



Benefits of CrossFit for Mental Health



What is Lift Up?

**Growing
community
through physical
culture & mindful
living.**

Co-founders:

- Amedeo Patuelli is a current AoL coach / community manager who has been dedicated to supporting mental health and growing community through fitness.
- Rachel Corallo was a former AoL member with lived experience and a passion for fitness during recovery. She was an integral member in the program's creation and has since moved on to other projects.

Objectives

- Promote wellness through exercise
- Community engagement / community building
- Instilling hope
- Create a positive culture of healing
- Nurture a sense of self-identity, meaning in life, personal responsibility & empowerment

Lift Up is a fitness-based program run through Academy of Lions, (AoL) Cross-Fit Gym in Toronto, Ontario.

Vision: To provide a safe, supportive & physically active environment for those who are recovering from addiction & anyone currently dealing with mental health issues.



Core Values

- 1.** Creating a culture and language of hope
- 2.** Recovery is personal
- 3.** Recovery occurs in the context of one's life
- 4.** Responding to the diverse needs of those living within the Toronto community
- 5.** Recovery relies on inclusive services and systems¹





Format of the program

Sessions are every Wednesday from 1:30 – 3pm at the Academy of Lions CrossFit gym and are FREE for anyone at any stage in their recovery.

Class format: Lift Up sessions include a casual group check-in (20-25 minutes) followed by a CrossFit / high intensity interval training style (HITT) workout, led by CrossFit coach, Amedeo Patuelli. The class is accessible to ANY & ALL fitness levels.

What are CrossFit/ HITT workouts?

A functional strength and conditioning program developed to make you confident, prepared for a broad range of physical tasks, as well as whatever else life throws at you. CrossFit classes are designed with both strength training and metabolic conditioning (which includes improving: cardio, endurance and technique) to give you an all round fitness regimen.

Our Coaches & Staff

Amedeo (Amo) Patuelli

Certified CrossFit Coach



Amo joined the Academy of Lions in Fall 2009 through one of its first programs aimed towards helping at risk youth. At the time of joining at 19 years old, he was dealing with several issues including homelessness, drug use, depression and anxiety, & being overweight and out of shape having gone up to 310lbs. Having spent years of dedication to improving his mental and physical wellness, Amo learned many skills inside and outside the Academy evolving to current roles as a Senior Coach and Community Manager. In the Fall of 2015, he was ready to give back the same way

his past mentors helped him and Co-founded the Lift Up program.

"I saw CrossFit as a stepping stone to turning my life around and changing for the better. The Academy of Lions helped me overcome my mental health at its worse and clean up lots of bad habits, allowing me to manage my life better. I see the great value a program like Lift Up can help those dealing with addiction, alcoholism and struggling with mental health. I hope to help participants dealing with these issues by using fitness as one of the foundations to their journey in recovery."

Elizabeth (Beth) Cruchley

Registered Occupational Therapist



In mid-2018, after being a part of the Academy of Lions CrossFit community for several years, Beth learned about Lift Up and its focus on supporting individuals with mental health and/or substance use issues. She reached out to Amo to learn more about the program and began attending Lift Up sessions. Beth created a role guiding the informal check-in discussions and providing motivation and encouragement during workouts. Beth's current role focuses on identifying opportunities for

program growth, reducing barriers for future / current members, advocacy and creating community partnerships.

Beth brings her devotion to improving mental health through fitness, and training in occupational therapy, to support individuals' recovery and community engagement. Her role has recently expanded to supervise occupational therapy students to continue the promotion of the Lift Up program.

Mental Health in Our Community

Definition of Mental Health

Mental health is not purely the absence of mental illness — “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with stressors of everyday life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.²

Definition of Recovery

“The concept of ‘recovery’ refers to living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life, even when there are on-going limitations caused by mental health problems and illnesses”.³

