

Case Study



Project

Mentro Allan Newport

Organisation

South East Wales Racial Equality Council

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About the Organisation

The Newport project is run by the SEWREC, the voluntary sector equality body for South East Wales. It is supported by a local partnership including Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO), the National Public Health Service, Newport City Council, Aneurin Bevan Health Board, and the University of Wales, Newport with the support of the National Mentro Allan Partnership. SEWREC has considerable experience of working with minority ethnic community groups as well as experience of working in partnership with other organisations and was well placed to make the connections needed for this project.

Project overview

The project's aim was to increase and sustain physical activity levels for people of all abilities from Ethnic Minority backgrounds. The project targets parts of the community least likely to participate, including older people, Muslim women and mothers with young children. Despite this focus the project is also open to a wide-range of community groups.

Walking is the main activity on offer to service users and there is an attempt to work with ethnic minorities with less experience of going on local walks. Cycling is the second activity although there have been issues with finding a female instructor who would be appropriate to work with women-only groups. There were also some health and safety and storage issues which delayed the development of this activity.

The project also offers adventure sports activities including rock climbing, gorge walking and abseiling. Sustainable behavioural change is a key principal of Mentro Allan and so the team has limited such activities, using them mainly as a reward for regular participation or continued involvement in other activities.

What was achieved?

The project engaged with 271 participants in the first year, many of them regular participants, and many of these report a change in lifestyle as a result of the project, notably walking their children to school or walking to the shops rather than driving.

The project co-ordinator has seen changes in people over a period of time; people become more confident and chattier as they have been given the opportunity to socialise with others. This has improved their mood and overall sense of well being.

The project has successfully engaged with Muslim women of all ages. These women appreciate the support on offer and have participated in many different outdoor activities. They have pushed the boundaries of what is acceptable in their communities and have changed from not wanting to participate in activities to regularly participating in many different types of activities. Notably these women are increasingly coming forward as volunteers to organise and lead activities. These activities range from group walks to camping.

How did the project get people involved?

The project has been very proactive in targeting people for activities. Initially, there was a focus on targeting specific community organisations and building relationships. For the first year the project workers constantly attended meetings to tell people about the project and to build and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders.

Recruiting participants for activities is an ongoing process and the project depends on word of mouth and recommendations in most cases. The Newport target group presents a number of challenges including language barriers, cultural expectations and ignorance of local facilities. The use of community champions has been particularly important.

The term BME hides a multitude of different cultural, religious and linguistic groups. Some groups have little to connect them with others, for example the use of different languages has made it difficult to integrate some groups, but others have mixed more freely.





What was innovative and what worked well?

SEWREC already had links to community groups and the project made extensive use of these, notably for consultation and to recruit community champions. These community champions helped to communicate with groups, encourage people to participate and some are now taking responsibility for organising and leading activities.

A significant challenge at the beginning of the project was the perception among many of the target group that physical activity was a chore and not a leisure pursuit. This was overcome by marketing walks in the country or to the seaside as 'trips'. This successfully attracted participants who would not otherwise have come, but who nonetheless enjoyed the walks and frequently took part in subsequent activities. One mark of the projects success in converting people to 'physical activity in the natural environment' is their eagerness to continue with events even in bad weather.

The project has developed a new programme called 'Re-Cycle', where donated bicycles are renovated by volunteers and passed on at low cost or no cost to people for recreation or transport. This partnership with Newport Wastesavers addresses environmental, physical activity and poverty issues. The programme has helped kick-start the cycling element of Mentro Allan and has led to an increasing number of cycling activities including beginner and learner sessions and cycle maintenance.

The future...

The project funding has less than two years remaining and the Team are in the process of organising a succession plan. The Re-Cycle project referred to above is seen as a key element of this. It is likely to draw in substantial additional funds before the project ends and to continue beyond the current Big Lottery Fund grant.

Maintaining the role of community champions beyond the end of the current funding is seen as essential possibly through the development of volunteer package including induction, training (first aid, walk leaders etc.). Again additional funding will be sought to ensure that this continues beyond the end of the current project.

The walking element of the project is seen as the most significant element and the form of physical activity most likely to result in a sustained change in behaviour – easier, cheap, practical, fun and genuinely 'do-able' on the doorstep. The project team are looking at ways of continuing this work possibly with joint funding bids with mainstream agencies, community groups or with organisations serving other hard-to-reach client groups like disabled people and older people.

Other possibilities include new projects to tackle the existing work in conjunction with other issues like nutrition, diversionary activities, sustainable development, personal development and confidence building.

Lessons from the project

There are some key lessons from the Newport project that can be applied to other projects and programmes.

Lessons from the project:

- Build trust with the target group – getting to know people, building relationships and then tailoring activities for them has been vitally important
- Work with organisations already engaged with the target group – working in partnership with other organisations including community leaders has been very effective in attracting participants
- Imaginative marketing – advertising walks as 'trips' has attracted participants to come along for the first time and, having come along once they frequently continued to come
- Community champions – these have helped to communicate with participants who did not speak English and spread the message widely within communities
- Staffing – have a diverse team, this does not mean having staff or volunteers from one non-White ethnicity group. Also development workers from any ethnic background can work with clients of any other ethnic background so long as they remain 'customer' focused