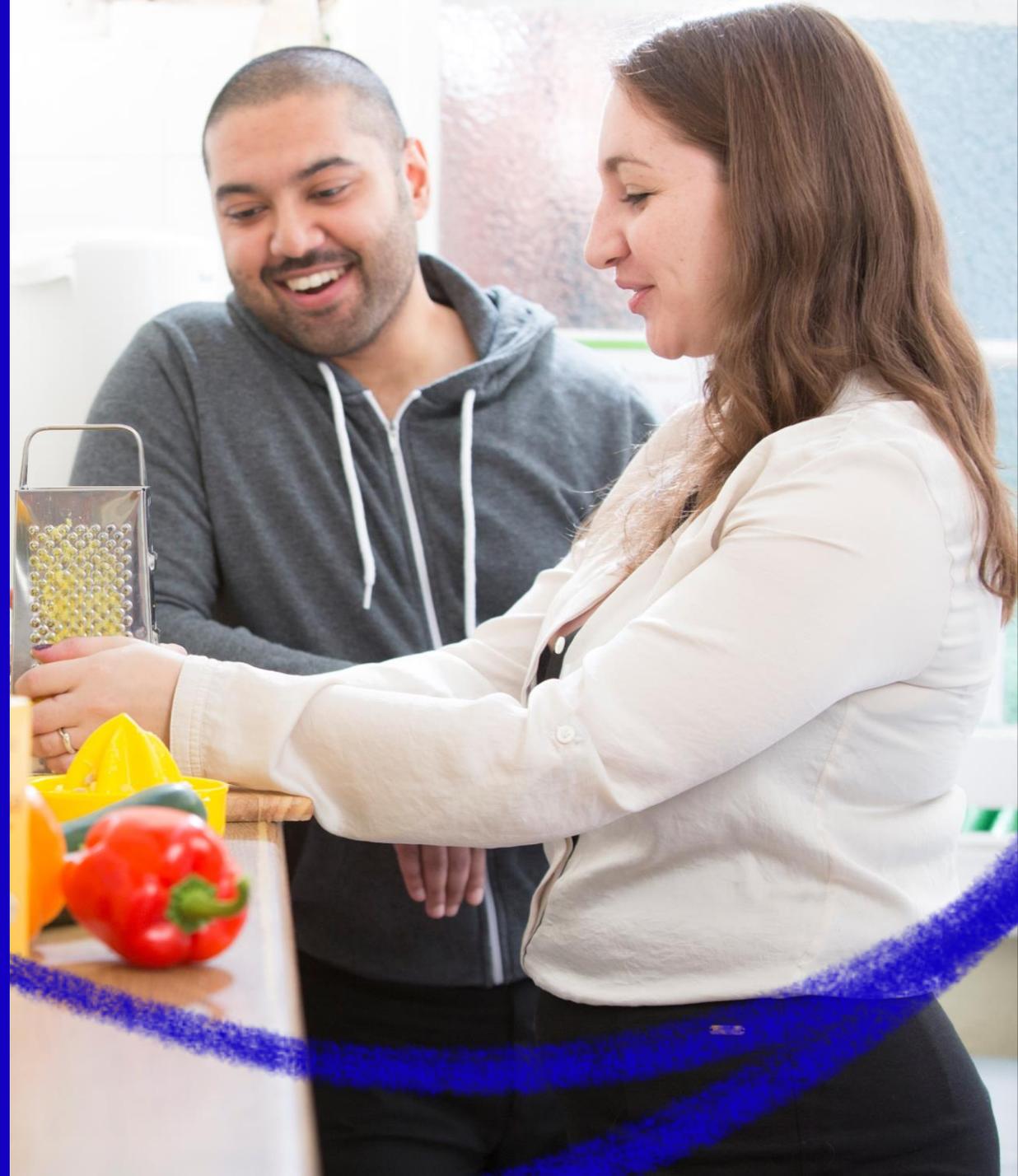


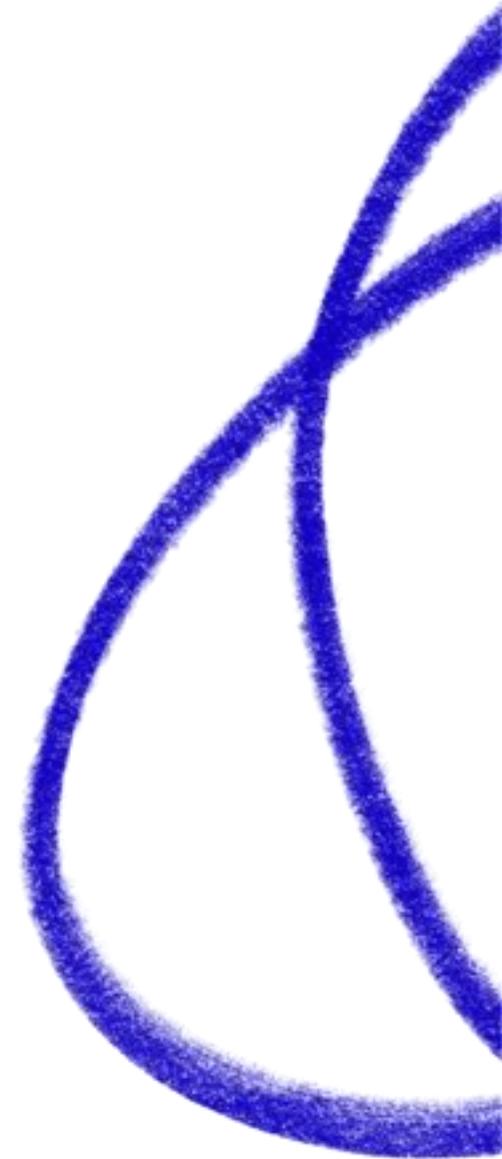
Why Weight for It?

Research findings



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- People's stories
- The research process
- Our findings at a glance
- Next steps



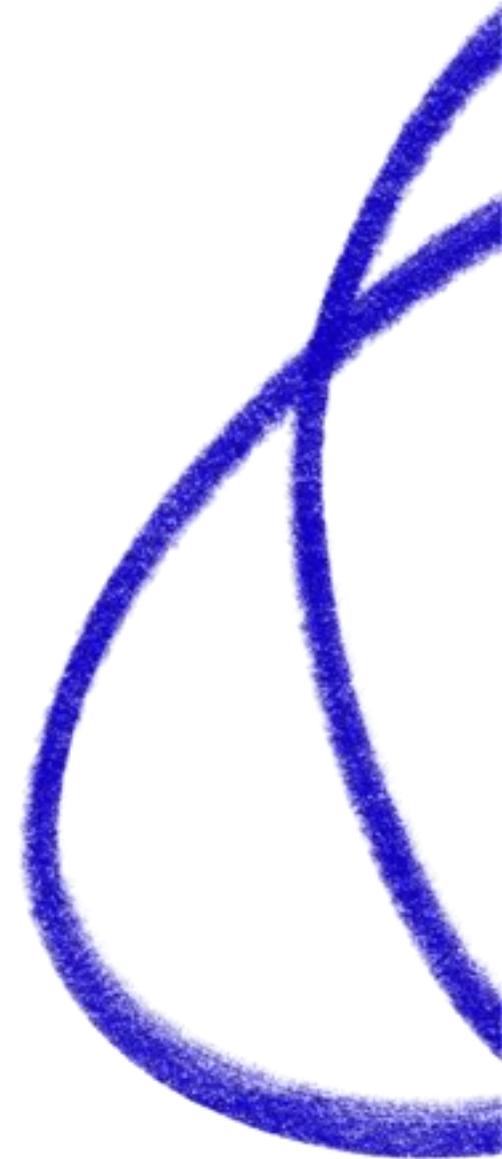


Introduction

We know that weight can have a significant impact on people's lives both physically and mentally. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified that the burden of diseases associated with unhealthy diets is a worldwide concern, particularly health issues caused by co-existing undernutrition, being overweight and obesity. As we know that weight is a prominent issue in the North East of England, Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind decided to design a service to support the people in our community to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

An external consultant, four members of staff from Middlesbrough & Stockton Mind and two Peer Designers formed the service design team working on this project. The aims of the service design team were to:

