

# Structured community activity for forensic mental health – a feasibility study

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## Purpose:

Low secure mental health services provide care and treatment to individuals with complex mental health needs and histories of offending and/or challenging behaviour. The restrictive nature of low secure mental health settings and the issues associated with risk management and safe practice present numerous challenges when engaging individuals in community based programmes. This paper presents two schemes where individuals from low secure mental health settings were supported to engage in community based schemes. Specifically it reports the acceptability, feasibility and sustainability of two projects designed to increase activity and develop skills.

## Methods & Materials:

Individuals were invited to attend the projects as part of their weekly rehabilitation intervention plan. The sole inclusion criteria was that they were currently within the low secure service. Individuals were only excluded from participating if they were unlikely to be able to follow instructions as evidenced by a failure to understand or follow the instructions associated with formal cognitive assessment.

Risk assessment and formulations were developed prior to the programmes starting and were monitored and reviewed formally by MDT at regular intervals throughout the projects. Data for the evaluation was collected from the attendance and progress reports included in individual clinical notes, feedback from individuals and through formal assessments such as the Model of Human Occupation Screening Tool (MOHOST).



Project	Number of places	Number of days	Total project spaces / total attendance %	OCN certificates achieved
1: Woodcraft and outdoor skills (May – July 2011)	10	10	100 / 93%	16*
2: Dry stone walling (July – Aug 2011)	7	4	28 / 93%	5
3: Community project 1 (June – Aug 2012)	10	7	70 / 87%	10
4: Community project 2 (July – Aug 2013)	9	7	63 / 78%	7

Number of recorded attendances by month

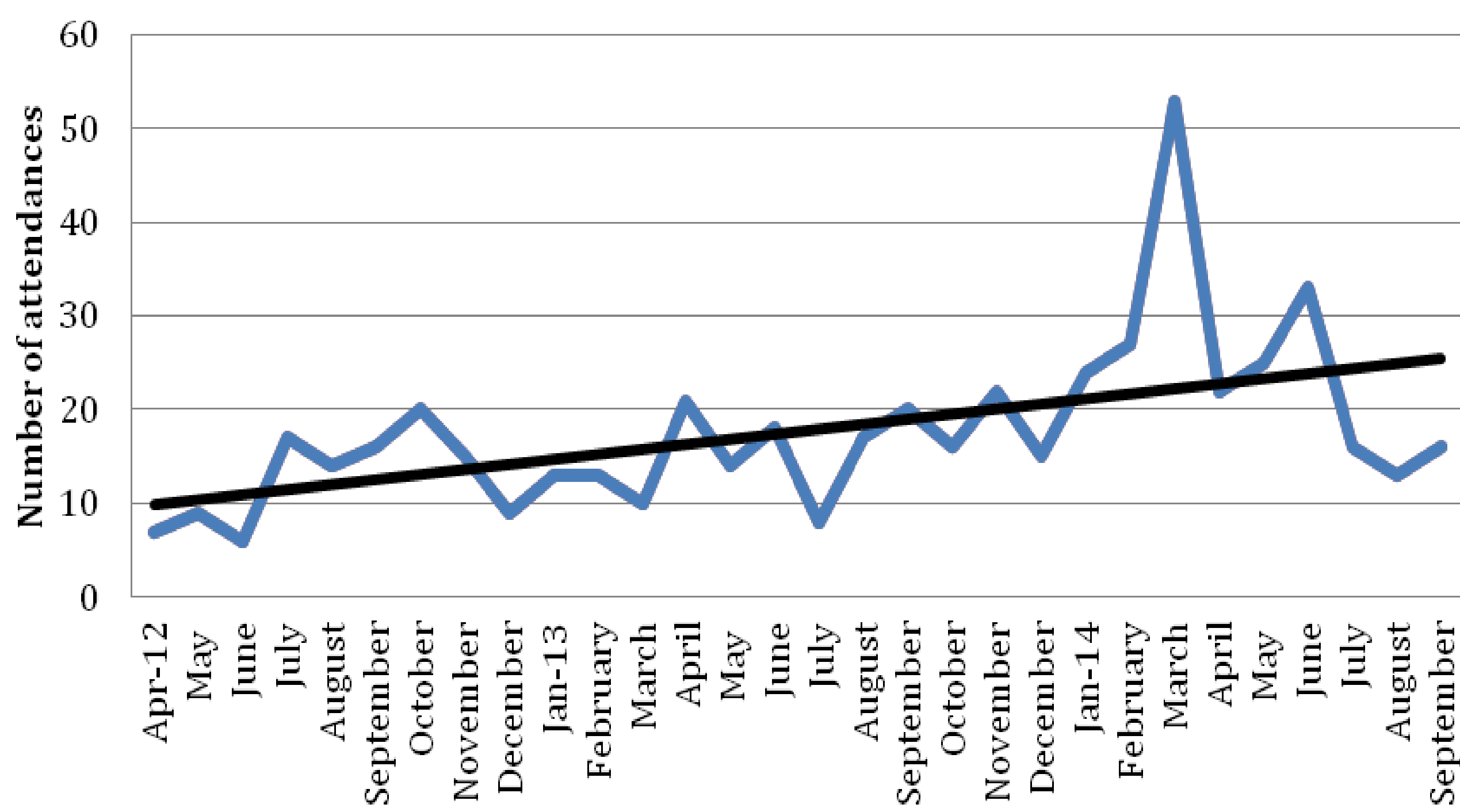


Figure 1: Monthly Kick Start attendance from April 2012 to September 2014.

Table 1: Down to Earth Project group attendance and achievements.

\*Individuals had the opportunity to obtain OCN certificates in both woodwork and cooking.

## Results:

As shown in table 1, and figure 1, both schemes were well attended with a steady increase in attendance evidenced for the exercise programme which was open to new starters at any point. Table 1 also shows the variety of skills areas developed by participants and the evidence of achievement shown through OCN certification. Participants and staff both gave positive feedback on the schemes.

Engagement in these programmes was associated with an overt demonstration of enjoyment and increased volition and skill level. Formal reassessment at two different time points showed improvement of overall occupational performance. Observations by staff recorded positive changes in overall confidence, self-efficacy, improved fitness and some weight loss. Initial interventions led to gradual generalisation as evidenced through engagement in a range of vocational skills training opportunities in the community, including real life work experience.

## Conclusions:

Planned positive risk taking enabled individuals to participate in a safe and structured way. Initial evaluation of the projects suggests that they were viewed as acceptable by the service and valued by participants. Participation led to some individuals engaging in new opportunities for vocational and leisure activities.

As a whole, the information presented suggests that community based programmes can be successfully delivered to those in low secure mental health settings with the right support. Attendance rates have been high and views of the programmes have been positive along with evidence of achievement.

This is the first known study of its kind utilising inter-agency collaboration to address the needs of those residing in a low secure mental health facility. Fostering access to community based occupational opportunities for those in low secure mental health services can be achieved safely and with numerous apparent benefits. Research is now needed to determine further the nature and extent of the gains made through such activity.

