

Participant M15

- I: There we go! Okay, so we're interested in understanding people's experiences of being invited onto the NERS, and what's working well and what could be improved. So can you tell me about how you first got involved, your referral stage?**
- R: Yes. I'd read about the service in the Macmillan pamphlet. I'd lost an awful lot of weight, and I went from 13 and a half stone down to eight and a half, and I needed to put on weight. I'd just finished feeding myself through my belly, but swallowing is still a problem and I realised I needed to expend energy, exercise. So I went to the GP, and asked him about it. A couple of weeks later, I got a telephone call from [name], I think his... [name] is his name, inviting me along. Now, I'm not sure if it was a choice or if he chose it for me, but it was Mondays the gym, basically cardio stuff. And Wednesday, a group activity, stretching, basically. I don't know what they call it, but we did a circuit for 45 minutes. I was the toy boy there, at 65. Yes, really enjoyed it.
- I: Yeah. So when you went to the doctor's and you said I'd like to join, what was that scenario like? What did they say?**
- R: Well, he seemed rather surprised, because my problem is chronic fatigue and it's counterintuitive, isn't it, to exercise? But I know, I've read enough to know that's what you've got to do. But he was surprised that I knew that, so he... Yeah, no, he was more than pleased to refer me. I think don't think he - I think he usually has to suggest it to people rather than people... And when I got to talk to the personal trainer, I had the opposite problem of everybody else. Everybody else seemed to be doing it because of aches and pains, or overweight, and I wanted to gain weight.
- I: How well did the doctor kind of explain to you what was going to be involved, or how kind of appropriate it would be for you and your treatment?**
- R: He didn't really, he just - he said, oh, it'll be... Yeah, from what I've read, I knew more about it than him, I think, to be honest. Yeah.
- I: Yeah, and so from the Macmillan leaflet, what did you kind of expect was your referral would be like, and what it was going to be like when you started?**
- R: Exactly how it was, to be honest with you. I didn't know, like, on the Monday, the gym work is individual, and you've got an individual programme from the personal trainer. The Wednesday one is a group activity, where you're working, all of you doing the same thing together, right? This is the sort of thing I expected, to be honest with you. I thought I'd be doing more actual gym work. In fact, I was asking her if I could change from the group activity to two sessions of the gym, because I was getting more benefit from that, I think. But I didn't go in this week - my condition - and I'm up and down like a yo-yo. You know what I mean? I do feel better from doing the exercise, but it hasn't cured the problem, if you know what I mean?

I: Yeah, of course, yeah. I've also heard before that for people with chronic fatigue, it can be really helpful to exercise, which does... You're right, it does seem counterintuitive, but, yeah.

R: Oh, I'm an old hand at illness, and I've made all the mistakes. I had my first heart attack at 42.

I: Oh wow!

R: I've had three, and I was so scared of having heart attacks that I did the opposite of doing what you should do: I did as little as possible. I was so scared of having a heart attack, until eventually it got through to my head that I should push myself, but it took years for that message to get through.

I: You are now. So was there anything you were unsure about when you started?

R: I was unsure whether I was well enough to do it, but it turns out I was.

I: Did you ask anyone about that, and did they reassure you at all?

R: Yes. The personal trainer, but I told him I'd had a heart problem. And to be fair, the first few sessions, the individual ones in the gym, the first couple of sessions, and he was with me all the time and talking to me. And I know why he was talking to me, because he didn't want me to get so out of the breath I couldn't speak. But we've got beyond that now, and when I started it, I was walking on the treadmill. But last - the week before last, I actually started jogging, so I'm getting there.

I: Well done! Did you have any other questions, and were they answered?

R: What other questions would I have had? Yes. What was my - how high should I let my heart rate go before I calm down and slow down? What was the maximum heart rate I should - when I'm exercising? He gave me a number, but he said to me, check that with the cardiologist. And, to be fair, I was going into - they pulled me in there... I'm a cyborg, I've got a defibrillator by here, and they bring me in every six months to take a reading [unclear 07:44]. And I asked the technicians there and they said, what was it now? Two hundred and forty, minus your age or something like that. Yeah, it worked at about 160, but I've discovered the drugs I take won't let me get, won't let my heart get that high, no matter what I do.

I: [Over speaking 08:10].

R: But my son got me this iPhone I'm talking to you on now. Oh God, it's - and the watch, so now I'm a slave to an app called Fabulous.

I: I have that app. I have that app.

R: Oh, you've got that?

I: Yeah, it's a habit reminder, is that right?

R: That's the one, yeah. I'm a slave to it, and it's funny. People laugh at me when I'm middle of a conversation, and I say, oh, I've got to stand up for a minute.

I: **Yeah, I really like it.**

R: I do. Yeah, no, it's been great and I've done... Have you done the stretch one?

I: **Oh, no, I haven't. What did I - I was reminded this morning that I need to start scheduling time, so noting down how long it takes me to do something, so I can schedule better. So I'm going to do that this evening.**

R: I tried the 20-minute tidy up, the tidy your house one.

I: **Oh, that's a good one.**

R: You take four tasks, you know you've got to do, and you just spend five minutes on that. And it doesn't matter if you haven't finished, so you can actually see how much you can get done in five minutes. Yeah, I'm enjoying it.

I: **Oh, that's good. So you mentioned your son, how support-...did you have any support from your family, and suggesting that you go and do the NERS programme?**

R: Yes, I live on my own, but my son lives in [place]. He's - right, he's the... Oh, what do you call the person who looks after someone who's got a severe disability? A PA or something. Right, he works for a guy who [has disability] and he's CEO of a disabilities charity in [place], and my son is his facilitator. That's the word, isn't it? So he knows all about - honest to God, he's been looking after me, to be fair.

