

CASE STUDY: “SPECFIT”- A PROGRAMME SUPPORTING LOCAL SPORTS CLUBS TO DELIVER PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES

Wigan Borough Sports Council, in partnership with the public health team at Wigan Council, secured funding to support local sports clubs in building capacity and capability to deliver public health initiatives. This funding was used to establish the Specfit programme for sports clubs in September 2013, which aims to improve the long-term health and social wellbeing of spectators, family members, staff, visitors and the local community, by tapping into the unique opportunity that sports clubs have to extend activity and awareness.

Under this programme, sports clubs must identify a lead to act as a community health champion. The identified individual attends a one day training course where they receive further insight into the funding available, and the criteria against which the applications will be assessed, and are also trained in the nationally accredited Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH) Level 2 award - Understanding Health Improvement. Once this training has been completed clubs can submit bids to the Specfit panel.

Health Champions are not traditional volunteers who give a set number of hours each week or month. Instead each champion commits to trying to make a positive difference to health and wellbeing in whatever way they can. Often this is through incorporating the messages received in training to improve the health of their own family, network, workplace or community. For some it involves signposting the people they work with in their daily role to appropriate help and services, as and when needed. Health champions are offered further training courses such as Cancer Champion training and Heart Start training, as well as receiving a monthly newsletter with information about health and upcoming campaigns. Wigan Borough has over 800 health champions from various settings such as the local community, voluntary organisations, local amateur sports clubs, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, Age UK, Groundwork, Wigan Council, Wigan Youth Zone, Wigan and Leigh College and Healthy Living Pharmacies.

Key Outcomes

- **New classes/health initiatives** - as of January 2014 there are 51 health champions in 40 local sports clubs, all of whom have received the RSPH Level 2 Understanding Health Improvement training. These champions have already developed 19 new classes/health initiatives, with 21 other applications underway.



Example - One of the initial bids came from Wigan and Leigh Wrestling Club. The club's aim was to engage with and increase the physical activity of those parents who drop their children off at its wrestling club then wait around until training has finished. Initial discussions with the parents indicated that they would welcome a circuit class (amongst others). The club had a venue where these classes could take place, and a qualified instructor, but some work was required to make this possible. The club therefore applied for funding to complete the building work (which was match-funded) and also some funding to offer twenty people subsidised half-price circuit classes for the first twelve sessions, after which parents would be charged £3 and the class would become self-sustaining.

- **Increased physical activity** - this programme is still in its early stages, and is yet to be fully evaluated, but evidence of increasing physical activity with different, and currently inactive groups, is already emerging. For example, the first club to receive money has a list of people who want to join the circuit classes once building work is complete. These parents currently sit and watch their children train but will now increase their own physical activity levels.
- **Greater social responsibility** - the fact that the clubs better understand the wider role that they could play within their communities, beyond physical activity, is being demonstrated by the variety seen within funding bids, some of which are focused on developing a social responsibility ethic with their clients. Some of the local amateur sports clubs have signed up to the 'Smokefree Touchlines' initiative via the Specfit programme, which aims to de-normalise tobacco use within the community. In the long-term this could assist in decreasing uptake of smoking within the youth population. The initiative is also environmentally friendly as it reduces tobacco-related litter produced within the club.
- **Positive Community Feedback** - many local amateur sports clubs are situated in areas where health inequalities are high, and early feedback on the programme is extremely positive. The health improvement team will maintain and build on this initial work with the clubs and the programme will continue to evolve and develop as more varied clubs become involved. Some feedback from the training includes:

"it was bright, enjoyable and very informative"

"it broadened my scope on our community and some of the issues needing addressing"

"lots to share with my club members"

Background

The borough of Wigan has a strong sporting heritage, with a vibrant, mature sporting club infrastructure. Sports clubs make a significant contribution to health and wellbeing, not just in terms of physical activity but also in their valuable work with engaging local communities and young people. Activities the sports clubs provide also help to increase aspiration, improve health education and support activities that combat isolation and improve overall health.