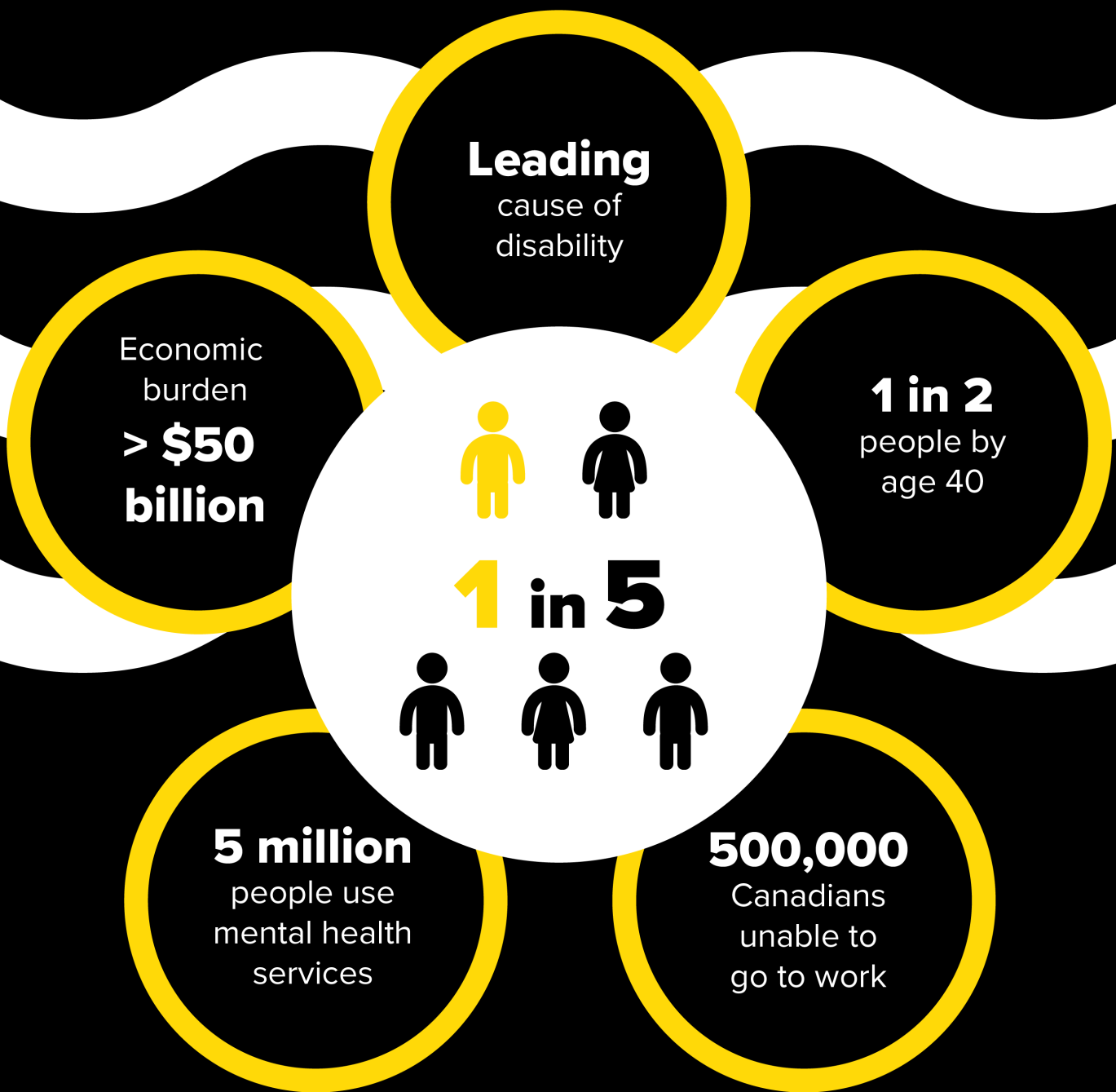
Did you know?

Mental illness is currently the leading cause of disability in Canada, affecting

1 in 5 Canadians.

As we know, the experience of a mental health challenge can negatively impact one’s overall quality of life, physical health, and participation in daily activities.

