

Project title: Community Healthwise

Start Date: January 2000

Part One:

1. What did you set out to do?

It is well known that participation in physical activity can play a crucial role in preventing and overcoming illness and injury and can also be an important factor towards increased well being. The Community Healthwise Project's aim is to tackle this root cause of ill health.

The project aim was to encourage the more sedentary people from within the communities of Burngreave/Pitsmoor and Parson Cross Foxhill, identified as suffering from some of the greatest health inequalities both within Sheffield and England, to participate in regular physical activity, by;

- Recruitment of officers with a range of community development and coaching skills
- Developing sustainable community based physical activity programmes
- Reducing barriers to participation
- Involving and supporting local community groups
- Providing accredited training programmes/employment opportunities for community members
- Developing partnerships to promote physical activity
- Showing sensitivity to both individual and community needs and interests
- Providing variety and opportunity for new experiences
- Making physical activity sessions affordable
- Engaging over 4000 participants
- Building on individual and group skills to sustain and & develop activities
- Producing accessible information on physical activities, community groups and facilities
- Developing social aspects, assisting overall community capacity building / area regeneration
- Increasing usage of local facilities

2. What have been your key achievements so far?

The project has met and in many cases significantly exceeded the targets originally set. The overall profile of the recognised link between participation physical activity and improved health and well-being has been raised considerably within the communities. Partnership work with a wide range of agencies has played an important role in achieving this. The manner in which the communities have embraced these increased physical activity opportunities has certainly exceeded all expectations. Key achievements have been;

- Proved that physical activities can be great fun
- Assisted in the formation of new social groups
- Identified key barriers to participation via Physical Activity Community Audit and succeeded in reducing/eliminating them in most cases
- Engaged large numbers of normally sedentary people
- Community members have successfully completed a wide array of accredited training courses, aiding group sustainability and providing potential employment opportunities
- Instigated a highly successful GP referral scheme based in GP's surgeries
- Engaged people from every sector and age group within the communities
- Presentation at Trent Public Health Conference (Jan 02 – Nottingham)
- Provided a wide variety of activities and new opportunities
- Groups have continued to develop beyond the initial activity
- Members have taken control and responsibility of their own groups
- Used local people and services where ever possible
- Community events, inc. health information days, chance to dance, festivals

- Healthwalks project – ‘Step out to a better lifestyle’ supported by HAZ. Led to employment of additional worker.
- Contribution to ‘Go for It’ summer programme 2001
- Contribution to ‘Chance to Dance’

3. How many people (approx.) did you reach?

The project monitoring systems have recorded the following quantitative facts in relation to the numbers of people and groups that it has had an impact on;

- In excess of 15,000 physical activity user sessions within 15 months
- Over 50 groups directly engaged in physical activities
- Regular contact with over 80 groups and agencies in the communities
- 20+ different physical activity opportunities
- Nearly 200 people so far attended GP referrals drop in sessions
- Over 25 active partnerships within areas
- 40+ local people gained relevant accredited training
- Contribution to 15 different Healthwalks across city – 3462 people attended to date

4. How would you explain the importance of this initiative to the public in terms of its potential impact on people’s health?

The project has taken physical activities to the heart of disadvantaged communities. It has shown that physical activity is not just ‘sport’ and that there are activities that allow everyone to take exercise at some level. Removing the barriers to participation provided opportunities which did not previously exist and inspired many into regular activities that would not have previously been considered. In layperson’s terms;

- Many people now have a better understanding of the benefits physical activity can have on their health.
- Those that have taken part spoke of personal health improvements and the great fun they have had doing it
- Individual’s confidence levels have improved
- Clear need for even more physical activity sessions within the communities, shown by high number of new requests received
- The large numbers of generally inactive people that have taken part in activities show that it is a successful way of getting people active
- Project has led to some activities being taken up by mainstream services
- Groups are now running themselves and developing their activities and membership
- Shown that working in partnership can provide a more much wider approach to health and well being than physical activity alone
- Proved that it is possible to successfully change the emphasis from curing people when they are ill to preventing them becoming ill in the first place

Part Two:

1. Case Study

A number of potential case studies exist within Parson Cross and Burngreave that can help to demonstrate the impact the project has had. The one illustrated below (from Parson Cross) shows not only the development of the group itself and the impact on its member’s health, but also the way in which partnership working provides a more holistic approach.

