

ShowCase

Woodside Gets Active

Topic:

Physical activity

Organisation:

Telford and Wrekin Council; Telford and Wrekin PCT (West Midlands)

Location:

Woodside. Telford (West Midlands)

Dates:

October 2007 to April 2008

Budget:

£15,000

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Woodside Gets Active

Overview

In February 2008, Telford and Wrekin PCT and Telford and Wrekin Council launched a three-month campaign to increase levels of physical activity amongst children and their parents in Woodside, an area of deprivation with high levels of obesity.

The overall aims of the campaign were to increase physical activity within the community, target hard to reach groups, and make recommendations for future service delivery across Telford and Wrekin.

Woodside Gets Active used a multi-pronged approach to get children and parents excited and motivated to engage in more physical activity by offering organised walks, leisurely swim time and discounted access to health and fitness centres.

Results:

- 157 new Flex leisure incentive cards were registered during the 3-month campaign
- Leisure centre visits increased from 12,092 visits pre-campaign to 20,062 visits during the same time period the following year, and this settled to 14,792 visits in 2008/09, 2,700 more than prior to the campaign
- Average leisure centre visits increased from 8.5 to 15.2 per registered person during the 3-month campaign, and settled to 11.9 in 2008/09, an increase of over 3 visits per registered person



Levels of childhood obesity in the UK are increasing at alarming rates. Research has identified that 89 per cent of people do not know the recommended Government guidelines for physical activity (30 minutes, 5 times a week). The community of Woodside in Telford was no different, with most local people unsure of the amount and level of exercise they should do on a daily basis.

With a growing focus nationally on increasing physical activity levels and the building of a new community facility in Woodside, which could be used for exercise activities, Telford and Wrekin primary care trust (PCT) and Telford and Wrekin Council embarked on a joint campaign to increase physical activity in Woodside. In addition, data from leisure facilities identified that the percentage of people in Woodside using leisure facilities was lower than in the rest of Telford. Research was therefore needed to identify why this was the case.

To guide the work, a project group was set up in 2007 with the following members:

- A representative from Telford and Wrekin Council
- The Physical Activity Lead from Telford and Wrekin PCT
- A representative of the commissioning team at Telford and Wrekin PCT
- The local community coordinator from Telford and Wrekin PCT
- Community groups from Woodside, including representatives from the older age group, the black and minority ethnic (BME) community and local community volunteers
- A representative from Woodlands School

While all these stakeholders were vital for the campaign, ensuring support from representatives from the local Woodside community was imperative, especially considering a number of previous initiatives had failed to gain this buy-in.

“I think lots of different organisations within the council and within the PCT had been to Woodside and touched around the edges in terms of trying to get people involved in specific projects and not really engaged with them well. I think the local people were getting fed up of people going in there, trying to get information off them and not actually doing anything. So we had to sit down and speak with them and explain what we were trying to achieve and what the benefits would be for themselves. We went out into the local community, became really hands-on, going out where parents were going to pick up children at school time and having a chat with them, going to local community meetings, going to projects that were already taking place in the local community, and just getting a better awareness of the makeup of that community.” (Richard Twigg, Business Development Manager)

The resulting campaign, Woodside Gets Active, aimed to build on existing successful activities taking place across Woodside, and to implement a cross-sector, integrated approach that could be delivered and measured within a tight timescale.



Behavioural goals

The project had clear behavioural goals for adults and children, based on Department of Health (DH) recommendations:

- Children to achieve one hour of physical activity every day

- Adults to achieve 30 minutes of moderate level activity, 5 days per week

Secondary goals included to:

- Motivate behaviour change and increase physical activity within the community
- Directly involve children in practical activities to change their attitudes and habits regarding physical activity and provide them with the tools and knowledge to encourage lifelong participation in physical activities
- Increase awareness among parents about the causes of obesity

Segmentation

Woodside Gets Active used geographic and demographic segmentation to identify different priority audiences.

Geographic: Woodside is an identified area of deprivation and local regeneration, with high levels of obesity (higher than in the rest of the Telford area).