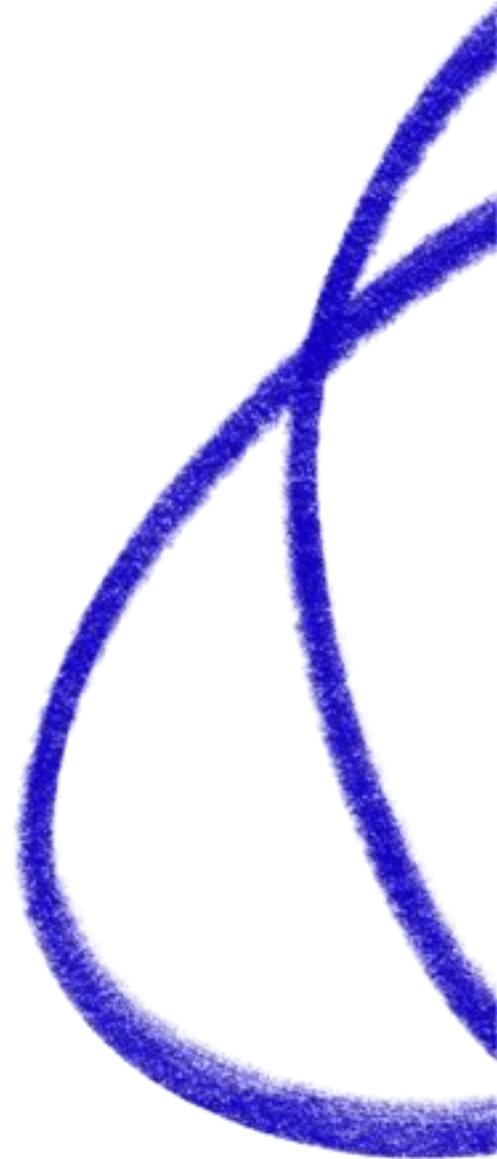
- Identify the unmet needs of the people in our community around weight management
- translate this into a service offer.



We have no preconceived ideas about what the service should look like; Why Weight for It? will be based on the experiences and insight from all the people who shared their stories around weight management.

This information pack describes:

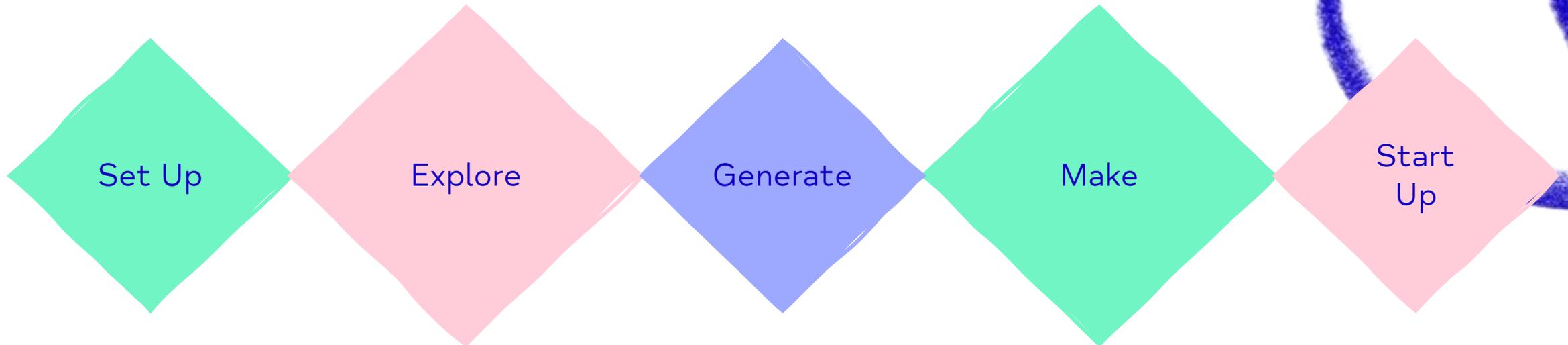
- An overview of the research methods used.
- The information gathered so far.
- Key design principles.
- Next steps and future plans.



Service Design process

National Mind developed a Service Design Methodology to support local Minds to design services, strategies, policies and systems that are effective, efficient and desirable.

This methodology enables us to create a service rooted in the needs of the people in our community who would like support with reaching and maintaining a healthy weight.



Five stages of Service Design

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

People's **mental health problems** can **often impact on their weight** and their **weight** can **impact on their mental health**.