I: **Oh, wonderful!**

R: I've actually filled out - oh, the DWP are swines, isn't it? So I let him do it all. I've signed - I've handed over all my finance; I trust him, he's my son. He's 36, and I love him. I've handed over my financial - he can sign cheques for me and what have you, you know what I mean? You do it online and you pay 30 or 40 quid. Anyway, I don't have to speak to social workers, DWP, anybody anymore and they talk to him.

I: **Right. So did he like the idea of doing this exercise programme for you?**

R: I'm not sure if he suggested - well, he was encouraging me to do more, that I'd got it wrong, that I should do more and I shouldn't be scared of having a heart attack. He convinced me of that. And it was in the Macmillan leaflet I knew - I found out about the national exercise referral programme. There's - I checked the surgery afterwards, and there was no information on the walls, they're not actually pushing it, you know what I mean? Yeah.

I: **Yeah, well, that sounds good. So is there anything that you would change to improve that kind of referral stage of getting involved?**

- R: Well, yes, the doctors should know more about it, and perhaps it's a good idea if they pushed it. Well, the nurse practitioners, you can usually talk to them and you can't talk to the doctors. Doctors seem afraid to speak these days.
- I: **Yeah, I can imagine. So moving on to the first meeting with... Did you say his name was Alex, the exercise professional?**
- R: Yeah.
- I: **We'd just like to understand a bit more about that first meeting. Can you talk me through when you first met [name], and what you did and what was discussed?**
- R: Right. We had - I think he weighed me. I can't remember if he took a blood pressure or something, but he definitely weighed me. We had a long chat, and he was very friendly and he showed me around the gym, and then explained about the Wednesday sessions to me. No, it was excellent. I don't know how you could improve it, to be honest.
- I: **Yeah. So he gave you a call before you first met, is that right?**
- R: That's right. And an email, and he followed it up with a call. Part of my problem is, I used to be wicked at administration, but suddenly I'm finding it all very difficult. I've got perhaps 300 emails I haven't looked at on my computer, so I did tell him, right, that communicating me at the time, especially I was getting my head was so fuzzy from the chemo, that sending me an email wasn't a very good idea, so I might not read it, but to ring me. And that's what he's done ever since, and they've kept in touch all through the pandemic close, yeah, closure and everything, to be fair.
- I: **Yeah, that's great. So was he - he was good at putting you at ease with your concerns about getting involved?**
- R: Yes, I told him I didn't - I found it difficult in getting involved with the online stuff, and they encouraged me to do the simple exercises at home myself. You know what I mean? The ones I can remember. And from what I can remember, he gave me a call every few months just to check how I was doing, and encouraged... Well, they'd got a bit of a problem, and at first they told everybody you had to get re-signed up, yeah? And, of course, that was a mistake, wasn't it? Everybody was contacting their GPs, well, at a time when GPs are completely overworked. Anyway, I couldn't just get the okay over the phone, and I had to make an appointment for my GP, which are like gold dust. I had to wait a fortnight for the telephone appointment for the GP. The same day as I had the telephone appointment for the GP, to fill out the forms for a re-referral, they sent me a text message saying, oh, sorry, we've changed the policy, you don't have to get the doctor. I told the doctor when he rang me up and he said, well, anyway, I've got someone else to talk to you about, so it wasn't a wasted call.
- I: **Okay, that's good. That is good. So is there any part of this first meeting with [name] that you think could have been improved?**

- R: Perhaps if [name] hadn't been there, some of the other participants have been there. I didn't know what I'd be walking into, would be a bunch of He-Men with muscles, or a lot of old ladies with arthritis. I didn't have a clue what I was going to be walking into. Yeah, if he had said, oh, they'll all be about your age and they're all crock, that would have been helpful.
- I: **Yeah, a little bit more about what to expect.**
- R: Going in with, but as soon as I got there and realised I was the youngest person there, it was all right.
- I: **So other than to improve, you wanted to gain a bit of weight, so to improve some health things. What else, at this point, were you hoping to get out of the programme? Were you hoping to meet other people and make friends, or any other wellbeing?**
- R: Yes. To be fair, when you're dying of cancer, everybody mollycoddles, everybody thinks you're dying, for starters, which is really bloody annoying, I can tell you. But having those two appointments to go to, regular appointments each week, because once you become ill and stop working, your routines, your old routines go out the window, don't they? And you've got to build new ones, isn't it? And I was struggling with that, I must say. But having two appointments to go to with people around my own age, more so, but who I could chat to, it was, yeah, beneficial, definitely.
- I: **Yeah, that's really understandable. Were there any wellbeing...**
- R: Sometimes I go to the garage and buy sweets just for someone to talk to.
- I: **Yes. It's got to be a balance, hasn't it? Because people, like you said, might be mollycoddling you, but then sometimes you want some time to yourself, or you want some time to not think about it, I suppose.**
- R: Yeah. It's all about balance, isn't it?
- I: **Yeah. Okay. So we understand you had some face-to-face exercise sessions, and then the pandemic hit, and you chose to postpone your involvement until face-to-face was available again. That's correct, isn't it?**
- R: Pardon?
- I: **That's correct, isn't it? That you...**
- R: Yeah. Sorry, yeah.
- I: **No problem.**
- R: [Over speaking 19:46] on my screen then.

