

Running Group Research

Ladies Running Groups: South Ribble



South Ribble Runners

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Abstract

Whatever our age, there is good scientific evidence that being physically active can help us lead healthier and even happier lives (Start Active, Stay Active, 2011). At present, there is a wide array of research available that focuses upon the lived experiences of 'active' people. This paper aims to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of one particular group of active leisure participants, group runners, and to highlight the associated health and well-being benefits that result from participating in this activity. The study utilises both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry to explore the social world of running groups and their beneficiaries. The research methods adopted included; questionnaires, case studies, focus groups and participant observation. The data collated was both thematically and descriptively analysed.

Key themes to emerge from study included; reasons for joining, retention of members, homogeneity of participants, barriers to participation, and discovering running groups. Findings highlight the role that group running can play as an; easily accessible, low cost, sociable and enjoyable physical activity. The study recommends that the introduction of further running groups could be used as a means of facilitating increased participation in exercise and physical activity amongst women of all ages and abilities.

Introduction and Background

This paper examines the increasingly popular activity of group running. To do so a particular focus is placed upon two running groups deemed as 'successful' within the South Ribble district of Lancashire.

Within the Start Active, Stay Active Report (2011) chief medical officers describe how aerobic exercise such as; running, walking or jogging can lead to improved; cardiorespiratory fitness, mental health and wellbeing. Group running is therefore deemed as a key benefactor within government strategies to tackle both psychical and mental health issues. The cost of which is estimated to cost £1.06 billion within the UK each year (DH, 2011), and £1,875.522 during 2011 in South Ribble alone (Sport England, 2011).

As exercise continues to be promoted as a necessary attribute of a 'healthy society' individuals are seeking specific activities that suits their ability, needs and lifestyles. Yair (1990) highlights that since the 1970's running has been one of the most visible on-going exercise activities. Due to this exposure, it could be argued that running is becoming an ever more popular method of maintaining personal health and fitness. As a result of an increased

in this activity, many running events have been developed including; park runs, marathons, trail runs, fun runs and communities have had more running groups introduced.

The question is why do people enjoy running and why does it attract interest. Bupa (2012) highlight the main benefits of running to be; practicality (cheap, easy), accessible to all, good way to keep fit, provides time out, helps manage weight loss and helps with mental wellbeing.

This paper will additionally aim to explore specific reasons why running groups work so well and how members benefit by being part of the group.

Relevant studies

With regards to running groups Shipway and Holloway (2010) found the main reasons for attending running groups were to; embrace a healthy lifestyle, seek self-esteem and confirmation, and fulfil the need to exercise among sport and leisure participants.

With regards to mental well-being previous studies by theorists such as; Martinsen and Morgan (1997) and Raglin (1997) have produced evidence that exercise can actually; reduce anxiety, increase our moods and work as an antidepressant.

In Addition, Nash (1979) revealed that distance running and running events are a momentous and rewarding experience for every runner, regardless of age, gender or ability. Such events and activities are proposed to provide both; improve health and meaning to the participants life.

Further evidence is provided by Ottensen (2010) who focused upon inactive women. Here, it was revealed that by women becoming part of a sixteen week running programme participants began to positively development social capital or; trusts, norms, networks that make it possible to achieve goals. Within this study the activity of running itself and the homogeneity of the group were highlighted as important to the bonding of individuals.

Run England

The two running groups featured within this study are registered with Run England (sub group Run Lancashire). Run England is the official England athletics recreational running project which aims to 'get the whole nation running'. This project is promoted as being non-discriminatory and strives to welcome all individuals into the running community regardless of age, fitness level, aspiration, background, or location.

The main aims of Run England are to:

- Enable people to join registered groups (www.runengland.org/groups).
- Provide free membership, plus benefits to the Run England community (www.runengland.org/join).
- Support affiliated running clubs and other partners in the provision of running groups for an increasing range of people (www.englandathletics.org/clubs).
- Support training and allow more people to qualify as running group leaders through the Leadership in Running Fitness qualification (www.runengland.org/lirf).
- Signpost people to local Run England 3-2-1 routes that have been created by local providers (www.runengland.org/3-2-1).

