

Access Therapies Website Supporting Self-Referral to Psychological Interventions – Case Study

NHS Fife Psychological Therapies Team

NHS Fife have developed and launched an innovative website to facilitate direct access to psychological interventions. The website not only provides people with information and signposting to self-help materials, but enables users to sign up to a range of local groups to help with their mental health problems without needing to go to a GP for a referral.

Background

In 2018-19 the ihub's Mental Health Improvement Portfolio led an improvement collaborative, focussing on improving access to psychological therapies. As part of this collaborative NHS Fife Psychology Service chose to look at improving access to psychological therapies by increasing the range of options available and improving the process for accessing these options.

Fife's Psychology Service developed and introduced a range of low intensity group therapies for which there is an established evidence base. To support access to the service, the team then developed a website which enables people to self-refer to the groups. This allows people to choose the group that suits them best and reduces waiting times. Throughout this work, the team worked in collaboration with key partners in community services - for example with GPs and local colleges to refine their marketing strategies. The team decided to focus on the following outcomes:

- Reducing the waiting time for patients who attend group therapy
- Increasing the number of patients who attend groups

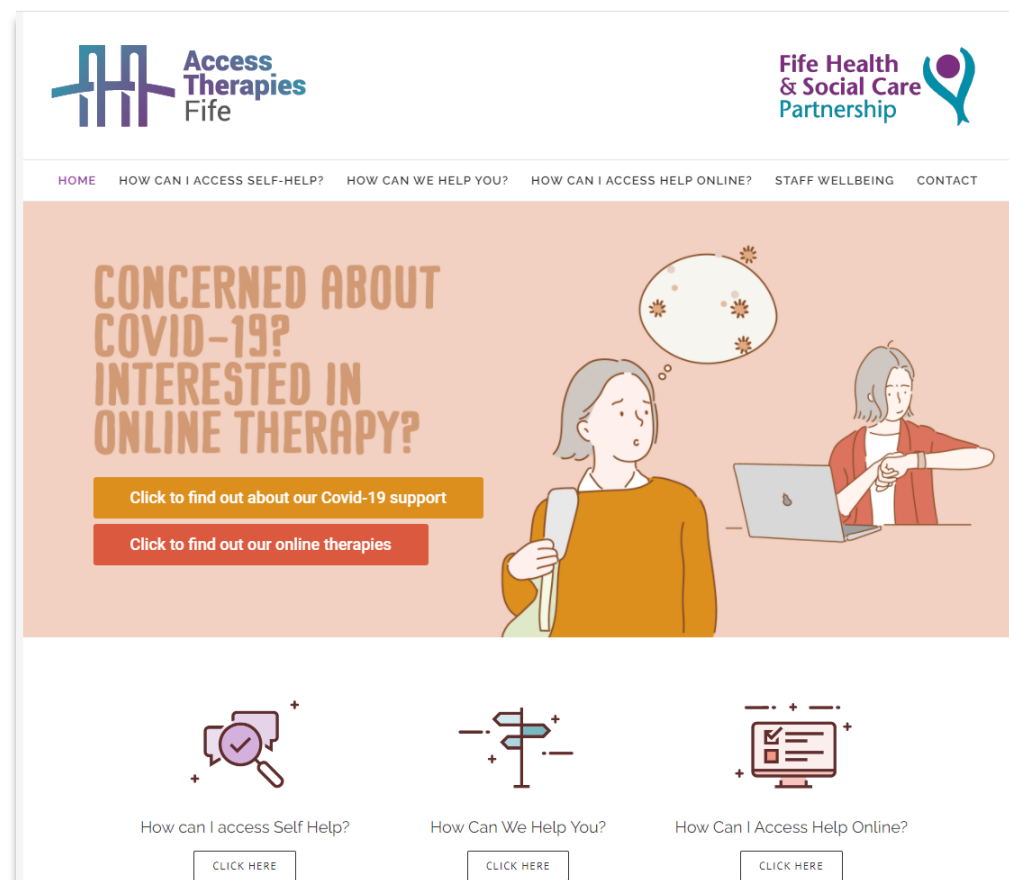
Website development and marketing

The team developed a range of low intensity therapies and group activities which were available to access on their website. Two main groups could be accessed via the website: Step on Stress and Back on Track.

Step on Stress is a three week online course which provides people with the strategies for reducing stress, anxiety and panic, and boosting self-esteem. Back on Track is a 6 week programme which provides people with ways to improve mood and manage symptoms of depression. In addition, people could self refer for assessment to a further transdiagnostic group called Change UP.

