

Bitesize Case Study: Community Links

Voluntary Sector North West

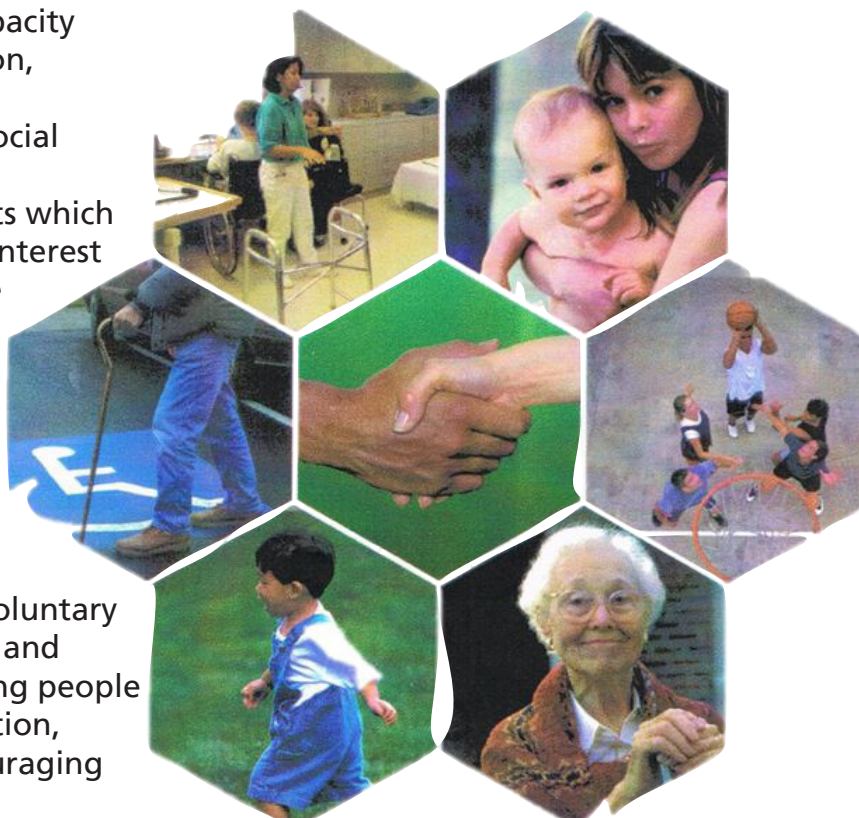
This case study is one in a series of studies curated to capture best practice, and highlight innovations, from the joint Health Education England (HEE) working across the North West and Voluntary Sector North West 'Learning Matters' awards 2017. The awards are part of a cross sector adult learning campaign delivered for the health and care sector through a number of key regional partnerships and collaborations. The overarching theme of the awards is simple: lifelong learning is good for people, organisations and health.

What was the issue or problem?

What did you set out to do?

Community Links aspire to apply capacity building, through quality information, communication, learning, health improvement, food and drink and social interaction to achieve local resilient communities. Local social movements which grow up in streets, communities of interest and choice, doing things compatible with and acceptable to our medical and social models but by and for the people without imposition.

With recent funding challenges Community Links offers sustainable and affordable options for communities. The organisation is a compilation of public, private and voluntary sector partnerships offering services and information for local people, bringing people together through health and education, promoting healthy living, and encouraging lifelong learning.



What did you do? What was the intervention or initiative?

Utilising community skills and experience, the Community Links was established. These are sustainable places offering a local, clean safe and welcoming environment where people of all ages can take away what they need, promoting learning, health improvement and social interaction. From these community links, those of the community and those serving the community can reach out into the places and people of need and who can be hard to reach. Whereas each community link is unique and retains an individual flavour, what follows is common to all.

The Community Links website www.realtld.co.uk is a central repository of current local information to help promote social prescribing and combat loneliness.

Practical information sessions are run supported by mentors from Patient Participation Groups. There are also 'Share and Tell' events with afternoon tea or supper where health professionals and service users can discuss health focussing on a key condition e.g. diabetes.

A plethora of other events and support, news updates through social media and transport support are also arranged.

What were the Key Outcomes?

Community Links is the outcome of eighteen years of work. Recently, a number of the products available have been brought together with newer initiatives, for the first time, with the full support and involvement of public, private, business and communities working together with a shared vision;

"To build a healthy community within the framework of a community based organisation..."

What were the lessons learned?

- Ensuring volunteers have the training support they need to feel safe. All information shared through the project was from trusted sources and further training opportunities were provided
- Interpreting the language used by the different sectors involved, and the possibility that different terminology is used in each setting. This required that words be chosen carefully to avoid confusion
- Avoiding service user/ client or patient 'labels' so as to prevent the exclusion of certain groups from accessing services. Community Link adopted a 'come to us' approach to mitigate this risk
- Some difficulties were encountered that are common with cross-partnership working e.g. organisational priorities and the extent to which teams can compromise, but ultimately the group came together to help families

Level of award:

Winner - Asset Based Approaches to Community Development Award

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