Take Five to Age Well Scotland 2023 Evaluation

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Take Five to Age Well is a UK-wide initiative led by the Open University which aims to encourage people to make a small change in their routine over a month, with a view to this becoming a habit that will contribute to them ageing better. The UK-wide challenge focused on individuals during September 2023, primarily engaging with the audience via digital platforms. More than 3000 people engaged with the challenge online, and their involvement being evaluated separately by the Open University.

Age Scotland piloted participation by older people's groups and services, offering them a pack of paper-based resources including a suite of health diary booklets (one for each of the five challenge areas: hydration, nutrition, social connection, physical activity, and brain stimulation), and a poster for individuals to track progress in introducing healthier routines. Groups were invited to share materials with their individual members, and to consider pledging a change a group routine for members' health and wellbeing.

The challenge was announced in May 2023, at Age Scotland's Wellbeing in Later Life symposium conference. Active promotion started in July, primarily via Age Scotland's Wellbeing in Later Life email and the health and wellbeing team's webpages. Groups were given three months to complete any collective challenges. Materials were distributed in August. This was later than hoped: it had taken longer than expected for the Open University to complete its funding package for the challenge, and it took longer than expected to finalise printed materials. Originally it was planned that Age Scotland would invite individual older people who were not internet users to take part in the challenge by calling us to request printed materials, however due to insufficient staff resource in Age Scotland this was not possible.

The Take Five to Age Well challenge, primarily for individuals, was promoted on Age Scotland's website through September, and on social channels including a blog from Professor Dawn Skelton.

There were 19 requests for the Take Five to Age Well groups resource packs, from a wide variety of groups including small and informal friendship and family groups, councils, local and national charities, an NHS service, and a housing association. The six groups that responded to our survey all said that they had taken part in Take Five to Age Well. To summarise their feedback:

- Overall participation had been beneficial for the groups
    - "It was a helpful programme to highlight important health aspects for older adults."
    - "The campaign was good fun, engaging and motivating. We adapted it to meet our own individuals and groups needs but it gave us all a focus. Anything to promote ageing well is positive."

    - "It felt easier and supported to have the Take 5 to Age Well framework to explain the benefits and reasons behind implementing different changes at the groups."
    - "We were able to use activities to highlight the need for hydrations with our older peoples' group."
    - "The chosen targets encouraged them to make changes in their lifestyles to become healthier. One person is trying to be more sociable and another is exercising at home regularly."
    - "We felt supported and a part of the campaign as we tweeted daily and our tweets shared. The individuals and groups enjoyed being part of the wider campaign."
- There was a mixed reaction to the printed materials.
    - "Our members liked having a physical handout to read."
    - "The tracker chart was useful although some admitted to not doing it every day. The diaries were not so helpful being too complicated."
    - "Excellent resources and very helpful liked by people we shared them with."
- A longer lead-in time and receipt of materials well in advance would be helpful in future.
    - "I think it was a good first year but requires more support, resources and planning."
- Simpler materials for next year, and in larger print, would be welcomed.

View the survey results

Case study – Pilmeny Development Project

Pilmeny Development Project (PDP) is a community organisation supporting residents in the Lorne area of Leith, Edinburgh. Age Scotland agreed with PDP staff to visit in mid-October to introduce the Take Five to Age Well challenge to members of its Monday group for older women, and to revisit in late November to find out how they had got on. A focus on hydration was agreed in advance.

In the initial visit, Age Scotland talked to the members about the importance of keeping hydrated in later life and how to approach it. Materials were circulated; the Hydration Diary booklets, Tracker Posters and the Age Scotland Hydration Guide, plus provided group members with free water bottles courtesy of Scottish Water (provided for a recent Age Scotland promotion). Overall, group members were interested and engaged.

The following is a summary of discussion with the group on my return visit:

- The time of year matters – ice cold tap water in winter positive
- One member had been given medical advice to restrict fluid due to heart failure but hadn't checked back with the NHS for some time on the extent to which this still applied, e.g., she had stopped taking soup for fear it would over-hydrate her. She was frustrated over lack of updated guidance from

doctors and found communication with health professionals hard because of hearing loss. She was encouraged by other group members to contact her cardiac nurse, and given lots of tips for raising concerns and questions.

