

**Improving Diabetic  
Outcomes for people with  
poor Mental Health and/or  
Learning Disabilities  
within County Durham &  
Darlington**

March 2024

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# About Healthwatch Darlington

Healthwatch is the health and social care champion for those who use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and improve standards of care.

We use feedback to better understand the challenges facing the NHS and other care providers locally, to make sure people's experiences improve health and care services for everyone.

We are here to listen to the issues that really matter to our local communities and to hear about people's experiences of using health and social care services.

We are entirely independent and impartial, and any information shared with us is confidential.

## Executive summary

Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) worked in partnership with the Darlington Borough Council Public Health Team issuing small grants to the Community & Voluntary Sector to educate people living with mental health conditions and/or learning disabilities around the risks of diabetes to support the Diabetes Model of Care across Darlington.

HWD invited organisations to apply and distributed grants to the successful applicants Café JJ's, Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) and 700 Club. We kept in regular contact with them throughout the evaluation process.

All three projects were very different in their approach but produced similar results. From one-to-one sessions to group sessions, each organisation took time to appreciate their service users learning requirements in relation to understanding what diabetes means to them.

We were pleased to see the partnership working between the organisations to ensure they were reaching as many people as possible and sharing resources. Their strengthened relationships were also enhanced by learning and support from local health teams, including PCN specialist diabetes nurse, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and the Move More Team.

Most individuals had limited knowledge of diabetes at the start of their sessions but over time, their knowledge increased by using different learning and assessment tools, from the online Diabetes UK 'Know Your Risk' Toolkit, hard copy questionnaires and individual conversations. Organisations covered many different topics from accessing diabetes information, what prevention means, early identification methods and diabetes management.

The organisations regular feedback and evaluation forms to Healthwatch Darlington evidenced the gradual change of diabetes knowledge and awareness not just with the project participants but also with their staff teams.

The programme has demonstrated that with an adequately funded and tailored approach, people who have poor mental health and/or a learning disability, can be empowered and motivated to self-manage or prevent diabetes, when given the right tools and knowledge in a safe and comfortable environment.

# Introduction

## Project Description

Healthwatch Darlington to work in partnership with the Darlington Borough Council Public Health Team issuing small grants to the Community & Voluntary Sector to educate people living with mental health conditions and/or learning disabilities around the risks of diabetes to support the Diabetes Model of Care across Darlington.

## Project Objectives:

To identify and work with third sector organisations who are already engaging with the target groups (people who have poor mental health and/or a learning disability who are living with or at risk of diabetes) to award small pots of grant funding to take forward initiatives focused on diabetes prevention, early identification, and improved management.

### Examples:

- Support with eating healthy and exercise.
- Support with my money and shopping to eat healthier and buy the right food
- Appropriate meal plans, especially for people with learning disabilities to gain an understanding of their needs.

## Project Criteria:

- **Primary Prevention** – To support initiatives that will help prevent type 2 diabetes amongst people who are at risk of diabetes and have poor mental health or a learning disability.
- **Secondary prevention** – To help prevent further diabetic complications amongst people who have diagnosed diabetes and are also living with poor mental health or a learning disability.
- **Early identification** – To help individuals to understand their diabetes risk (using tools such as the Diabetes UK Know Your Risk tool) and encourage those at high risk of diabetes to consult their GP.
- **Access to structured education** – To support people to access structured education programmes to increase their skills and confidence to take control and manage their diabetes.
- **Sustainability and legacy** – To utilise the grant funding to build knowledge, capacity and relationships within existing organisations that will help support diabetes prevention and care beyond the initial grant funded projects.

# Methodology

## Engagement Method:

The project had 4 elements:

1. **The Public Health Team and Healthwatch Darlington worked on the application criteria** including aims and objectives with clear evaluation evidence.
2. **Healthwatch Darlington identified VCSE organisations via networks, newsletter and social media.** HWD invited organisations to apply and worked with Public Health to choose successful projects.
3. **Healthwatch Darlington managed the application process and brokered £8000 funding.** HWD distributed grants to successful applicants plus kept in regular contact with them throughout the evaluation process.
4. **Healthwatch Darlington evaluated the overall project using the criteria below.**

## Evaluation

To evaluate the awarded grants, the following needed to be evidenced by the successful applicants:

