

Supporting men's mental health in Tower Hamlets

A Social Prescribing Innovators Project
Final Report: August 2023



Healthy London
Partnership



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Executive Summary

Healthy London Partnership funded St Margaret's House and key partners as one of 12 Social Prescribing Innovators projects from across London to 'find innovative solutions for using Social Prescribing to improve people's health and wellbeing' (HLP).

St Margaret's House worked in partnership with Social Action for Health, Tower Hamlets GP Cares Group and Voicebox to devise a project to support men's health through a series of training, workshops, events, engagement and coproduction.

We know from data provided by our partners Tower Hamlets GP Care Group that less men are benefitting from Social Prescribing in Tower Hamlets: Data shows from last year the percentage of men accessing social prescribing services were Quarter One: 37.3% Quarter Two: 40.7% Quarter Three: 38.1% and Quarter Four: 39.7%.

The project explored the barriers to accessing social prescribing with local men, identifying what a more holistic programme looks like.

Executive Summary

From November 2022 – August 2023, the project team developed and delivered a series of consultation and co-production workshops with men from across Tower Hamlets, working towards a fuller understanding of barriers to engagement with social prescribing, and the development of a project model for programmes of activity which could support men's wellbeing in the future.

Findings from this project support the following recommendations:

- A place-based approach, engaging communities and local organisations in developing a programme of activity which does not replicate but supplements current provisions
- Consistent dates, times and place to access activities in the long-term; building a community and network through a social space where a number of activities can take place weekly
- Programme must be free or very low cost to access, with key activities having clear outcomes for participating, such as developing knowledge or practical skills
- Further work should be done to encourage wider understanding of what social prescribing is, how it works, and how it can be accessed

Project Outline

Key stages of the project:

- Planning development stage
 - Working together with project partners to develop a consultation approach with men in Tower Hamlets, considering challenges of language barriers, reaching men who don't normally engage, developing a strong workshop structure to ensure participants are empowered to contribute meaningfully
- Consultation stage
 - Delivering workshops to men and men's groups which focus on exploring current feelings of wellbeing, exploring why they might not currently engage in social prescribing, and what wellbeing activities would be of interest in the future
- Co-creation stage
 - Inviting participants to develop project ideas for wellbeing activities as a group, based on the sharing of findings from the consultation stage. These project ideas will become the basis for future wellbeing activities when funding can be identified
- Reporting stage
 - Collating all documentation and findings to produce a single report on the project and its resulting recommendations for future wellbeing activities

Consultation Findings

Consultation was delivered through five workshops:

- Focus group with Coffee Afrik youth group for marginalised young people
- Focus group with Social Action for Health & St Margaret's House men's exercise group
- Focus group with Social Action for Health's Bengali Woodwork participants
- Focus group with GBT+ with Tower Hamlets LGBT+ Community Forum
- Focus group with Poplar HARCA's Men's Cabin group

Additional consultation through:

- Evening online workshop for men living or working in Tower Hamlets
- Online survey for men living or working in Tower Hamlets
- Consultation with 4 male social prescribers at Tower Hamlets GP Cares

Focus Group Findings

Questions explored during consultation:

- What do you like to do?
- What do you do to look after yourself/look after your wellbeing?
- What would you like to see from social prescribing?
- What stops you engaging in social prescribing?

Answers were shared and discussed within each group, and later collated into word-clouds which shows the responses of all groups to each question.



Bengali Woodwork consultation group

Survey Results

55 survey online respondents to survey which explored current sense of wellbeing, and how we can better engage men in Tower Hamlets in social prescribing.

- 52% felt loneliness has a negative impact on their health and wellbeing
- 79% would choose to do physical activities if offered by social prescribing
- 70% cited work as the reason they might not be able to do things they enjoy
- 68% did not know how to access social prescribing
- 56% would spend time outdoors to help themselves feel less lonely

Male Social Prescriber responses

There are over twenty Social Prescribers based within GP practices across Tower Hamlets – four of whom are men. We invited them to contribute their perspectives to male engagement with social prescribing during our Social Prescribing Day:

- *There are more females accessing services in general for most services in Tower Hamlets, this also reflects primary care and general practice.*
- Shamimuz Zaman
- *Men are too scared to come forward in sharing/ disclosing their issues/ problems and keep things inwards, hence the low level of participation and accessing services in the community*
- Muhammad Miah
- *My perception is that men do not access social prescribing services as activities may not be men-only and these services are often oversubscribed*
- Abdullah Monsur

Co-creation Sessions

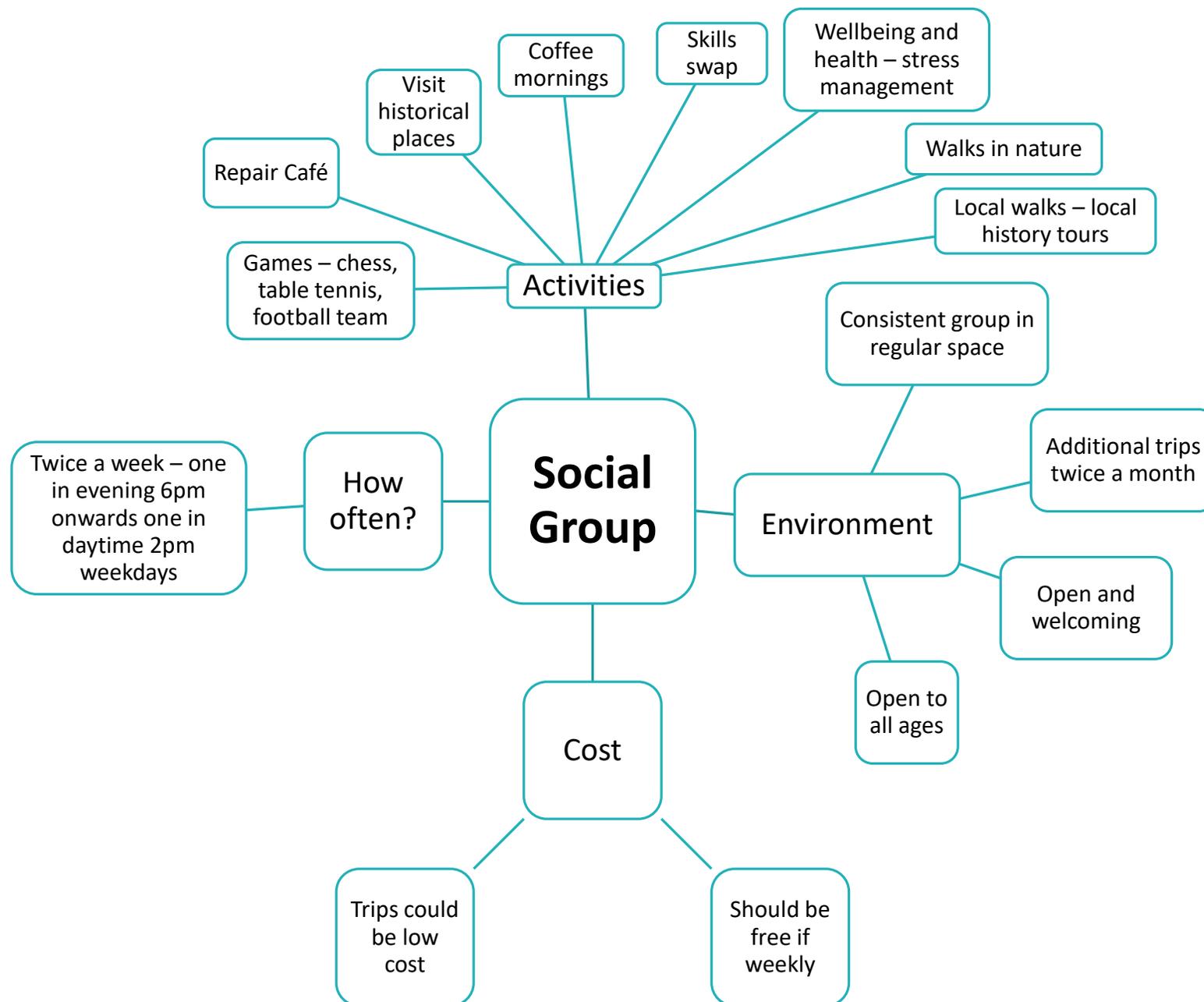
25 men from Tower Hamlets attended three co-creation sessions in the Tramshed and worked together to develop projected ideas.