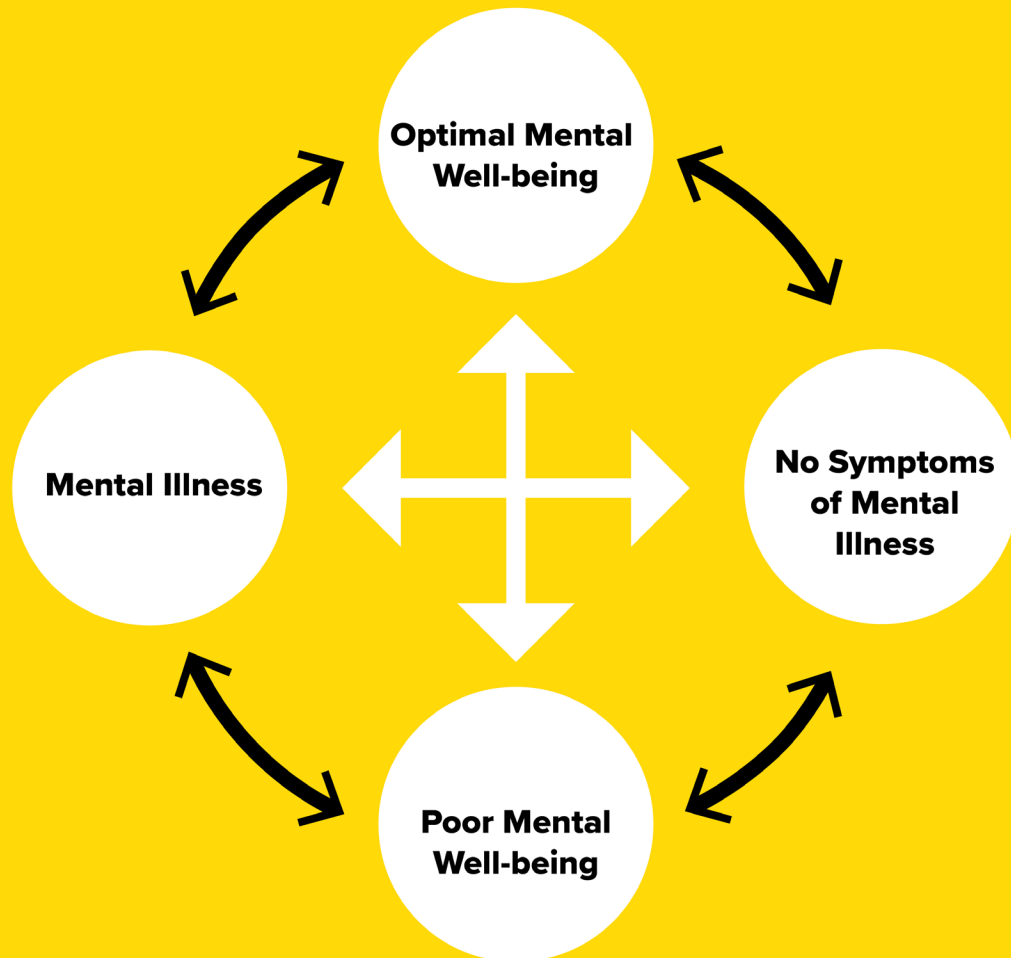
Some of the most common mental health issues among Canadian adults are mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders.^{4,5}



In addition, many people experience mental health challenges that are not diagnosed as illnesses, and relatively few people are considered to be in a state of complete positive mental health or flourishing. As such, mental health is often viewed on a spectrum -

Whereby both positive and negative mental health can be experienced simultaneously and fluctuate throughout our lives. For example, an individual may be diagnosed with depression and experience both, positive and negative mental health throughout a week.^{4,5}