Current services that provide weight management support have set **inclusion criteria** and people who do not meet the criteria cannot find support.

When people do get support around their weight issues, it is **often short-term** and **does not address underlying factors** such as initial triggers for changes in weight. When the support comes to an end, **people often struggle to maintain their progress** leading them to eventually return to old habits which can further impact on their mental health.

 **It seems that once you've lost weight your body doesn't forget. It seems to bounce back – and more. I found that I went back up in weight quite quickly. It's a long process and quick diets don't work.** 

Real quote taken from research.

What do we want to achieve?

We want to create an **accessible and effective service** that **supports people's mental health and physical health**.

We want a service that provides **accurate information** that is relevant and understandable to the individual.

People will be supported to make **long-term sustainable changes** which will have a **ripple effect** in other areas of their lives and overall help to improve their **quality of life**.



I would love to go to a class where everyone was my size and the point of the class was not to go as fast and as hard as you can until you can't breathe, but to recognise that people might be starting out and not have great stamina yet.

Real quote taken from research





People's stories



From the age of 13 my life has been trials and tribulations of every diet, every method you could possibly try.”

“I don’t know why any medical professional thinks that trying to shame someone that is fat is the way to get them to lose weight.”

“Over the last 3-4 years I’ve done a lot of work around my mental health. It has taken a lot of unlearning to realise that there is more to it than ‘eat less, move more’ – it’s a lot more nuanced.



Olivia, aged 32

Anonymised story based on research



Olivia's story

From a young age, Olivia noticed that she was bigger than her friends. Since then, despite many attempts at trying to lose weight, Olivia's weight has steadily increased. Olivia is currently involved with the tier 3 weight management team and is on a waiting list for bariatric surgery.

Olivia has a good knowledge base about nutrition and exercise. Olivia will start most weeks with good intentions around her health and wellbeing. However, if she doesn't manage to fulfil that, she will tell herself that she is a self-fulfilling prophecy and that she is what everyone assumes her to be which is lazy, unmotivated and with no willpower.

Olivia's experience of getting support from healthcare professionals has often been a negative one where her weight overshadows any other health issues she is seeking help with.

Through therapy and research, Olivia has worked on being able to accept herself in her present form, although she would still like to change that.



It starts as a genuine desire to eat healthy but then it just gets deeper and deeper until I'm becoming unhealthy."

"It got to the point where I wouldn't eat unless I went to the gym."

"My whole personality is very black and white. If I do something it has to be perfect and that's where I struggle with healthy eating."



George, aged 29

Anonymised story based on research



George's story

Five years ago, George had an eating disorder. Through getting support, George recognised that his eating habits were triggered by wanting to gain a sense of control over his life when there were so many things that he did not have control over.

George recognised that he was becoming increasingly focused on calorie counting, calorie restriction, and over-exercising. When he spoke to his GP he was told that because his BMI was above the inclusion criteria, he was unable to be referred to the Eating Disorders team. Reaching the lower BMI became a goal for George so he could get help.

Having received support, George was frustrated after being discharged from the Eating Disorders team because there was no long-term support to help him maintain his progress.

George continues to find it challenging when he is around people talking about dieting and calories. When George exercises he knows that in order to stop him from obsessing about burning calories, he needs to do it as part of a group.



I'm just worried because at my age I'm getting to that point if I don't start looking after my body it is going to degenerate fairly quickly and I will put on weight."

"If I decide to weigh myself, I'll shower, shave – I'll make sure there is nothing that would put any extra weight on me. I'll do anything to get that number down. I feel terrified, but when it goes down it feels good and it can become an obsession.



Michael, aged 71

Anonymised story based on research



Michael's story

Physical activity has been a substantial part in Michael's life whether that is as an athlete himself or as a coach. However over recent years, injuries and physical health conditions have reduced Michael's level of involvement which has had a knock on effect on both his weight and mental health.

Since Michael's physical activity levels have reduced, his weight has increased. He tries to focus on managing his diet through using My Fitness Pal which helps him track and adjust his calorie intake in accordance with his weight loss goals.

Michael has found it frustrating acknowledging his physical limitations as a result of his health conditions. Michael would love to be able to increase his physical activity levels in a way that is manageable for him, but would like it to be as part of group where the others have similar restrictions.