Wigan Borough Sports Council

[Wigan Borough Sports Council](#) is the link between the voluntary and public sectors for sport in Wigan. All local sports clubs can apply to advertise on a central online directory, and can access a range of support such as coaching and volunteer workshops, advice on how to establish links with schools, to apply for funding and to work towards national governing body accreditation, as well as other forms of support.

Key Aims

- **To link into the existing public health capacity building programme** - the trained health champions will not only lead the health grant improvement activity but will also ensure a sustainable and lasting legacy within participating clubs.
- **To maximise health improvement activity** - a small grant will be allocated to member clubs to stimulate and innovate health improvement. There are agreed areas of health improvement activity that the grant can support.



Key Stages of Setup

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- The initial clubs targeted by the health improvement team were those who were existing members of Wigan Borough Sports Council. Two training dates were completed in June and July with 17 people from 12 different clubs attending. These clubs are now writing and submitting their bids with support from the team

- The promotion of Specfit funding was then widened to include any sports clubs listed with the Sports Development Service, with two further training dates organised for September

- The next step is to widen this further to include darts clubs, dominoes, snooker, fishing and pool clubs and so forth, with further training dates planned up to January 2014; with the final submission date for bids for the 1st funding period being in February 2014

- The second delivery period for the funding will be from April 2014 to March 2015. The Health Improvement Team will continue to provide support to the clubs both with writing their bids and with any other health improvement activity to help to embed health improvement within their club

How It Works

The identified sports club 'health champion' is required to attend a one day training course where they will receive further insight into the funding available and the criteria against which the applications will be assessed, and also be trained in the nationally accredited Royal Society of Public Health Level 2 award in Understanding Health Improvement. The training is provided by the health improvement team.

Once the club member has accessed the training, the Health Improvement Team supports the clubs to identify their specific health needs. The project must demonstrate one

or more of the following themes and priorities to improve health:

- build sustainable communities
- develop early years
- make healthier choices easier
- ensure a decent standard living for all

Delivering the training, prior to the clubs completing their applications, has allowed relationships to develop between the clubs and the Health Improvement Team ensuring health improvement becomes fully embedded. The training also allows clubs to network and share ideas with each other. These relationships will be maintained by keeping contact with the clubs via the team's health champion programme.

Once the club have decided what they would like to bid for, they complete the application form and submit it to the panel who decide whether the bid is successful. The success of the club's project is evaluated based on the timescale for delivery given in its bid.

Resources

As the Specfit programme is linked into public health's existing capacity building programme, the resource of the health improvement team was used to deliver the health champion training and to support clubs in writing their bids.

Key Challenges

- **Coordinating training dates** - arranging suitable training dates for sports clubs volunteers was a challenge but by remaining flexible training was arranged for weekdays, evenings and weekends to ensure those volunteers who work are able to attend.
- **Accessing clubs** - many club websites and lists of local sports clubs are not up to date and it has been challenging finding the right information to contact clubs.

Key Learning

- **Communication** - the initial information sent to the clubs explained that funding was available to be used on health and wellbeing projects but it did not give an exact monetary amount and examples of what clubs could use the money for. At first the programme had a relatively low uptake as a result, for the first couple of courses. However, once information was provided on how much money clubs could apply for and showed examples of projects, more clubs registered their interest. This indicates that it is vital to communicate such information early on.

Sustainability

Training volunteers from the sports clubs to be health champions enables Wigan Council to maintain contact with the clubs and also encourages networking between clubs, which helps the council to continue supporting them to deliver health initiatives.

Next Steps

- Maintain and build on this initial work with the clubs so that the programme can continue to evolve and develop as more varied clubs become involved
- Support the clubs to identify and bid for other funding
- Facilitate collaboration between different clubs, sometimes across different sports
- Carry out a full evaluation once this programme has become more established
- Facilitate the second year of funding bids



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