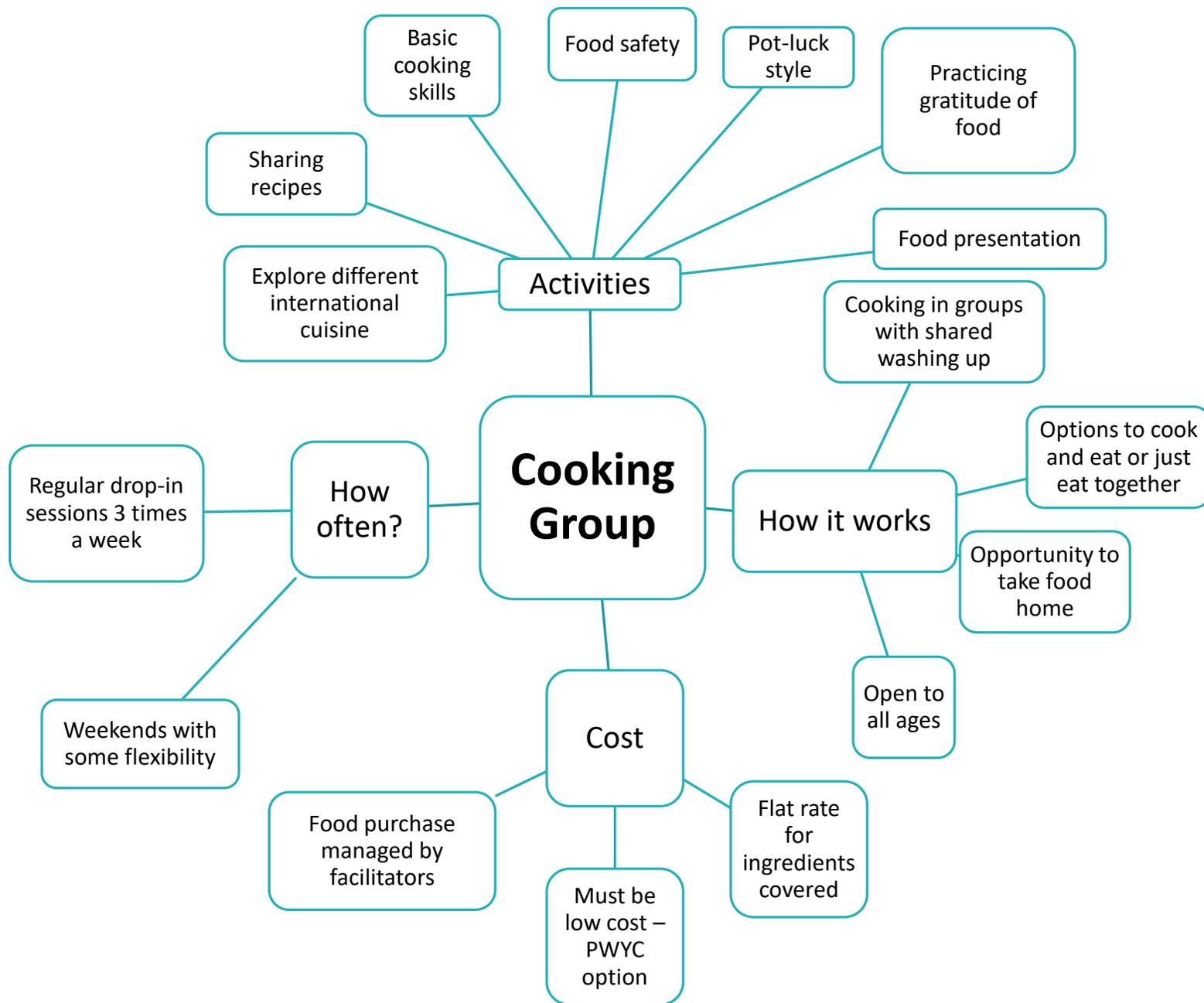
- Discussed key activity themes that emerged from the consultation stage:
 - Healthy lifestyles
 - Support and advice
 - Creative activities
 - Education and learning
- Identified activities that were of interest to the groups, and discussed what these activities might look like as a project idea – considering:
 - When activities should be available
 - Where they should take place
 - Scope and range of activity
 - Price points
 - Who would attend
 - Any perceived challenges