I coped through comfort, so if anything came up in life, I would eat to make myself feel better.”

“Once you let yourself go, you can’t imagine ever being healthy again. You see yourself as a monster. No one will ever want to be with you.



Priya, aged 54

Anonymised story based on research



Priya's story

Priya's weight journey goes back to her childhood where she sought comfort from eating triggered by a difficult home environment.

This behaviour continued into adulthood with circumstances such as being a single parent contributing to the need for comfort.

Priya knows the impact her weight is having on her health and her quality of life. She has engaged with support from healthcare professionals including dietitians and therapists, but all the support she has received has not helped her change the way she thinks about food. Therefore it has only been effective in the short-term.

Priya believes that her thought patterns are her main barrier to being able to sustain healthy behaviours. She knows what she needs to do in order to reach a healthy weight but her mental health and low self-esteem stop her from being able to make and sustain those changes.

For Priya, a healthy weight would mean that she is able to walk without pain, that she can look at herself in the mirror and feel mentally and physically better in herself.

The background is a solid, vibrant blue. In the upper right quadrant, there is a white, hand-drawn scribble consisting of several overlapping, curved lines that resemble a stylized 'S' or a series of connected loops. The lines are thick and have a slightly grainy, chalk-like texture.

The research process

Research methods

Over a period of two months our service design team carried out research to help us better understand the stories and experiences of the people in our community relating to weight management.

During that time we carried out:

- 11 in-depth interviews with people with lived experience of weight management,
- 6 interviews with professionals,
- 8 in-depth surveys,
- 84 short surveys and
- 4 pop-up events. Over the four events we engaged with 146 people.

Each interview, survey and event was reflected on individually to identify the insights that should influence our next steps, before identifying themes and insights across the data.

The identified themes and insights, which are presented in this information pack, will be used by our service design team as we move through the subsequent phases of the project.

“If you’ve spoken to yourself the way I have for almost 20 years, where every time you get dressed and look in the mirror your head says ‘you’re disgusting’ or ‘that looks disgusting’ or you relive words that other people have said, it’s very hard to look in the mirror and think otherwise.”

“Emotions take over and results in me eating for comfort. I have never reached a weight I am happy with.”

“My main challenges are just everyday life getting on top of me. Juggling work, food, shopping, studying, hobbies etc”

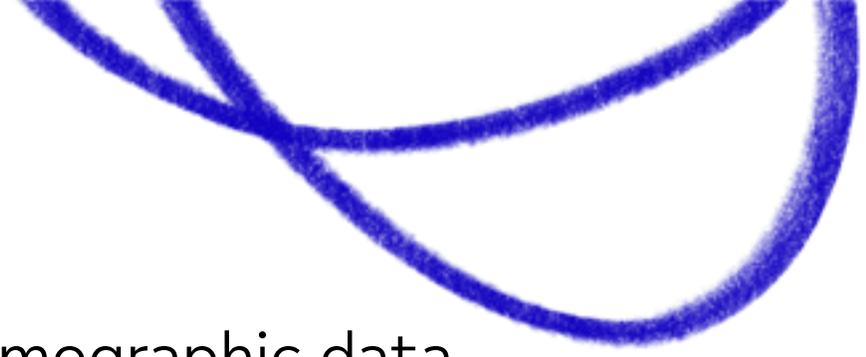
“I see myself as a second-class person standing in a corner, no one wants to talk to me, why would they.”

“I feel embarrassed about how I look which makes me miss out on a lot of social events, even silly things like leaving the house to go for a walk