- I: No problem. So I'd like to ask you about your experience with the face-to-face sessions. What was working well, and what didn't work so well? So can you tell me about your experience with the face-to-face sessions?**
- R: I've got absolutely no complaints. I mean, when this - my 16 free weeks are over, I'm going to definitely join the... It's in [*place*], the local swimming pool and there's a gym there. I never ever thought to join the gym before, but definitely I will join the gym. Since I've had a smartphone, I've been counting my steps and things and the one noticeable thing is, I started slowing down in October, then November, December, January I did nothing, you know what I mean? I mean, it's because when you get to my age, you feel the cold something terrible, isn't it? So if I'm going to exercise, I'd have to go to a nice, warm, air-conditioned gym to do any, otherwise, I won't do it like, it's simple as that. So but, yeah, it's - and I will definitely join the gym, but at the moment I'll take advantage of the free 16 weeks.
- I: Yeah, of course. And I think some people roll over as well, so you can ask if that's...**
- R: If it rolls over? Oh right, excellent.
- I: Some people have been, yeah. So how did you feel before the first session? I know you said that you thought that you weren't certain it was going to be people your age, but what other kind of feelings did you have, concerns maybe?**
- R: That I'd get better, but at that time - I'm much better now - but at that time, it's a toss-up in the morning, what sort of day it was going to be, you know what I mean? I didn't know if I'd make it, yeah, so I actually booked a taxi for that time that put added pressure on myself to make sure I went. When you're feeling sorry for yourself, it's so easy to say, oh, fuck it! That I was most worried about, to be honest with you.
- I: Yeah. Okay.**
- R: But I booked a taxi, and I got there, and after the first session, I was fine.
- I: Did - was anyone encouraging you to arrive on that first kind of... In the face-to-face sessions?**
- R: My son, yeah, over the phone. He knew what I was doing. Yeah, he's in touch with me regularly, bless him.
- I: And the exercise professional, [*name*], did he provide any kind of support or encouragement to attend?**
- R: Yes, he shows me off as his - to the newcomers, yeah, oh, 'this is [*name*]; he's got cancer'. No, I told him he could tell, and he's not - he isn't breaking any confidentiality. And everybody can see I'm also a cyborg, so it impresses the oldies that I can do what I do, isn't it?

I: Yeah, I'll bet. How suitable were the sessions for you with kind of all your health conditions, were they made more suitable for you?

R: Yes. The first couple of sessions, I got a bit too enthusiastic and he did tell me, oh, calm down, I'm not having you drop having a heart attack on me, he said, you'll spoil your programme. So he did have to calm me down the first couple of sessions. Now, he's like increased the reps and the - instead of doing the curls with one kilo, I'm using three kilos. He's upped it, and now I'm feeling it. I'm definitely sweating and, to be fair, I feel [?wholesomely 24:41] exhausted afterwards. Yeah. No, I'm enjoying it.

I: Oh, that's good. So what were the sorts of things that you enjoyed the most?

R: The insurance that I can do these things again. Well, I used to be a [sport] player, and I used to play [position]. I was - even though I'm not very tall, I was quite muscley and 13 and a half stone, and five foot eight. I played [position], yeah, and I was very fit. Being a raspberry ripple is [unclear 25:31] it takes years to come to grips with it. I mean, it's taken me years to come to wearing glasses.

I: Yeah.

R: We don't like change, us humans.

I: No, you're right. And what didn't you - was there anything you didn't enjoy about the sessions?

R: Too short.

I: Yeah, really?

R: Yeah, too short. I think they could have been half an hour longer, I think.

I: If you could change those things, what sort of thing would you change? So half an hour longer, and would you do more sessions, would you...?

R: I'd have two sessions with a break in between, so people could have a little socialise and a slice of orange, or something like we used to have at half time [unclear 26:29]. Yeah, a break in the session, so people could have a little socialise. A lot of people just run off afterwards. If [?there was a 26:41] break in the middle of the sessions, then you're more or less forcing people to socialise, aren't you?

I: Yeah. So it sounds like it was really good for your confidence, in what you could still manage to do. But...

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Was there any other positive impact, so socially or in your - kind of in terms of isolation?

R: Yes. So I'm getting out more. It definitely - right, I've got... Oh, what do they call it? [condition]. And a few years ago, I got referred to a physiotherapist and I was so impressed.

He gave me a series of exercises to do, and I never had to go back again, and he just said, do them every day and it'll be all right. And I do, and if I forget to do them, I get a pain in the neck.

I: Oh wow!

R: I realised that exercise was the way like, isn't it, to get better? What was the question? I'm rambling now.

I: Did you experience any other kind of positive impact on you?

R: Well, [unclear 28:02] the arthritis, I've got arthritis in my knee and in my neck, and it's helped that a hell of a lot. And I now have worked out which exercises are best for the pain in my knee, and the pain in my neck, so I don't waste my time doing exercises that aren't going to help it. Other benefits? Well, yeah, I'm getting out more and I've made a couple of decent friends.

I: Oh, amazing, yeah. So has it improved your kind of mood at all, or...?

R: Yeah, definitely. Definitely, yeah. And I'm getting better, and there's other things I've got now, but certainly when I started doing it... I've restarted again now the last few weeks, but when... Before the pandemic, it was vital to get... It was the - and there were weeks when that was the only time I got out of the house, was to go to these sessions. So, yeah, they were really important.

I: And did you...

R: I've got more of a social life now, because I'm feeling better.

I: That's great. Yeah, that's really helpful, and taking part in NERS has kind of help provide that, has it?