The Mental Health Spectrum

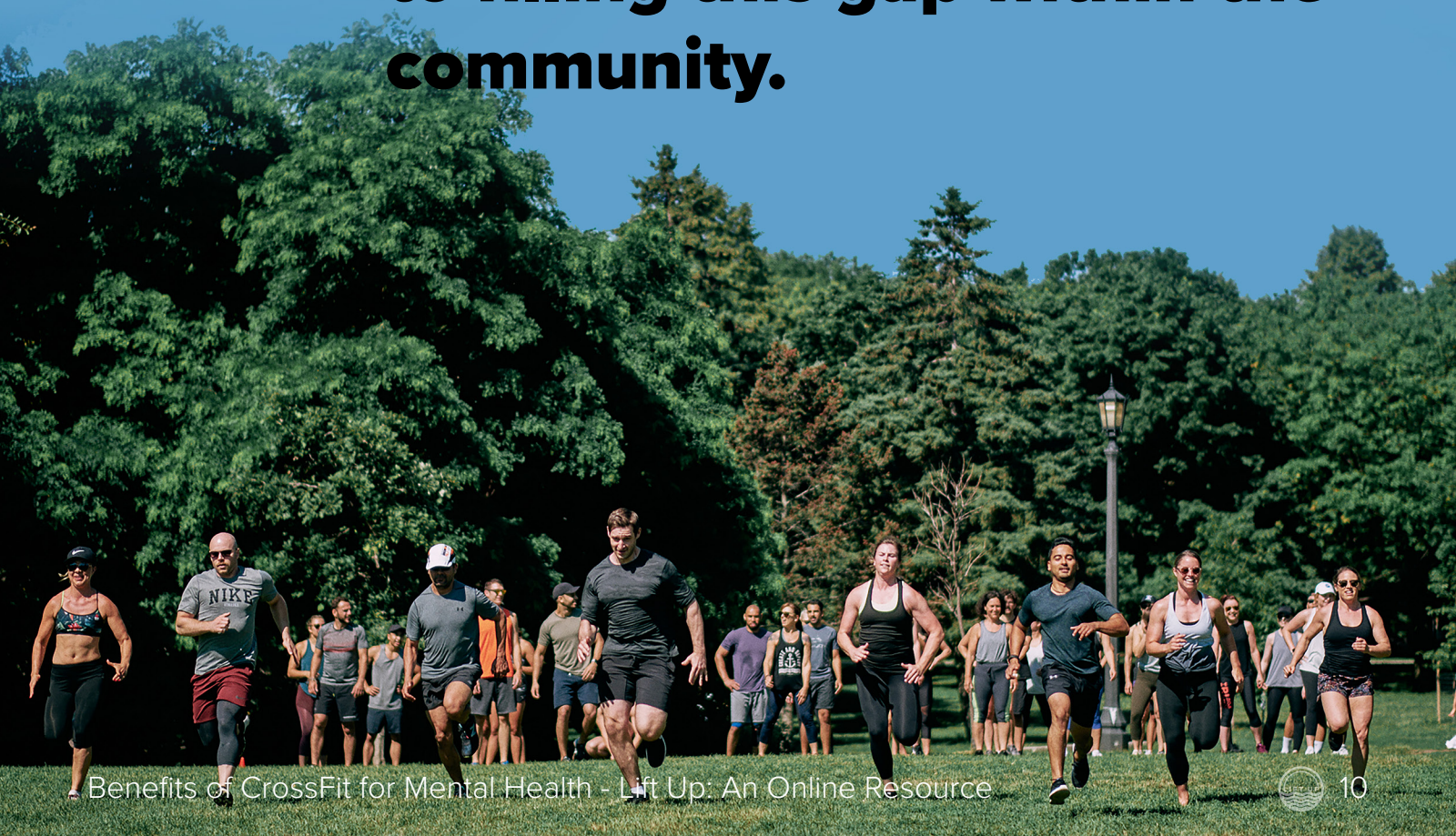


You may fall anywhere on the black double-sided arrows and your mental health status may change quite often, this is normal.

Examples:

- You may be experiencing no symptoms of mental illness; however, be struggling with mental well-being.
- You may be leaning towards optimal mental well-being and be diagnosed with or experiencing symptoms of mental illness.

Toronto is home to an estimated 2.8 million people. There is an incredibly high demand for innovative mental health supports within the city. The **Lift Up program run within the Academy of Lions CrossFit Gym has committed to filling this gap within the community.**



Benefits of Exercise for Mental Health



It is commonly known that mental health can be improved through exercise. But it is important to ask the question: where is the proof? By turning to research that has been done on exercise and mental health, we can begin to understand how it can help us work towards mental well-being.

