

A local idea turned into a local resource

Evening exercise classes and a physio pop up held in our local hall providing opportunities for all members of the community to get support for health and activity within their own community

A local appetite for support of health and activity in our own community

East Loch Lomond covers a large geographical area from Rowardennen to Buchanan Smiddy outside Drymen. There are approximately 200 households in the area. A large proportion of the population are older adults or of working age. A large local survey completed by residents of East Loch Lomond in 2023 identified the appetite for health treatments and exercise classes to be held locally in the Buchanan Memorial Hall in Milton of Buchanan outside Drymen.

Most people need support to be more active to promote mental and physical health and wellbeing

The World Health Organisation recommends that adults undertake 150 minutes of moderate physical exercise and two strength sessions per week to promote mental and physical health and wellbeing. In Scotland, at least 27% of the population do not meet these recommendations. Access to inexpensive, effective, easy to access activity classes is a way to help people to achieve and exceed the recommended physical exercise guidelines to improve wellbeing and physical health. Furthermore, exercise classes can promote a sense of connectedness, reducing social isolation and promoting wellbeing when available in local settings. Additionally, providing exercise classes and a pop up physio clinic in the local hall could reduce the environmental impact of members of the community travelling outwith the parish to attend classes or appointments further away.

March 2024 trial demonstrated that it is feasible to set up and run exercise classes in the local hall

We completed a successful trial of circuits and HIIT classes in the Buchanan Memorial Hall in March 2024; this March trial demonstrated that it is feasible to setup and run exercise classes in the hall. Attendees of this March trial paid £2 per person per class to cover hall hire and the local instructor – a member of our community- volunteered her time. On completion of the March trial, the attendants of these classes completed a survey - the results of this survey indicated a strong local appetite for continuing with circuits and HIIT plus respondents wanted to try different exercise classes such as yoga, pilates, and boxing exercises. When asked in the March 2024 survey “Which of the following describes your approach to attending the evening classes at Buchanan Memorial Hall?” n=13 said they’d go to a class every week if it was running; n=5 said they were planning on dipping in and out of attending; n=1 planned to attend during term time only; n=0 planned on attending in winter/dark evenings only; and one other respondent remarked that they would like to attend in future once health improves.

Cost, time and travel are a barrier to access activity and health support

All other options for exercising in Drymen, Balfron, Killearn and beyond, exceed the cost that respondents to the March 2024 trial survey felt comfortable paying plus there is the cost and time associated with travel to these venues for Buchanan parish residents so it

made sense to bring the instructors to our residents in the hall. All hall hire costs in the March 2024 trial were met by the £2 per person charge meaning it is feasible to charge a small fee however the additional cost of the instructor time would make the costs too high for many of the members of our community thus we identified the need for subsidised funding of instructor time. Cost of activity is a barrier to people trying new activities or engaging in exercise so it is important to keep costs as low as possible to ensure the classes are viable for as many members of the community as possible to promote adoption of healthy behaviours and ultimately to improve physical and mental wellbeing. Hall hire fees for future classes could be paid by exercise class attendees paying a small fee at the class that has been deemed comfortable based on the results of the survey.

Additionally, from informal discussion with members of the community, many people reported pain or chronic conditions as a reason for not engaging in the activities in the pilot in March 2024, or for not being able to complete them to the level that they would like. Nationally, the number of people living with long term conditions is increasing with back pain the number one cause of disability, and one of the recommendations may be exercise, but pain may be a barrier - a vicious cycle of the myth that exercise may increase their pain. Public Health Scotland state: “health inequalities are worsening and that socioeconomic position is increasingly impacting on how long we live for, and how long we live in good health. The best evidence currently available suggests that this is due to austerity and that pressure on health and social care services are also contributing.”

Following the March 2024 trial a survey was completed by the 20 people who attended the trial classes. Of the respondent, 60% (12/20) identified that it would be helpful to them to have access to a subsidised specialist pain and rehabilitation physiotherapist available for appointments in the Buchanan Memorial Hall, another 35% (7/20) thought this maybe a helpful thing. The nearest NHS physiotherapist is in Killearn which is up to a 35 minutes car journey with no direct bus and an extensive waiting list. The closest private physiotherapy clinics are Bearsden, Callander or Balfron which take at least 30 minutes to travel to from the East Loch Lomond area, and the only means of travel would be car as there is no direct bus service. It was noted that the Buchanan Memorial Hall in Milton of Buchanan would provide a suitable central venue to host health treatments for local community members; it would be easy to get to by bus or a short car journey, or even on foot or by bike thus reducing the environmental impact and increasing the likelihood of people attending the appointment and going on to take health advice to improve health and wellbeing. Thus we considered the feasibility of arranging for a physiotherapist to attend the Buchanan Memorial Hall. Given the rising cost of living, it is important that the cost of obtaining treatment is appealing to all members of the community to ensure that socioeconomic background does not limit peoples access to a local service.