R: Yeah. And I see the benefits. I mean, before, all right, I had heart failure before and I'm a cyborg, and I tell you, I used to be an adviser, but I don't know. I don't know why, but they had me on, like, £70 a week for years, isn't it? And then when it dawned on me that they've been underpaying me, they had to give me, like, what was it? Two and a half thousand pounds in back money that they owed me, and they upped me to £100 a week, yeah? And I thought I was rich. And after about a year, I'd saved £1,000 out of this £100 a week. And then I got the cancer, and they told me I was going to die and then they fucking tripled my income. Oh, I was so - instead of being grateful, I was so angry. You swines, man, why didn't you help me ten years ago, when I did it? But now I've got the latest Apple iPhone, I've got the latest watch. My living room is beautiful. I discovered that most - I reckon if you give people 50 quid a week extra on what they're having now, most depression will be gone! Will be gone!

I: Yeah, I can imagine. It's money doesn't always buy happiness, but what you can do with money is see friends, is visit family, isn't it?

R: Exactly. Well, I wouldn't go out to a pub with my friends, because I wouldn't go into the pub without any money, that's... You can't walk into a pub without money in your pocket, can you? So it just completely shrunk my social life. I don't drink anymore, so it's pointless going into a pub, but... Yeah. No, I'm so limited. To be honest with you, maybe this cancer is the best thing that has happened to me, so I feel like I'm middle-class now, honestly.

I: **Oh, that's great. Yeah.**

R: But let's hope they keep the pep up, because if I lose my... They're such fine margins. If you lose your pension credit, that's it, you're going into poverty, isn't it? But if you've got pension credit, you're all right and your rent is paid [unclear 32:41]. But so many old people I've come across don't claim it! I can't understand why they aren't doing it.

I: **Yeah.**

R: It's their money like. Anyway, yeah. No, thank God for pension credit.

I: **Yeah. And, well, thankfully, it was - you got to meet some new friends and then spend some time with them with all your new money.**

R: Yes. I shop in Marks and Spencer's food all now, and not Lidl.

I: **Moving up in the world, you!**

R: My friends all laugh, and I show them my watch and I go, I'm middle class now.

I: **So did you attend both classes a week, the two classes?**

R: Yes. A Monday - at the moment, oh right, now I'm doing Monday, two o'clock, and Wednesday, 2.30. They go on for about three-quarters to an hour. Before the pandemic, I was doing Mondays and Thursdays, and I stopped when the pandemic started and I restarted just a few weeks ago.

I: **Were there any challenges with attending those sessions? You said you had to book a taxi, was there anything else that kind of made it difficult?**

R: Well, yeah, at first, because I couldn't walk the distance, so I had to get taxis there and back, to be honest with you. Now I'm fit enough to walk it, it's about one and a half kilometres, maybe a mile and a half. Oh, I don't know how far it is? Yeah. No, it's two kilo-...about two kilometres to the swimming pool. The last couple of times I've managed to walk there and back, so, yeah. No, no, my health is improving, definitely.

I: **That's great. And is there anything that helps you to keep motivated to go?**

R: Auntie Apple. It reminds me, I've got it set up on my iPhone.

I: **Oh, your iPhone sends you a reminder, does it?**

R: Oh, yeah.

I: Perfect.

R: Oh, it's on the fitness app as well. All the different machines I can record my performance on the fitness app, yeah. Oh, I'm full of data.

I: So how would you sum up this kind of overall experience of the face-to-face sessions?

R: Oh, definitely positive. Definitely, yeah. There's two trainers, [name] and - oh, I can't remember the other lad's name. Yeah. No, they're both really good. Yeah, they answered all my questions, or tried to anyway, and good advice. They kept making a point to everybody that if you're going to get information off the internet, make sure it's an NHS site, and you can't trust anything else. Definitely positive. No, they both struck me as pretty cool professionals, to be honest.

I: Amazing. Was there anything that could be improved?

R: Well, as I say, yeah, entering the session, have a little break in the middle, just maybe five minutes to have a...drink your water and it'll force the people to talk to each other.

I: Yeah, that would be nice. All right. How many weeks of the exercise sessions did you have in total, before it went virtual?

R: I think it was ten before the Covid stopped it, and now... They haven't told me yet whether I'm continuing on from the ten, or I'm starting 16 again. I think they're going to start me at 16 again, and I've done three weeks so far. Yeah, next week will be the fourth week.

I: Okay. And do you pay anything for the exercise sessions?

R: Yeah, for both, £2.

I: Two pound. Okay. And how much does your taxi cost one way?

R: Four pound fifty.

I: Okay.

R: But I don't need it anymore.

I: Yeah, you walk now, yeah. Did you have to buy any clothing for these sessions?

R: No.

I: No, no new clothing?

R: I had joggers and...

I: Trainers.

R: Trainers, yeah.

I: Yeah, you didn't have to buy any new footwear?