The website was named Access Therapies Fife or ATFife. The site provides a system for self-referral to these groups as well as information and signposting to self-help materials. As part of the improvement programme, the Fife team looked at different marketing approaches to raise awareness and promote the use of the website, to ensure people in Fife were aware of the website, and could use this easily.

The team added QR codes to all marketing materials to improve access and improved accessibility to the information on the website by adding British Sign Language videos.



<https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/>

The improvement work included reviewing and streamlining group therapy administrative processes, developing and piloting additional transdiagnostic low intensity group therapies.

The website removes the need to seek referral from GPs or other health professionals, providing information to people about mental health resources and how to access help. People in Fife are now able to access an increased range of psychology group options available through the website at a time and venue suitable to them. Having successfully piloted in one locality, the team in Fife then moved to a roll out phase to other areas in Fife.

Data and measures

The team received improvement support as part of the collaborative and were supported by the ihub to understand and analyse their demand data for the therapies available, and to develop marketing approaches to raise awareness of and increase access to the website.

Data was collected for waiting times for group therapies and group sign-up. An analyst from the Mental Health Access Improvement Support Team (MHAIST) and Improvement Advisors worked with the team to refine the measures for the project as well as presenting data in run charts to help identify improvements.

Chart Legend

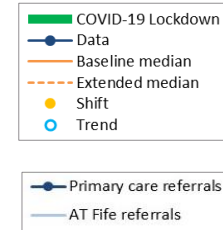
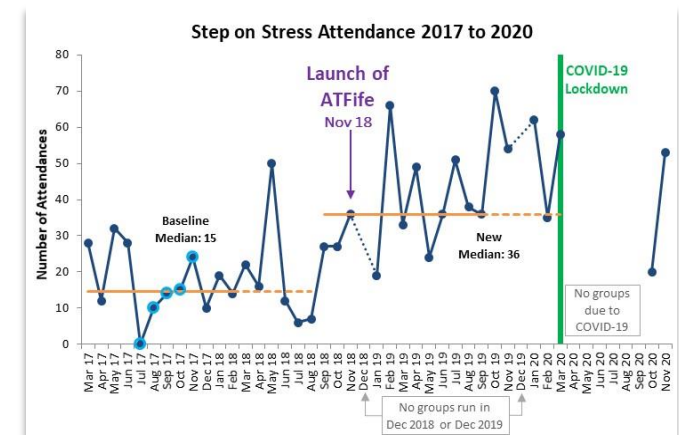


Figure 1 – step on stress attendance



What was the impact of this work

There was a significant increase in the number of people accessing therapy groups. The run chart in Figure 1 shows a sustained upwards shift in attendance at 'Step on Stress', following the launch of the Access Therapies Fife website in November 2018.

There was also a reduction in referrals into the psychology service from primary care, as shown by the run chart of the dark blue data in Figure 2. This showed a sustained shift downwards following the launch of the website, reducing from a median of 145 referrals per month to a new temporary median of 120. Unfortunately the on-going impact of the COVID-19 pandemic means that no conclusions can currently be drawn about the impact of the website on referral rates beyond the initial 16 month period.

By June 2019 there were consistently more self referrals via the ATFife website (pale blue) than referrals from primary care (dark blue) and this trend continued into the early part of 2020, when services were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of people on the waiting list for group therapies (taken as a snapshot of waiting list size at the end of each month – figure 3) shows signals of a downwards shift from June 2019 (yellow markers). Unfortunately the break in the data due to COVID-19 means that we aren't able to see if this shift was sustained, but it looks promising that the introduction of Access Therapies Fife is having a positive impact on the waiting list size.

