

Case Study



Project

Rhondda Cynon Taff Mentro Allan project

Organisation

Sustrans

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About the Organisation

The project is managed by Sustrans in partnership with Rhondda-Cynon-Taff County Borough Council (RCTCBC). Strategic direction and financial supervision is given by a steering group made up of representatives from the local public health board, national public health board, Independent Living Services, Sustrans, local activity providers and RCTCBC.

The Coordinator is based in RCTCBC sport's development department and works closely with an officer whose main focus is outdoor activities.

Project overview

The project provides free opportunities for people to be physically active in their local natural environment. It targets people who do little or no exercise, specifically people on low incomes, people with mental health issues and older people. The project works with these groups to find out what activities should be run and how they should be structured. At the same time raising awareness of the target groups needs with local service providers.

Cycling and walking continue to be the main activities offered. There are also a range of outdoor activities offered by a largely voluntary group who run a local outdoor activity centre. These include team-building, orienteering and climbing, these are tailored to suit the needs of the participants.

The aim of the activity sessions:

- give people a good experience of outdoor physical activity;
- build confidence in physical and mental abilities;
- provide opportunities to discover and develop skills;
- increase knowledge of the local environment; and
- improve awareness of different activities available to them.

The main aim is for participants to be physically active in the outdoors on a regular basis.

What was achieved?

Early achievements centred around making contacts and building relationships in the local community. People got to know the co-ordinator and know more about the programme as time went on. Regular participation has become more common across all the activities.

The cycling groups have been an achievement and have proved very popular with service users. Many participants have learnt how to ride a bike from scratch and some of these have started riding confidently for three or four miles. Thirteen individuals took part in a recent cycle ride from Hirwaun Library Car Park along the disused tram road to Penderyn community centre. The group included five volunteers, some who have progressed from being participants to leading the group. Some of these individuals have taken up cycling as a hobby and bought their own kit and subsequently taken ownership of the activity.

Some participants and volunteers have formed friendships and meet outside of the group activity. It has been an opportunity to make friends and to socialise in the outdoors.

How did the project get people involved?

The co-ordinator has made links with various individuals and groups through contacts provided by members of the steering group. Groups include Communities First, voluntary groups and activity providers.

Holding large events has spread the word quickly around community groups. Some particularly useful partnerships have been made with the Independent Living Support team whose support role includes introducing people to activities.

The co-ordinator has spoken at meetings and events with many local voluntary groups and organisations that are likely to be made up of people from the target groups, for example the local Women's Institute. There are good links with mental health groups and learning disability groups in the voluntary sector, sheltered accommodation, hostels and Community First groups. Participants and park wardens themselves get people involved by spreading the word to family, friends and neighbours.



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What was innovative and what worked well?

The Co-ordinator feels it is important to start small, be patient and concentrate on one thing at a time when looking to develop the project. During activities, it was emphasised that appropriate equipment must be used and that the right mix of people can help with the delivery. For the cycling activity, it was clear that the team responsible for the group consisted of a mix of individuals who were good with people and with the right tools and equipment.

Activities work best when they take place in an accessible and safe environment. Therefore, many activities take place in local parks and on traffic free cycle routes. It is important to be upbeat and positive when introducing activities or challenges to individuals who may not enjoy exercise or feel embarrassed. The attitude of the leader and volunteers is crucial to create an encouraging, non-threatening and sociable atmosphere.

Being able to discuss issues and ideas with workers doing similar things at ground level has been of great help. The seminars held with other Mentro Allan coordinators have been well facilitated to encourage honest discussion. Having hands on help and expertise from a colleague in Sustrans working on a similar project has been key in the success of the cycling groups.

The future...

It is hoped that the Rhondda Cynon Taff activities will continue in some shape or form after the funding stops. It is likely that the volunteers who have been trained and gained personal qualifications will be happy to continue their role as long as their personal situations allow. Ideally, more women with cycle maintenance experience will get involved. At the time of writing it is felt that the cycling activity could easily be sustained and the walking group may continue.

The groups need to sustain participation rates in order to continue these activities. This may be achieved through keeping in touch with participants and establishing regular times and places for activities to take place.

Were there any unexpected outcomes?

Most unexpected has been the way that taking part in simple activities can have such a positive and life-changing effect on an individual's life and behaviour. For one participant taking part in Mentro Allan activities has had a major impact. This participant has gone from not taking part in any activities, but watching television, to asking what will be happening at the next session. This interest is something that no-one expected or could have foreseen.

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:

- Contact with other projects – being able to discuss issues and ideas with workers doing similar things at ground level has been of great help.
- Attitude of the activity leader – the attitude of the leader and volunteers is crucial to create an encouraging, non-threatening and sociable atmosphere.
- Importance of volunteers and leaders - these individuals, along with the individuals managing referral organisations, are needed for the ongoing development of the project.
- Consultation – consulting target groups to find out what they would like to do increased participation.