- To feed back to academics that some more information on hydration with e.g., heart failure would be helpful.
- One person confirmed they had used the hydration diary and found it useful as a 'reminder' – she was mindful already of the need to stay hydrated because of a health condition/heart failure, kidney problems, checked her wee etc. She felt staying hydrated was helping to keep her feeling well.
- There was questions and discussion about dehydration symptoms, lots of sharing among group members, e.g. a volunteer with the group had been a nurse, and talked about how at work she had looked for signs that skin was dry and needed cream. Talking about, rather than just reading about, health and wellbeing topics was felt to be very important, as sometimes "you just don't get round to reading about it."
- One member had read the diary daily, but found writing hard so hadn't filled it in.
- As the result of Take Five to Age Well group members agreed that they were more conscious of the need for good hydration, including at home asking at the end of the day "have I drunk enough."
- There was discussion about hydration helping with some medicines.
- Discussion about how they differed from young people, e.g., older people not so much using IT, but also had noticed lots of young people carrying water bottles. Including at school on their desks – "we would have been told-off for doing that!" Discussed how schools had noted that sometimes children were becoming dehydrated and not learning as well.
- Members agreed that it had helped being part of a group "If I hadn't been part of the group, I wouldn't have known about all this." "In a group you can talk about things and get explanations in plain English, and other folk can share what they are going through, and you don't feel like the odd one out. It's good to get an opportunity now and again to have a wee blether about things that keep us healthy."
- The group was interested in taking part in future, perhaps around nutrition, welcoming Age Scotland back. Members had lots of questions – how to get enough fibre in a day? What exactly is protein, carbohydrate etc? Is cheese good for me, and what kind? Healthy eating on a budget?
- We discussed the link between hydration and continence. "I started off well, every time I went into the kitchen, I was having a drink of water, then as the day went on, I was frightened to leave the house!" (Laughter). Shared how drinking less could make the bladder less elastic, so little and often through the day, stopping early evening, might be best.

Case study: Multiple Sclerosis Centre, Mid Argyll

The MS Centre Mid Argyll embraced the challenge with enthusiasm. Centre Manager Karen McCurry says: "It helped that there was an existing group, 'Super Snowdrops', that met every Tuesday for exercise. The challenge gave the group something to focus on." The group posted regular videos and photos of them taking the challenge on Twitter. "The online story helped, as it allowed me to remind group members that they were inspiring others and making a difference. Tagging on social media and getting positive comments I could share with the group, made it feel like you were part of something bigger." Karen says the peer support among group members "was incredible", and that the key was that it was fun, although the competitive element also helped.

Although individual challenges were discussed initially, it very quickly became about weekly informal group activities based around social connection, playing a game, and some physical activity. "They were asking the team, 'what have you got for us today, what's planned?' Outreach staff also supported people who were unable to attend the centre to take part in activities at home.

Karen feels Take Five to Age Well has contributed to improved health. "We have an open 'Living Room' session on Mondays at which people who weren't in the Super Snowdrops noticed that a lady who was had changed. She has dementia, and used to sit in silence, but now she was chatting and engaging, and walking better and much more. Here family has also noticed she is more confident.

We asked Karen what resources would be helpful for future challenges. Certificates are motivating. Also, "practical workshop activities are good, e.g., make a smoothie or soup you can take away." The Centre has used Age Scotland's Wellbeing Flower kit for planning, and Karen felt activities in this could be adapted for use directly with groups members.

Case Study – Kingsway Care Centre, Dundee

Lead Occupational Therapist Donna Mackintosh, and colleagues, have used the five healthy diary booklets developed for 'Take Five to Age Well' on an ongoing basis to support recovery by people aged 65 and older with mental health conditions. "We used the booklets very successfully as discussion prompts in our recovery sessions," says Donna.

"We use the Wellness Recovery Action Plan tool and fit the booklets into its Wellness Toolbox activities. For example, they have helped us set up discussions about how the symptoms of anxiety and depression impact on cognition, and to establish baselines with and for people. So, if someone used to read, but now finds it hard, we might suggest they aim to read a page a day."

Donna says that her nursing colleagues have found the hydration booklet helpful. "Patients are sometimes unclear about why fluid is important, and working with the booklets leads to some 'aha' moments for them, e.g., that soup can help with hydration. People often get stuck on the idea they must drink lots of water or juice, with they can dislike, so it's great to show alternatives."

While patients didn't tend to use the diary components of the booklets, "we have calendars on our walls, and daily maintenance plans where we could add their comments from discussions. And people did say in discussions we had at the end of each week that they may not have kept a physical not in diary, but they had kept a mental note and done more of the recommended behaviours."

