

Free, culturally responsive and trauma-informed physical activity service for people experiencing social disadvantage in Sydney, Australia: the 'Addi Moves' initiative

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BACKGROUND

People experiencing social disadvantage (eg, financial hardship) are at risk of poor health.¹ Physical activity is an evidence-based strategy to improve physical and mental health,² and free, tailored programs may enhance participation in underserved populations.³

ADDI MOVES

Founded in 2022, Addi Moves is a free, culturally responsive and trauma-informed physical activity service for individuals experiencing or who have experienced trauma or disadvantage, including mental illness, gender-based violence, food insecurity, homelessness or displacement. Accredited exercise physiologists⁴ deliver tailored sessions to meet the unique needs of service users. Addi

Moves operates within the Addison Road Community Organisation ('Addi Road') in Sydney, Australia—a hub for 40 organisations including a food pantry providing free and discounted groceries to ~8500 people weekly. Service users are referred by affiliated organisations. Addi Moves has received programme and research support from Mindgardens Neuroscience Network, New South Wales (NSW) Ministry of Health Refugee Flexible Fund and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Key strategies guiding Addi Moves are described below.

EXPERIENCE-BASED CO-DESIGN PROCESS

An initial co-design process engaged people from a refugee and asylum-seeking background to develop six guiding principles: cultural safety, emotional safety, community connection, accessibility, physical activity literacy and support to address basic needs.^{5,6}

Striving for inclusivity

Free services address a pervasive financial barrier: lack of money to pay for services. Addi Moves provides culturally responsive and trauma-informed care through interpreter services and maintaining a physical space that promotes cultural and emotional safety, unlike many commercial exercise facilities. The space includes a small garden, optional window blinds, a mural painted by people with lived experience of forced displacement (see [figure 1](#)), posters by Books Unbound⁷ and a world map where clients mark their cultural origins.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships strengthen referral pathways and service quality. Ethnic Community Services and Community

and Cultural Connections translated promotional material into 12 languages, while the NSW Refugee Health Service advised on our physical space. Collaboration with the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) and Stepping Out provided staff training on working with trauma survivors, and Addi Moves' practitioners have shared expertise with STARTTS mental health workers. Non-profits such as Thread Together⁸ offer free activewear and Joy of Giving⁹ offers toys for children of Addi Moves clients.

STAFF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMME

Research shows staff physical activity programmes improve workplace culture and approaches to physical healthcare.¹⁰ Addi Moves initially invited Addi Road staff to participate in a 4-week programme; due to positive feedback, it became ongoing. This initiative familiarised staff with the service, enhancing referrals.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Referrers and service users

Ethical approval was granted from UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee (iRECS7852). Between January 2023 and March 2025, Addi Moves had 52 unique referrers with 87 service users (55% identifying as female gender and mean age of 58 years). Almost half (44%) spoke a language other than English at home. A total of 1306 one-on-one and 783 group sessions were provided. Sessions ranged from 30 to 60 min duration, with an average of 96% of participants opting to return ([table 1](#)). Service feedback highlights the service impact:

Nobody has ever asked how they can make a space more safe and comfortable—thank you. Service user #2, female
It's nice having a group exercise class where we can speak in our own language. Service user #4, female

Work integrated learning

Addi Moves offers unique practicum opportunities for exercise physiology and public health students, contributing to workforce development. Addi Moves' practitioners have supervised 11 EP students to complete 1194 placement hours gaining skills in clinical communication, community engagement and person-centred care. Student

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Figure 1 Mural inside Addi Moves painted by people with lived experience of forced displacement.

Table 1 Service user demographics and service use data

Service user demographics						
Participants with baseline data (n)	87					
Age (years), mean (SD)	57.8 (±14.64)					
Gender (female), n (%)	48 (55)					
Language other than English spoken at home, n (%)	38 (44)					
Total different languages spoken (n)	10					
Service use data						
	Number of new clients	Number of one-on-one Sessions	Number of group sessions	Total number of attendees at group sessions	Number of clients who did not attend appointments	Rebook rate (%)
April 2024	3	30	31	62	12	90
May 2024	14	38	37	88	9	92
June 2024	5	43	24*	31	10	95
July 2024	1	26*	24*	51	8	96
August 2024	3	36	28	60	15	100
September 2024	4	47	25	56	8	100
October 2024	1	49	24	49	11	96
November 2024	1	35	22	44	12	97
December 2024	0	16	8	23	7	88
January 2025	6	20	18	51	6	100
February 2025	1	20	18	51	6	100
March 2025	3	25	31	86	2	96

*Usual schedule sessions reduced due to offsite activities and exercise physiology leave.

feedback emphasises the value of these placements:

One hour at Addi Moves is worth three hours at other placements. Student #4, female

I learned to express empathy, which is a key skill in this context, and something I value the most. Student #5, female

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Addi Moves achieved success through its co-designed approach, inclusive practices, partnerships, staff physical activity programmes, embedded research and workforce capacity-building efforts. While services should be tailored to local contexts, such strategies may improve uptake and engagement in other settings.

However, challenges faced include service user transport barriers, demand for services in additional areas and reliance on time-limited funding. Future goals include acquiring resources for transport and staffing mobile services to expand accessibility.

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Competing interests None declared.

Patient consent for publication Not applicable.

Ethics approval This study involves human participants and was approved by UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee (iRECS7852). Participants gave informed consent to participate in the study before taking part.

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