- A number of relatively mature adult patients from a local GP's surgery, suffering from a variety of health problems, started a short local 'walk' in the Parson Cross area under the guidance of the Practice Nurse, as a way of improving their health
- This walk was subsequently taken in by the 'Rangers' service of SCC and the 'Healthwalks' project was instigated, leading to walks being developed throughout the city
- The walkers all reported health improvements on their conditions and formed a strong social group
- Partnership working led to the Community Healthwise Project Officers training to become Healthwalk leaders and taking the lead on this walk
- The group expressed a wish to try new experiences and from this Tai Chi taster sessions were arranged
- These sessions received a very positive response and Tai Chi became a regular weekly session (in addition to the Healthwalks), improving balance, co-ordination and assisting the feeling of well being
- The termination of the Community Healthwise Project in March 2002 has meant the group's sustainability is dependant on securing external funding and they have successfully won a £1000 bid from SRB5/Community Chest
- Named themselves 'Stepping Out', they now organise and manage own sessions
- Further developing group membership and range of activities (bowls, swimming, sculpting, IT, photography, etc).
- Become a strong self sustaining/developing community group

2. What have you learned during the process, positive and negative?

The project has been a very positive learning experience and has experienced few if any, true negative aspects, though some clear leaning points have come to the fore. The lessons would seem to fall into 2 distinct categories; Firstly in relation to the administration of the project itself and secondly with regard to what works within the communities;

Project Issues:

- Essential to get monitoring/evaluation procedures in place early
- Identify key groups/partnerships to produce early wins
- Longer term project timescales + continued funding are keys to success
- Keep project profile high in local newsletters/newspapers
- Promote successes throughout city/region
- In areas identified as 'disadvantaged', people can often feel overloaded with the number of activities on offer
- Use community events as way of reaching wider community
- Steering group/forum overload (Duplication)
- Gain key workers support (champions) in allied agencies, crucial to success
- Limitations on what opportunities can offer due to financial constraints
- Timing of activities eg day, time, weather conditions (taxi driver sessions -drivers busy in wet weather !)
- Prepare for unexpected (expect around 20 kids for activities, 120 turn up!)

Community Issues:

- Getting people to take responsibility for the running of their group activities is generally difficult
- Even in cases where groups have become relatively autonomous, some level of support/contact is still regularly sought for reassurance
- People will generally only travel very short distances from their home to participate
- Childcare is a critical issue in people's ability to take part, costs are very prohibitive

- Transport connections across large estates makes accessing some facilities difficult
- Poor levels of information on activities in communities mean few aware of opportunities which exist
- Cost of activities restricting in disadvantaged areas
- Willingness of community members to try new activities

3. What evaluation methods have you used?

A number of different methods have been utilised to evaluate the project, both on a continuous basis and at specific stages.

➤ Quantitative –

Continuous recording of session attendance numbers, including details on gender, age, ethnic minority groups, disabilities, etc.

Documentation on community groups and partnership agencies

Recording of accredited training courses attended

➤ Qualitative –

Session users evaluations

Formal and informal interviews at sessions

Feedback from events and presentations

Feedback from partnership agencies

➤ Physical Activity Community Audit (March 2001) -

Questionnaires, interviews and informal discussions with community groups

Producing an insight into people's understanding of physical activity and health, the levels of activity they undertake, what opportunities they would like and the barriers they face.

➤ In depth evaluation (2002)

Part of dissertation by Leeds University student ("Health Promotion in a Local Authority Leisure Department")

Range of evaluation methods to analyse how the project's intervention affects the health of the people targeted and the health implications of this.

4. In what way is this initiative different and/or innovative?

The project used a number of distinctive elements that played an important role in the overall achievements.

- Tackle a key issue in the root causes of ill health - Inactivity
- Actively sought to and succeeded in removing a range of barriers preventing participation
- Provided a wide and extremely diverse range of activities, to give everyone within the communities the opportunity to take part
- Project targeted and successfully managed to engage full range of groups within communities
- Undertook grass roots community consultation to identify what the problems actually were and what the residents actually wanted, to inform action planning
- Made early connections with agencies having similar agendas to provide the best use of skills, knowledge and resources, and prevent duplication
- Promoted health and well being in a fun and enjoyable way