Social Group Project

- Varied activities as part of a consistent weekly group, including sharing skills and knowledge
- Two meetings a week, one evening and one afternoon session
- Space for tea, coffee making and games in an open and welcoming environment
- Additional trips twice a month to different places in London or other cities
- Weekly sessions should be free with trips as low cost



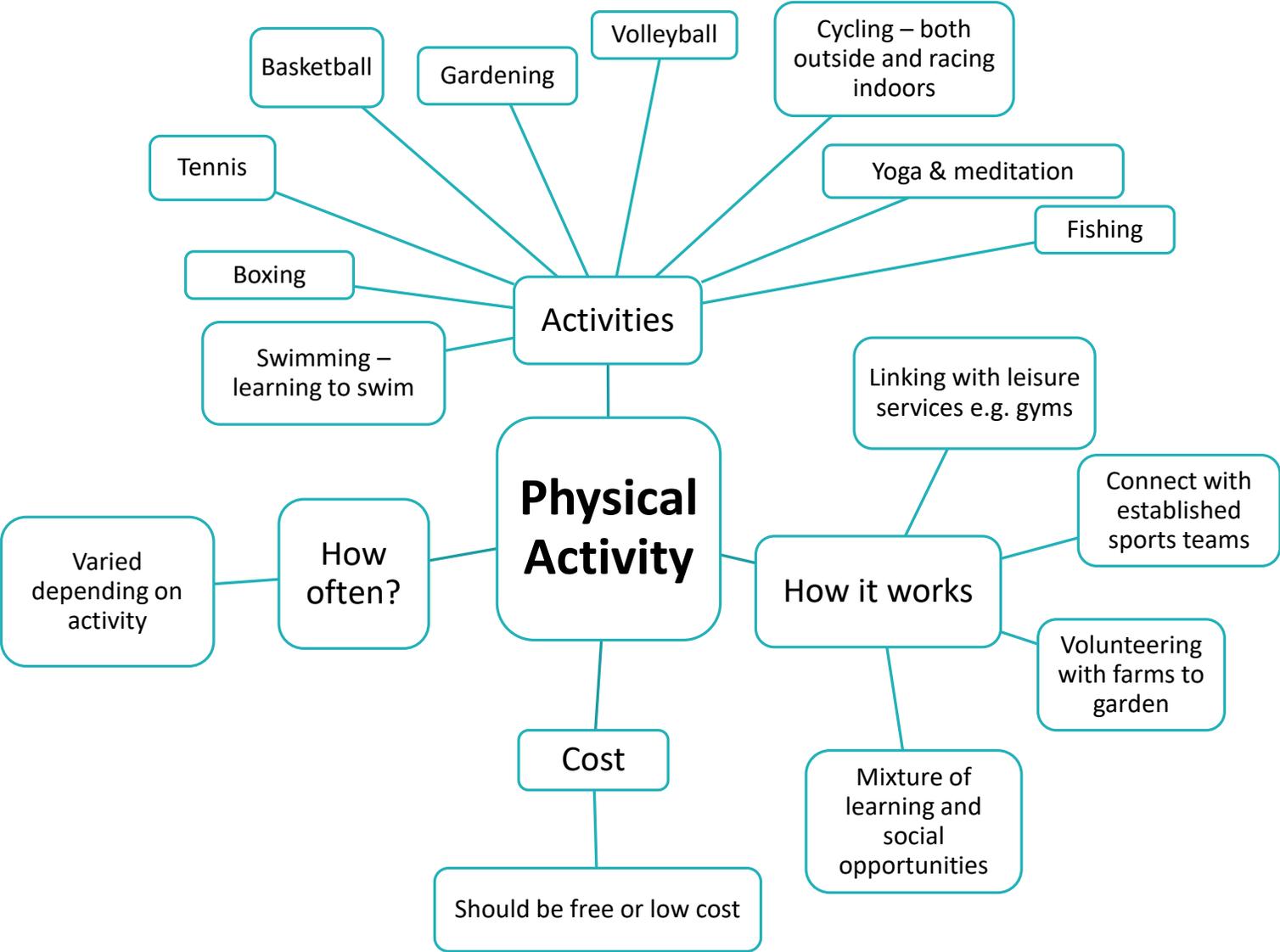