Run England website (2013): www.runengland.org/

Coaches and Leaders

There are a number of ways individuals can gain experience in coordinating and supporting running groups sessions. The most recognised qualifications are delivered by England Athletics and are listed below:

- Athletics Leader (one day course with no Assessment)
- Leadership in Running and Fitness (One day course with no assessment)
- Coaching Assistant (two day course with no assessment)
- Athletics Coach (Four day course with formal assessment)
- Coach in Running and Fitness (Four day course with pre-course work including; supported practice and assessment)

For more information upon running qualifications visit www.englandathletics.org/courses

Research Methods

The project was carried out over a three month period from initial consultation to the completion of the written report. During this time data was collected via case studies, participant observation, focus groups and questionnaires. The findings developed throughout each of the stages have been linked together to form more robust conclusions.

Case studies

Group members and coaches provided historical accounts of how and why they became part of the running group. From the 15 profiles provided; key themes were identified and are described throughout the research findings.

Participant observation

Several group running sessions were attended by the researcher. This provided the opportunity to become submerged in the world of running groups and to gain a better understanding of how and why people benefit from this particular activity. During this part of the research process; informal interviews with group members, and observations of the running sessions were carried out. All members had consented to the researcher being present during running sessions.

Questionnaires

50 Questionnaires were distributed between members of both running groups. This allowed larger amounts of shallow data to be collated within the limited time available. Participants were given the option to complete questionnaires at the session or, to take home to complete and return the following week.

Focus Groups

Two small focus groups were carried out with members of the groups (total of 10 participants). This allowed dialogue to take place amongst members and the researcher with the aim of revealing; perceptions, opinions and beliefs about being part of a running group.

Sample

The total sample included; 15 case studies, 10 focus group participants, 50 members completing questionnaires and 25+ members attended each session observed.

Findings

The findings of the study have been divided into three sections entitled; 'Group Members,' 'Joining the Group', 'Discovering the Group' and 'Retention of Members.' Under each theme a variety of sub-topics are used to expand upon findings.

1. Members of Groups

Past experience

The research revealed the level of running experience that run group members had obtained prior to joining the group. It was revealed that out of the 50 participants who completed questionnaires; 46 had never been part of a running group prior to their current membership and in addition, only 20 had actually tried running in the past.

Many of the ladies advised how their last experiences of running had been at school, and how they had not carried on with this particular activity into their adult lives.

“I used to enjoy running at school many moons ago and used to run for the district sports days etc. Once I left school I went straight into work and my running went out the window really.”

For others joining the running group had been their very first experience of running;

“I started running mainly to see if I could, I've always liked the idea, but never done anything about it”

Barriers to Running

The most common factor in preventing participation in running groups in the past was found to be ‘not feeling confident enough;’ with 35 out of the 50 women stating that confidence had been a significant force in avoiding this type of activity. Other common reasons for not taking part included having; nobody to join with (32/ 50), a lack of time (16/50) or, not knowing where to go (15/50). Graph 1 describes the most common barriers found to joining running groups.

Graph 1: Barriers



Source: Lancashire Sport Survey 2013

Apprehension

Prior to joining the group many of the women described feeling apprehensive about meeting the group for the first time and in their running abilities.

“Just the thought of attempting to go out running made me nervous”

One of the hardest obstacles for women to overcome was found to be going to meet the group for the first time.