Demographic: Woodside Gets Active targeted members of the Woodside community who were currently inactive, specifically:

- Children – To increase levels of activity to tackle the trend of increasing obesity among children
- Parents – To assist parents in motivating and exciting their children about regular physical exercise



To identify inactive population segments, the team used the Sport England Active People survey along with local management information. This included using Geographic

Information System (GIS) mapping using the Council's leisure facilities Management Information (MI).

Previous service delivery review

Using the Council's leisure systems database, the team carried out a mapping exercise to identify relevant services and activities taking place across Telford and Wrekin, and to see which activities were not taking place in Woodside to explore whether it would be worth implementing them in the local setting.

The team also consulted previous service delivery expertise to inform the campaign's design. For instance, prior to Woodside Gets Active, experience had shown that to maximise adult participation in physical activity opportunities, these opportunities had to be combined with other weight management initiatives. Since a weight loss clinic was already running in the area, Woodside Gets Active aimed to signpost people to this service and to combine it with the offer of physical activity opportunities.

Primary research

Research was conducted to gain greater understanding of the attitudes of children and parents in Woodside to physical activity. This involved:

- Running focus groups with children and their parents
- Attending school assemblies to speak with children
- Holding drop-in sessions for parents in schools
- Speaking to parents outside school gates
- Asking parents to fill in questionnaires

To assess the needs of the broader Woodside population (beyond parents and children) a street-based questionnaire was also conducted. This was carried out by Walkabout Wrekin, a well-established local health walks scheme.

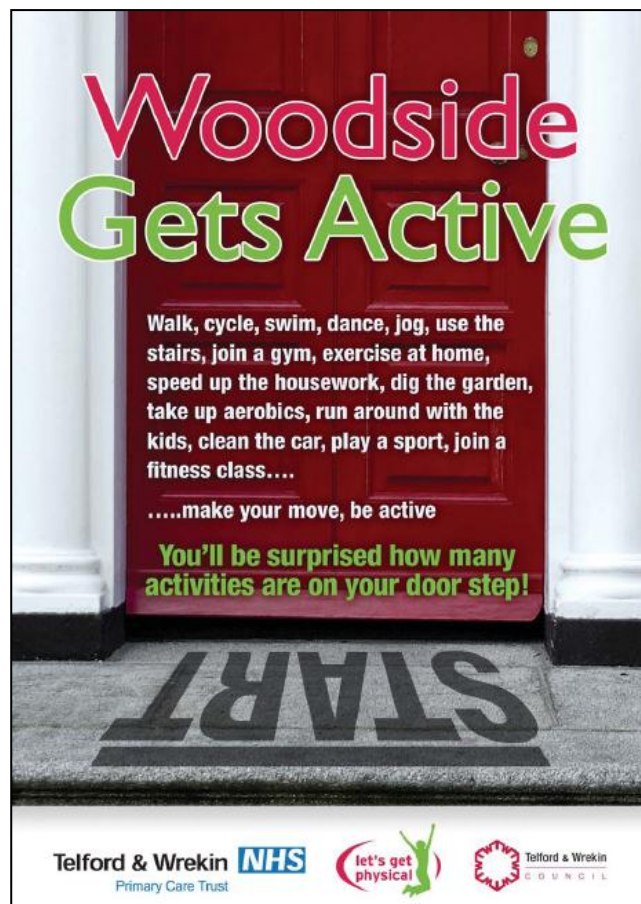
“In terms of research methods that did not go so well, trying to get people to fill out questionnaires was quite difficult as some people had poor literacy. It was an area of high deprivation and an area with lots of different communities, so perhaps some of them could not read English. A lot of the time, people get very put off when people approach them with a clipboard – people try and back away from that. Being out there and actually speaking to people worked the best.” (Richard Twigg, Business Development Manager)

Insights

Generally, local people wanted to get involved in physical activity, but felt there was a range of barriers that prevented them from engaging in exercise activities:

