

## **Executive Summary – Wellness UnLAOISed 2024**

**Wellness UnLAOISed** was a 12-week funded online multimodal exercise, nutrition, and health education programme for adults of economic, social, and/or educational disadvantage living in county Laois and county Offaly delivered between April and July 2024. The programme was delivered through the **Wellness UnLAOISed** app on Android and Apple devices, that could be downloaded from the app stores (Google Play Store and Apple App Store, respectively), which was co-created and custom-built with the target population during a pilot programme between April and July 2022 funded by Sport Ireland. The programme content was designed specifically to provide age- and ability-appropriate multimodal exercise, simple and practical evidence-based health education information, and cooking demonstrations with the aim of increasing knowledge and practical skills to support the adoption and long-term maintenance of positive lifestyle behaviours and promote improvements in physical health, mental health, and quality of life in the target population. The current programme is the first step in rolling out the **Wellness UnLAOISed** programme, and supporting collaboration between Laois Sports Partnership and Offaly Sports Partnership, in addition to EduFIT and Sport Ireland.

A total of 180 participants engaged in the **Wellness UnLAOISed** programme – 172 were female (96%) and 8 were male (4%). A total of 106 (59%) participants were living in county Laois and 74 (41%) participants were living in county Offaly. Participants ranged from 19 to 83 years, with an average age of 48 years. A total of 62 (34%) participants were living with one or more long-term conditions, and 118 (66%) were living without long-term conditions. The long-term conditions included high cholesterol, high blood pressure, low blood pressure, type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), type 1 diabetes, underactive thyroid, joint disorders/issues, back pain, osteoarthritis, asthma, muscle injuries, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia, vestibular disorders, a family history of cardiovascular disease, and others. Prior to participation in this programme, a total of 113 (63%) participants engaged in aerobic exercise, 55 (31%) participants engaged in strength exercise, 35 (19%) participants performed flexibility exercise, and 23 (13%) participants performed balance exercises.

The key findings of this **Wellness UnLAOISed** programme were that this 12-week multimodal exercise and exercise, health, and nutrition education programme resulted in substantial improvements in participant wellbeing, physical self-efficacy, and physical performance, including increased muscle strength and endurance (both upper and lower body) and bilateral single-leg balance. Physical activity participation was sustained at 4 days per week post-programme and participants were provided with an opportunity to engage in all four types of multimodal exercise (aerobic, strength, flexibility, and balance) which are pertinent to physical health, mental health, and quality of life. It is proposed that higher wellbeing and physical self-efficacy scores reported by participants following the **Wellness UnLAOISed** programme may be attributed to increased knowledge of ageing physiology, multimodal exercise prescription, sleep hygiene, stress management, and nutrition, increased self-confidence and self-awareness,

feeling fitter and stronger, experiencing less fatigue, enhanced technological literacy, and the adoption of healthy lifestyle behaviours which will support optimal health and wellbeing, mobility and performance of activities of daily living, reduce the risk of falls and fractures, and mitigate cardiometabolic risk in the long-term in adults of economic, social, and/or educational disadvantage from both county Laois and county Offaly.

Participant feedback and testimonials highlight the success of the **Wellness UnLAOISed** programme, with nearly 70% rating it as excellent and 100% willing to recommend it. Participants valued the programme being free of charge, found the **Wellness UnLAOISed** app easy to use, and appreciated the flexibility of the on-demand content. The live online multimodal exercise classes and ‘Lunch and Learn’ health education workshops were well-received, and 78% utilised the pre-recorded exercise videos. These findings emphasise the broad appeal of the **Wellness UnLAOISed** programme, effective design, and the importance of accessible, co-created, and user-friendly technology in promoting long-term health, wellbeing, and quality of life, particularly for adults of economic, social, and/or educational disadvantage.

## **Acknowledgements**

Laois Sports Partnership, Offaly Sports Partnership, and EduFIT are sincerely grateful to Sport Ireland for supporting and funding the delivering of **Wellness UnLAOISed** for adults from social, economic, and/or educational disadvantage living in Laois and Offaly.