“For many women the hardest part is walking through the door for the first time, once they have got over that they often settle into things quite quickly”

A lady described her personal thoughts prior to joining the group;

“I thought, would I look out of place, not fit in; hold back the 'proper' runners and would it be a waste of my time and the clubs. I didn't want to set myself unachievable goals as the disappointment is bad for my mental health”

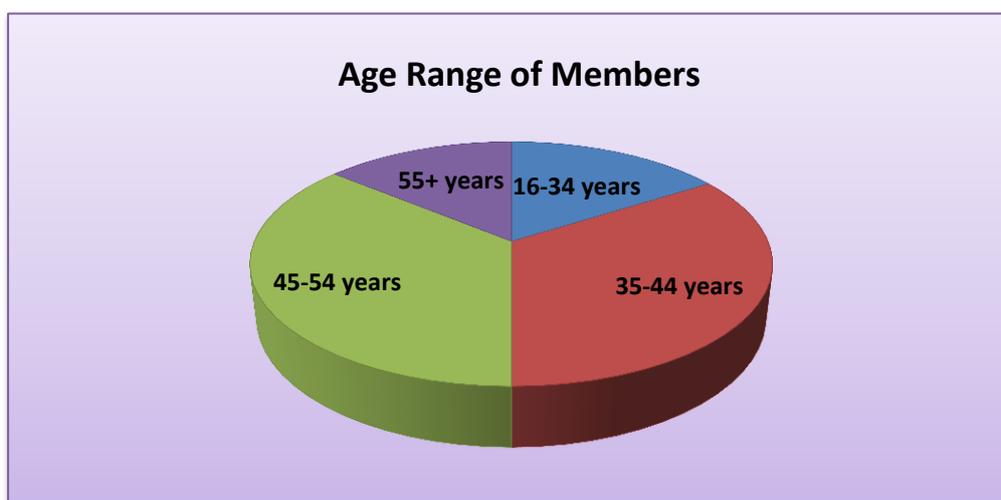
To overcome this initial fear many of the women joined with someone who they were knew already. This included; getting a friend or family member to join with them or already knowing someone in the group prior to joining. By having a familiar face at sessions appeared to ease any nerves;

“I bring my daughter along for moral support and she enjoys it too. Now though, even when my daughter isn't able to come with me, I come to the sessions on my own”

Homogeneity

The most common age ranges amongst the women at the running groups was 35-44 and 45-54 years. This particular demographic of members was also found to consist of women who often wanted something do for themselves outside of the family (such motivations are discussed further in the 'reasons for joining' section). Graph 2 provides a full picture of the age ranges present at sessions. Here it is described that younger women (16-34 years) were much lower represented within the sample; this also appeared to be the case during sessions attended by the researcher.

Graph 2 Ages:



Source: Lancashire Sport Partnership Survey 2013

2. Joining the Group

Graph 3 describes the main reasons for joining provided by group members these include; improve health, enjoyment, make friends, lose weight, achieve new goals, be part of a team, improve confidence and get time to yourself.

Graph 3: Reasons for Joining



Source: Lancashire Sport Partnership Survey 2013

Cost

The relatively low cost of joining a running group was significant when choosing this specific activity. Joining fees were found to range between £20-25.00, plus members had an additional fee of £2.00 per session. £10.00 of this membership fee goes to UK Athletics for affiliation; providing some security regarding insurance.

“After having the my daughter I gave up the gym, too expensive and too full of young posers”

Improve Health/ Weight Loss

Many of the women revealed that they had joined the group due to the health benefits associated with running. One participant described how losing weight could improve her chances of having children and so this had been a key motivation for her;

"I started running because I had to lose a lot of weight for fertility treatment"

Another lady described how the running group had been a way of improving her health after a battle with cancer;

"I decided about a year ago to give running a chance as I had recovered from a battle with cancer and I wanted to get fit."

In addition to the physical health benefits of running, mental health issues were also found to be a reason for joining the running group;

"I suffer with panics attacks; I thought joining would help with my confidence and keep them under control".

Enjoyment

Another common theme was found to be the fun factor that came hand in hand with running groups. Individuals described how their usual gym routines had become mundane and they wanted something different that could provide more enjoyment;

"I began to get bored of going to the gym and doing it all on my own as well"

It appeared that working with others, with similar goals was a key factor in achieving this enjoyment.

When talking about setting the club up one coach highlighted that;

"the emphasis was more on having a giggle rather than increasing our lactate-acid threshold. And it was an approach that struck a chord with the womenfolk of Preston from the outset"

This non-competitive approach to running appeared to be significant in the enjoyment for the women within both groups.