- **Activities were at the wrong times:** Current activities were taking place at the wrong times, when local people could not attend them
- **Lack of access and affordability:** Parents and children said they did not have access to facilities where they could be physically active. They also believed that exercise clubs were ‘too expensive’ and were concerned about the cost of having to buy new ‘trendy’ sports clothing
- **Lack of interest in current activities:** People thought that current activities would be too energetic for them, and so were put off attending
- **Lack of parental support and/or encouragement:** Children highlighted they needed their parents’ support to be involved in physical activity, such as taking them to and from activities
- **Support for walking:** Walkabout Wrekin’s street survey identified that people felt they needed organised opportunities to walk

The research also identified that a potential key competitor for the campaign was the local pub, which offered a series of social activities such as darts and playing cards.



The project group wanted to make sure that Woodside Gets Active was appropriate for the target audiences, so they involved local residents in the planning of activities and the design of all campaign materials (including the wording, tone and artwork for materials).

The campaign promoted a range of existing physical activities that the target group could participate in and supported these through a strong umbrella communications campaign. Insights from the scoping phase guided what activities to promote, when these should take place, and at what times. A full review was conducted of current service provision in the local area (such as after school clubs, other

leisure promotions and local social clubs), which helped to engage partners and build timetables to avoid clashes or duplication.

Available activities, with promotional offers for the campaign period, included:

Walkabout Wrekin

- A programme of weekly guided walks led by trained volunteers
- Walks were graded for length, speed and gradients, and wheelchair/pushchair routes were identified
- Walks took 20 to 90 minutes to complete depending on the grading, and timetables were available online with new walks regularly introduced
- On their first walk, participants completed a registration form that included a health questionnaire, and then received a Flex card to use at Telford and Wrekin Council Leisure Centres



Everyday Swim

The Telford and Wrekin Council offers free swimming to disadvantaged groups, including disabled groups and children receiving free school meals. This initiative was running prior to Woodside Gets Active, but was publicised and promoted during the campaign period.

Health and fitness clubs

Several leisure centres in the Woodside area already offered services, including:

- Exercise classes for individuals of all ages and abilities (such as aerobics, pilates, and kick aerobics)
- Running sessions led by a qualified pace setter
- Health suite facilities, such as sauna, steam room and spa
- During the Woodside Gets Active campaign, membership to these clubs was offered at a 50 per cent discount, along with further offers such as getting one session free with attendance at a number of sessions and 'recommend a friend' promotions

PR and media

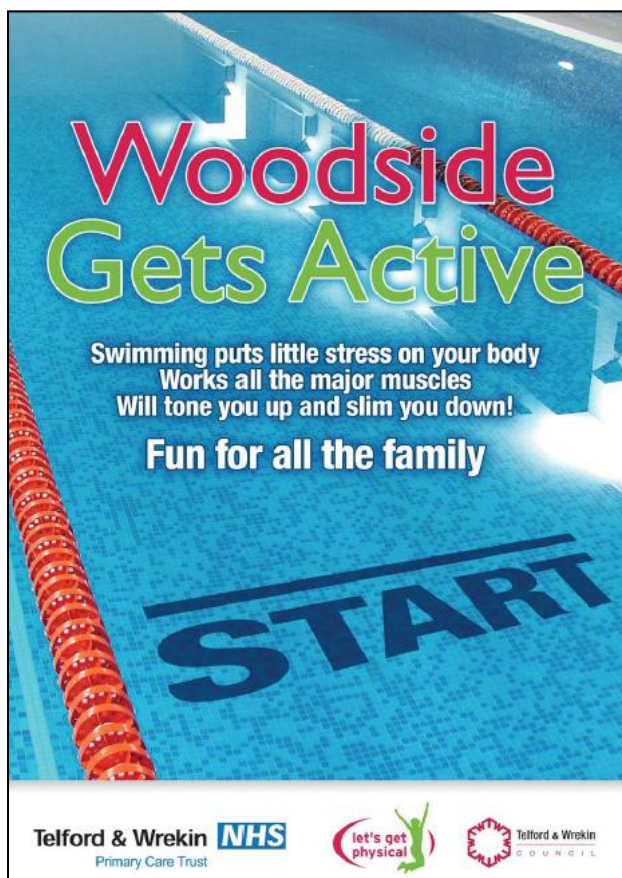
A communications campaign was developed to help promote the above activities and offers.