- R: No. No, I was awash with money, man. I'd just had - I'd just been given [?pep 38:41]. I'd entered the promised land.
- I: **Yeah. So the decision to postpone and not continue with the online sessions, once Covid hit, can you talk me through why you decided not to?**
- R: Difficulties with my laptop that I have, yeah, and I couldn't get motivated, to be honest with you. The laptop was playing up, and trying to log on to Zoom sessions was really bloody annoying. I've stopped - actually, I've stopped using my laptop since I've had this Apple, this iPhone. I got the Max Pro with a bigger screen, isn't it? And I can do everything on this.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: I'm thinking of getting - I've still got a carer. I've still got - and they're obviously going to take it away from me soon, and I'm too coherent. But when I was really bad with the chemo and radiotherapy, they gave me ten hours of care, so I've still got a carer coming in, isn't it? Oh, he's a laugh! He saw my Apple iPhone and he said, Apple rule, mark of the devil! Anyway, he brought his VR thing, Oculus VR around. Yeah! Oh, absolutely brilliant! I was in World War I biplane, shooting [unclear 40:35]. Oh, I'm going to get one, and I'm saving up for one. I'm going to get one.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: They're absolutely brilliant.
- I: **[Over speaking 40:41]. Yeah. What were you told about what the virtual programme would be like?**
- R: I wasn't told anything, really. Well, yes, I was sent emails about it. To be honest with you, I wasn't in a mood for reading them. It was the beginning of the pandemic and everything looked black and, to be honest, I took to the bottle a bit. And I've detoxed since, but I definitely took to the bottle and I lost interest in it, motivation. Because it was - if it had have been... If I was teched up like I am now, I would have done it, I think, it's... I'm so - I can actually... It's taken me about four weeks to learn how to do it, but I don't half get some looks from teenagers with jealousy, when I pay for things with my watch. Looking at me, and I can see they're jealous as hell. I don't blame them.
- I: **Yeah. No. How did you feel about what you were told? You were saying that it just - you'd lost the motivation and everything looked a bit black at that point, is that about right? About what you were told about doing NERS virtually?**
- R: No, no, no, they were trying to encourage me to do it. I had a couple of telephone calls and emails, to be fair to them, and they were trying to encourage me to do it, but I found it too difficult (a) to my laptop wasn't... I've cracked it now, and I don't even bother with it now. My laptop wasn't working properly, and it was too much of an effort to... Yeah, and I was getting drunk most days, so...

I: Yeah. What made you want to stick to just face-to-face? What were some of the pros of face-to-face?

R: The fact they gave me somewhere to go out of the house - I needed to get out of the house.

I: Yeah.

R: The human interaction, isn't it? Talking.

I: Yeah. Is your...

R: And I can use - right, I've been using Zoom and the other, Skype and stuff for a while, but I can keep in touch with my children and my grandchildren, but it's deeply unsatisfying. It's not the same, and you can't smell and not touch them, or... Or really tell what mood they're in. You're not really communicating, are you?

I: No. No, you lose a lot on - over the internet, don't you?

R: Yeah.

I: Was your home kind of suitable? If you did want to exercise at home, could you have done with the kind of space you have?

R: At the time, no, I couldn't have. I was borderline alcoholic, and I would have tripped over stuff on the floor. Since then, I've detoxed and I'm 120 days sober.

I: Well done!

R: At that time, no, I was in danger of breaking my neck from tripping over the rubbish on the floor. Since I've sorted myself out, [unclear 44:55].

I: Lovely. It looks lovely in there.

R: So, yeah, I detoxed and sorted myself out, but at the time, no, I couldn't have.

I: So was there anything else that kind of put you off doing it virtually?

R: What was [unclear 45:23]? Yeah, I feel silly doing it on my own. I don't know why. If I'm doing it in a group, I don't feel silly, but I feel silly doing the yoga poses on my own, to be honest. Yeah, it doesn't - I've can't... I'm not - I've never been one to self-motivate, you know what I mean? This is why I never got a good degree. No, I'm not a self-motivator, I need people to encourage. I like group work.

I: Yeah. Could you see any benefits to doing it virtually? I know you decided not to, but can you see any of the benefits [over speaking 46:14]?

R: Oh, now I can. And now I'm doing extra exercise sessions on - when I got the new iPhone, and I got three months free to Apple Fitness.

I: Oh wow!

R: Yeah, so I've done a couple of sessions with women who look like Beyonce.

I: **That sounds all right.**

R: Yeah, I've learnt how I can mirror screen, and I can get what's on my iPhone on my big telly.

I: **Oh, well done, yeah.**

R: I've learnt how to do that, so, yeah, I can have the exercise session on my big telly. Yeah, I've started doing them now. At the time, when they were offering the internet, I didn't have the tech and I felt silly doing it. Now, no problem and I don't care if the windows are open. I don't care who sees me.

I: **Well, it's very impressive what you're doing.**

R: It's the - you go and spend the best part of a £1,000 on technology, you're going to use it, aren't you, or you think you've wasted your money.

I: **Yeah, absolutely.**

R: And, oh yeah, it's really spurred me on, yeah.

I: **Was there anything that anyone could have done when it was going virtual to encourage you to take part, or was it just, it was a definite no in your eyes?**

R: It was a - no, I didn't have the technology, no.

I: **And did you discuss this with [name], and did he provide any sort of encouragement or address any concerns?**

R: He did, right? I said to him that I found it difficult [unclear 48:15], but that I was still doing little, little exercises when I brushed my teeth, and things like that. I was trying to keep up with it, and we basically agreed that he'd give me a ring every couple of months to check how I was doing, and I'd come back to the face-to-face sessions. So I told him I really wasn't interested in trying to do the online stuff. Yeah, to be fair, I got a few emails and telephone calls off both of them, trying to encourage me, yeah. But, yeah, they understood - well, as soon as I could I would... As soon as they opened up, I'm straight back on it, so yeah.

I: **Can you - so we want to talk about people that supported you to stay on the programme, or to get on the programme in the first place. Can you tell me a bit about your relationship with [name], and the other exercise professional?**

R: It's professional. They answer my questions, and they are not overly friendly, but I get on really well with both of them, yeah.

I: **Good. That's great.**

R: And they're more than happy to answer questions, actually. They're like any skilled person, and they like to show off their knowledge, don't they?

I: Yeah. And the amount of support they gave you, was that just right? Could you have done with more? Did you need less?

R: It was just right. No, it was fine. No, I don't - I was chuffed, to be fair, when the pandemic was a couple of months in, the fact that I got a telephone call from, oh, [name] his name was - [name] and [name]. I got a telephone call from [name] and cheered me up no end, to be fair, it was nice.

I: Yeah, lovely. And so how often were you in touch with the exercise professionals, when you...?