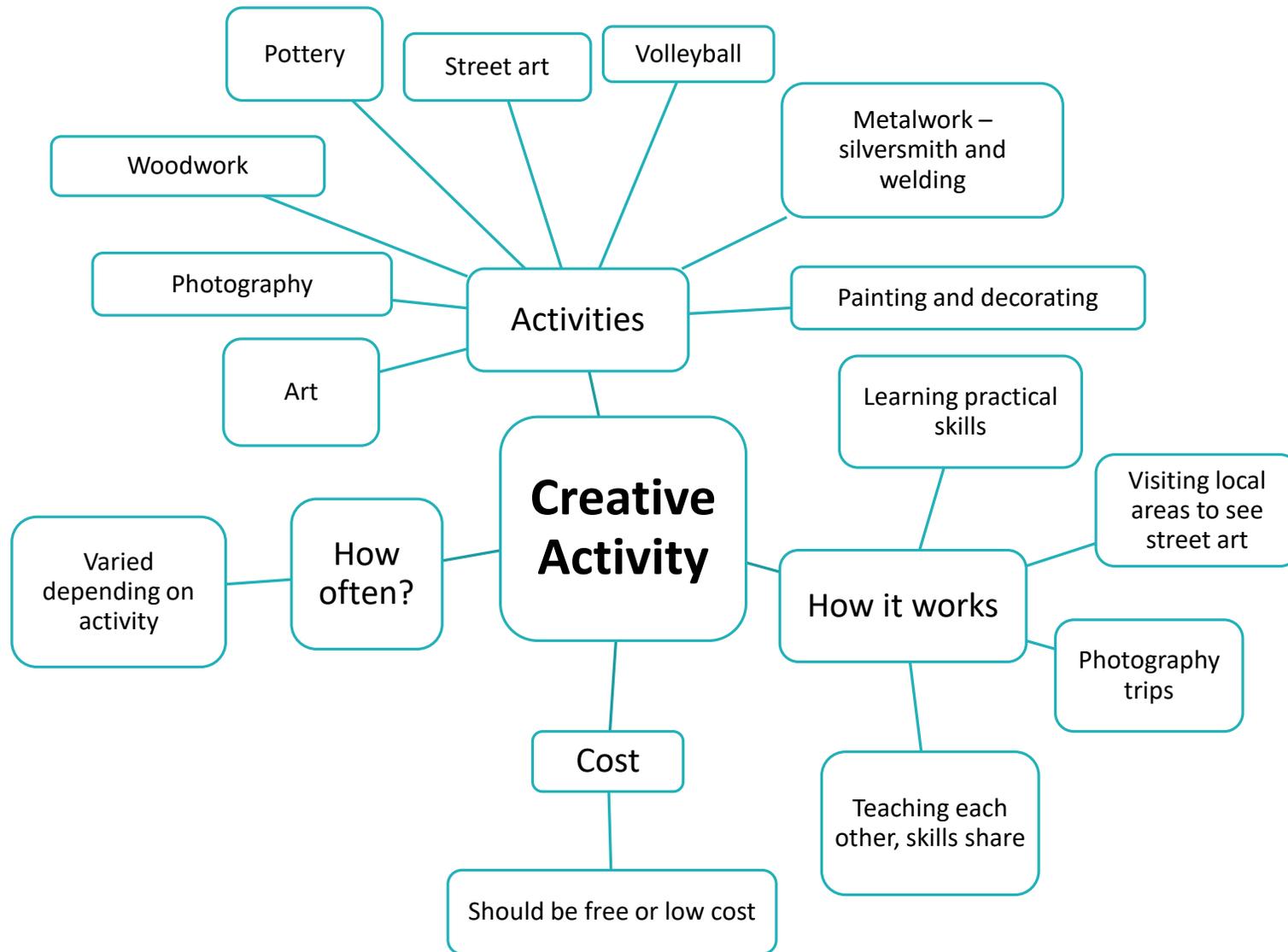
Cooking Project

- Space to cook and eat together, opportunity to share recipes and knowledge
- Including learning opportunities such as food hygiene, food service and preparation
- Opportunity to both cook and eat, with opportunity to take prepared food home to support budgets
- Regular drop-in sessions 3 times a week
- Low-cost, contributing small amount– facilitator buys food for the session