Overview of who we spoke with

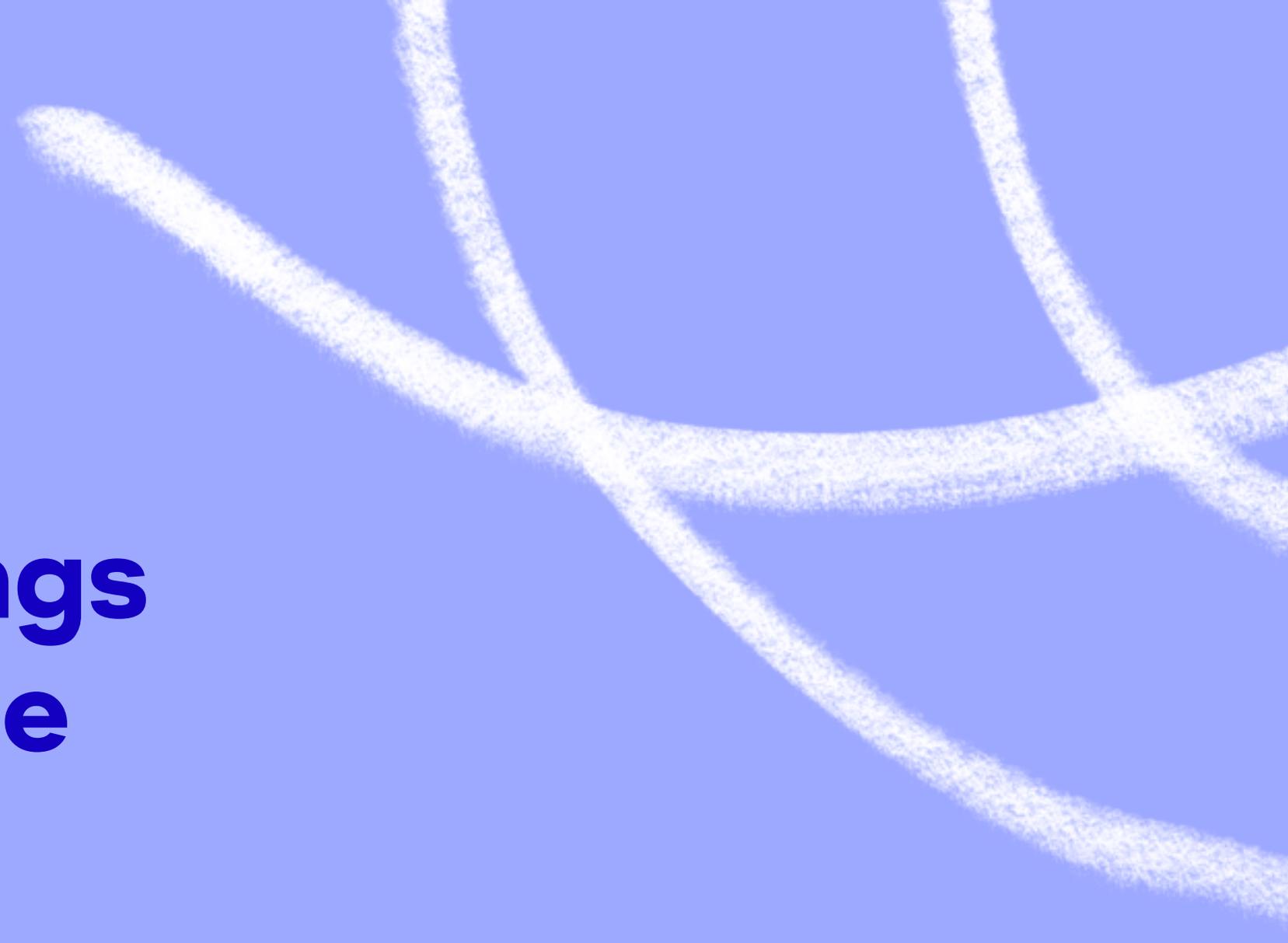
	Lived experience interviews n = 11		In-depth surveys n = 8	Short surveys n = 84	
Gender	Female: 6 Male: 4 Transgender male: 1		Female: 3 Male: 5	Female: 69 Male: 10 Non-binary: 1	Prefer not to say / self-describe: 4
Age range	25 – 34: 3 35 – 49: 1	50 – 64: 5 65+: 2	18 – 24: 1 35 – 49: 3 50 – 64: 4	18 – 24: 9 25 – 34: 19 35 – 49: 34	50 – 64: 34 65+: 3
Ethnicity	Asian / Asian – British: 2 White: 9		White: 8	Asian/ Asian – British: 5 Mixed: 1 White: 75	Other: 1 Prefer not to say / self describe: 2
BMI Classification	Healthy weight: 2 Overweight: 6 Obese: 3		Healthy weight: 1 Overweight: 4 Obese: 3	Underweight: 1 Healthy weight: 25 Overweight: 31 Obese: 27	

Overview of who we spoke with



During our four pop-up events we did not gather demographic data, however overall the events engaged a cross-section of the community.

