

Documented health benefits of CYCLING WITHOUT AGE activities

I. Researched and reported on by Gray & Gow, 2020 GOW* - Introduction

“As the CWA mantra “the right to wind in your hair” suggests, another key element is access to outdoor spaces, the importance of which is evident in the wider literature. Care home residents place a high value on outdoor spaces being accessible, with the need to be around greenery of particular importance (Kearney & Winterbottom, 2008).

Lack of access to outdoor spaces has also been reported as the main environmental variable predicting depressive symptoms in care home residents (Potter et al., 2018). Despite this, there are several barriers such as physical limitations, lack of assistance and design issues that can prevent care home residents from enjoying the outdoor environment.

When these barriers are overcome even for a short while, there appears to be a positive impact on health and wellbeing (Astles, 2013; Dahlkvist et al., 2016). In people at different stages of dementia, significant improvements in agitation and sleep, as well as general wellbeing, were reported as a result of supported access to outdoor spaces. This was even the case for simple garden usage (Heliker et al., 2001; Whear et al., 2014).

The frequency of access to outdoor spaces has been associated with feeling more cheerful and alert, as well as improvements in emotional well-being and the alleviation of some depressive symptoms (Rappe & Linden, 2005).

The current study explored short-term changes in the mood and wellbeing of older adults as a result of participation in the CWA activity. As CWA includes elements of socialization and access to the outdoors, both suggested to have benefits in terms of wellbeing and mood for older adults in care settings, we predicted that participation in the CWA initiative would be associated with significant immediate improvements in mood and wellbeing.

Conclusion

“The current study provides an insight into the effects of a novel initiative aimed at improving the lives of older adults in care homes and supported housing environments. This research provides useful findings in terms of the immediate impacts of the CWA initiative, and supports the implementation of the scheme more widely.

There is a relationship between participation in this activity and positive short-term changes in mood and wellbeing that should be explored further, including the assessment of possible cognitive and physical changes”

II. Interpretation excerpt of findings from Gow 2020 Report**

The results provide support for the positive effect that participation in Cycling Without Age can have on older adults’ mood and wellbeing. It is important to note that the improvements we report here were immediately after having taken part in a ride.

Although the improvements (in this report) can only be described as short-term, and in a relatively small sample given the nature of the activity being studied, it is important to note those benefits may still be valued by those participating in the activity. **That may be particularly the case for those with more limited mobility for whom Cycling Without Age provides an opportunity for getting outdoors and socialising.** The short-term changes observed are consistent with the qualitative evaluation we conducted on the initial Cycling Without Age trial in Falkirk.***.

III. Heriot Watt University CWA Evaluation Report 2018

Benefits cited: social interaction during the outing; the feel of “breaking out” & the freedom from the rest home complex; being invigorated by the fresh air & meeting new people, intergenerational conversation between pilot & passenger & having something to look forward to.

*Gray, R & Gow, AJ 2020, 'Cycling Without Age: Assessing the Impact of a Cycling-Based Initiative on Mood and Wellbeing', Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine, vol. 6.

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**Gow-2020-Cycling-Without-Age-Research-and-Evaluation-Report-2019-20.pdf

*** Heriot Watt University CWA Evaluation Report 2018