Research has shown that exercise is beneficial in the management of mental health issues - including:

depression, stress / anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia spectrum disorders, and substance use issues.⁶



**For example,
regular exercise
can help:**

- **Protect against stressors**
- **Reduce negative symptoms**
- **Promote well-being**

Researchers have yet to determine the specific type and amount of exercise needed to best improve mental health. To date - a few recommendations have been made:

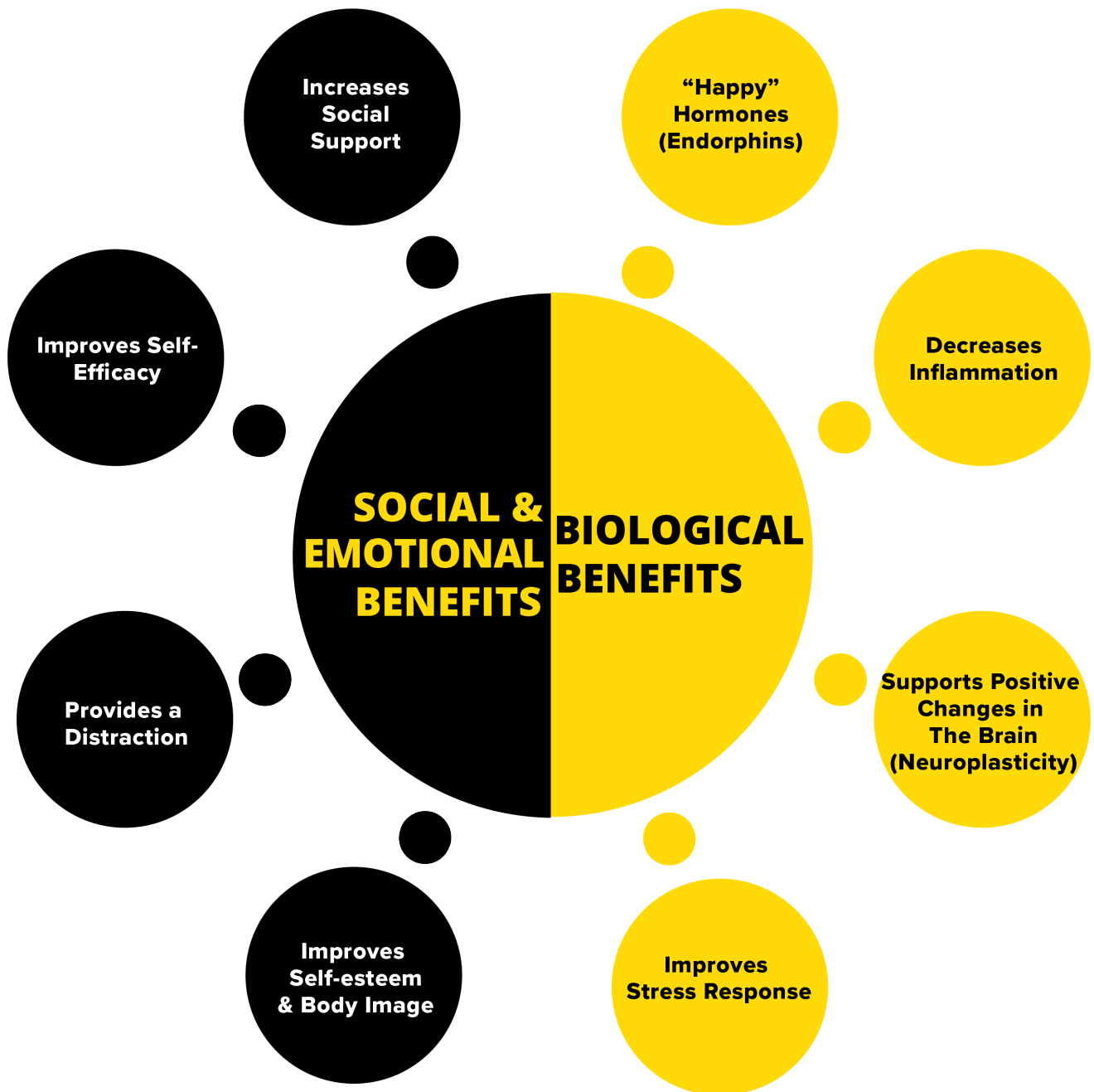
- **Structured exercise**
- **Supervised activity**
- **Individually tailored**
- **Aerobic and/or resistance training**

SOMETHING IS BETTER THAN NOTHING

Small doses of light exercise, such as walking, can have an immediate positive impact on mood, stress relief, energy & self-esteem.