This included:

- News releases to local radio and media
- Press insert in the Telford Journal
- Direct mail card targeting existing leisure Flex Card holders
- Posters, leaflets and beer mats around local community facilities, as well as adverts in local taxis
- Pull-up banners in the Park Lane Centre and local community facilities

“There were a number of existing activities, but people did not know about things or did not think it was for them in terms of how it was marketed and the types of messages that were being put out there, so our communications

aimed to change that.” (Richard Twigg, Business Development Manager)



Because timings and costs were identified as key barriers to local residents getting involved in physical activities, the Woodside health and fitness centres ensured the existing exercise classes were available in the daytime, evening and weekends to accommodate a wide range of busy schedules as identified in the research, alongside discounted access during the three-month campaign period. All walking activities were offered free and participation in Everyday Swim was free for low-income community members. Eligibility for free swim sessions was based on Council policy, which offers the scheme to people on benefits or low incomes.

Beyond these existing activities, the campaign initiated the following activities:

- A men-only aerobics class conducted within the local pub
- In-school exercise activities, such as chair-based exercises during registration

Importantly, Woodside Gets Active aimed to make physical activity fun and exciting for children and parents. Subsequently the campaign worked to make sure all sessions and activities emphasised interactivity, openness and honesty – not telling people what to do, but listening to what they wanted and providing it for them within the local community.

The campaign also aimed to educate parents about the consequences of childhood obesity and motivate them to become involved in their children’s physical activity sessions. For this reason dedicated staff were at all events to provide personalised advice and support for individual families.



The three-month campaign was launched on 31 January 2008 at the Park Lane Centre in Woodside, followed by a healthy living event organised by Woodlands School. The event involved all of the partners who contributed to the project, including Telford and Wrekin PCT, Council employees, elected members, Police, Ambulance and Fire Service staff. 422 children and their parents went on to attend various activities within the Park Lane Centre and Madeley Court Sports Centre during February to April 2008.

The project group used the GIS data to monitor use of the leisure Flex cards, alongside feedback from the sessions to assess which activities were most popular and which were still struggling to achieve optimal uptake. This was used to make appropriate amendments to timings where possible. Unsurprisingly, the activities that were more formal and structured, which were factors that residents had said were off-putting in the research, did not see vastly

increased uptake despite amending the timings and offering promotions to reduce costs.

“I think what didn’t go so well were your traditional type leisure centre activities, where whatever we seemed to do, people were not really interested in it. The attendances were ok, but they were not significantly higher. Things like team sports, like badminton, table tennis, etc.” (Richard Twigg, Business Development Manager)



Despite not achieving vast uptake of the more structured activities, other activities at the leisure centres, such as swimming and gym use, did see greater uptake. Feedback supported that the incentives and promotions played a key part in increasing participation in these activities.

More localised activities tended to be more successful, especially the interventions with schools, which was particularly pleasing for the project team as the campaign particularly targeted children.

“The most successful activities were in the local school where we did activities before registration. We got trained members to deliver chair-based exercises for the children, and that went down really well.” (Richard Twigg, Business Development Manager)



The team considered evaluation from the start, as they were keen to demonstrate whether the project was successful or not and the reasons why. The project benefited from already having a good system in place with the Council’s leisure facilities, so Woodside Gets Active was primarily evaluated using leisure facilities usage data, along with follow-up questionnaires and customer feedback forms.