## **Executive Summary – Wellness UnLAOISed 2022**

The *Wellness UnLAOISed* Innovation Project was a partnership between **Laois Sports Partnership** and **True Fitness (now EduFIT)**. The overall aim of the *Wellness unLAOISed* project was to increase exercise participation rates in adults from economic, social and/or educational disadvantage in Laois. Additionally, the programme aimed to increase exercise, nutrition and health literacy and skills in our target group in order to increase the adoption and maintenance of exercise and other health enhancing behaviours in the long-term while being innovative in our approach.

Our *Wellness unLAOISed* Innovation Project took place over a 12-month period from September 2021 to September 2022. The activities conducted as part of this project were:

**September – December 2021 (month 1-4):** Stakeholder engagement. Customer discovery. Participant profiling. Development of our logic model. Planning and preparation of the course content, participant resources and technical innovative solutions to support this project. Research into potential technology partners. Preparation and submission of tender for technology partner.

**December 2021 – March 2022 (month 4-7):** Customer discovery. Focus groups with target groups. Participant profiling. Participant recruitment.

**April 2022 (month 8):** Pre programme in-person testing to assess baseline levels of strength, cardiovascular fitness, balance, flexibility, physical activity levels, perceived wellbeing, and quality of life.

**May-June 2022 (month 9-10):** Implement the 12-week *Wellness unLAOISed* online exercise, nutrition, and health education intervention. This consisted of two live 60-minute online multimodal exercise classes per week (from a choice of 6 different times), one twenty-minute online exercise education workshop per week, one hour nutrition or health education per week, weekly monitoring and support *via* email, phone, app/innovative technology solution and in person focus groups. Participants also received take home resources such as home-based exercise videos and circuits, weekly and monthly challenges and health homework via app, summary of workshops via the app.

**July 2022 (month 11):** Post programme participant testing and creation of individual feedback reports. Post programmes feedback session with participants.

**August 2022 (month 12):** Programme evaluation.

The key findings were that 12-weeks of multimodal exercise sessions, and nutrition and health education workshops that were co-created with our target group improved their aerobic fitness, lower body muscle strength and endurance, upper body muscle strength and endurance, balance, and habitual physical activity levels. These improvements result in numerous benefits to their physical health and mental health. The programme also improved indicators of participants' wellbeing. Additionally, the co-creation of the final person-centred *Wellness unLAOISed* app with our participants worked very well. The end result is an exercise, health and nutrition education programme and app that is relevant, appropriate, practical, of interest

to, person centred and completely specific to adults from economic, social and/or educational disadvantage. The app and programme could easily be scaled up for greater reach in this target group or modified slightly to achieve similar benefits in other adult target groups.

This was an extensive and challenging but very rewarding project. Many key learnings were experienced over the 12-month period in different areas relating to project preparation time, project partners, stakeholder engagement, customer discovery, participant recruitment, procurement and legal considerations, project management, the importance of time of year, the exercise classes, the nutrition workshops, the health education session, and the app (detailed in section 4.2). All of these learnings are important to take forward into future projects of this scale and may be useful to other groups working with similar projects in the future.

The support and training we received from Karl Thomas, Sport Ireland and everyone involved in delivering workshops for the Innovation Projects was invaluable to us. We learned so much about innovation, different ways of thinking, spending a lot of time in the problem space before moving to the solution stage, investing time in stakeholder meetings and customer discovery and useful tools to use in this and future projects. We found this support and training to be very valuable and essential for a project of this nature and scale.

The final *Wellness unLAOISed* programme and app have many potential applications moving forward. We intend to apply for round two Innovation Funding to scale up the *Wellness unLAOISed* programme in two neighbouring counties to explore the reality and feasibility of scaling up the programme for greater reach in this target group and/or modified slightly to achieve similar benefits in other adult target groups.

Laois Sports Partnership and the True Fitness (now **EduFIT**) team would like to express our sincere thanks to Sport Ireland for giving us the opportunity to conduct the *Wellness unLAOISed* Innovation Project. We really appreciate the substantial investment that has been made in us and the programme and app.

## Acknowledgements

Laois Sports Partnership and True Fitness (now EduFIT) are sincerely grateful to Sport Ireland for supporting and funding the delivering of **Wellness UnLAOISed** for adults from social, economic, and/or educational disadvantage living in Laois.