Therefore we sought funding to:

- **Set up a pop up specialist physiotherapist clinic in the local hall.** Funding was used to reduce the cost of the physiotherapy treatment by subsidising the appointment cost plus paying for hire of the hall, to make it easier for local

members of the community to get help for their pain with the aim of improving the health and wellbeing of members of our community, reducing barriers for local residents by providing local access and providing a sense of community by placing care in the centre of the place they reside. We also plan to undertake a feasibility study of this pop up physio clinic – the results will be available in early 2025.

- **Run weekly evening exercise classes in the local hall.** Funding was used to cover the cost of the exercise instructors' time and to buy equipment for exercise classes to provide a fairly priced trial of a range of popular weekly exercise classes to provide members of the parish of Buchanan with the opportunity to access to a range of reasonably priced, easy to access, local exercise classes to help promote mental and physical wellbeing, reduce environmental impact of travel to classes outwith the parish and provide opportunity for social connection for members of our community.

What we have done so far

Evening exercise classes:

We organised a 6 week block, once a week of Circuits on a Monday, and pilates on a Wednesday in our summer block which ran from Monday 26th August until Wednesday 2nd October.

Pop up physiotherapy clinic:

We have run six physiotherapy sessions - one per week for six weeks across September and October 2024. The sessions were a mix of morning and afternoon/early evening sessions to accommodate people with caregiving responsibilities or work commitments. The pop up physio pilot clinic allowed for one subsidised initial appointment and one subsidised follow up appointment each for 15 clients but we were able to increase this to 17 clients. West End Physio, Glasgow (<https://www.westend-physio.com>) were the service provider. The physios at West End physio have a specialist interest with chronic issues and their interventions address the wide range of individual factors that can lead to ongoing pain and disability, such as negative beliefs, emotional distress, and unhelpful behavioural responses to pain such as movement and activity avoidance. It places the person at the centre of their care where the physio acts as coach and not fixer.

Pain and injury seminar:

We also ran an 'understanding pain and injury' seminar for free, led by the physiotherapists at West End Physio, in the local hall thanks to funding.

All of this has been made possible by support from the East Loch Lomond Community Trust (ELLCT) – I had the inclination and energy to drive forward the idea posed by members of the community but if it weren't for the support of the ELLCT, it would not have been possible. As members of my local community, they supported the grant funding applications and have been the grant holder.

Feedback so far

Feedback from the March 2024 survey after the trial of evening classes:

- “I think it would be fabulous for the community. The classes are amazing it would be great to have regular classes especially being so rural.”
- “Thank you for organising, opportunity to go to a class within walking distance is brilliant”
- “Thank you for providing a local service!”

We are due to undertake a formal evaluation of the physiotherapy pop up clinic but anecdotally, here are comments that my neighbours/members of my community have made to me directly about the clinic and the evening classes:

- “I slept through the night for the first time in 18 months – thank you so much for bringing this to the hall, I wouldn’t have had that sort of treatment otherwise – everyone should have access to physio like that”
- “I had a lot going on at home and having the physio and the exercise classes just along the road in the village made it so much easier – I would never have gone to the physio if I’d had to travel anywhere to get it”
- “The circuits on a Monday is a great start to the week – I feel so good for it and it’s so easy to get to with it in the village”

What we have planned in future

We have planned Circuits on a Monday, and yoga on a Tuesday in our autumn block which will run from Monday 21st October. We also have boxing and HIIT planned for our winter and spring blocks in early 2025 to run alongside weekly circuits classes.

We also have funding to provide free CPR training for members of the community and plan to provide the training in early 2025.

I will look for funding for the evening exercise classes for beyond spring 2025. This is dependent on being able to secure an easy to apply for funding source. I undertake all of this in my spare time and any complicated applications and lengthy application processes with no guarantee of funding would make it too challenging for me to undertake the applications for funding.

Dr. Julie Brown

Resident of Milton Of Buchanan and member of ELLCT