Social Aspect

The members revealed how they had predominantly joined to get to know other people as well as getting fit;

"We do it for fun, to have a chat a catch up and it keeps you fit"

A woman with a young family mentioned how it got her out of the house and gave her a break from the children whilst she wasn't working.

"I have young children and don't get out of the house much whilst my partner is at work, this is a way of me getting out and spending some time with other people in the same boat"

Achieve new goals

Most women said that they started running with a personal goal. The types of goals members had ranged from; running a few steps, to completing a marathon.

"I decided that I would like to run the Great North Run, my husband and brother in law had done it so I thought I would give it a go, so I could train I joined the group".

"I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it, so I joined South Ribble Runners as a beginner"

Other's goals were to simply join a group and spend time with others in a social setting.

"The challenge for me was getting through the door and not panicking, I wanted to prove to myself that I could join the group and get to know the other people whilst attempting to run"

3. Discovering the Group

There were a several ways in which members first discovered the group these included; recommendations made by; friends, work colleagues, family members or neighbours. Others found out about the group by seeing them out and about during sessions and at events or by searching the internet.

Recommendations

For some women the group had been recommended to them by people at work place or by neighbours. Members revealed that notices had been put in their work place by work colleagues and this is the only reason that they found out about the group.

"A couple of girls I worked with told me about a ladies only running club and so here I am"

"My neighbour told me about it, she said it was good fun and so I thought it was worth giving it a go"

Other Events

One lady revealed that she had already been a keen runner and had found out about the group whilst attending the great north run.

"I completed the Great North Run in 2002 and found out whilst I was there that almost on my door step there was ladies running club."

Club Kits

One effective way of discovering groups was found to be via the yellow vests and t-shirts that were worn at sessions/ events. This uniform allowed the group to made visible to members of the public.

"I saw the group's name on a t-shirt when they were running down the road, I then searched for them on the internet"

Another lady spotted the group in her local super market car park during their weekly sessions;

"I saw the yellow vests on the car park every week when I went shopping and so I stalked them for a bit to see what they did ha ha, after that I got my friend to come and join with me"

This uniform worn by runners was also revealed to be a key motivator for members during runs;

"There is no better motivator than seeing a sea of green South Ribble Runners t-shirts all cheering you on"

4. Retention of Members

The two groups featured within the study were selected due to their success at retaining members. Amongst survey participants; 50% had been members for over 6 months. In addition, out of the 50 survey participants only 1 advised that they were unlikely to attend on a regular basis. The main reasons for none attendance were revealed to be; work or family commitments, bad weather, illness or injury.

Two main themes to be drawn from the study with regards to retention of members were; 'incentives and benefits' and the 'delivery of sessions'.

a) Incentives and Benefits

Costs

Due to the relatively low cost for membership many members were not only attracted to the group but were also retained. After the initial fee of £20-25 was paid, a renewal cost of £15.00 was required on an annual basis. Included within in these charges was a water bottle per session for runners and club t-shirts when joining. An extra incentive was offered by South Ribble Runners was; a £5.00 discount voucher to use towards club kit for any annual renewals.

It was further highlighted by coaches that profits were redirected back into the group for; coaching, refreshments, extra events (running/ social) and equipment for the group.

Although cost wasn't the main reason for remaining at the club for most members; such savings were revealed to be effective in retaining members.

"The gym is too expensive for me so I packed it in years ago, this way you're only paying a couple of pounds and getting loads of enjoyment"

The fact that you do not sign any contract or agreements prior to joining was also viewed as a huge benefit to the ladies at both groups;

"I joined South Ribble Runners as there is no expensive outlay and you have no contractual commitment"

Feelings

The feelings members experienced when running was found to be a key benefactor and another reason for their continued participation. Some of the women talked about how running often helped them to feel less stressed after a busy day.

"I do it to chill out; I'm a teacher so need to let all my stress out"

Another lady with young children also believed that running was a good outlet for her stress;

"I have kids and a job so the running group helps me to distress"

It was further highlighted that by getting out there and doing something it provided the runners with a feeling of wellbeing;

"I could easily go home and have a bottle of wine, if I come and join the group I just feel better for doing something"

Feeling part of the group was an additional way to boost attendance amongst participants;

"It's nice to feel like you're part of something and so you make sure you turn up so you don't let the others down."