R: When I was out of the scheme? Right, I got emails often, I'd say about five or six times over the 18 months or 16 months, or whatever it was. But I [signed 50:56] into the WhatsApp group of people who were doing the exercise programme, before the pandemic. And though I didn't get too involved in it, I kept an eye on the WhatsApp group. So I found out what people, who I knew, were still alive, because people were dropping like flies around here at one point. And on an edge of council estate, most of the houses have been bought, but the flats are still tenants, mostly tenants, and there's a lot of old people around here. And in one week we had five hearses coming down the street, man, in one week.

I: Oh, my goodness!

R: Honestly, people were dropping like flies at one point.

I: Yeah, that must have been quite scary.

R: It was, yeah. [C'est la vie, eh 52:00]!

I: Yeah, I know you've done very well. Did you cope with the - I suppose you had to shield, did you?

R: Yes, yes, I was shielding. Oh, no, to be fair, in Wales, and I don't know what happened in England, but in Wales they were very efficient. They quickly - I think it was emergency powers, wasn't there? Because they quickly told the major supermarkets who the vulnerable people were, because I'd been... You see, I had been shielding the year before, because I was on chemotherapy, so I was having deliveries anyway. And I already - even before the pandemic came out, I had hand cleanser by the door, because my immune system was down, wasn't it, because I was having chemo.

I: Yeah.

R: So I had a year's preparation for it.

I: [Unclear 53:04], been longer than everyone else's then, hasn't it?

R: It has, yeah. Yeah, I'm still - I still am... I've been outside in a pub and I've met my friends outside, but I'm still a bit nervous. I mean, there's still a hundred and something old people a day dying, isn't there?

I: Yeah.

R: It still is going on, this pandemic. So, no, no, I got one of those very expensive masks that actually filter the air, which I'm keeping for when I go on public transport. The rest of the time, I wear the blue ones, yeah? But my son got me one of those N-something masks that cost about 120 quid. He bought me it for me and sent it to me, and he said, wear that when you're on the bus!

I: Yeah, oh, that's kind of them.

R: Yeah.

I: So, yeah, again, so speaking of your family and friends, so your son as well, were they supportive whilst you were on the programme?

R: Well, I've lived on my own, you see, and I've got one son in [place], and I've got one in [place]. I've got a daughter in [place], and another one in [place], so they're all over everywhere, and I live on my own. Supportive in terms of my son, especially because he's a carer by profession. This is what he does, really, even though his degree is in electronics, that's what he does. Anyway, yes, I got support from my son.

I: And were there any kind of negative influences, people that didn't encourage you or dismissed the effort?

R: Yes. Surprisingly, yeah. I've got one friend who is a bit younger than me, and he's 62 and in total denial, right? He's 18 stone, and he's shorter than me. He keeps joking about it, right? And I keep trying to tell him this is not funny, mate, this isn't a funny... And I think I'm getting through to him, but he was poo-hooing it. You'll have a heart attack, you... You hear about these people dropping dead jogging, the stupid buggers and all this. The same thing I would have said in my early-forties, when I had... Before I started having heart attacks. No, a lot of people are like that. Mind you, I've been reading Lieberman, Exercised. Have you seen that book?

I: No, I don't think so.

R: Yeah, oh, it's really good, I'll show... Now, where is it? Daniel Lieberman.

I: Oh yeah, okay.

R: He's a social anthropologist, and he basically explains why you shouldn't feel guilty about feeling lazy. That exercises, that we're not biologically [unclear 56:37] to exercise. It's something strange that we have to do, because of labour-saving devices and stuff, and don't feel bad about it. Not many people actually enjoy exercise.

I: Oh, well, that makes me feel better.

R: It's like brushing your teeth. It's just - and wiping your bum, it's something you've got to do, isn't it?

I: Yeah.

R: That's his attitude, and basically - he's basically saying try to put the physical activity into your daily life, do something that's enjoyable and that you will repeat, and yeah. Basically, the same message that most people are saying these days. You don't have to be a super athlete, but go up the stairs and not take the lift. Yeah.

I: Did you make any friends on the programme? Were they supportive?

R: Yes. And I think it was more me being supportive with them. They thought they were too old, and weren't going to benefit from it. Right, there's two friends, I'd say I've made out of it, are both about ten years older than me and they're in the mid-seventies. And I noticed it is too easy to be bloody negative and grumpy when you're old, because you've got so many bloody things going on with aches and pains all over the place. It's just too easy to be negative, isn't it? So that's my role, and I enjoy it. I cheer them on, and I'm the one telling them, come on, we can do it.

I: Did you meet with any of them outside of the sessions?

R: Only online, not - well, it's been the pandemic as well, but I have been chatting to them online. Two people in particular, yeah. No, not deep stuff, you know what I mean? But, yeah, I mean, oh, I was chatting with someone else about this. This pandemic has shown to me how important nonsense conversations about the weather are.

I: Yeah, I can imagine. Anyone on the programme who was a negative influence?

R: No.

I: That's good. Okay. Yeah. All right. So overall reflections now, and we're coming to end of the session. In fact, we've gone over, are you happy to stay for another five minutes?

R: Yeah. No, I used to be a sociology student, so I used to do qualitative interviews, so, yeah, I know what's going on.

I: Oh, so you can tell how good I am at interviewing.

R: I never got that far with it, you know what I mean?

I: Okay. So through the programme, have you found that you've developed an enjoyment of exercise?

R: Yes, most definitely. Yes.

I: Yeah. And it sounds as if it's been a benefit to your wellbeing and mental health, is that right?

