What impact can parkrun have on the health and wellbeing of adults with a learning disability?

Abstract

*Background:* People with learning disabilities experience multiple disadvantages and health inequalities compared with the general population. Current policies are reliant upon limited evidence as to how to enable people with learning disabilities to lead independent and fulfilling lives in the local community.

*Aim:* To explore whether community-based activities, such as parkrun, could contribute to improved mental and physical wellbeing for people with a learning disability.

*Method:* A qualitative research study using semi-structured interviews to capture the experiences of six people with learning disabilities living in Cheshire East, which were analysed using an interpretive thematic approach.

*Results:* Four key insights emerged from the data: participants prioritised wellbeing as a core component of health; participants identified multiple benefits from taking part in physical activity but placed a higher value on activities which facilitate fun and interaction with others; previous positive experiences of feeling accepted in public spaces led participants to want to contribute to communities, and; alongside close friendships, participants viewed organised social groups as an important resource to maintain their own wellbeing. parkrun was perceived to be a space of health and wellbeing which could fulfil the desire of participants to belong and contribute to a community, differentiating it from traditional physical activity interventions. Proactive engagement may be required to instigate participation for people with learning disabilities, with support in place to facilitate an initial positive experience of taking part.
in parkrun. The opportunity for multiple informal interactions with other participants of parkrun would be a valued social resource, sustaining ongoing participation in physical activity.

Conclusion: parkrun can be an integrative space of health and wellbeing for people with a learning disability with appropriate social supports in place. Further research is required to understand the long-term contribution that parkrun can make to public health outcomes for people with learning disabilities.

Key terms: learning disabilities, parkrun, social inclusion, wellbeing, physical activity