

# *A focus group to explore people with learning disabilities perspectives on fitness & exercise*

## **WHY DID WE DO THIS?**

People with learning disabilities often have physical difficulties and problems engaging with fitness regimes. We wanted to see if using a media-rich tool such as the WiiFit would enable this client group to participate in and benefit from exercise and fitness regimes tailored to their needs.

## **What did we do?**

We (Sussex Partnership Brighton & Hove CLDT) recruited willing participants from the local day service. We ran groups exploring the ideas of 'health' and 'fitness' with people thought to be broadly representative of the learning disabled population.

## **What did we find?**

The results are yet to be analysed but in brief, we discovered that

- People often confused fitness with health such that, to be unfit was to be unwell
- People held views about exercise as something you had to be careful about—if you do too much it will make you unwell

These are important considerations as first, it is clear that people with learning disabilities often do have concomitant health problems such as heart defects (in Down's Syndrome) or epilepsy and so care is advisable but second, that the notion of exercise as something that can cause illness without understanding the circumstances may be a message that has generalised through over-protective concerns of those around them.

It is also clear that, in addressing the matter of fitness and health, we need to disentangle it from the ideas of illness per se.

## **What do we need to now?**

We need to do content analysis on the transcripts of the group work

We need to invest in larger scale research projects to demonstrate that the issues raised in this study generalise to the whole of the LD population.

We need to address unnecessarily over-protective messages

We need to extend the research into practical applications such as the proposed WiiFit programme.