Social Aspect

The social aspects of the running group were revealed to be an important reason why people initially join the group and, are also a huge reason why people continue to attend. Many of the women talked about the warm and friendly nature of the group and how it is one of the main reasons why they continue to go along each week.

"I joined the club and found running with other ladies was great, much better than running on my own. The group were really friendly and welcoming and I found that I was able to push myself much more than being on my own"

This is something that as a researcher I also found to be the case when I joined in with the group. During one of the sessions that I attended I found myself running a lot further than I had done before. I found it much more rewarding to have others around you saying well done at the end of the session. The friendliness of the group was apparent during the sessions and as a result I was asked to come back to run with them in the future.

When talking about setting up the group on coach described how;

"We only wanted to keep fit, have a bit of fun and head to the pub afterwards to complain about our partners".

The homogeneity of the group discussed earlier appeared to add to ability of members to connect much easier on a social; level;

"I found a wonderful group of likeminded ladies who are funny and have their own stories to tell".

The friendliness of the group continued outside of the running sessions; as the group arranged other activities that did not involve running.

"We sometimes arrange to have a few drinks together, to have a chat when we are not running"

The women additionally meet outside official group sessions to have a run with friends that they had made there. The survey revealed; 32% of women went running with others from group outside of sessions.

Goals and Achievements

The members remained motivated to this particular activity by setting themselves personal goals and targets. The types of goals set included; losing weight, improving health, completing marathons/ half marathons and trail runs, or by trying to improve on their times or distances.

"To date I did my first 10k in 8 years last Sunday in the quickest time I have done it, 57.17 and today I ran my fastest 5k in 28.37 and to date have lost 4 stone 8lb"

"I know I will run 5k one day and I know when I do the pride in myself will be overwhelming and genuinely shared by my family and coach, this all adds to the incentive"

To achieve such goals many other events were attended by the group outside of the usual sessions. This included making travel arrangement together and entering races together including; park runs, marathons, fund runs etc.

"We usually go to do the park runs on a Saturday together; we try to improve our times each week, some weeks are better than others though ha ha"

Communication

Communication between members was made possible through; group sessions, meetings and social networking sites. An important element of remaining motivated appeared to be good communication and sharing successes and failures with the others within the group.

“I love telling the others how I’m getting on it, really keeps me going when you find out how their doing it makes you want to do better”

Facebook was one way in which women could keep up to date with; upcoming events, arranged runs outside of official group sessions and, to share any news they had regarding their running.

This high level of communication through Facebook appeared to strengthen the group as a whole and allowing them to keep up to speed with each other’s progress.

b) Delivery of Sessions

The way in which sessions were delivered was highlighted by coaches and members as being highly important in retaining members. Factors deemed important in the delivery of sessions included; keeping running sessions interesting and informative, timing appropriately, holding in the correct locality, managing abilities of members, and providing adequate support.

Keeping things interesting

Coaches revealed how they would keep participants both motivated and interested by including a variety of activities within sessions such as; technical skills and hill training.

“we always try to mix things up a bit, keep it interesting tonight we have some hill training at the half way point of the run”

This varied approach to sessions was appreciated by members who believed that this style of coaching benefited them by improving their ability levels, technical skills and knowledge.

I have learned loads about running and how to train properly since I started, before I wasn’t getting any faster and I didn’t know why.”