Questionnaire results

- 40 per cent of questionnaire respondents reported that they had already increased activity levels
- 60 per cent stated that they would continue to participate in physical activity

Flex Cards data

GIS data was used to monitor the registration and use of leisure Flex cards, which showed uptake of swimming and gym usage through the leisure facilities:

- During the 3-month campaign period (February to April 2008), 157 new Flex cards were registered in Woodside
- Increased exercise uptake in the region, with 12,092 leisure centre visits prior to the campaign, increasing to 20,062 one year after the campaign
- Leisure centre visits in 2008/09 settled at a rate of 14,792, which is 2,700 visits more than prior to the campaign

Use of Madeley Court Sports Centre

A comparison of visits made at the Madeley Court Sports Centre between February to April 2007 and February to April 2008 showed an increase from an average of 8.5 to 15.02 visits per registered person. In 2008/09, this rate

settled at 11.9, an increase of over 3 visits per registered person.

Aerobics and Walkabout Wrekin

Attendance at community aerobics sessions and Walkabout Wrekin walks was monitored through the registration system. Both demonstrated an increased uptake.



Following completion of the three-month campaign, the work was reviewed and feedback obtained to assess ways certain activities could be mainstreamed. Telford and Wrekin PCT extended funding for initiatives, with Telford and Wrekin Council contributing free activities and instructors' time for a further year until April 2009.

The community aerobics sessions have been mainstreamed and are now taking place in the whole of Telford and Wrekin. In addition, the chair-based exercises are still taking place in the two primary schools in Woodside and children in each class have been trained to run the short sessions during registration.



Another project (Women in Motion) was funded by the Big Lottery, using some of the feedback

from the Woodside Gets Active project. This project aimed to get women in Telford to take part in physical activity by leading or participating in low cost local beginner's class. Since the initial Big Lottery funding ended, NHS Telford and Wrekin Community Health services recognised the popularity of these classes and has kept the scheme running, with an added small fee per session for some activities (but not running or walking sessions).

Walkabout Wrekin has been appointed a Heritage Lottery Funded project officer to add value to the project by providing training for walk leaders in local history, thereby increasing interest among the local communities in Telford.

The team have linked in with the physical activity network set up for the West Midlands and have submitted a case study for their bulletins. The team have also presented on the project at a number of conferences in the West Midlands. Locally, the project report was distributed to all the local stakeholders and more widely in Shropshire. In addition, Woodside Gets Active was featured in the Association for Public Service Excellence in the October 2010 brief.

Lessons learned

Engaging the community

- Engagement with communities needs consistency, rather than being changeable depending on the latest initiatives and policies. More deprived communities can become weary of short-lived initiatives, many of which seek information without giving anything back to the community

“Link in with the local community in a hands-on manner. Do not dip in now and then. We were very much out there in the local community trying to make sure we really understood them

and got feedback from them.” (Richard Twigg, Business Development Manager)

Engaging parents

- Increased media coverage may have helped involve more parents and consequently encourage greater numbers of children to get involved
- Vouchers, offers and free trials could have been used more to increase the value of activities

School assemblies

- Assemblies were an effective way of motivating children to take part and can be used to stimulate further health activities in schools
- They were also effective at reaching a number of children with one message
- Continued teacher involvement is needed to ensure activities launched through assemblies are carried through and the excitement and motivation generated is maximised

Media

- Media fatigue with healthy living created difficulties in securing features. A targeted advertising budget would have secured guaranteed media coverage
- Media targeting parents needs to focus on healthy living ideas, tips, suggestions and provide benefits to parents, rather than promoting the campaign
- A strong media partnership is essential to secure this coverage

Launch

- Disappointing attendance figures could have been improved by promoting the launch from the start of the campaign and booking entertainment and prizes as rewards for attending
- Consultation with the target audience to determine the best day and time for the

launch may have increased attendance numbers

- All campaign elements should be agreed by the start of the campaign to ensure adequate lead time to promote activity to stakeholders

Partnership working

- Better communication and assignment of responsibilities would reduce errors and ensure more efficient use of budgets
- In future, any delivery partners should attend all interventions to best promote the activity and understand all aspects of the campaign

Process

- Timetable of direct interventions – planning, process and delivery – was well received. Awareness of other associated projects needs to be clear at the outset, allowing for re-schedule of the campaign if necessary