

Experiences of Slimming World group Consultants supporting members with a learning disability

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Introduction

People with learning disabilities are often less able to access and respond to public health interventions. There is also considerable evidence that people with learning disabilities are more likely to be overweight or obese. Slimming World (SW) aims to provide widely accessible weight management support and has been involved in research investigating ways to further develop support for people with a learning disability. Part of this work included a survey of SW group leaders (Consultants) to investigate their experiences of supporting members who have a learning disability, with the aim of informing the development of SW Easy Read resources.

Methods

SW hosted a questionnaire online for two weeks, exclusively aimed at group Consultants who've had a member with a learning disability. The questionnaire asked about their experiences including: any challenges they have encountered, the role of a carer and the need for Easy-Read resources.

Closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics whilst open-ended responses were analysed by grouping responses into specific themes.

Results

Of the 379 respondents, 97.6% had a member attend with a learning disability and almost half of those (49%) had a member attend with a carer. Carers could be a family member or a paid support worker.

Results continued

- Reported challenges included the inability of some members to read or write, which impacted on their comprehension of the SW plan and completion of food diaries.

“Difficulties in understanding the plan especially where reading is a problem

- Consultants also found difficulty in getting some carers to engage and support their member as they often seemed 'disinterested or inconvenienced'.

“The carers have very little interest in supporting the members-it's too much like hard work and often there are a number of different carers and they do not communicate well. It's such a shame...Often they can spend the whole group on their phones-assuming they even stay in the room-some see it as an hour off

- Consultants often used larger A4 size and audio versions of existing SW resources to support members but indicated a need for more tailored visual and Easy-Read resources.

“...a colleague asked for some visuals to help, so we brainstormed and created some... But we need official ones

- Several Consultants shared positive stories of members who had lost weight successfully, while others mentioned the positive impact the member with a learning disability had on their group.

“I have a member who has Down syndrome she attends every week and has lost 5 stone 8lbs. She is an amazing asset to the group and helps with the raffle. Her weight loss has been an inspiration to the group...Also she is diabetic which is now under control and her doctor is thrilled with the results

Next steps

Some Consultants have encountered challenges whilst trying to support members in group with a learning disability, while others recounted positive experiences.

Moving forward, SW are using the findings from the survey, and other SW research into this area, to develop Easy-Read resources for members with a learning disability.

These include:

- An Easy Read enrolment form
- An Easy Read Guide which includes a simplified explanation of the healthy eating plan with lots of visuals, step-by-step recipes and simplified information to support increases in physical activity
- Information for carers to emphasise their important role in supporting the member both at group and at home

- Guidance for Consultants on supporting members with learning disabilities in group.

These resources are currently being piloted to assess their acceptability before being rolled out nationally.