When one member was asked about what she thought would be happening at a session she noted;

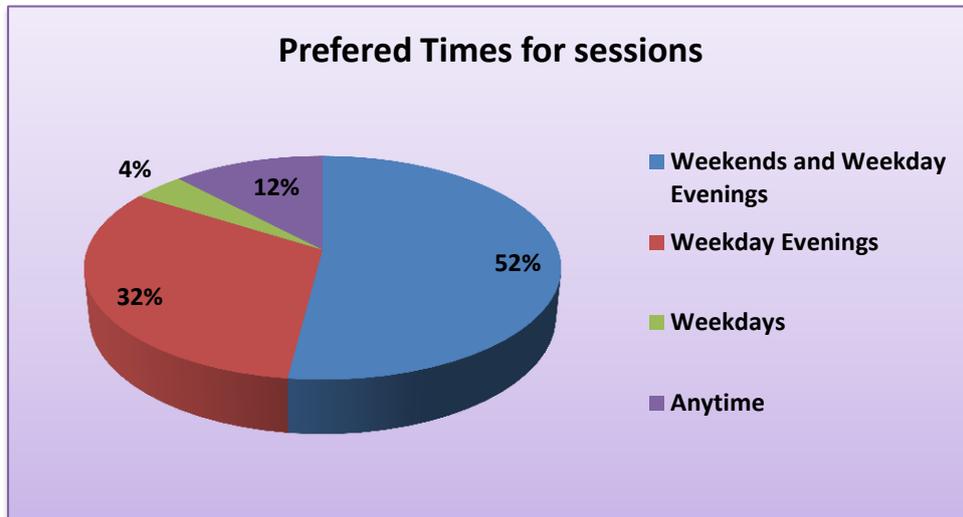
“Who knows what we will be doing tonight? they always add something extra in to keep you on your toes”

Timing of sessions

The timing of sessions was highlighted as important to most members; this was due to many working full time jobs and having young children to look after. This particular factor did not however to affect the small percentage of retired members within groups who could quite

often meet at any time. Graph 4 describes the preferred times for sessions to be weekday evenings and weekends (52%).

Graph 4: preferred times of sessions



Source: Lancashire Sport Partnership Survey 2013

Meeting place

The place that groups chose to meet was raised as an important factor in success of groups. When asked about their willingness to travel to sessions; 52% of participants advised they would only be willing to travel between 1-3 miles, 32% advised 3-6 miles, 12% advised 6-7 miles and 4% were not willing to travel at all.

The actual venue from which groups chose to run from was found to provide; a good place for members to socialise before and after sessions, and a way to the groups identity.

Both groups involved within the study initially utilised local supermarket car parks as the meeting place for their sessions. Such meeting places had been found to cause issues especially as groups grew in numbers.

“As the group grew I had an occasional run in with the store managers and cafe staff @ Morrison’s but having nowhere else to go to I decided to give them some chocolate and a donation to their charity of the year. This kind of earned us some brownie points and bought us a little bit of time. There was a grumpy cleaner at the Tesco store so we decided to do the same at Tesco Café; again this bought our coaches a bit of time but I did realise it was borrowed time”

Due to such issues the coach for one group managed to secure a room within Leyland leisure centre as a meeting place;

“Last year I was in the pub with the girls and I spotted the Leisure Centre Manager got talking about running, he mentioned it would be nice to have a running group from the Leisure Centre I said I can bring ours”

Not only does this room allow the members to have a chat out of the bad whether before and after sessions, it was also revealed that this has allowed the group to form a more positive identity; something that appeared important to members who took pride in being part of the group;

“The room has changed the club; we became more of a real group instead of Morrison’s or Tesco group”.

Abilities/ Progression

Sessions were split into; beginners (new runners completing their 10 week beginner course) and main groups (made up of mixed ability runners who had completed beginner programme). Although this worked for some women, it appeared to be an issue for others who were daunted by the thought of moving into the main groups after ten weeks.

A few women chose to remain in the beginner group and did not advance into the main group often due to; lack of interest in progressing, lack of confidence, wanting to run at an earlier time slot with the beginners. Some of the ladies suggested an intermediate group would be helpful so that they did not have to go straight out with faster runners straight from the beginners group.

“I think we need an intermediate group, so that women don’t feel scared off and thrown in with the really fast runners”

None of the women were forced into main group, but confidence was obviously an issue to take a step up. Coaches and leaders showed awareness of this issue and encouraged members to have the confidence in their abilities.