- Increased awareness and understanding of diabetes, diabetes risk factors and diabetes prevention amongst the target population group. (Use of a validated tool for example, the long-term conditions Well-being Outcome Star)
- Increased awareness and understanding of diabetes, diabetes risk factors and diabetes prevention amongst VCSE organisations and front-line services. (Use of before/after surveys to assess changes in awareness/understanding/confidence to capture change to practice)
- Increased awareness of diabetes risk and use of risk tools (e.g. Diabetes UK Know Your Risk Tool) and earlier identification of diabetes. (Report numbers of people who have completed the risk tool, identified in each risk category and received appropriate advice/health check)
- Improved uptake of structured education programmes amongst the target group. (Report numbers of people in the target group supported to access structured education)
- Specific outcome measures dependent on the specific grant funded project, to be agreed.

# Successful Applicants

## Café JJ's

### **Description:**

Café JJ's support a team of disabled people to provide a community café to the local community.

### **Project:**

"Cooking for a healthy life" - June 2023 to October 2023

### **Application:**

"Café JJ staff aim to work with Keyring to help their members (with diabetes) understand their condition and to manage and control it. We also aim to provide information to prevent Keyring members without the condition from developing it. A Café JJ staff member with a nursing background will provide lessons in "Cooking to prevent diabetes" which will create a healthy lunch for all the members. The Café JJ staff member will also provide easy read handouts to help Keyring members understand the condition and provide recipes to take home. We could consider including light exercise in the sessions. The sessions will take place at the Clifton Centre on 8 occasions – 1 or 2 sessions per month."

### **Project Summary:**

Due to unforeseen circumstances the project had a delayed start but once the project commenced, they explained to their service users through video and work sheets about how diabetes occurs in the body. They discussed healthy eating, reducing carbs and aiming to lose weight if needed.

None of the participants wanted to share the risk assessment tool details, so were encouraged to self-monitor to assess their own risk factors. Café JJ's aim was to provide information in a simple way which gave members an understanding of how diabetes develops and the consequences of having the condition. By encouraging health eating with cooking lessons and take-home recipes Café JJ's will hopefully improve the health of the members taking part.

Members were asked to complete a health questionnaire at the beginning of the course and asked for a second questionnaire to be completed a few weeks after the course had ended with the aim to measure any changes in the members' health.

CAFÉ JJ's also worked more closely with Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) as a result of this project, which has further strengthened their relationship.

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*My Dr is very pleased with the changes the diabetes awareness has brought.*

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### **Project Outcomes:**



Café JJ's prepared dishes for lunch to show how recipes can be made healthier. Copies of the recipes were given out reflecting portion sizes using the meal planning information from Diabetes UK, and the plate method which uses your hands to look at quantities of the different food groups.

Participants were taught how to reduce carbohydrate intake through their understanding of foods that have a high content of carbohydrates. When it was someone's birthday, they were shown how to replace high carb foods with lower ones, and this was enjoyed by everyone.

Some of the participants who were looking to reduce their weight were advised to manage their diet better by drinking more water and less fizzy drinks to reduce the hidden sugar content. They were taught better meal planning, to support a more balanced diet and to make healthier choices.

Café JJ's did not use the tool kits as people found them difficult to do but they did log comments throughout the project.

One of the ladies really enjoyed learning more about healthy eating and Café JJ's discussed how the lady and her partner could make economical healthy meals, where to shop and about the importance of meal planning to ensure little wastage.

They looked at examples of how to fill a plate with more protein and vegetables and limit carbohydrates, also reducing take away meals and convenience foods where possible.

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*My GP is very pleased with my blood sugars and diet.*

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**Numbers throughout the project:**

32 people attended 8 sessions about diabetes awareness and prevention, plus healthy eating and knowledge and skills. 10 people had diabetes and 22 people did not have diabetes. 4 people were supported to access appropriate health advice and 8 people went on to access diabetes structured education. The average knowledge of diabetes, risk factors and prevention was 2 out of 10 at the start of the sessions and had risen to 8 out of 10 at the end.

**Staff awareness knowledge and confidence:**

Staff's knowledge of diabetes, the confidence to give diabetes prevention messages and the confidence to support people living with diabetes scored an average 2 out of 10 at the start of the project and an 8 out of 10 at the end. Staff felt they could support better meal planning, support adults to have a more balanced diet and to make healthier choices.