We also spoke with six professionals including people involved in supporting people with exercise and nutrition, and healthcare professionals. Their thoughts and opinions are not included in this information pack, but have helped to validate our findings.



Our findings at a glance

Behaviours

Insight: People's eating behaviours are often emotionally driven and come from wanting to feel a sense of control. People can often be self-critical and judgemental of their own behaviours; this can result in further unhelpful behaviours.

“ I love healthy food but when I get down or depressed, I comfort eat or look for easy food because I'm tired. ”

Real quote taken from research.



Behaviours

Opportunity	The issues	The needs	What's working
<p>To improve the understanding and awareness of the link between food and emotions.</p> <p>To help people understand that eating healthy does not have to mean restricting food.</p> <p>To show people that increased physical movement can be achieved in a variety of ways.</p>	<p>People use food not just for sustenance but as a source of comfort, as a reward for an achievement or as a coping mechanism during stressful / difficult times.</p> <p>When people don't succeed with restrictive diets, they assume that it is a reflection on their lack of willpower / lack of self-control which can maintain the cycle of unhelpful behaviours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- People need to know their triggers for emotional eating.- People need to identify alternative sources for comfort- People need to know that setbacks are ok and are part of the journey.- People need to know the psychological impact of restrictive eating and how this impacts their behaviours.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- People being able to identify when they are eating to satisfy their emotions rather than their hunger.- People having alternative healthy coping strategies- People being able to find enjoyment from eating and exercise in their own right instead of seeing them as a necessity for weight loss.

Behaviours

How might we improve the understanding and awareness of the link between food, our emotions and our behaviours?

People told us...

Feeling low, stressed or bored are some of the main triggers for unhealthy eating behaviours whether that is through comfort eating or opting for convenience food over cooking.

Unhealthy eating behaviours would often provide a short-term feeling of contentment, however that would gradually change to a sense of guilt which could lead to further unhealthy eating behaviours.

“I am overweight. When I become depressed, I put on weight as I comfort eat – that makes me more depressed, and it becomes a very negative cycle.”

The majority of the people that we spoke with have tried various methods of weight loss that required some element of food restriction. People approached these diets with an ‘all or nothing’ mindset and often the smallest setback would result in binge eating.

Education

Insight: There is conflicting information available about what you should / shouldn't be doing regarding getting to a healthy weight. Much of the information is aimed at short-term changes not at long term sustainable change.

“ I don't think it's about knowing what not to eat. I think there's a lot out there that makes you think that food is bad. ”

Real quote taken from research.



Education

Opportunity	The issues	The needs	What's working
<p>To provide up-to-date evidence based information about the best ways to support a healthy lifestyle.</p> <p>To tackle common myths around weight management.</p> <p>To encourage and support people to do their own research and make the best choices for them and their situation.</p>	<p>Much of the information shared is out-dated or not backed up by quality research or strong evidence.</p> <p>A vast majority of the information is aimed at short-term changes not long-term sustainable change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- People need to understand the many factors that impact on and influence weight.- People need to understand that everyone is different and part of the journey is finding what's right for you.- People need to know where they can find trustworthy information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- People being empowered to understand their bodies more and know what works for them.

Education

How might we provide up-to-date evidence based information that will help people understand factors that impact on our weight and support people to make long-term sustainable change?

People told us...

It is confusing to know what information is the right information when it comes to healthy living. People often place their trust in relevant professionals to tell them what should be done but don't question why they should be doing it and what research is behind it.

“There’s such a wealth of conflicting advice it can be difficult to know if you’re eating well or not.”

“As I get older, I need to watch how many carbohydrates I eat as this adds to my weight. I eat very little bread now and that helps.”

People often have limited awareness of the many impacting factors concerning changes in weight such as stages of life (such as menopause), physical health and medication.

About me

Insight: People's self-esteem and self-image are closely linked to weight and body image. People are sometimes unable to recognise their own successes and feel that lack of motivation is a key barrier to making positive changes for them.

“ I've spent more of my life than I haven't feeling like I don't fit into societies view of what is an acceptable human being. ”

Real quote taken from research.