Having more groups of varying abilities did not appear possible at this moment in time due to lack of leaders and coaches to run them.

“We would like to send people out in smaller groups and with people who are exactly the same ability but it’s just getting leaders; no one wants to do it”

Flexibility was highlighted as the key to retention by ensuring members don’t get moved into groups where they don’t feel comfortable and therefore put off attending.

“Over time we developed beginners and improvers sub-groups but it is very flexible and the sub-groups overlap happily”.

Another coach noted;

“We have changed our Wednesday night run and put 2 sessions on in the hope of keeping our beginners. Last week we had 36 runners and as news of the changes spread we hope to retain more”

Coaches and Leaders

The number of qualified coaches and leaders varied between groups. The south Ribble Runners had two qualified coaches and 10 run leaders and the Lancashire Lasses had six qualified run leaders with no coaches. Funding for both coaches and leaders was found to be subsidised through various sources including; create a coach schemes, sport development programmes and county sports partnerships. However, in some cases the women would have to pay the course fee upfront and then claim the money back.

“Our ladies have had their training paid for by the sport development programme; I’m not saying they have all had their money back though”

Issues were found to arise with lack of funding; which prevented leaders progressing to coach level. One leader highlighted;

“I am looking to up skill to Coach Level when any relevant funding arises; as yet there just isn’t the funding to move forward”

The support provided by coaches and leaders was of great importance to the success of the clubs. The coaches were found to be responsible for the setting up of the clubs and ensuring that members had a good experience. Within both of the groups coaches and leaders would give up many nights each week (some up to 5 nights) as well as weekends to engage with the group.

Members revealed how the coaches at the group not only provided support to them but also made running more enjoyable;

“Our coaches Ali and Carol really keep you going and make it fun for everyone”

In turn, members put their achievements down to the support provided by coaches, leaders and other members of the group;

“My improvements in running have only been possible though through the support of the coaches and group members and their never ending encouragement.”

Many of the women talked about the way coaches had treated them like individuals and how this had helped them to improve and enjoy sessions.

“Firstly the coaches or; friends, mentors, therapists and esteem builders, have spent their time and effort to enable people like me to be a part of something that some of us would

never have dreamed of doing. This is majorly down to their patience and knack to include and mentor every person no matter what their ability."

Treating members as individuals was something that was considered to be of great importance by one of the coaches who noted with regards to coaching;

"You have to know how to approach people, they have to be treated like individuals, not everyone walks in and can run 5k, and you have to be aware of other issues that people have in their lives"

Additional issues became apparent with people trained as leaders actually having the confidence to take groups out by themselves. It was further found to be difficult to get members to commit their time to becoming leaders on a regular basis.

"We have ladies trained as leaders but they are lacking in their own confidence to take the groups out, sometimes it's a struggle and they have to give their time to do it"

Coaches highlighted that their own running can suffer from time to time as they put their time and energy into coaching groups each night. It was advised that more time would be nice to ensure their fitness levels don't suffer.

"I need to have a longer run, I have just given up all my time to coaching the beginners which I love but I need a long run soon"

The training that leaders received was over one day and it was suggested that this training was not always suited to lead all abilities.

"Sometimes I feel the training just provides advice on how to train people who can run already, it doesn't teach you how to cater for all abilities, and how to deal with individuals problems, I think there should be beginner, intermediate training for leaders."

One final revelation made during the research was the love that coaches and leaders have for running. This enthusiasm appeared to spill over to the members of groups and provided them with the motivation to keep running and enjoy it. One coach revealed;

"oh yes I love it, I hardly ever see my family they come second to my running; well it's my running, job, then my family ha ha, I have got the bug"

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the world of group running and in particular to understand why ladies running groups have been so successful within the South Ribble district of Lancashire.

The research revealed that a degree of homogeneity was found to exist between run group members. Groups were found to attract ladies predominantly between the ages of 35 to 54 years. Members were additionally found to have little or no experience of running prior to joining the group. This common ground was also found to be a key factor in the members working together during run sessions and also on a social level.