R: Most definitely, yes. As I explained, in my forties, I just got lazy. I was just scared, and I thought I was going to have another. I had [health event], and I was [procedure] and then I had a [procedure], and then they made me a cyborg. And, to be fair, I was scared of doing any physical activity. It took a long time - it took a while for it to sink in on me that I was

taking totally the wrong strategy, and the change, but I am. I think what got me through the cancer was that I just, I stopped taking them bloody opioids. I mean, I kept telling the doctors, give me a codeine tablet and I'll just stare at a leg of a chair for 4 hours, isn't it? If you're having chemotherapy, especially radiotherapy on your neck, oh, a nasty business, you need nursing, but they can't afford that. And I lived on my own; I was supposed to gargle every hour and a half, and all this sort of stuff. I took a codeine tablet, and I wasn't even going to brush my teeth and I'd be zonked, completely zonked! I kept telling them, but, no, especially the nurses, they kept pushing tramadol.

They tried to get me into the hospice for my second big chemo treatment, because I had such a bad reaction the first time. And I said to her, I said, look, will you let me walk about with a pillow on my belly, drawn in with every outbreath? Because that's how I coped with it the first time. And she said, no, she said, we can't have you in pain and I said, well, so what are you going to do is make me lie in bed, and fill me up with opiates. And she said, yeah, and I said, well, thank you, but no, thank you, I'll deal with this myself. I stopped taking the opiates, I'd get a half ounce of bud on a Monday with half a bottle of vodka, which I couldn't drink because it stunk. I'd put the bud in the vodka, let it seep for about three or four days, and then inject that into my belly and I didn't need to take the opiates. I just took the paracetamol and the weed, and alcohol into my belly, and I'm here to tell the tale.

I: Yeah.

R: Well, I could - they offered me fentanyl, and I [unclear 1:03:45] bing-bing-bing! You don't come back from I'm don't come back from fentanyl. So they give me six months to live, and they've try to put me in that bloody hospice and 18 months later I'm here. I'm laughing, because I like to tell the tale. But I swear it wasn't just the skill of the oncologist and the radiographer, it's because I stopped taking those bloody opiates, they would have killed me.

I: Yeah, you want it your way.

R: You've got to want to live, and when they give you the opiates, a codeine, you don't want to... You just don't care.

I: Yeah, you're not with it.

R: You're not.

I: Yeah. It does - it sounds like you've been through a lot. I'm wondering how is your - before the programme, how was your mental wellbeing, having gone through what you've gone through?

R: Right. I'm on antidepressants; I am taking an antidepressant. Right, I was doing so well and I started that programme, the... I'd started the programme, and I was feeling really good, that I was getting better. So I stopped taking my antidepressant I was taking. And I was all right for a while, then the pandemic came and I started drinking. I didn't click until I detoxed, that I started drinking not long after I'd stopped taking the antidepressant tablet, right? It hadn't clicked, but I got myself into a really bit of a state and I had to phone, a help line because I was doing like three bottles of wine, and some whisky every day. I was going through a litre

bottle of whisky in two or three days, and I was in a bit of a state, so I rang up for help. And, basically, I was lucky, I got a psychiatric nurse rang me up about twice a week, and I detoxed over eight weeks. I stopped the whisky first, then the wine, then the beer. But I'm rambling now, what was the question?

I: No, I was just asking, did you have any concerns for your mental health? And you've answered the question, and it sounds like it's been really tough and you were concerned, hence you called the help line, is that right?

R: The help line. Yeah, yeah. I'm back on a different antidepressant, and I'm happy as a sandboy, which, yeah, I hope it lasts. I get a bit nervous when I'm happy, because it used to prelude a period of manic... I'd get manic and I'd do too much, you know what I mean?

I: Yeah.

R: But nowadays I'm - I feel fine, yeah.

I: And the exercise programme helped in some ways, so much...

R: Tremendous - no, a hell of a lot, yeah, tremendously.

I: Yeah, that's really good.

R: As I say, as soon as I finish my free sessions, and I'll definitely sign up for the gym.

I: Yeah, that's wonderful.

R: And I can see what happens, you see, people in their late-fifties, early-sixties, especially low-paid and manual workers, get an illness, right? They suddenly realise they're actually physically, and financially better off sick. No, seriously, right? Especially people doing nasty, physical jobs, right? I was in the building trade, and then you don't see many people who are over 60 on a building site, you know what I mean? Most plasterers can't work after about 60, because they've got arthritis in their shoulders. You get an illness mid-fifties, especially for a manual worker, you know damn well you can't keep up with the 30-year-olds. A lot of it's on piece work, and your income is going down. Your top earning time is like mid-thirties, early-forties. Your earnings go down, because you haven't got the speed anymore. You suddenly get an illness and you realise you're better off on the sick, so there is no incentive to get better. You ain't going to tell the doctor you're feeling better, in case he stops your benefits.

I: Yeah, I see what you mean.

R: Yeah. It's sad, isn't it?

I: Yeah, it is. So I'm really glad to hear that NERS helped with your mental health.

R: Oh, it's - well, besides the radiotherapy and the... It's been the best bit of therapy I've had, to be honest with you. It's helped me with my arthritis. It's pushed me to sort out my tech.

I've made a couple of friends, and I've picked up the exercise habit, so, yeah, [unclear 1:09:56] all around.

I: That's really good.

R: I haven't given up smoking yet though.

I: Well, you can't do it all.

R: I have to keep that secret from everybody though. Honestly, people think I'm a complete nutter, but, honestly, I've tried so hard to give up smoking. I gave up alcohol. Oh, I've given up taking silly lines of idiots, like, isn't it? And I don't do any of that sort of nonsense. I used to, but not anymore, but I can't give up smoking. I still - oh God, I've got to have at least one fag a day, or I'll bite someone's head off.

