

The emerging role of occupational therapy for adults with ADHD: The impact of a pilot group intervention (SPARKS) upon health-related quality of life



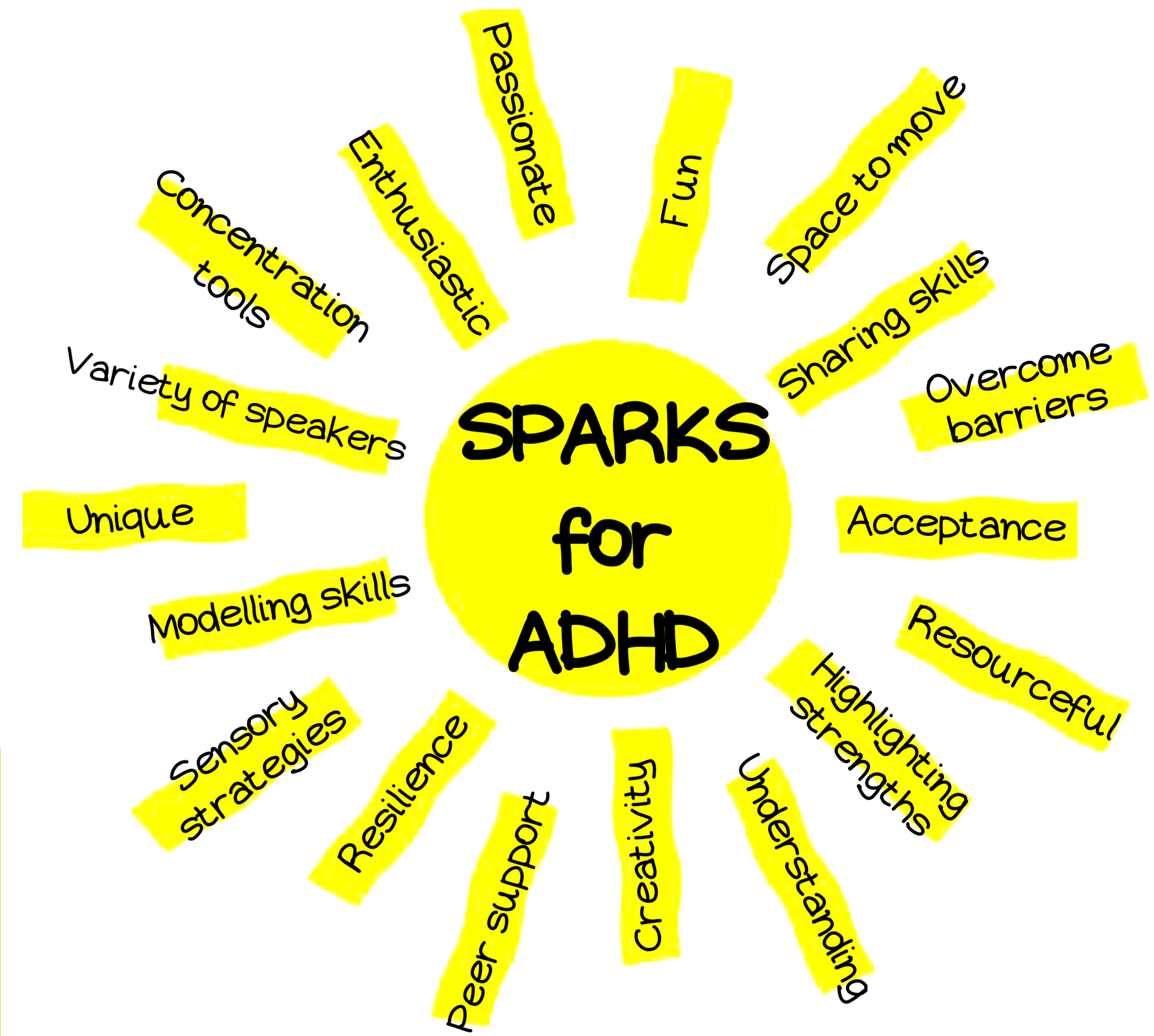
Nyla Moran & Amanda Robertson, South East Primary Care Mental Health Team, NHS Lothian

Background

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a lifelong and often highly impairing condition associated with significant psychosocial and economic costs, particularly when untreated (1,2). Adults with ADHD are reported to have substantial unmet needs in terms of assessment and treatment in the UK and wider Europe (3,4).

Locally, the numbers of adults with ADHD presenting to mental health services in NHS Lothian are increasing, with this client group forming 26% of referrals to the South East Primary Care Mental Health Team (SE PCMHT) Occupational Therapy (OT) service between January 2016 and 2017 – a 6% increase from the previous year.