The most common barriers to taking part in this particular activity were found to be 'lack of confidence' and 'having nobody to go with.' Here, women revealed that they had experienced a lack of confidence in their ability to run and in meeting new people within the group. One way in which ladies overcame such apprehension was to ensure that a familiar face was at sessions to provide moral support. In addition, the welcoming nature of the group was a key factor in successfully introducing new members into the group and ensuring their retention.

The low cost and lack of contractual obligation when joining the groups was found to be a good incentive for members. However, the primary reason for joining was found to be embracing a healthy lifestyle and seeking self-esteem and confirmation. Many women shared stories of how running and the social aspect of the group had enabled them to overcome both mental and physical issues, whilst also achieving new goals. The time spent with the group was described as a means of giving women some time to themselves away from the stresses and strains of work and family life.

Social networking sites were of great importance with regards to communication amongst group members through which they could; arrange meetings, share personal success and failures and generally keep in touch on a day to day basis.

To running interesting, the majority of women within the groups required goals or targets to work towards. Such goals were found to vary amongst members depending upon ability, yet despite the differences in abilities all members appeared very supportive of each other in achieving their set targets. In line with Nash (2010) the achievement of completing a run was a momentous and rewarding event regardless of their level of ability.

The study revealed that women had discovered the group via; recommendations from friends, neighbours and colleagues, at other events and, by seeing the runners in the street on group sessions. It would therefore be deemed as beneficial to ensure club kits had the contact details of the group clearly displayed for promotion purposes.

The meeting place for the groups was highlighted as being a place; where members could socialise during and after group sessions and, was found to be significant in the forming of a group identity. Issues were raised with supermarket car parks being utilised as meeting places for groups. In some instances (particularly with larger running groups) this choice of meeting place had led to tensions between supermarket owners/ managers and group leaders.

The role of coaches and leaders in providing support to group members was significant in both introducing and maintaining member's interest in running. The need for coaches and leaders to be sensitive to individuals needs during sessions and to be flexible with individual progression was found to be significant to the women's enjoyment and therefore continuation within the group. This additionally included varying sessions to suit particular members within the group on any particular day.

Funding for both coaches and leaders was found to be difficult to attain, here it was revealed that in some instances women had paid the costs of training upfront themselves and had then claim it back. This could be problematic when attempting to encourage existing members to become leaders or coaches. In addition, this lack of funding had left one group without any qualified coaches.

A need was also found for improving newly qualified leaders confidence when taking groups out; it appeared that after a one day training session the women were not always fully confident in their ability to lead a group session. This was an area of priority as currently the groups relied upon a significant few to lead all sessions.

Arguably, the most importantly revelation was found to be the enthusiasm that the coaches and leaders displayed within each of the groups. This love for running appeared to be a means of keeping both new and old members encouraged and striving to do better.

The study supports Ottensen (2010) as the groups were found to positively develop; trusts, norms, networks that made it possible to achieve goals. In addition for Ottensen (2010) and LCP (2013) the activity of running and the homogeneity of the group were highlighted as important to the bonding of individuals.

Recommendations

- Ensure a flexible approach is taken with regards to beginner's progression.
- To provide intermediate ability groups where possible.
- To ensure that all groups have at least one qualified coach.
- Ensure any money paid out for leader/ coach training is subsidised where possible.
- Support to be provided to leaders to increase confidence in leading sessions.
- Training for leaders to include; supporting different levels of ability and sensitivity to individual needs.
- Groups to seek sporting venue to lead groups from where possible.
- Run Groups name and contact details to be made visible on club kits.
- Promote bring a friend (due to most women finding joining less stressful with a familiar face).
- Encourage members to promote to friends, work colleagues and neighbours.

- Ensure enough leaders are in place to give coaches some free time to reduce possibility of fatigue and ensure their own running doesn't suffer.
- Make sure run sessions provide different activities to keep things interesting and informative.
- Ensure groups are made visible at local running events.
- Use social networking sites as a means of maintaining group contact.
- Ensure groups are advertised in places that women may attend i.e. weight watchers meetings, leisure centres, colleges, family centres etc.