## Darlington Association on Disability (DAD)

### **Description:**

DAD exists to promote independence choice and control for disabled people and carers through support, services, and information. Based on the Social Model of Disability, promoting disabled people's rights.

### **Project:**

"Diabetes Awareness".

### **Application:**

"DAD supports disabled people of all ages, regardless of impairment. The project would offer bespoke sessions to meet individuals needs in small group sessions. Delivered in accessible formats with a package of support to enable to participate including; accessible transport, Personal assistance, materials in a range of formats such as easy read and large print etc. Group sessions would include people with mental ill health and people who experience learning impairments and autism. The sessions would be delivered over several weeks and included an introduction and awareness raising about diabetes is, how someone may be at risk, what to do to prevent diabetes etc, a healthy eating session and cooking a healthy meal. Support will be provided to refer people into services if they feel they are at risk and need a check for diabetes".

### **Project Summary:**

There was a slight delay to the start of the project due to staff annual leave, but DAD began informal discussions with people to gain more of an understanding of the people interested in the sessions, so that they can be tailored to meet their needs.

DAD met with Primary Healthcare Darlington (PHD) to discuss the project and any support they may be able to offer, as there is a lot of information online. PHD supported them by delivering a session with one of their local diabetes specialist nurses.

In addition, to link their individual projects, they met with Café JJ's and agreed to support people to attend their health meal preparation sessions, and the 700 Club offering to share resources and information.

DAD's initial work with individuals took place around their understanding and knowledge of diabetes. Many people they support are aware of diabetes and the risks, but they know less about food and balanced diet to manage diabetes.

Changes in knowledge of diabetes and diabetes risk factors were measured through discussion with individuals at the start and end of the sessions. It was also measured through ongoing conversations and observations when people have reported they have tried or learned something new. Observations were also noted when participants shared new knowledge with others that did not participate in the sessions.

### **Project Outcomes:**

During the project DAD continued to share resources with Café JJ's and they also were pleased to report that the project was going well. All seven support staff used the NHS Healthy Living training and, on receiving the Diabetes Toolkit 'Know Your Risk', they supported individuals using it during their sessions.

#### **Case Study:**

D has type II diabetes and through the initial work, they have increased their awareness of what foods to eat, and when to help manage their diabetes, their and their lifestyle. D is now more regularly monitoring and checking blood glucose levels. They now have more awareness of food intake and independently finding out more about metabolic processes to better manage health.

The PHD diabetes specialist nurses delivered a session to participants about the metabolic process related to diabetes and links were made to increasing physical activity. Some participants already using the gym, have increased their attendance and some are thinking of joining the gym. Sessions also focussed on healthy eating and meal preparation including using the Diabetes UK recipe book to make poached fruit crumble.

#### **Case Study:**

A, who is at high risk of developing diabetes, has become more aware of the food they eat and the nutritional value. A, has made changes to the lunches they make while attending our service and has introduced more salad and vegetables while reducing high sugar / carbohydrate foods.

Changes that people planned to make because of the project included:

- Try and have a more balanced diet
- Increased awareness of impact, positive and negative, of different food groups

- Increased exercise
- More aware of signs / symptoms and sources of support
- Confidence to try new foods and food groups.
- Increased physical activity and gym attendance.

Even when the project ended DAD reported that people are still talking about and focussing on the sessions that took place. People have an increased awareness of the sugars in food and are checking labels to make healthier choices. They are also still talking about Diabetes Toolkit and using it.

**Numbers throughout the project:**

15 people attended 12 sessions about diabetes awareness and prevention, plus healthy eating and knowledge and skills. The average knowledge of diabetes, risk factors and prevention was 3.5 out of 10 at the start of the sessions and had risen to 8 out of 10 at the end.

**Staff awareness knowledge and confidence:**

Staff's knowledge of diabetes, the confidence to give diabetes prevention messages and the confidence to support people living with diabetes scored an average 9 out of 10 at the start of the project and a 10 out of 10 at the end. Staff were already knowledgeable and confident to give prevention messages. This was due to having previously supported people to access diabetes information and support, and through personal experience, by either having diabetes themselves or living / caring for someone with diabetes. However, they feel their knowledge and understanding of diabetes has increased due to new resources, tools, and sources of support they have identified and shared with the people they support.

## 700 Club

### **Description:**

The 700 Club works with homeless and vulnerable people with the primary objective of assisting them to achieve independence.