Physical Activity Project

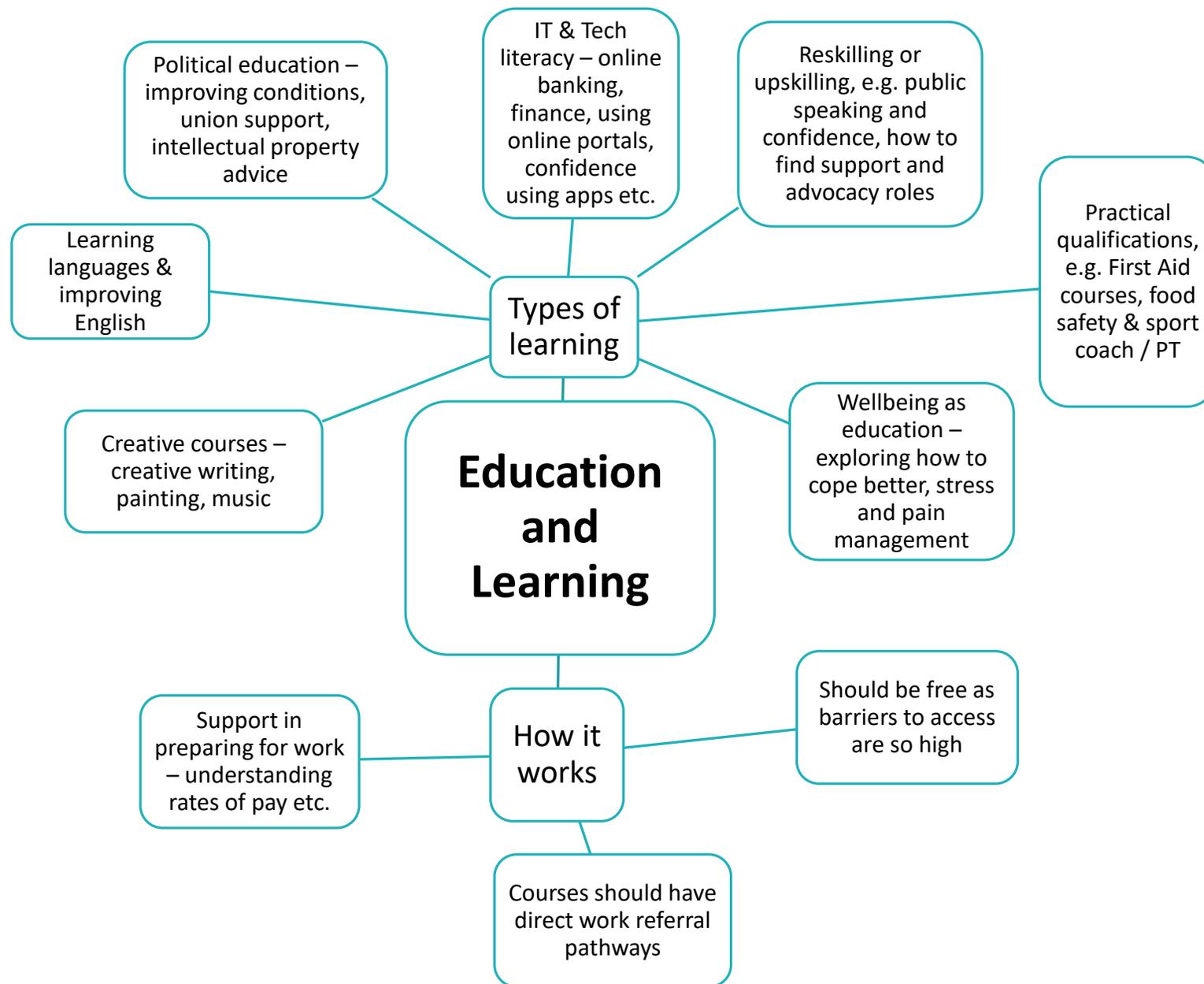
- Discussed current local provision, and what participants already do – including running, cycling, gym and walking
- Ideas were varied, but focused around provision for regular activities, from learning to swim or play tennis to regular social football / basketball groups
- Interest in linking to current services, including established football groups, or gardening linked to city farms





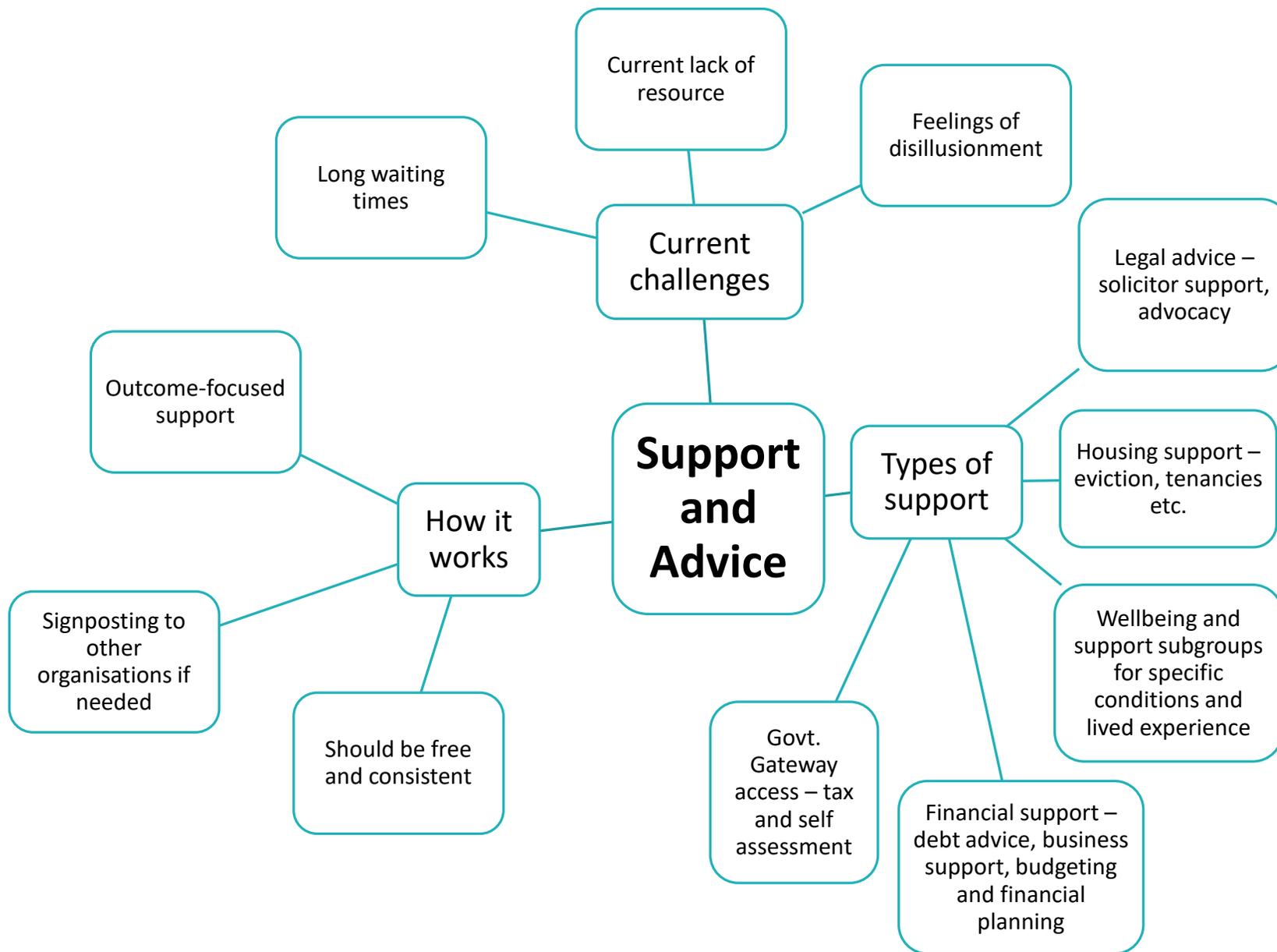
Creative Activity Project

- Group found it challenging to identify creative activities of interest initially, but photography, metalwork, woodworking and street art were of interest
- Activities were largely connected to learning practical skills, such as woodworking and metalworking
- Photography and street art were discussed both in terms of learning to do the activity, and visiting local areas and walking together / trips



