

Holt HiiT - Bootcamp: Alice Holt Forest

As part of the Forestry Commission England and Sport England 'Active Forest' programme data was gathered at a regular bootcamp activity in Alice Holt Forest called 'Holt HiiT'. Ten people participated in a focus group all of whom were women. Participants ranged in age, with five in the 35-44 age category and five in the 45-55 age group. Four women were looking after family, four were self-employed and two worked for an employee. The majority of participants lived very close to Alice Holt Forest.



Holt HiiT at Alice Holt Forest

The majority of the women had heard about the bootcamp through word of mouth and particularly through a local running group called 'Run Fit Mum'. Seven of the women in the focus group were involved in 'Run Fit Mum'; including the two women who started it. Holt HiiT is run on a Tuesday at Alice Holt Forest in term time and all year round. Participants include mums who are not working and those who have some flexibility in their jobs to undertake a morning class.

Motivations

Motivations for getting involved included people not always enjoying gyms: *'going to the gym makes my skin crawl'*. The convenience of the bootcamp which starts after the morning school run was viewed as very useful, making it easy for participants to attend. The exercises were thought of as not something people would generally do on their own at home: *'running you can just do from your front door, but I'd never do this sort of exercise – so you do need a bit of a class'*. One woman had had a break from exercising after having children and outlined the class had come at the right moment when she wanted to start doing more activity. Another outlined: *'I started running five years ago, before that I did absolutely nothing.'*

Benefits of Holt HiiT at Alice Holt Forest

Fresh air, vitamin D, mental health and escaping from the pressures of busy lives and children, as well as having some time to themselves were all part of the benefits of carrying out the bootcamp. The women stated that the class went ahead in all weathers; some of them had been out in the snow, heatwave, rain

and gained a real sense of achievement from this; it provided a talking and bonding point. There was much laughter in the focus group and the social element was said to be 'huge'. The women outlined how there was flexibility in paying for the class which they thought made it excellent value. Participants could pay for a block of classes, or per session when they were able to attend.

Benefits of Holt Hiit at Alice Holt forest

'I think the mental health side is huge, but also I am really conscious as women of a certain age we are getting to a point where strength work is really important'

'I think that is the nub mental health, even more than the physical activity'

'I run out my crazy – that is what I tell people'

'I think if you compare this class to the gym, this is more chatty, you saw us being cheeky with one another. So you have a laugh while you're doing it and you all have a moan together [about sore legs etc.] afterwards'

Living close to Alice Holt Forest

The majority of participants lived close to the forest, with a few being only 10 minutes walk from the site. This made the forest easy to access with most visiting the forest often, and one person stating they came at least five days a week. Not all had a discovery pass as some walked or ran in; some came for breakfast with the family. One woman described running at night with 'Run Fit Mum': *'We switch off the lights and the sky is just amazing, its magic and there is literally no one else around and we get owls hooting... we get deer and all sorts'*.

Supportive and encouraging activity

The trainer and group were viewed as being encouraging and supportive of each other, with the trainer understanding about women's health and being able to tailor the activities for anyone with an injury or issue. She also made the class different each time: *'C makes it interesting as she does different things every week, so it's never boring and she always mixes it up'*. Being active in the forest through the bootcamp or running via 'Run Fit Mum' was seen as important as it was non-judgemental, and the women felt less self-conscious: *'I think the reason so many women like running in the forest is there are no vans, no cars, no one can see you, no blokes, there is no car going beep beep'*

Holt Hiit fits well into the active lives of those participating and is convenient for them as well as fun. Having an enjoyable and supportive environment that is non-judgemental was seen as particularly important for women coming back to fitness after having children, as they may be self-conscious about how they look, their pace and level of fitness. The variety of exercises in the class means that all can benefit and work towards improving their fitness and strength.

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Website: <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/active-forest-programme-evaluation/>