How Does Exercise Help?



*Definition of self-efficacy: “Improved sense of one’s ability to cope with adverse, overcome barriers, and regulate stress; improved sense of physical mastery and competence”

References ⁷⁻⁹

What makes the Lift Up Program Unique?

THE LIFT UP PROGRAM

GOAL: To provide a safe, supportive & physically active environment for those who are recovering from addiction & anyone currently dealing with mental health issues

PEER SUPPORT

COMMUNITY
BASED PROGRAM

BODY POSITIVE
ENVIRONMENT

MENTAL HEALTH
INCLUSIVE
ENVIRONMENT

ACCESSIBLE
RESOURCES

EXERCISE & MENTAL HEALTH THEORIES

The theoretical foundation of the Lift Up program draws on multiple exercise psychology and recovery frameworks that can help to explain the benefits of exercise for one's mental health. Importantly, the Lift Up program takes a biopsychosocial perspective to exercise and mental health – which acknowledges the unique interaction of physical, emotional, and environmental factors in one's mental health journey.

Pillars of the Lift Up Program:

Peer Support

Lift Up aims to provide an environment that fosters meaningful connections through peer support.

Community Based Programming

Lift Up is a unique program within the city of Toronto that aims to increase a sense of community and belonging among its members.

A Body Positive Environment

The Lift Up program encourages individuals of all fitness and ability levels! We hope to promote a sense of pride and appreciation for the body's overall health, function and fitness.

A Mental Health Inclusive Environment

The Lift Up program invites individuals from all walks of life, at all stages of their mental health / addiction journey, as well as those dealing with precarious housing situations.

Accessible Resources

Lift Up is a free fitness-based program that aims to support its members by providing social and emotional support, in addition to tangible resources.

What Do Current Members Have to Say About Lift Up?

"Since moving to Canada to pursue my education, The Lift Up program has changed my life. This program has helped me regulate my mental health and given me more confidence physically and mentally in every way. I am amazed everyday I participate in workouts where one change could have such a huge impact. In every Lift Up class I have learned that even if I am physically tired, my mind had taught me not to give up and to fight back. I really appreciate everything that this program and the coach has done for me. It's priceless."

— **Sharmin**



" I found the Lift Up program through Not 9 to 5 organizations Instagram. I was coming out of a dark period in my life and really looking forward to getting back into a routine which re included exercise and positivity. With my own struggles and being a Chef (therefore needing to maintain the good spirits of my team as well), I thought Lift Up could be a great place for myself and my team to benefit from an activity that was external to the work environment where we could promote encouragement and have fun while getting fit.

I love this program! I literally tell

everyone about it, and bring people whenever I can. I have always felt welcome and encouraged every class I have attended. I have never felt "weird" or "ashamed" about working out, as can happen sometimes at gyms. I love that Amo always structures the workouts to be hard but also attainable for everyone, and is always available to help guide you if you're feeling lost. It's very refreshing to be a part of a community at a gym, rather than feel like an outsider struggling. I highly recommend Lift Up for anyone who needs a break from their mental stressors and wants to get a good sweat going in order to revitalize themselves."

—**Meghan**

Contact Us

How to Sign Up for the Lift Up Program?

Feel free to drop in on **Wednesdays (1:30pm-3:30pm)** at the **Academy of Lions CrossFit Gym** to join a session. You can also reach out to the Lift Up Program by:

Email: amedeo@academyoflions.com

Instagram: [@liftuptoronto](https://www.instagram.com/liftuptoronto)

Website: <https://www.academyoflions.com/lift-up-recovery>

Academy of Lions

Email:

info@academyoflions.com

Phone Number:

416-538-4967

Address:

64 Ossington Avenue

Toronto, Ontario

**Hours of
Operation:
Weekdays
6am - 9pm
Weekends
8am - 3pm**

This document was written by Amy Nesbitt and Monique Gill, Occupational Therapy Students at the University of Toronto, during their placement at the Academy of Lions CrossFit Gym and the Lift Up Program. This document was created in collaboration with Elizabeth Cruchley (OT Reg.), Amedeo Patuelli (Certified CrossFit Coach and Community Manager at Academy of Lions) and Banujah Balachandran (Graphic Designer).

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