SUICIDE CRISIS HELPLINE: 0508 828 865 (24/7)
- WHATSUP: 0800 942 8787 (1pm to 11pm)
- YOUTHLINE: 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz