



Tawonga Outdoor Fitness Equipment Class

A case study from Gateway Health's Health Promotion Team

A collaborative partnership between Gateway Health and Alpine Health as part of the Active Alpine Group to promote healthy living.

Aim	To run free exercise classes at the Tawonga Outdoor Fitness Equipment with the aim to increase and promote opportunities to be active and in turn promote health and wellbeing, social connection and a healthy, thriving community.
Rationale	The Alpine Active Living Mapping Project (2018) shows approximately 50 per cent of the Alpine Shire population do not meet the recommended Australian Physical Activity Guidelines. One of the biggest barriers identified by the community was the cost associated to being active. By running free exercise classes at the Outdoor Fitness Equipment in Tawonga, we can show the community how to safely use the equipment which they can then return to at any time to use for no cost
Partnerships	Active Alpine Group with member agencies Alpine Health as lead and Gateway Health as support to coordinate the project.
Outcomes	The community received access to free classes to help improve their physical activity levels in an environment that is friendly, fun and fosters social connection. Participants have been taught the correct way to use the equipment. With the aim that they will come back after classes finishes and use the equipment in their own time.

Objectives

The partnership had a number of objectives:

- To run a series of free exercise classes at Tawonga's Outdoor Fitness Equipment (OFE).
- To teach the community how to safely use the equipment safely to promote ongoing use of the equipment for people to use in their own time.
- To encourage class participants to continue to meet as a group after the classes finish to help motivate each other to still use the equipment and encourage social connection.
- To create a 'train the trainer' video as a resource to support other community members/community groups/organisations who might want to run volunteer peer led class's in the future.

The story

A local exercise physiologist was employed to run free OFE classes at Tawonga. Commitment was asked from the participants when signing up to the classes for consistent attendance to help foster social connection. We hoped participants would then continue to meet after funded classes ceased.

- Group 1 - May 2022 - Four classes ran weekly with up to eight participants each week.
- Group 2 - October 2022 - three classes ran weekly with up to nine participants each week
- Group 3 - November 2022 – three classes ran weekly with up to nine participants each week
- Group 4 - March/April 2023 – six classes ran weekly with up to six participants each week. We encouraged this class to go for a 'coffee' afterwards to increase social connection.

We then encouraged group 4 to continue to meet after classes finished to continue exercising at the OFE. Four of the participants continue to meet at the OFE most weeks (depending on weather) and have their 'coffee catch up' afterwards which has been a great outcome.

Train the Trainer Video

Utilising the expertise of the exercise physiologist, we created a 'train the trainer' video to use as a resource to support other community members, community groups, organisations who might want to run volunteer peer led classes at the OFE.

Participants from Group 4 participated in the video. Final editing of the video is currently taking place and will be ready for release and promotion soon.

What difference did we make in the community?

General feedback from all groups were as follows:

- They got a lot out of the classes
- Their physical activity levels had improved
- They felt like they could come in their own time and safely use the OFE
- They had fun at the group and had increased their social connection levels

Group four in particular became sustainable and is a great outcome as the participants support and encourage each other to meet and be active after funded classes finish.

Having the 'train the trainer' video as a resource to use in the future will also support any informal or formal classes that may end up occurring.

A few comments from participants of the OFE classes:

"Group work is a great way to stay socially connected with your community and motivated to do things you don't normally do in a day."

"It is so much more fun exercising with people rather than on my own."

".....it was great to have one on one tuition in using the equipment tailored to my needs."

"Grateful for the chance to be more connected with others. Love the class and having a cuppa afterwards".

Evaluation and lessons learnt

We evaluated the project by doing a pre-survey with the participants before they started the OFE classes to look at:

- How active they were in the lead up to classes starting
- Had they used the equipment previously
- How confident they were in using the equipment
- How socially connected they were

We did a post survey after the last class to see if there was any increase in physical activity levels, confidence in using the equipment safely, improved social connection and if they would recommend the OFE to others.

We followed up with the groups with a three-month and six-months post survey to see if they had continued to use the equipment and had their physical activity levels continued to improve since the pre-survey. Group 1, 2 and 3 most participants had recommended the equipment to others. Sustained use of the equipment had dropped off but participants identified that this was usually due to poor weather either being too cold/wet or too hot. Most identified wanting to get back to using the equipment and spoke highly of the free classes.

Group 4's three-month post survey (their six-month post survey is yet to be completed) showed that participants from this group continued to meet weekly after classes finished to use the equipment and go out for 'coffee' which is a fantastic outcome for the participants and validating for the work we have undertaken.

The time of year you schedule the group matters. Getting sustainability in the wet and cold months or over the heat of summer is difficult. We encouraged the participants in winter to meet during the middle of the day to maximise the heat of the day and summer early morning to beat the heat.

We experimented with the number of weeks the participants were offered the classes for. We tried to find a balance between wanting to run more groups, to enable greater numbers through the class vs running the group for a longer period of weeks which means less people through the class hoping to aid sustainability and increased social connection.

To encourage the group to become sustainable and meet after official classes finish we recommend classes be at least six weeks.

Building in the 'coffee catch up' to follow the formal exercise class was a key component for the group to become sustainable as participants got to know each other and the social connection aspect helped them to continue to meet and do classes on their own.

Recommendations & next steps

The 'train the trainer' video is almost finished being edited. The next steps are to get the group of participants who are meeting on their own together to show them the video as a resource they can use. There will also be a written document/manual that complements the video that is in development.

The 'train the trainer' video will then be promoted to groups like Neighbourhood Houses, University of the Third Age to see if they are interested in starting up any OFE classes of their own. The OFE at both Tawonga and Mount Beauty sites have the exact equipment so the video can be used to support classes on either site.

We also want to do some general promotion of the OFE to local sporting clubs, personal trainers etc who might want to use the OFE as a session for their participant's. This will help to continue to promote the OFE as a community asset that is there for use.