Figure 2 – referrals from primary care

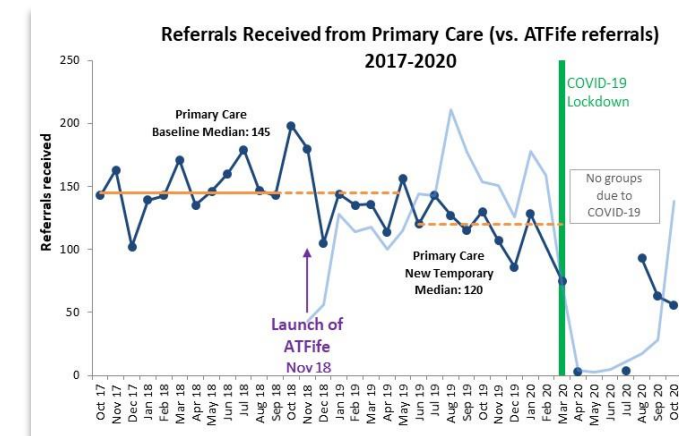
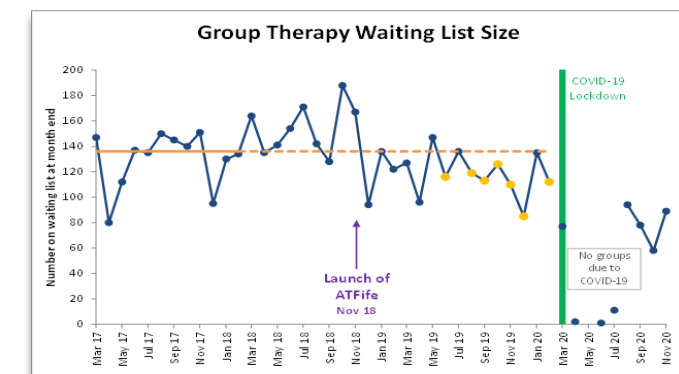


Figure 3 – group therapies waiting times



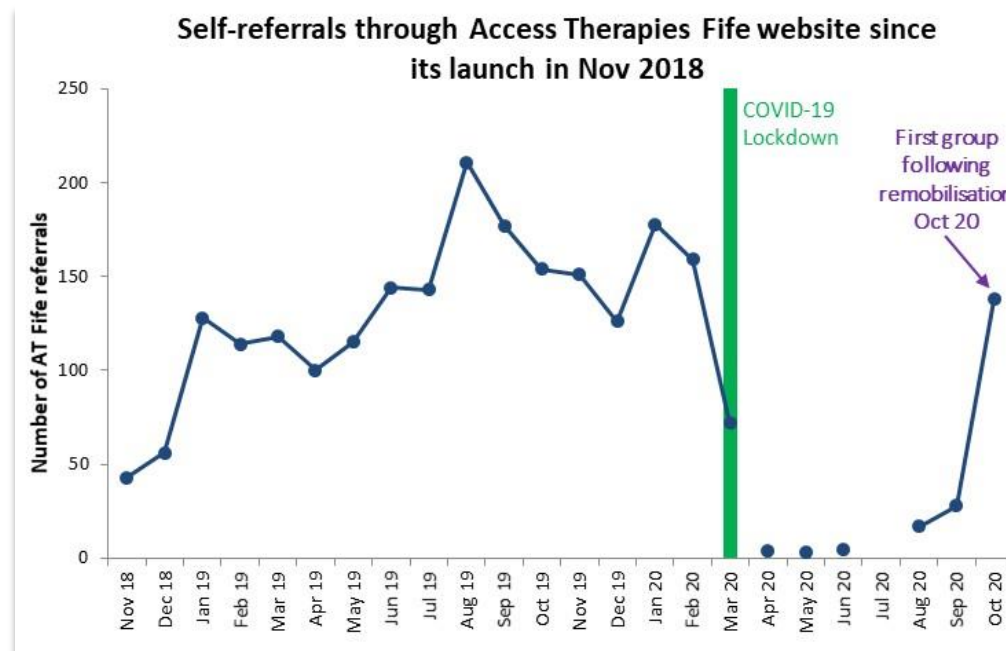
Post Covid-19 response

Self-referrals via the website increased again following remobilisation of services in October 2020 (figure 3).

The Step on Stress course remains as it was, but both Back on Track and Change UP are currently being delivered as brief 1:1 interventions with self referral leading to an assessment for these. It is anticipated that both will be delivered once again as groups in the future.

The data collection tools remain in place to support monitoring and data capture and so guide further service planning and development.

Figure 3



Next steps and reflections

The Fife team plan to continue to use a QI approach to develop this work further and also plan to make use of Google Analytics to analyse how the website is being used. Data collected is helping the team to monitor demand for different groups, so they can plan which groups to run and where in the future. The team will continue to collect data on group activity, the numbers accessing the website and referrals rates to other parts of the service.

For further information please go to the access therapies website - www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk. Further information on the Mental Health Improvement Portfolio resources can be found here: <https://ihub.scot/improvement-programmes/mental-health-portfolio/mhaist/>