Whilst medication may reduce the number of core ADHD symptoms experienced, this often does not translate into functional improvement (5). Improving occupational functioning and quality-of-life is at the core of OT; thus OTs are arguably well-placed to meet the demand for more holistic treatment options.



"Sharing, Problem-Solving, Achieving, Resilience, Knowledge, Strengths"

Aim

- To address the gap in service provision and establish a person-centred, OT-led group-based course for adults with ADHD. Group interventions are a recommended first-line non-pharmacological and potentially cost-effective treatment for adult ADHD (6) yet few such groups exist within the NHS, with no OT-specific groups offered within NHS Scotland;
- To evaluate its effectiveness in terms of improving self-reported occupational functioning and health-related quality of life;
- To establish its impact, if any, upon the SE PCMHT OT treatment waiting list

Outcomes/results

15 referrals were received, 11 individuals attended ≥ 1 session of SPARKS (an overall attendance rate of 73.3%), which led to fewer 1-1 OT treatment sessions, or none at all, being required post-course, therefore improving our waiting list times.

A paired samples *t*-test revealed a clinically and statistically significant pre- ($M = 36.0, SD = 13.9$) post- ($M = 46.3, SD = 14.3$) improvement in self-reported quality-of-life ($t(6) = -2.30, p = .03, \eta^2 = .47$ [a large effect size]) for those participants who had available data and attended ≥ 4 sessions of the course; $n = 7$. Below is participant feedback outlining what was helpful.

"The community- sense of shared purpose and situation. The variety in activities; ability to get up and move; broken up sessions. The information! The variety in subjects covered - it wasn't all relevant to all of us all the time but there was always something. Feeling not alone. Feeling like you were doing something about your life"

"Course came at a key time for me, providing a weekly anchor to help structure getting myself on a positive path again"



Methods

Individuals with ADHD, clinicians, third sector organisations and former Scottish ADHD charity, Addressing the Balance, formed a focus group and met to discuss ideas and views regarding the creation of the course.

Using feedback from this and individuals attending 1-1 OT treatment, a nine-week community-based pilot course, "SPARKS", was established by NHS OT staff.

The fundamental ethos of the course is to support individuals to identify and develop their strengths, build problem-solving and goal-setting skills, and to inspire positivity and self-confidence. Integral to the group experience is a peer support element, facilitating sharing of understanding, experiences and strategies.

The course explicitly takes into consideration the issues identified by this client group that can act as a barrier to treatment and aims to minimise these as far as possible. Examples include: participants not being required to stay seated; provision of paperclips, pens and paper to fidget and doodle with; sugar-free hard sweets; refreshments and everyone is asked if there is anything that can be done to make it easier for them to attend. This offers a variety of sensory and motor strategies for participants to try out.

For evaluation purposes, attendees were asked pre/post course to complete The Adult ADHD Quality of Life Questionnaire (AAQoL) (6) an adapted version of the locally-developed OT Measure of Change, and weekly and end-of-course participant feedback forms.

Conclusions

- This evaluation provides preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of
- an OT-led group intervention in improving quality-of-life in adults with ADHD;
- The course addresses a gap in service provision: to the best of our knowledge, this is the first course of its kind in NHS Scotland;
- Participants reported an improved quality of life due to increased knowledge about available resources and the strategies/topics covered;
- SPARKS has since become a city-wide intervention within Edinburgh



Who is the course for?

- Adults aged 18-65 who have been given a diagnosis of ADHD and who are attending their local mental health team
- Who would like to attend a group to learn more about managing their ADHD
- Who are able to commit to attending weekly 2-hour (including time for a coffee break) sessions over nine weeks
- Who would like to meet other individuals with ADHD in a supportive environment

What is SPARKS?

SPARKS is a nine-week course offered by the NHS Lothian Edinburgh Community Occupational Therapy service in partnership with local community-based organisations.

The course aims to enable participants to identify and build upon their strengths and develop strategies that will help improve their lives.

Each session explores a different aspect of life with ADHD. Previous sessions have looked at topics such as:

- What is ADHD?
- Problem-solving
- Building confidence and self-esteem
- Communication skills
- Parenting, working and studying
- Building structure and routine
- Harnessing creativity
- Managing anxiety and stress



SPARKS

Sharing, Problem-solving, Achieving, Resilience, Knowledge, Strengths



A nine-week course for adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)



Contact details: nyla.moran@nhs.net/amanda.robertson@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

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