

The role of the jog leader to promote physical, mental and social health benefits for social jogging group participants

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Community-based jogging initiatives facilitated by 'Jog Leaders' are increasingly popular in the UK, and are promoted as a convenient, low-cost way of improving individuals' physical activity levels and social networks. The purpose was to document the myriad benefits of group involvement, understand the motivational role of the Jog Leader, and understand which aspects of these group environments encourage versus undermine prolonged participation. Online surveys were distributed to social jogging group Leaders and joggers across the UK. 161 joggers and 438 Leaders, responded to a series of open-ended questions, exploring their experiences of participating in/leading their groups, the impact of being involved, and ways in which their experiences could be enhanced. Joggers derived a number of physical (e.g., weight loss, increased energy), psychological (e.g., self-esteem, life satisfaction, overcoming adversity) and social (e.g., new friends, tackling loneliness) benefits from participating. Data also indicated the importance of specific Jog Leaders' interpersonal strategies (e.g., personalisation of sessions, understanding individual goals, social support). Last, joggers revealed a number of aspects of the group sessions which encourage (e.g., 'family' ethos, social events) versus thwart (e.g., competitiveness of sessions, lack of leader involvement and knowledge) their motivation to remain involved. Social jogging groups offer a range of benefits but the extent to which individuals experience such beneficial outcomes may depend on the group environment, and the way the leader facilitates the group. The findings offer evidence of strategies that Jog Leaders can employ to support joggers' sustained involvement.