

POWER PLATE / THE DIALS

GIVING INDEPENDENCE TO PEOPLE IN LATER LIFE

“Across all sectors and ages, people’s perceptions of Power Plate must change,” says Brett Jenkins, wellbeing development manager for The Dials – an independent living scheme for the over-55s.

“From schools to gyms and private studios, hospitals and physiotherapy clinics to retirement settings and care homes, Power Plate is one of the best interventions to support a wide range of medical and wellbeing goals. The sooner you can get Power Plate into people’s lives, the better – but the problem is a skills gap. People don’t always know how to unleash its power,” adds Jenkins.

There is no such skills gap at The Dials. Conceived as a new generation of retirement community, wellbeing sits at the heart of everything – the foundation of a connected, inclusive, independent lifestyle for residents – and, says wellbeing advisor Charlotte Bacciochi, Power Plate is “centre stage”.

She confirms: “No other tool could sell the dream of independence to our residents in the same way as Power Plate. With the support of an instructor who genuinely cares, this core piece of equipment moves people from fear to confidence in the space of a week.”

The best you can be

The Dials’ approach to wellbeing centres on Be Well 360 – an inclusive, holistic, personalised programme in which the health and wellbeing needs of each resident are assessed and individually addressed.

Be Well 360 spans five areas of wellbeing: *Be Active* involves group fitness in the communal lounge, Fitbit goal-setting and live and recorded workshops, with one-to-one support also available; *Take Notice* is about being present in the moment and includes things like meditation, relaxation and yoga; *Learn* includes digital skills coaching, plus on-site events and talks; *Give* includes activities such as volunteering and helping others with technology; and *Connect* is all about community and social connection.

At the start of the programme, each resident receives an Independent Living Outcome Star assessment as well as a SMART health assessment. This includes functional tests to establish upper body strength, lower body strength and balance – grip strength, for example, and how long people can stand, including on one leg – as well as medical tests ranging from BMI to cholesterol, blood glucose to blood pressure.

The results contribute to a calculation of each resident's biological age and form the basis of a realistic action plan that's bespoke to each individual. This might include anything from gentle stretching and seated exercises to relaxation and meditation techniques, dietary advice, weight-loss programmes and so much more.

It's also very likely to include Power Plate – especially where residents require one-to-one intervention – with The Dials equipped with a personal Power Plate, Power Plate Move and Power Plate Pulse.

The idea, explains Jenkins, is to help everyone be the best they can be. "Perfection doesn't exist, but we compare people's results to the benchmarks for their age and then try to work with them to bring them up to this level – and ideally beyond."

Simple moves, big results

"Much of the work we do with Power Plate revolves around falls prevention and strength and conditioning in later life," says Bacciochi. "We use simple moves – calf raises and so on – to loosen joints and get muscles moving that have been static for perhaps decades. This can stop people dragging their feet, so helps prevent falls, and the results are fast-tracked when you add vibration."

Power Plate brings other benefits too, she adds: "It improves hand-eye co-ordination, helps balance left and right brain, improves circulation and heart rate, reduces anxiety, builds confidence... All the benefits of exercise and more.

"When people start a session they're often quite subdued, but as the minutes go by they start chatting and end the session feeling far more positive. They've had that endorphin release without even realising they've been exercising."

"We're also seeing residents become less reliant on medication, while their GP visits become less frequent," adds Jenkins. "Six-monthly surveys also show measures such as life satisfaction, happiness and anxiety all improving significantly. Of course, that isn't solely down to Power Plate, but it's a crucial part of it. I believe Power Plate has a key role to play in addressing the nation's healthcare crisis."

Transformational results

Bacciochi is now conducting a number of six-week case studies using Power Plate in one-to-one sessions, to evidence the direct impact of this piece of equipment.

One female resident had a fractured arm, which left her low in confidence and fearful of leaving the flat, and her husband in charge of everything from domestic chores to her personal care.

Bacciochi spent weeks one and two visiting her at home, building her confidence and strength to enable her to use the communal areas. Says Jenkins: "The portability of the personal Power Plate means we can take it into people's homes and work with them there. The setting and how you present exercise is key, and starting in residents' homes makes them feel comfortable and safe."

The programme designed by Bacciochi set out to heal the lady's fracture faster by promoting new cartilage and bone formation, using the Power Plate for static and dynamic stretches, complemented by basic bodyweight moves. Together, they worked on grip strength, hand and arm mobility, and improved range of motion at the shoulder cuff, elbow joint and wrist following the accident.

On further assessment, Power Plate Pulse was used to treat the frozen shoulder that also resulted from the injury.

By week three, the resident felt strong enough to visit Bacciochi in the wellbeing office rather than requiring a home visit, and by week four she had the confidence to join *Move It or Lose It* group strength classes. These brought the added benefit of more social contact, which she enjoyed.

By week six, she was helping her husband at home and had returned to doing chores such as washing-up. She had equal 20kg grip strength in both hands – as opposed to 10kg in week one on her injured left side – and could weight bear, including pushing herself out of a chair. She had also progressed from a 30° to a 110° movement in her shoulder, while wrist flexion – previously at 50 per cent following the accident – had returned to normal.

She now exercises twice a week, feels positive about life and – with a 20 per cent improvement in lower body strength and a 70 per cent improvement in upper body strength since she began her Be Well 360 journey – has reduced her risk of balance issues, fractures and falls.

"She's more confident on her feet with a walking stick, which has boosted her independence," confirms Bacciochi. "She's also able to do all her own personal care. She's back to where she was before the accident, and better. It's great for both her and her husband."

Changing people's lives

In a second case study, Bacciochi is working with another female resident whose decade-old back problem involves two pins in her spine, meaning a regular need for pain relief.

“We do some stretching and rowing motions sitting on the Power Plate,” says Bacciochi. “There’s no quick fix with an injury this historic, but each time I see her, she comes to me standing at a 100° angle and after 30 minutes is standing tall. She tells me she feels like a new person.”

In a third case study, Bacciochi is working with a female resident on her balance and coordination. With the resident initially afraid to leave her flat following the pandemic, the first step was home visits, with Bacciochi designing Power Plate sessions that included lateral work and mobility exercises to strengthen the lady’s ankles and legs.

By week three, the resident was attending the main wellbeing room for Power Plate sessions as well as art classes. She is now able to do standing and side-to-side exercises on the Power Plate and, says Bacciochi, “says she’s getting the best sleep she’s had in years, as her restless leg symptoms have subsided by doing more specific exercise”.

A second chance at life

Bacciochi is now keen to work with a gentleman resident who has Parkinson’s, creating a six-week programme to relieve his symptoms and improve his walking ability.

She adds: “I also want to run sessions with three or four ladies at a time. The fun and the novelty factor of Power Plate mean I’ll be able to get less active people moving, engaging those who would never come to something like HIIT classes or even chair aerobics.

“Power Plate doesn’t feel like exercise to them. We’ll start just sitting with feet on the plates, then do some standing moves, some side-to-side, break for a chat. It’s simple for me as an instructor, but it will be huge for them.”

Simple in practical terms, perhaps, but the impact of Bacciochi’s approach is significant. “One resident told me it was the first time she’d ever been made to feel her health was important in this way,” she says.

She concludes: “I’m really proud to be with a brand that gives people a second chance in later life and makes them feel they matter. Life doesn’t stop just because they’re in a residential home, and Power Plate is a huge part of that.”