



Exercise reaping rewards for some of Brisbane's most vulnerable residents

By Andree Withey

Posted Sun 11 Dec 2016, 2:37pm



PHOTO: Exercise physiologist Tim Douge (left) helps resident Nilima Harajah (right) with her exercises. (ABC News: Andree Withey)

Some of Brisbane's most vulnerable residents are reaping big rewards from working out, thanks to an exercise program at a supported housing development on the city's southside.

MAP: Brisbane 4000

Almost 150 people who have been homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless have access to a gym and free personal training sessions at their residence Common Ground Queensland.

The program is aimed at improving social inclusion, emotional wellbeing and physical health.

Resident Kellie Williams, 25, lives in chronic pain and has been going to the gym since it opened at the facility two years ago.

"It helps my rheumatoid arthritis and improves my mental health," she said.

"I go twice a day unless I have appointments."

Tim Douge is one of two exercise physiologists who volunteer at the gym, running free, one-hour sessions twice a day, five days a week.

He said many residents had multiple chronic diseases and needed to move to stay healthy.

"If someone can come in one day and tell you they've been able to walk to the shops when the previous week they've been in too much pain, that's a huge bonus for us to see that progression," he said.



PHOTO: Common Ground resident Kellie Williams (right) goes to the gym twice a day for her rheumatoid arthritis. (ABC News: Andree Withey)

Melanie Plugge, a masters student in public health at Griffith University, evaluated the program and said it was having a positive impact.

"Everyone comes from a variety of different backgrounds and situations, and they come in and it's kind of like a little

sanctuary for them," she said.

"That's kind of what the aim was from the start."

Participation has been an issue with less than one in five residents taking part in the program.

But Nilima Harajah, 64, who has always been into exercise and yoga, is a fan.

"I feel I am getting stronger when I go to gym. I feel like I'm up and up" she said.

Leona Wallace said going back to the gym, four months after spinal surgery, had paid dividends.

"It has really helped me deal with my pain, both before the surgery and now as I recover," she said.

The project recently won some local sponsorship, but is seeking more.

Topics: homelessness, exercise-and-fitness, brisbane-4000

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