

Buggyfit Focus Group: Whinlatter Forest

As part of the Forestry Commission England and Sport England 'Active Forest' programme a small focus group was undertaken at Whinlatter Forest. Five women took part in the Buggyfit class, three participated in a focus group and two responded via email, all had babies of one year or under. One person was new to the class; the others had been attending for a number of months. Four of the women carried out other physical activities, while the other did not.



Buggyfit at Whinlatter Forest

The Buggyfit class at Whinlatter takes place for an hour on a weekly basis. Five women with their babies participated in the class; one woman had her toddler with her as well as her baby. The class is run by a fully qualified instructor who has recently completed an advanced training course in post-natal assessment, core restore and functional exercise programming. A course designed to help women heal their bodies and restore function following child birth. The class involves walking different routes in the forest and stopping off at different locations to complete various exercises. The exercises are focused on improving posture, pelvic floor and core strength, and upper and lower body strength.

Motivations

Motivations for getting involved included getting outside, getting fitter, to meet other women with babies and as one participant put it: *'to get my body back'*. One woman stated that she wanted to get fitter, she outlined *'when I was pregnant I didn't move, I had some difficulties in pregnancy so I just lounged'*. The women outlined that they found out about the class through friends, Netmums and Facebook. Four of the women had spent time at Whinlatter, with one woman visiting in previous years and another holding a current discovery pass, and who was looking for opportunities to come more often to the site.

Benefits of Buggyfit at Whinlatter

The women talked about enjoying being outdoors, with some finding the gym boring. Being out in all weathers was not seen as an issue by the women. The trees in the forest offered an element of protection from any rain and wind. The social nature of the activity was important and the fact that they were all at a

similar life stage. A group of women who had undertaken the classes previously usually arrived early to breast-feed their babies and then stayed to visit the café after the class. The current group sometimes do this. The women talked about the importance of being out in the fresh air and gaining a sense of freedom.

Benefits of Buggyfit at Whinlatter Forest

Female 1: 'I can't spend all day in the house with her [the baby] it would drive me mad'

Female 2: That is the thing you have to get out

Interviewer: 'do the children sleep any better when you been out?'

'Yes a whole lot better'

'I have a Fitbit and being here is 55 minutes of my 150 minutes a week and it shows me how I must have worked extra hard today'

'We are really lucky here it's not like we are outdoors and surrounded by traffic noise, we are in a rural area so it's really peaceful'

The importance of appropriate and targeted activity

Post-natal women can have specific problems with the separation of their abdominal muscles, meaning that the muscles become overstretched and weakened. Women can also have a weakened pelvic floor after pregnancy. The Buggyfit instructor is specifically trained to help support women to restore their function in these areas. As one participant outlined:

'Cause J is trained in post-natal fitness it is much easier going to her - someone who understands a lot of the problems you get during and after pregnancy. It makes it a lot easier than just going to an exercise class and they don't know what to do or exacerbate your problems'

The nature of the target group means that if the women go back to work they stop doing the classes, so the instructor has a high turnover of participants.

The challenge of getting fitter after having a baby

Getting back to exercise after the birth of their baby could be challenging and frustrating. One woman started a Buggyfit class with the instructor in another less hilly location than Whinlatter and could not push her buggy on the walks for 3-4 months (the instructor did it for her), she stated: *'I was really depressed when I first had the baby as I thought I was never going to walk up hill again'*. Another woman outlined that she had never done as little activity as she does now, which was a key reason for her to join the class.

The Buggyfit class at Whinlatter provides targeted, enjoyable and appropriate post-natal physical activity for women. Having a supportive and encouraging environment and someone who knows the women and what they can do and what is appropriate for them was seen as effective and very important.

Funding: Sport England and Forestry Commission England

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