Education and Learning

- Key point of discussion was free practical skill development or education with clear work referral pathways to ensure future progression
- Discussed wellbeing as education – workshops on coping better, self-awareness and self-esteem
- Information support, such as tech confidence, literacy, understanding banking and the basics of finance
- Political education – knowing rights, improving conditions, employee support



Support and Advice

- Discussed issues with current support and advice provisions, such as long waiting times and lack of resource leading to feelings of disempowerment
- Developed the idea of wellbeing support groups and sub-groups for specific conditions / lived experience
- Highlighted the importance of consistently free advice and support with emphasis on legal, financial and housing support

Co-creation Sessions – Challenges & Opportunities

- Groups were aware that there is lots of provision already, but one of the key challenges was knowing about opportunities and understanding how to access them
 - **Learning:** Groups were in agreement that it would be useful for any programme to have a signposting facility where participants can be directed to other organisations which can support specific needs, or for organisations to attend sessions to make them aware of what's available
- Work is the strongest reason for not accessing activities – it was difficult to find a time to run activities that could be agreed upon
 - **Learning:** A flexible programme model with at least two sessions per week should be considered – one during the early afternoon, and another post-7pm. Weekdays rather than weekends
- Despite physical activities and creative activities being two of the most popular themes during the consultation sessions, it was challenging for co-creation groups to generate a singular project from these themes as tastes, interest and concerns varied widely.
 - **Learning:** It was clear, however, that having access to a local, free space on a weekly basis to join in with activities was of interest to all groups. This could be a strong basis for developing a future programme
- The concept of social prescribing was not fully understood by some participants. Discussion facilitated this understanding, but it is clear there's still a disconnect with the idea of social prescribing itself.
 - **Learning:** Discussing / raising awareness of social prescribing and how to access it could be part of any future programmes. Groups were in agreement that they were interested in organisations attending sessions to share their offers / opportunities

Project Recommendations

- A place-based approach, engaging communities and local organisations in developing a programme of activity which does not replicate but supplements current provisions
- Consistent dates, times and place to access activities in the long-term; building a community and network through a social space where a number of activities can take place weekly
- Programme must be free or very low cost to access, with key activities having clear outcomes for participating, such as developing knowledge or practical skills
- Further work should be done to encourage wider understanding of what social prescribing is, how it works, and how it can be accessed. This can be done within the programme itself, and can encourage a network / alliance-building approach to signposting local provision
- Strongest project model was cooking project, demonstrating:
 - Importance of developing practical skills – food safety, preparation, learning new recipes
 - Social but practical atmosphere focused on making food and eating together
 - Supports budgetary concerns – being able to take food away for later was key to project outline

Information on project partners

Social Action for Health

Social Action for Health is a community-based health charity providing services and support to people most affected by health inequalities. Current projects include self-management programme for those living with chronic health conditions, accessible weight management classes and 1:1 support, tackling loneliness and isolation through peer support, appropriate physical activities, befriending, structured volunteering, and coordinating delivery of welfare advice in GP surgeries.

safh.org.uk

St Margaret's House

St. Margaret's House is an Arts & Wellbeing Community Hub, founded in 1889 to support local people in Bethnal Green, creating healthier and happier communities. Our mission is to promote positive social change by creating opportunities for people to come together and play a more active part in their local area. Our projects anchor us in the community, providing spaces for residents to eat, shop, learn, create, and enjoy a diverse cultural program.

stmargarethouse.org.uk

Information on project partners

Tower Hamlets GP Cares Group

Tower Hamlets GP Cares Group leads the provision of innovative, high-quality, responsive and accessible health care services for the residents and clinical professionals of Tower Hamlets. Their social prescribing programme aims to prevent the development of associated complications when such factors are left unaddressed, by addressing the wider social factors affecting health and wellbeing.

gpcaresgroup.org

Voicebox

Voicebox promote healthy masculinity by providing drama-based workshops, assemblies and projects which engage and inspire young people to be agents of change in our society. Our highly-trained team enable participants to practically explore the role of masculinity and gender stereotypes in difficult topics such as consent, gender-based violence, misogyny, relationships and mental health - with all genders, for all genders.

www.voiceboxcic.com