



## **Subject: Free climbing sessions to improve mental health**

Dear Local Healthcare Professional,

I am writing from the charity, Climb Alongside Mental Health, to inform you about a new initiative we are trialling in Leeds.

As you may or may not know, we currently partner with climbing walls across the UK to offer a free introductory climbing session for individuals experiencing low mental health. We do this in the belief that climbing can be beneficial for overall wellbeing and quality of life.

In order to make this scheme more accessible, we are now able to offer eligible individuals five additional free climbing sessions. We are currently trialing this at a climbing wall local to you: the Climbing Lab, in Kirkstall, Leeds.

I am contacting you today to let you know about this offer, and ask that if you have any clients/ service users who you think may benefit from this offer, please consider referring them. I have attached the referral form that needs completing to take up this offer, along with a flyer providing an overview of the offer.

### **Who can refer?**

Anyone who works as a healthcare professional, therapist, counsellor, link worker, social support worker, or similar professional position caring for someone with mental health needs, can refer a service user/client.

### **Who are these sessions suitable for?**

Any individual, 18 years and over, who is experiencing low mental health, and you feel (in your professional judgement) may benefit from this offer. They do not need a formal mental illness diagnosis. We would advise that this is most suited to individuals experiencing mild to moderate mental illness or low mood. The Climbing Lab is a supportive environment, however please be aware that the sessions are not specifically designed for people experiencing poor mental health, so no additional support is given over and above what the general public receive when attending this climbing centre.

### **Why may climbing help?**

Research studies have shown that taking part in indoor climbing sessions can improve mental health symptoms. A one-off indoor climbing session was found to have acute increases in positive mood and coping emotions, and decreases in negative mood and depressiveness, in inpatients with major depressive disorder<sup>1</sup>. An 8-week bouldering, (low-level climbing without ropes), and psychotherapy course for outpatients with depression led to significant reductions in depressive symptoms, compared to the control group<sup>2</sup>. Reduction in the severity of depression symptoms were maintained even 12 months later<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, bouldering is commonly prescribed by a number of hospitals in Germany.

There are many ways in which climbing can be beneficial for mental health, including; improving problem solving abilities, goal setting and accomplishment (increasing self-efficacy and body

confidence), present-moment awareness (mindfulness), reducing social isolation, and of course through the same mechanisms that physical activity in general work.

### **How do I refer someone?**

If you have patients/clients/service users whom you think may benefit from trying out climbing, please complete the referral form and email it to [info@climbalongsidementalhealth.org](mailto:info@climbalongsidementalhealth.org). The referee also needs to complete one section of it. We will then be in touch with the referee directly to arrange the sessions.

### **Where will the climbing sessions take place?**

These sessions are only available at the Climbing Lab, in Kirkstall, Leeds. For more information on their facilities, please take a look at their website: <https://www.climbinglab.co.uk/>

### **What are the sessions like?**

There are two options to choose from:

- 1) **5 climb punch-card:** this will be pre-paid for them, so they can turn up and climb at any time they wish. This does not include any instruction/tuition, nor does it include shoe and chalk hire (£3, £1.50 respectively). However there are set days and times where free instruction is given routinely at the Climbing Lab, and other days/times where social climbing sessions occur. These are usually: Monday 6-8pm Women's social; Tuesday 6-8pm General free coaching. Please check their website and social media for up-to-date information on these sessions.
- 2) **4-week kickstarter course:** this is aimed at beginners to intermediates and is a group course led by an in-house instructor. This course runs at set dates and times, usually a week-day evening, once a week for four weeks. It covers basic climbing skills. If this option is chosen, please be aware that they may have to wait until the next available course, which could be a couple of months. This course includes shoe and chalk hire. We would book the referee onto the course for them so they can turn up at the set time and join the course.

For more information about Climb Alongside Mental Health, please take a look at our website: [www.climbalongsidementalhealth.org](http://www.climbalongsidementalhealth.org)

Thank you for your time in reading this. If you have any questions, feel free to get in touch.

Kind regards,

**Dr Louise Hall,  
Director of Climb Alongside Mental Health**

### **References**

- <sup>1</sup> Kleinstäuber, M., Reuter, M., Doll, N., & Fallgatter, A. J. (2017). Rock climbing and acute emotion regulation in patients with major depressive disorder in the context of a psychological inpatient treatment: a controlled pilot trial. *Psychology research and behavior management*, 10, 277.
- <sup>2</sup> Stelzer, E. M., Book, S., Graessel, E., Hofner, B., Kornhuber, J., & Luttenberger, K. (2018). Bouldering psychotherapy reduces depressive symptoms even when general physical activity is controlled for: A randomized controlled trial. *Heliyon*, 4(3), e00580.
- <sup>3</sup> Schwarz, L., Dorscht, L., Book, S., Stelzer, E. M., Kornhuber, J., & Luttenberger, K. (2019). Long-term effects of bouldering psychotherapy on depression: benefits can be maintained across a 12-month follow-up. *Heliyon*, 5(12), e02929.