The booklets also prompted discussion about community activities that people might get involved in, engagement in which Donna and colleagues actively support. "The habit change discussion is really key, as getting someone over the door is more important than them taking part, as once out they get more cues and stimulation for healthy behaviours."

Donna sees merit in the simplicity of the booklets. "They help us set up questions and ask patients about what they think or do. For example, one patient self-neglects, so I used the booklet to discuss with them how not eating or drinking might be an early warning sign, in which case they should contact the Community Mental Health Nurse." Another advantage is that they are generic as "sometimes patients feel stigmatized by materials that target them."

Case Study – Scone Exercise Class

The group was set up 10 years ago by Penny Arnott, who is trained in delivering Extend Exercises classes. There are 12 regular members who attend weekly gentle exercise classes. "Some joined at the start and are still coming," says Penny, who leads the class on a voluntary basis. The small size of the group, and of the venue, is part of the appeal.

"They were quite keen to take part," says Penny. "I gave them time to think about it. It appealed that it wasn't about lots of big changes, just one thing. All were quite enthusiastic and said they would do it again."

The group decided to do individual challenges, rather than a group one, and chose the topics most relevant for them.

"One lady used the exercise materials, first the chart, and then the diary, which I told her was the wrong way round" says Penny. "She was already very aware of exercises as her husband, who died last year age 90, also attended the class, and kept active to the end of his life." The challenge helped her increase her exercise levels. "She now uses exercise videos from the NHS website on a regular basis."

A male member of the group took a social challenge. "He told me that if he met a lady on her own at a bus stop, he wouldn't say anything as he didn't want her to feel threatened," says Penny. "I was able to tell him that it's okay just to say 'hello' back!" Penny says because of taking part he is now trying to be more sociable when he's speaking to people in the community.

Penny used the food diary, which didn't fully resonate with her as "I don't eat that much, and don't feel like breakfast unless I'm going out." However, it has made

her think more about eating fruit. "I used to take a banana as a snack when going out, but got out of the habit, so am now trying to get back into that habit."

Penny says that for the group "doing the target made them more aware of 'doing the target'." There was a little anxiety about target setting at first and she "had to reassure them that nobody is checking up, and it's fine to miss a day." Because of the challenge, one lady is changing her activities to have more variety. As well as Sudoku she is doing jigsaws and knitting. Another, aged 86, is walking more, 9000 steps over four days, and learning Spanish!

Case study – Cuppa and a blether group, Renfrewshire/East Renfrewshire

The group was started five years ago by Lesley Anne Palmer, to encourage people to make self-care part of their daily life. There is a Facebook page with around 45 followers, and a group of 8 people aged 50 to 70 meeting regularly in Lesley Anne's home.

Lesley Anne promoted Take Five to Age Well on the Facebook page, and to people in a local Carers' Centre and National Women's Register group she is involved with. "The people who took the online challenge found it useful. A few said however that they were expecting more content and more often and would have welcomed more consistent and regular with prompts."

Lesley Anne says there wasn't much take-up in the face-to-face group, in part as she had to cancel group meetings for a time at the start of the challenge due to personal circumstances. "It would have been helpful to have had more lead-in time," she says. "I've found people in groups such as this need quite a lot of encouragement and support beforehand to take part in something like this. Also, the booklets weren't available until very close to the start of the challenge. However, she does think the printed materials were "pretty good."

Lesley Anne has noticed a change because of the challenge. "The habit of drinking more water has been kept up. From the challenge, I noticed two or three people who bought water bottles and are actively drinking water every day."

Lesley Anne would like the challenge to go ahead again, with a longer lead-in, and thinks the group would be keen to participate. "I hope it gets bigger and better," she says.

Conclusions and recommendations

While uptake was relatively small, the non-digital engagement strand of Take Five to Age Well in Scotland shows promise as participating older people and community group/service organisers gave generally positive feedback. Learning for this or similar campaigns in future is:

- For the non-digital strand, the focus on community groups should continue. Even where people choose individual rather than group challenges, creation of opportunities for discussion and peer support is critical.

- The suite of materials for participating groups should be improved, with simpler materials to complement the diary booklets, certificates, and PowerPoint presentations for organisers to introduce topics in advance. The Wellbeing Flower might also be promoted as a potential resource for groups to explore topics in the lead up to the challenge.
- A longer-lead in time, more notice, and earlier provision of materials to interested groups would be beneficial, with promotion starting in earnest quite far in advance of the challenge start date.
- The potential for greater involvement by Age Scotland's Community Development Team in promoting and supporting take-up should be explored.