

## Reflections on 'Senior Spin' part of Cycling with Confidence – Tracy Lenihan, April 2023



My idea was to introduce cycling to older adults during winter via leisure centre spin studio.

With the challenge of delivering outdoor cycling to older adults in winter I felt that the take up would be limited and maybe older adults who require cycling with confidence, the risk of falls and slips on bikes during winter months would prove high risk and possibly dangerous.

With this in mind I started to consider alternatives to outdoor cycling.

Having personally experienced Spin classes I was aware that cycling on a stationary bike has lots of health benefits as well as being something fun to do on a bike, and the possibility of re-engaging people with the concept of cycling.

I researched via the internet and found very little information on where Spin had been tried and tested with older adults, however there was lots of information on how stationary bikes have lots of health benefits. The list was very promising as the benefits of cardio, respiratory, weight loss and non-weight-bearing exercise which is good for people with arthritis and joint replacements. This all pointed towards the cohort of people I was looking to target and this information could be used to attract participants.

I decided to approach Active Leeds as I was aware that they offer a health programme to older adults and they also have Spin studios. After an initial meeting they said they had never tried the concept of an adapted Spin class for older adults but were interested to support my idea.

I went away to plan. First a name was needed, being conscious not to use words that offend older adults but a title that would still promote the correct age group I came up with the name: Senior Spin.

I wanted to create a sociable group and encourage people to commit to a course as I felt that this way we would achieve people becoming connected with each other and possible friendship development.

I decided on 6 weeks as I felt that this was long enough but not too long for people to commit to and thought that a 45 minute class that allows for slower bike setups meant that 30 minutes of cycling would be achieved per session.

Next I visited venues to check the location and its accessibility via public transport, the facilities, bikes, accessibility (lifts) and most importantly an area that we could use for socialising after and before the Spin class. I settled on John Smeaton Leisure Centre situated on the East side of Leeds.

When everything was clear in my mind I wanted to know if Senior Spin was something that older adults wanted and importantly if they understood the concept. I decided to do some focus groups and went to three groups where older adults meet to do my research.

I wrote on a large piece of paper the words SENIOR SPIN and asked the group what they thought it was:



1/16 knew in one group: 0/12 in another group: and the group that were existing exercisers at the leisure centre all knew and immediately became excited at the thought of a new challenge other than aqua aerobics or 'keep moving' exercise.

I then showed a picture of a Spin Bike and asked if they thought they needed to be able to ride a bike to do the class:

Thankfully they all said it didn't matter as it was stationary bike – I was glad of the response as I didn't want people to think they needed to be able to ride a bike to participate.

I talk about age and asked if they thought that their age would be a barrier to participating:

Everyone felt that they would be able to cope with the concept if allowed to work at a level that they could manage.

I mentioned committing to 6 weeks, that we would be delivering outside of school holidays (as some grandparents provide childcare duties). The focus groups were happy with the commitment and the class length as they saw that as an activity they would do on that day. It appears that many older adults like to have something to do each day – possibly a purpose for the day.

The feedback was overwhelming and I knew that having talked to 40 people that Senior Spin was something that was definitely something of interest as people were wanting to sign up there and then. I explained that as yet this was still in the planning process but I would return when things were finalised.

#### **Next stage: Marketing and Sign ups**

In the focus groups I mentioned key words that I felt needed to be promoted to draw attention: like Free, Age Range and Health Benefits.

Once the poster and leaflets were designed, I promoted these at John Smeaton Leisure Centre, local Neighbourhood Network Schemes, supermarkets in the surrounding area, Wilko and two community hubs, plus the Crossgates and Seacroft community hub put the poster on their Facebook page.



Within 4 days all 28 places had been filled plus I had a healthy waiting list. This allowed for the arrangement of 2 class running after each other with 14 participants per session.

Some participants called and most emailed asking for further information. I was mindful to respond immediately as I didn't want people to have time for a mind-set change.

Once speaking to participants I talked about the concept of Spin, about the health benefits, about the commitment, why the sessions were free (funding) and about the social aspect.

Each conversation was a minimum of 15 minutes as this time spent is the investment into people's commitment. They got to know me and I got to know them which creates a bond that makes people feel connected to the project.

I took time to explain that as this was the first Senior Spin in Leeds their feedback was important not only for the project but hopefully for the City for further funding if the project was successful.

I wanted them to feel important and that they are playing their part not just for their own health benefits but for the concept of Senior Spin.

I took limited detail from each enquiry: name, age, health conditions, agreement to be contacted, consent to exercise, contact number in case of emergency, reason for wanting to sign up and how had they heard about Senior Spin. All this information was collected on a secure spreadsheet.

To my surprise the most participants contacted me after seeing the poster on social media – who says that older adults can't use the internet!

I advised each participant that I would email the week before as a reminder and I thought this would allow for anyone who was thinking of changing their mind to reply. A copy of the friendly, informative email I sent is at the end of this report, in appendix one.

Once this email was sent there was a number of replies saying “can’t wait” and lots of reference to the excitement of cake mentioned in the email.

No-one replied saying can’t attend – RESULT!

As the first session approached I wanted the staff to stand out and be recognisable as the Leisure Centre staff weren’t managing the session and I wanted the participants to know who to approach when first arriving.

