The Functional Zone

The vision for the Functional Zone is to provide easy access and opportunity, for people with specific exercise needs, to exercise under the supervision of an exercise professional, implementing a prescribed program that has been developed in conjunction with a healthcare/medical professional.

The Functional Zone is a dedicated training area, with a range of fully accessible equipment.

Most people exercise for health & wellness benefits, whether it’s to lose weight, increase energy, improve mental wellbeing, reduce risk of illness & disease – generally looking and feeling healthier.

People with physical disabilities or medical conditions which result in limited movement function are no different. Not only does exercising provide health & wellness benefits, exercising provides an opportunity to be part of the community and society in a way that that provides a feeling of achievement and progress.

The Functional Zone offers a whole new experience. Whilst the main gym areas are still accessible, the Functional Zone is a dedicated exercise space, so issues of having to wait for equipment, other people getting in the way, distractions & other things that may disrupt a workout just will be an issue.

Recent government policy promoting access to services within the community, and promoting better integration between acute healthcare services, and community healthcare services has created a demand for access to facilities such as the Functional Zone.

Many therapists & healthcare specialists have indicated that there is a ‘gap’ between the hospital environment & services, and what is available in the community for people to access on an ongoing basis. When the healthcare professionals look to the exercise industry they do not see the facilities or programs that they need to access, or refer to.

**It is this gap in provision that we hope the Functional Zone will fill.**

In our discussions with disability groups, individuals and healthcare professionals, ongoing exercise and access to training facilities, where people can train and work on improving their function, reducing the impact of the disability, is seen as a vital component of the maintenance and development, (where possible) of everyday activities.

It’s well reported that people have a low adherence to prescribed home exercise programs, which ultimately results in poorer outcomes, and as a result increases the likelihood that they will re-enter the healthcare system, using valuable resources that may not need to have been accessed had the adherence to the home exercise program been greater.

The Functional Zone is an open resource that we hope will be used and enjoyed by many groups and individuals.
Programs are now underway, providing access to the Functional Zone for a wide range of conditions. Referral pathways are being developed with the HSE, that will allow patients to access the Functional Zone in a quick & efficient way.

The LeisureWorld staff, exercise professionals with appropriate experience & knowledge, oversee exercise programs that have been developed in conjunction with chartered physiotherapists and other suitably qualified healthcare and medical professionals.

Local HSE community physiotherapist services have engaged with the Functional Zone in a very positive way. Facilitating a wide variety of patients with neurological conditions such as Parkinson’s, Multiple Sclerosis, Stroke survivors, and other forms of acquired brain injury.

Ensuring that each person is professionally screened by a healthcare professional ensures that any exercise is suitable and minimises any risk.

Once referred, these people can visit the Functional Zone when they wish, exercise under supervision of an exercise professional who can motivate and ensure that the exercise is completed appropriately.

Early indications are that patients are gaining huge benefits. In general health and wellbeing, significant weight loss can be seen, the combination of cardiovascular and resistance training offering multiple benefits. Components of balance and stability training are offering challenges in a controlled & supervised session, this is leading to increased confidence outside of sessions.

The overwhelming feedback from participants is the freedom and normalisation they are experiencing, in being able to independently exercise and attend to their own health & wellbeing once more.

The HSE community physiotherapy department envisage a continual drip feed of patients into the Functional Zone as an enhanced discharge process, in the belief that the supervised exercise sessions will in better patient outcomes and also reduce the need for them to re-access HSE services as frequently.

A further group of stroke survivors, organised by Cork Stroke Support Group, and supported by HSE physiotherapy staff, have started an 8 week exercise program that involves 2 sessions per week. This group have included some functional and movement testing before and will be retested after.

An MS Strand A group have also commenced weekly sessions, utilising the wide range of equipment available in the functional zone.

Further groups such as Spina Bifida Hydrocephalus Ireland, Spinal Ireland, Headway, Cope, POLAR (Prosthetic Orthotic and Limb Absence Rehabilitation) have all expressed a keen interest in accessing the area, and once referral and screening has taken place will commence.

Future developments will include offering similar supervised exercise sessions to orthopaedic patients including those who have undergone hip & knee replacements, as well as sports injuries.

LeisureWorld is a not for profit organisation, operates facilities in Bishopstown and Churchfield on behalf of Cork City Council, and has a strong mandate to provide services to the community.
The current rate for individuals to access this specialist service in the Functional Zone is €5.20 per session. The Functional Zone is also available for groups to rent exclusively. The Functional Zone is located in Bishopstown, but Churchfield will be undergoing a major equipment upgrade in May, and will be in a position to offer similar services.

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