About me

Opportunity	The issues	The needs	What's working
<p>To support people to appreciate their body and look after themselves regardless of the number on the scales.</p> <p>To help people understand that they are not alone in their experiences.</p>	<p>People are unable to recognise their own successes.</p> <p>People evaluate their self-worth based on the number they see on the scales.</p> <p>People see setbacks as a reflection of their abilities which can result in unhealthy behaviours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- To support people to build their self-esteem and recognise that the number on the scales does not define them.- To challenge the stigma around body weight and what being healthy means and looks like.- To help people understand that change takes time and it won't always be plain sailing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Measuring progress based on wellbeing not scales.- Peer support from people on a similar journey who understand the challenges and can share experiences about how they overcame them.

About me

How might we support people to see that what they weigh does not define them or what they can do?

People told us...

That their weight, how they look and how they have been treated by friends, family members, healthcare professionals and strangers all have a significant impact on how they view themselves.

People will avoid putting themselves in situations where they might be judged because of their weight, despite it being something that they would like to do or would benefit them.

“I have always felt like I am fat and that my body shape does not look good in certain clothes. I’ve cancelled nights out because of this, and it upsets me.”

There is a lot of stigma attached to weight. People perceive a ‘failed’ attempt at reaching or maintaining a healthy weight as further confirmation of the stigma that they are lazy, unmotivated and lack willpower.

Impacting factors

Insight: People's current circumstances impact on their ability to engage in positive behaviours. People see having busy lives, getting older, having physical / mental health conditions, having a lack of / poor support network as barriers to having a healthier lifestyle.

“**Work leaves me with little energy to focus on a healthy lifestyle. Menopause feels like an uphill struggle.**”

Real quote taken from research.



Impacting factors

Opportunity	The issues	The needs	What's working
<p>To support people to identify solutions to overcoming their barriers.</p> <p>To help people understand that healthy living is not one rigid set of rules but can be flexible to their wants and needs.</p>	<p>People often view eating well and exercising as an additional burden that becomes more challenging the busier their lives get.</p> <p>Self-care through eating well and exercising is not always considered a priority and is often sacrificed so other demands can be met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- People need individualised support that recognises their situation and supports them to move forward in a way that works for them.- Opportunities to connect with people in similar circumstances and share experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- People having the knowledge and confidence to explore ways of healthy living that works for their circumstances.

Impacting factors

How might we support people to identify solutions to the barriers that stop them from being able to reach and maintain a healthy weight?

People told us...

Time is one of the biggest barriers. Many people have a lot of demands on their time including family, work, caring responsibilities and other commitments. Trying to find the time to eat well and exercise regularly feels unachievable.

“I love healthy meals; I just lack the time to cook them (and then do the washing up!). I struggle with making time for self-care.”

“I have PCOS and have to follow a particular diet. This can often be very expensive especially when on a low income. Financially it’s expensive to pay for a gym membership and finding the time outside of work to exercise is also limiting.”

Many people believe that healthy living means spending more money whether that’s through buying healthy food or cost of gym memberships or exercise classes. With the current cost of living crisis, people see these things as a luxury rather than something that is within their means.

Output from research

After analysing and reflecting on our research findings, we have identified some **key design principles**. These will act as a checklist as we develop our solution.

- Support me to make small changes that'll make a big difference over time.
- Show me how to appreciate my body regardless of the number on the scales.
- Help me understand my relationship between food and my emotions.
- Acknowledge that I am an individual and my situation might be different than others.



The background is a solid blue color. In the upper right quadrant, there are several thick, white, hand-drawn style lines that curve and overlap, creating a sense of movement or a stylized graphic element.

Next steps

Generating and developing ideas

The 'Explore' stage of the project is now complete. A lot of insightful research was gathered to allow us to progress into the 'Generate' stage. We will use the insights gathered to identify a direction for this project and the different ways of moving forward through creative methods and tools.

People who contributed to this project including additional stakeholders, were invited to attend one of two initial idea generating workshops. The output of these workshops was an extensive list of ideas which the service design team will consider. The strongest ideas will be identified and developed further.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will further develop and prototype the ideas generated. We will continue to engage with and gather feedback from the people who have already contributed to this project. Our aim is that the final product meets all the needs identified during the Explore stage and provides people with a service that supports them to make positive, sustainable changes.



Thank you!

If you would like to provide any feedback or insights about our research findings, or if you are interested in being involved with this project, please [click here](#).