I designed the Senior Spin t-shirt to reflect the yellow jersey worn by the leader in the Tour de France (or Yorkshire!)

I designed the logo and had our Travel Connections and LOPF branding added – It looks amazing.



### Session One

EVERYONE TURNED UP!

The first session I wanted to meet and greet people – I had name badges in the form of stickers and had laminated their names to put on the front of their bikes. This was so that everyone knew each other’s names and we could quickly get to know one another.

At the start of session I welcomed everyone and introduced the team, I made a joke about sending homework via an email to ask for feedback from the first session, the reasons for wanting to take part and what they thought their fitness score would be out of 10 (10 being very fit).



After a group picture the session got going, in the meantime the next group was arriving.



Session one done and everyone was smiling and headed straight for the refreshment. People made drinks and chatted. Two thirds of group one stayed and it was nice to see new acquaintances being formed.

Session two done which went as well as the first but unlike group one group no-body knew each other but after the session nearly everyone stayed for refreshments.



I sat with both groups and group one had members of the exercise focus group so there was around 5 people that knew each other. They were louder and more confident with each other than group two due to their familiarity.

Group 2 were much quieter and respectful of getting to know each other. They all commented on how nice it was to be able to have a coffee and chat and made an effort to talk as a group.

The feedback from the “homework” came in thick and fast. People shared their views and lots of lovely feedback was received.

## **Week 2**

After the first session 4 people emailed to say that Spin wasn't for them. This was mainly due to health reasons and sensibly they listened to their body and decided not to return. I contacted the waiting list people and managed to fill the 4 places for the following week.

As the weeks have progressed participants know the routine of collecting their name badges and immediately start chatting to each other. They always arrive early and the second group sometimes have a cup of tea before and after the session.

One week the snow came and as it wasn't bad enough to cancel. I still thought numbers would be low. We had a few no shows but still the turnout was high.

As the weeks have passed there has been no one leaving the course, I have had people arriving who have seen what we are doing and have asked to join in and the Leisure Centre has had enquiries as word has spread.

Our final week we were visited by our external evaluator and an Active Leeds Development Officer. I had told the group that this was going to be the opportunity to provide feedback which would support an evaluation report that LOPF had commissioned to be submitted to the Department for Transport. I asked if people had time could they stay for the focus group everyone stayed from both groups.

For me that could only mean one thing – success for the individuals and for the Senior Spin project. Everyone wants to keep coming they now look and feel united as a group of people who come together every Thursday at a certain time, they do their exercise and they have a cuppa and talk to each other.

Since Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February - 33 people have taken part in Senior Spin. Collectively myself, the instructor and the participants have gone on this journey together that none of us want it to end. Let's hope that Senior Spin will be here to stay.

## **The Future**

When I started working on Cycling with Confidence my biggest challenge was finding people. By bringing 28 people together I could then maybe transition this group to cycle outdoors. Having asked the group who would want to cycle outdoors there is some anticipation about roads and traffic. When I asked the groups about completing a cycle with confidence course this raised interest and as of today I am in the process of seeing how we can make this happen.

Over the next couple of months I plan to:

- To support the legacy of Senior Spin via Active Leeds
- To work with external partners to assist Senior Spin participants to join cycling with confidence courses.
- Explore possibilities for social cycling

## **Appendix one**

Hi All

### **Senior Spin Class Reminder Starts Thursday 23rd Feb at 1.30**

Just sending you this email as It's nearly time for your first session of Senior Spin. Hope you're all looking forward to it as much as we are, as we spend the next 6 Thursday having a wheely good time!!!

The plan is that when you arrive for your first session enter the leisure centre and you should see one of us with a yellow T - Shirt saying Senior Spin. We will direct you to the second floor where the spin studio is situated (lift is available if needed) and from there we will register you for the session.

Once registered we will require you to complete an Active Leeds - Declaration to say you are fit to exercise - you will only need to complete this once. As we have this to complete please could you arrive a few minutes early to ensure we get you checked in for your class.

Vickie will be your instructor for the sessions and is an experienced health professional who specialises delivering activities for older adults. If you have any health conditions or concerns about the class please feel free to have a chat with Vickie or myself.

**What To Wear** - You will be pleased to know it doesn't have to be lycra or even sportswear, just something comfortable. Footwear is more important as you need to wear trainers or flat canvas style shoes.

**Water** - I will bring some small bottles of water but if you have your own water bottle then feel free to bring that along.

**Refreshments** - As I mentioned when I spoke to you we will be providing refreshments of Tea / Coffee / Soft Drinks and snacks before and after the classes. It's our aim at Leeds Older People's Forum to provide as much feedback as possible to our funders as to how you find the class and what benefits it has brought to you. So it will be really useful for myself and Jennie to get to know you over the duration of the course.

As it's going to be Vickie's (instructor) and Jennie's (my co-worker) Birthday within the week they have twisted my arm to provide cake, and after all it is a celebration of the first Senior Spin so why not join us for a slice of cake after the class - you will have deserved it.

If you no longer require your place on the course, please let me know. The demand for places has been extremely popular and I have a significant waiting list.

I look forward to meeting you on Thursday