

Case study:

Report: **Sheila and Willow – A Journey from Fear to Empowerment**

Background:

Sheila, a 42-year-old woman, is a colleague at Freedom Leisure and also the mother of work experience student, Willow. Sheila falls into the obese category and has not been regularly active or attentive to her physical or mental health. Since the Heart of the Game NHS Hypertension Project began, Sheila has been avoiding having her blood pressure taken. Deep down, she feared an alarming result - she was worried that, due to her weight, lack of exercise, and ongoing struggles with anxiety, her reading would be dangerously high. Consequently, she buried her head in the sand, reluctant to confront what she imagined would be a worst-case scenario.

Intervention:

It was Willow, with her growing interest in cardiovascular health and her concern for her mother, who sparked a breakthrough. After several heartfelt conversations, Sheila confided in me that her fear of a poor reading had kept her from seeking help. Understanding the power of trust and reassurance, Sheila asked me to measure her blood pressure privately. To our surprise, the reading was normal. Despite being in the obese category and having minimal physical activity, Sheila's health, in this moment, was better than she feared.



This discovery was transformative. It broke the cycle of avoidance and fear, and, importantly, it gave Sheila a spark of hope. Inspired by this positive outcome, she began asking her colleagues if they would join her for lunchtime walks. In this way, a simple normal reading inspired her to take ownership of her health, to get active, and to view her situation not as a downward spiral, but as a fresh start toward healthier choices.

Case Study Report: Unexpected Outcomes from the Heart of the Game NHS Hypertension Project

Caroline, 57 years old

Caroline has a number of long-term health conditions and struggles with poor mental health. Despite repeated visits to her GP, she was convinced she had high blood pressure, even though the GP repeatedly reassured her there was no issue. After being referred by a project colleague, I took Caroline's blood pressure reading. It was borderline normal-high, but nothing alarming. Still, due to her anxiety, she remained unconvinced. We lent her a home blood pressure monitor.

After a week of regular morning and evening checks, she realized her blood pressure was consistently normal.

This daily monitoring gave her peace of mind: she now understands her physical health is stable, and her anxiety, not high blood pressure, was the root cause of her distress. This has reduced her need for constant reassurance visits, easing her own burden and reducing demand on GP services.

Patricia, 72 years old

Patricia, with multiple long-term health conditions and on a low dose of anxiety and depression medication, began experiencing “funny turns” - dizziness, nausea - and was certain she was about to have a heart attack or stroke. In desperation, she called paramedics at night and repeatedly contacted her GP and practice nurse. Extensive blood tests, blood pressure checks, and medication reviews showed no physical cause.

We then lent Patricia a blood pressure monitor. At home, in a calm environment, she saw that her readings were normal. These insights helped her understand her symptoms: they were a combination of heat, medication side effects, and mild vertigo. Before, she believed the worst; now, with self-monitoring, she trusts her body’s signals more and no longer places undue pressure on emergency services.



Impact Summary:

Though neither Caroline nor Patricia were classified as having hypertension, the Heart of the Game project gave them vital tools for reassurance. By empowering them to monitor their own blood pressure at home, the project reduced their anxiety, cut down on unnecessary GP visits, and lessened pressure on NHS resources.

Both women now have a clearer understanding of their health, enabling them to better self-manage their conditions and live with greater confidence.

Summary of Findings:

The Heart of the Game project has delivered unexpected outcomes beyond its original scope. Although Caroline, Patricia, and Sheila did not fit the classic profile of hypertension