### **Project:**

700 Club

### **Application:**

"The 700 Club works with around 550 homeless and vulnerable people annually. Their needs are, for the most part, complex, cover a spectrum of need that (alongside housing need) embracing addiction, mental health difficulties, different kinds of neural diversity, asylum, domestic abuse (perpetrator and victim), and people with complex forensic histories. Most are at the lower end of the economic spectrum and fall into the catchment of some of Darlington's most deprived areas. For every person with whom the organisation works, a comprehensive support plan is developed. The overall aim is to help individuals recover their independence. Imparting the knowledge and helping people to develop the skills to be independent in a sustainable way is the essence of the support delivered. Personal well-being, including healthy live-style choice, is an important part of this. As a result, we deliver well-being sessions that cover everything from the long-term consequences of drug and alcohol use to developing a healthy diet, from avoiding STD's to cancer awareness.

Delivering an awareness raising initiative around diabetes, the causes and the preventative strategies, would be straightforward to administer within our existing support model. Alerting individuals to the long-term effects of their choices when young, whether around drug taking, alcohol use, smoking, or diet is what we already do, so extending the awareness-raising to diabetes would not be difficult to administer. It would begin with some diabetes awareness training for staff and would then cascade down to clients through the personalised support package that each receives. We would develop a fact sheet for use in this area in a form appropriate to the cohort with whom we work so that they have some tangible reinforcement of the information imparted within the overall support".

### **Project Summary:**

At the start of the project a representative from the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust attended a staff meeting to discuss the Xpert diabetes training course, available to anybody with type 2 diabetes. Staff teams took this information away and passed on to their clients. The sessions were conducted in different ways for the clients attending including one-to-one sessions, group

sessions and drop-in sessions. People move quickly through the system at 700 Club, so the information is added to support plans. Questionnaires were completed by clients before and after to gauge their level of understanding.

Following the use of the assessment tool, clients discussed the risks with their GP. Support was offered to those who had been assessed as high risk and clients who had previously missed appointments with their diabetes nurse were now attending, and staff were able to better support them to understand their diet needs and restrictions.

### **Project Outcomes:**

#### Case Study:

AD - White Male, 57 years old, Weight 10st 9lbs, Waist 32-inch and Height 5 foot 7 inch

AD knew very little about diabetes, scoring only 3 on his initial awareness questionnaire he also scored low on his risk factor awareness and a 4 on his prevention awareness.

AD completed an awareness session with his Key Worker looking at the facts around diabetes, the risk factors and prevention measure that could be taken, around healthy eating, what types of food to eat and moving more etc. AD was also given a healthy eating booklet with basic healthy eating advice and some specific advice around diabetes.

On completing the Diabetes risk factor tool AD noted that he had in the past had high blood pressure and on completing the test scored 11. The advice from the tool was for AD to contact his G.P. AD's support worker supported him to arrange a G.P appointment which he attended on the 27/03/23.

The G.P. explained to him that his past high blood pressure meant he was at increased risk. His blood pressure at the appointment was within normal levels. It was noted that AD had lost quite a bit of weight since he recorded a high blood pressure score.

KW provided information around high blood pressure and discussed with AD the need to continue his physical activity which mainly consisted of walking often throughout different times the day and eating less.

On AD post diabetes awareness questionnaire, he scored 9 for an increased awareness, 9 on an increase for knowledge of risk and 9 for knowledge of risk reducing measures and preventing diabetes.

AD now states that has a better understanding of how to reduce the risk of high pressure and diabetes.

Clients found their measurements interesting when going through the risk tool particularly on what they thought they knew about themselves, to what they measured and weighed.

Working with the Move More Team conversations were had regarding gym membership and supporting people to get moving. Consequently, two people are using the gym and one person is walking more, having taken up fishing as a new activity.

#### Case Study:

Following G's 'Know Your Risk' assessment, it stated that he has an increased risk of diabetes due to his BMI being high as he is overweight. G also has high blood pressure which he gets medication for through his G.P. G has arthritis in his hips but he does still try to get out walking, despite being in some pain.

G went for a routine health check with his GP on the 11/09/23 and he mentioned his moderate risk of diabetes that had been assessed through the 'Know Your Risk' tool. The G.P. took his blood pressure which was normal, but G was advised to lose some weight. It was explained that at his next health check they would like him to have a fasting blood test.

