Group Exercise to Punjabi music in the new normal, Sport England fund a project to enable Activators to get more South Asian females active at home

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Why

South Asians females are the most inactive demographic in the UK for various reasons, a situation which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus. Many are being supported by their family, friends and colleagues to be more active at home, but we need an initiative to boost exercising at home.

What

From September 2020 to the end of the year, we are inviting people familiar with using platforms such as Microsoft Teams to become a Pungra@Home Activators. The Pungra@Home Activators are volunteers who will form a community who support and motivate friends, family members and other south Asian women to exercise at home by coordinating sessions for everyone to enjoy together.

Pungra, supported by EMD UK, the UK's national governing body for group exercise and funded by Sport England through National Lottery funds, will recruit up to 25 people to become Pungra@Home Activators with the aim of engaging more females to exercise to Punjabi music at home, in front of their TV.

How the idea came about

Pungra has a suite of exercise to Punjabi music videos, which are available on their YouTube channel. The idea of this project is to create groups of family, friends and colleagues, that motivate each other to follow videos at the same time, exercising as a virtual group from the comfort of their own homes.

The founder Ravi Sandhu told us, "our videos are popular, however, we have had feedback from some people who find it hard to motivate themselves to do an on-demand workout at home by themselves, which is where the idea of having Pungra@Home Activators came from". Activators will use existing high-quality videos on YouTube and using accessible platforms such as WhatsApp, encourage a group of people to take part in the on-demand class at the same time.

Many exercisers have told Pungra, "we video call our family and friends to encourage everyone to join your videos at the same time. It's sort of like our own live streaming, with the benefits of using our living room TV instead of our tiny laptops". These heroes at home need to be recognised, encouraged and supported to learn new skills. New skills may include learning how to use Facebook Messenger Rooms with WhatsApp, or Zoom with Facebook Portal. This is an industry in which the technology companies are innovating rapidly – so there's a constant need to learn. We want to help Pungra@Home Activator keep abreast of these developments to enable them to support more people overcome barriers to accessing exercise sessions at home.

The aim of this project is to formalise the heroes at home, who we call the Pungra@Home Activators. It is anticipated that there are dozens, if not hundreds, of people across England who either are informal activators already or need to be guided on how to be part of the activator community. Many of whom work from home and are also familiar with technologies that can be used for video conferencing. They also have a passion to connect to their family and friends, to encourage them to exercise together. Pungra would like to support and grow the pool of activators, creating a community that will continue post lockdowns.

Why it's necessary to try this new approach

The BBC[1] has reported that the coronavirus is here to stay for many years, which is why we need to act now to support those who have been affected the most by the pandemic. We need a creative and modern way to help combat conditions like obesity, heart disease but also mental illness associated with the loneliness of being at home for long periods. Helping more people to become Pungra@Home Activators is vital to ensure people exercising at home are regularly motivated. Also, many South Asian females are put off exercising in public places through the concern of embarrassment and potential

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harassment of spectators. We will reduce the cost to access by empowering trusted family, friends and colleagues to become Pungra@Home Activators.

What people have told us

Faye Downey from EMD UK told us, “This project will not only support those from the South Asian community access to exercise sessions at home but has the potential to have a positive impact upon their well-being through the support and encouragement of the Pungra@Home Activators.”

Opening the door to new initiatives

Beyond the pandemic, many activators may decide to take their interest further and work with Pungra and EMD UK beyond this project to become qualified group exercise instructors. Carrie Hill from EMD UK said “becoming a group exercise instructor and leading from the front is a journey that feels very long for some people. Becoming an activator is a great introduction. Not everyone will want to become a qualified instructor, but for those that do, we are here at EMD UK to guide and support them”.

How to apply and get ready

People are invited to apply to become Pungra@Home Activators at pungra.fit

Who are Pungra?

The name Pungra is inspired by the authentic pronunciation of the word bhangra. Polly from Pungra describes it as “many people who do bhangra fit type dance classes are teaching performing arts, that are a bit ‘exercisey’. Pungra classes are exercise classes to Punjabi music, that are a bit ‘dancey”. We have turned the concept on its head because we firmly believe that our user group don’t want to be dancers, they want to participate in high-quality exercise activities.

Nusrat describes the vision for Pungra, “there was a brief time when the UK was the bhangra capital of the world, that time has gone. We have everything in the UK to help us become the Pungra fitness capital of the world, where people around the world who love Punjabi music look towards us in the UK for the world’s highest standards”.

For more information, please go to: pungra.fit

-Ends-

Notes to editors

Pungra

Specialise in delivering projects using Punjabi music to help people exercise. The videos, classes and other services appeal especially to South Asian females (the UK’s most inactive demographic).

EMD UK

The national governing body for group exercise.

emduk.org

About National Lottery

National Lottery players raise £30m every week for good causes, funding arts, heritage, sports, voluntary and charity projects around the UK. For more information on good causes in your area go to www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk

About Sport England

Sport England is a public body and invests up to £300 million National Lottery and government money each year in projects and programmes that help people get active and play sport.

[1]BBC https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53491324

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