I: Yeah, well, maybe one day, but you've tackled a lot so far.

R: I am lucky. My brother, who is four and a half years older than me, we weren't in touch with each other. He got diagnosed with exactly the same cancer six months before me; he now can't speak. He's got one of those things, and he's got a hole in it, a permanent hole in his neck. So I'm really lucky, really lucky.

I: Yeah, [over speaking 1:11:22], isn't it?

R: And I didn't realise what a - like the biggest keywords for depression is (a) money, and (b) retiring, and I've retired, haven't I? The man is off my back, I don't have to prove anything to anybody anymore. Oh, what a civilised concept retirement is!

I: Yeah.

R: And, oh, I'm ecstatic, man! The last three months I've really enjoyed; it's brilliant!

I: Don't tell me that, at the start of my career. You're telling me the best thing is retirement.

R: To retirement. Hey, you make sure you aren't going to - if you get on to a government pension, work for the government or the NHS or local government, their pension schemes are brilliant, absolutely brilliant. And they're worth fighting to keep, I tell you, because they're going to be under attack, definitely.

I: Yeah, I know.

R: I just got - oh, I was... I worked for seven years on [place] Council as a joiner; I was a joiner there, yeah? And you had to wait a year, or 18 months to get on to the scheme. So, basically, I think I only had about five years contribution, yeah? That's going to give me a pension of £30 a week, which is not a lot, is it? But I'm getting a lump sum of £9,000, it's more money I've ever had in my life.

I: Oh, so where are we going on holiday, then?

- R: Well, my son, has just bought a - oh, I've been... I've managed to give my son five grand towards... He's just bought an apartment in [*place*], him and his girlfriend, €53,000 for a three-bedroom apartment.
- I: **Oh, wow!**
- R: In the old sector of [*place*], right near the beach. So as soon as all this Covid nonsense has calmed down, I'm out there.
- I: **Yeah, that would be lovely.**
- R: I sent him some money to help him out, and him and his girlfriend, because she's a [*nationality*], and he's British, obviously, couldn't get a mortgage, but they managed to do it on personal loans. Yeah, fair does to them.
- I: **Yeah, very good. Right. So shall we finish these last few questions? And then there's not many left, actually. So the other thing is, do you think that the type of delivery depends on the person, in some way? Who do you think that the virtual delivery of the programme would be better for?**
- R: Frankly, the middle-class people have got the tech. I mean, a couple of years ago I couldn't have got online. I mean, I was buying my data pay as you go. I couldn't afford broadband, yeah? But since I've got cancer, I can afford broadband.
- I: **Yeah, how funny.**
- R: Yes, the middle-class people, but the poor people who would take a prescription for doing exercise, and pay a nominal £2, right? Aren't the people who are going to have broadband access. I think - well, I think and I'm not sure, right? But I know plenty of pensioners living in poverty around here, who shouldn't be? Who could claim pension credit, but for some reason they don't. Someone needs to do it for them. And those people, this ain't going to help those people.
- I: **Yeah. Are there parts of the programme that you think should always remain face-to-face?**
- R: Oh, the face-to-face stuff, yeah, because - yeah, attendance to the gym or to the... Because I discovered if I join the gym, there's all these other things I can do, like yoga. Mind you, I had a look at the yoga class and there's no way I'm going to be the only bloody man in a yoga class, so I knocked that one on the head. I'll have the piss taken out of me something rotten, won't I? So, yeah, I'm struggling to find a yoga class that's got men in it, to be fair. But it's not just that, there are other activities, and if I was just doing the face-to-face stuff, I wouldn't find out about all that, would I? And I would have thought the programme would be encouraging people to attend gyms, and swimming pools.
- I: **Yeah. Well, it's more when there's a social aspect, there's more than just your physical fitness that improves, in some cases, isn't it?**
- R: Yeah. And this is important for old people, it is. And raspberry ripples.

- I: Do you think that if people using NERS were asked to pay for the online programme, elements of the online programme, do you think that would be a good idea, or do you think that perhaps they wouldn't want to pay for online content?**
- R: It depends who you're talking about, isn't it? I'm pretty sure - it seems to me, pensioners are either comfortable or they're in poverty, and there doesn't seem to be a bloody in between. And I think the richer ones, they won't mind, they're used to having spending a thousand pounds on a phone, or what have you. But the ones who have just got the state pension, no, they won't pay for it, they wouldn't have broadband.
- I: Yeah. And so for NERS in the future, if there was like, no limit, you could do whatever you wanted with the programme, what would you do? What would you improve, is the sky was the limit?**
- R: For me?
- I: Mm.**
- R: After initial training, to make sure we're safe, it would be nice if you let us do more on our own, yeah, access to the gym. But I don't know how long it would take for the personal trainers to say, oh, yeah, he's sensible, he's not going to drop dead from over exerting himself. They'd have to convince themselves of that, wouldn't they? Yeah, but once they've done that, to allow us, not just to go to the sessions, but to go to the open sessions to the gym, if you want to do extra.
- I: Yeah, that makes sense.**
- R: But that's money, isn't it? You know what I mean?
- I: Yeah. So we've finished the questions, is there anything you want to add?**
- R: Just so I went - I sought it out... I'm probably unusual, and I wasn't referred, I sought it out, and it's been better than I expected it to be. I'm really, really pleased with it, and I will sign up to join the gym as soon as I finish this programme.
- I: Yeah, great. So I'm just going to turn - I've got one more, well, two more questions, but...**
- R: Okay.
- I: So I'm going to turn the recording off.**

End of Transcription