G has since decided to lose some weight and has opted, after some research, to follow a low carb diet and gentle exercise which he feels is working well.

Changes that people planned to make because of the project included:

- Join the gym
- Continue with the gym
- More exercise e.g. walking
- Eat more healthily e.g. a more balanced diet, more fruit and vegetables
- Eat more healthily and discuss with GP
- Attend groups
- Attend cooking class
- To eat five a day
- Keeping active
- Walking more rather than bus
- Keep Aware

- Drink less pop, reduce takeaways.
- Daily Walking and look at healthier meal options
- To keep active
- Will start to prepare more meals from scratch rather than processed food
- Will engage with G.P. with current health conditions.
- Will engage with G.P. to attain a diabetes test and to address current symptoms such as feeling tired, out of breath and regular falls

**Numbers throughout the project:**

67 people attended 67 sessions about diabetes awareness and prevention, healthy eating, knowledge and skills, and physical activity. 3 people had diabetes and 64 people did not have diabetes.

65 people completed the Diabetes UK Know Your Risk Tool, 42 people were assessed as low risk, 18 as medium risk and 4 were assessed as high risk. Of those assessed 6 people were supported to access appropriate health advice and 9 people went on to access diabetes structured education. The average knowledge of diabetes, risk factors and prevention was 4.4 out of 10 at the start of the sessions and had risen to 8 out of 10 at the end.

**Staff awareness knowledge and confidence:**

Staff's knowledge of diabetes, the confidence to give diabetes prevention messages and the confidence to support people living with diabetes scored an average 5.2 out of 10 at the start of the project and 7.9 out of 10 at the end. Staff cited the following as areas of learning because of the project:

- Learned to always read the nutritional information on the back labels on food items, not just the front.
- More knowledge on the different types of diets for diabetics and courses that are available to those who are diagnosed.
- Encourage service users to see a GP in relation to diabetes when needed.
- Awareness of prediabetic symptoms
- More aware of better food choices to support people in making healthier meals
- More knowledge around agencies we can signpost to
- The impacts diabetes has on a person's health
- Things to keep in mind when supporting a person
- Will advise clients to make the right food choices

## Evaluation

All three projects were very different in their approach but produced similar results. From one-to-one sessions to group sessions, each organisation took time to appreciate their service users learning requirements in relation to understanding what diabetes means to them.

We were pleased to see the partnership working between the organisations to ensure they were reaching as many people as possible and sharing resources. Their strengthened relationships were also enhanced by learning and support from local health teams, including PCN specialist diabetes nurse, County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and the Move More Team.

Most individuals had limited knowledge of diabetes at the start of their sessions but over time, their knowledge increased by using different learning and assessment tools, from the online Diabetes UK 'Know Your Risk' Toolkit, hard copy questionnaires and individual conversations. Organisations covered many different topics from accessing diabetes information, what prevention means, early identification methods and diabetes management.

The organisations regular feedback and evaluation forms to Healthwatch Darlington evidenced the gradual change of diabetes knowledge and awareness not just with the project participants but also with their staff teams.

This project has demonstrated that with an adequately funded and tailored approach, people who have poor mental health and/or a learning disability, can be empowered and motivated to self-manage or prevent diabetes, when given the right tools and knowledge in a safe and comfortable environment.

## Response from Public Health

*"We are grateful to Healthwatch for supporting with this exciting and innovative piece of work. Well done to JJ's Café, DAD and the 700 Club for making Diabetes a priority in their services and making real changes to the lives of people. It has been wonderful to see the collaboration taking place not only between the 3 organisations but also clinical teams to ensure the messaging was right and to create a link in services. These projects have not only affected current service users and staff members/ volunteers but also hopefully those in the future who will learn from their peers. Learnings can also be taking from this for other local projects who are looking to prioritise Type 2 Diabetes and ways to prevent and manage this through lifestyle choices and informal education taken to the people".*

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Darlington would like to thank the Darlington Public Health Team for the opportunity to manage and facilitate such a worthwhile health and wellbeing programme.

We would also like to thank Café JJ's, DAD and 700 Club for delivering their individual projects within time and with such positive and encouraging outcomes.

Finally, we would like to congratulate everyone who took part in the project for your increased awareness of healthy eating, physical exercise and learning to either manage your diabetes or prevent it in the future.



**healthwatch**

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