



U3A Foyle-Engaging Older People in Physical Activity

Location	U3A Foyle, Derry
Programme	Engaging Older People in Physical Activity
Contact name	Don Patterson
Address	Pascal McDonald House, Gransha Park, Londonderry, BT47 6TQ
Telephone	0287 186 0123
E-mail	U3a.foyle@btinternet.com
Date of research	21 st August 2006

Project description

A two-year project seeking to engage older people (especially men) in a range of physical activities, to promote greater health and wellbeing, and extend the range of activities available.

A part-time Physical Activities Co-ordinator (PAC) will work in partnership with Active Living in Later Years Foyle (ALLY), a network serving 43 older clubs throughout the Derry city area. Volunteers will be trained to maintain activities in the future.

The PAC works with the U3A Foyle staff to identify current members who would benefit from a physical activity programme. They then work with 12 participants for a 12-week period to identify and support them through a physical activity programme (Physical Activity Co-ordinated Programme).

The project receives a total of £29,994 over two years.



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Project aims and objectives

The overall aim is to encourage and support older people to take up physical activity opportunities. Through this, the project aims to:

- Use companionship as a key driver
- Improve health and wellbeing and
- Use participants to encourage their peers to be physically active.



Project delivery

The project funds the salary of a part-time Physical Activity Co-ordinator (PAC). The PAC works with a small number of older men (12) to develop time-limited programmes (12 weeks) of physical activity. These are designed to encourage participation beyond the programme itself, and link with other aspects of healthy lifestyles. Additionally there is scope to use as a catalyst to develop other physical activity sessions within the wider organisation, which has in excess of 600 members.

Participants self-evaluate their performance and physical activity habits. This is designed to promote mental stimulation as a benefit. Those on the programme encourage others to participate and are tasked with recruiting the next intake of participants. Volunteers are also trained as part of the programme.

Project links

The project is linked to several networks:

- Active Living in Late Years (ALLY) a network serving 43 older people clubs throughout the Derry City area
- Wider U3A programme and link to Animators for future delivery and sustainability
- Links with the University of Ulster are currently being explored
- Existing sport and physical activity providers.

Project performance and impacts

The programme has been well published in the local press and within the U3A Foyle membership. A PAC has been appointed and work with the first intake of beneficiaries has commenced.

Monitoring and evaluation of the project is ongoing. A significant emphasis is on self-evaluation with participants completing physical activity diaries.

The approach appears to be working well. But there is a limit to what one part-time worker is able to achieve. The model is time intensive.



Issues or barriers to progress

The project does not face any specific issues not anticipated. However, there is a limit to how much impact one part-time worker can make, especially given the time-intensive nature of the model.

The project still faces more traditional issues, such as transportation.

Good Practice

The model used for the programme was carefully researched and follows guidance from the International Society for Ageing and Physical Activity (ISAPA).

The project displays much good practice. Ideas for the project, and potential delivery models were based on extensive research, both within U3A's own operation, and through researching the impact of physical activity programmes for older people across a number of countries. Examples of good practice include:

- The project builds on an established setting with a successful track record of providing services and activities for older people.
- Engagement with older men is based on a personal approach, and project leaders emphasise that it is the project that needs the participants rather than the other way round.
- The project design is continuously modified in response to beneficiary needs. The 12 week- 12-man model allows this to happen, and due to the small number involved at any one time, activities are tailor made.
- There is the potential, given the setting for the project, to link the Physical Activity Programme with the other healthy living initiatives. These can include healthy eating schemes, and advice/ guidance on a range of health and social care services.
- The project has looked at a number of monitoring tools to capture the impact of the project. This includes the use of photography, but also the development of the PAC diaries, so that participants can monitor their own progress. This helps to keep participants mentally stimulated as well.



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Future

The U3A model should ensure that the project is sustainable. Volunteer Animators are used to deliver a comprehensive educational, social and recreational activity programme. There is scope to continue some of the activities under this arrangement.