



University of the  
West of England

## South West Well-being

### *“Promoting community action for public health”*

#### Briefing on the programme evaluation findings

##### Overview

Recent government strategies suggest we need to rethink how community-focused action can promote health and well-being in a changing society<sup>1</sup>.

Much evidence shows that the prevalence of depression and anxiety, overweight and obesity and reduced levels of physical activity is increasing in the UK population. These are linked to a major burden of ill health in the form of cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and mental ill health. They adversely affect people’s life chances and quality of life, have a disproportionate impact on lower income and marginalised groups, and significantly contribute to the widening gap in health and other inequalities<sup>2</sup>.



At the local level, health and social care services - working with civil society – will need to find imaginative solutions to these issues. Through the re-localising of public health, new Health and Well-being Boards will need to bring fresh emphasis on the role on all stakeholders to develop evidence-

based prevention and wellness activities in the communities they serve.

In recent years the voluntary and social enterprise sector has been rising to the public health challenge. Increasingly these agencies have refined their focus on outcomes, cost effectiveness and service quality. To support this work the **South West Well-being**

programme received a £3.96 million Big Lottery Fund investment, plus local funds, and has been delivered by a consortium of 15 community-based voluntary sector organisations from across the region.

This briefing summarises findings from the programme evaluation by the Institute for Sustainability, Health & the Environment at the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE).

##### Participation and Partnerships

South West Well-being (SWWB) has been an extensive initiative. Over 30 months SWWB projects worked with over 25,000 people, of whom 43% are on low incomes, 18% have low level mental ill health and 19% are obese, overweight and/or have weight related medical conditions.

Participants have taken part in over 105 types of SWWB project activities that include gentle exercise groups, befriending groups, grow and cook groups, art and craft groups, individual counselling and one-to-one personal health goal setting. Monitoring and case study feedback suggest that the projects offered a high level of individually tailored support to beneficiaries.

Roger first started going to the Elder Tree’s SWWB gentle exercise group in Plymouth after he’d had a coronary bypass operation: *When you have a bypass you feel very vulnerable. I was feeling low and very brittle. When I started going to the class I think I gradually got my confidence back. As a group we talk a lot about things and there’s a lot of laughter that goes on. I’d never been to this sort of class before. It’s now a regular engagement in the week and I really look forward to it. You could say it’s opened up the old doors that I thought were closed forever.*

**Volunteers** are central to the programme. Over a three year period, 903 volunteers contributed an estimated 165,677 hours to support the delivery of project activities. This is a per annum equivalent of 55,225 hours - or 28 full time staff. Based upon an hourly rate of £7.11 (£5.93 hourly national minimum wage plus 20% employment overheads), the total volunteer hours equate to an economic contribution of over £1.17 million towards the programme<sup>3</sup>.

Volunteers are a central part of Penwith's Pathways to Pathways to Health project – especially for older people who live in smaller, remote locations of Cornwall. The project's 40 volunteers make regular visits and offer support which can extend to offering transport to visit GPs or hospitals, DIY, gardening or shopping. Bernie, a recipient of the services, says *I don't know how I would have got by without it.*

Rosalind says *It has brought a great friendship [with Bernie] which I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been introduced to the voluntary service...and I know that this is a mutual thing because we enjoy each other's company.*

The **service costs** for SWWB were found to be relatively low. Using the PSSRU formula, the unit costs for group based activities range from £3.20 to £9.40 per session. One-to-one services have unit costs ranging from £15.30 to £30.90 and are targeted at individuals with higher levels of ill health or social needs. This compares with national figures of £11.25 unit cost for a voluntary day care service session of similar duration for older people and a £64.00 unit cost for a one-to-one cognitive behavioural therapy session<sup>4</sup>.



The SWWB programme works as an **ally to GPs, social care services** and a range of partner organisations. UWE's survey of 171 practitioners in partner agencies finds that 71% recommend or signpost SWWB services with 59% confirming they

formally refer people to a SWWB project. Practitioners indicate effective links between SWWB and their own organization: 64% said SWWB activities provided a good fit alongside other local services. This shows the potential for linking clinical services with community services with a demonstrated impact on health and wellbeing.



**The South West Well-being Programme runs from 2008 to 2011. It consists of fifteen projects across the South West of England**

*Westbank New Steps, Westbank HLC (Healthy Living Centre), Exminster [Programme Lead]*

*Positive Well-being Project, For All HLC, Weston Super Mare*

*Pathways to Health, West Cornwall HLC, Penwith*

*Step by Step, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HPS*

*Activate Your Life, Healthy Living Wessex. Dorset*

*Lawrence Weston Health Steps, Barrowmead HLC, Bristol*

*The Well-bean Project, Balsam Project, Wincanton*

*South West Well-being Plymouth, Eclipse, Relate & Elder Tree. Plymouth*

*Upstream Health Maps, Upstream HLC. Crediton*

*Pathways to Health, Knowle West Health Park, Bristol*

*Wellspring Community Kitchen, Wellspring HLC. Bristol*

*5x 30 Devonwide, Westbank HLC. Exminster*

*Living Well, W.Somerset Sports & Leisure. Minehead*

*Be Happy Be Healthy, Gloucs. City Council lead*

*Community Action North Devon & CASP The Healthy Living Project. Barnstaple*

\*Personal names have been changed unless permission has been given.

## Well-being outcomes

Using validated questionnaire measures developed in association with the new economics foundation (nef) and the national BIG Lottery evaluation team, UWE analysed the well-being outcomes for a sample of 737 beneficiaries taking part in a range of programme activities.

### General health

Sixty five per cent of SWWB respondents reported their general health to be 'good' to 'excellent' at baseline. This rose to 82% at follow up. These data show improvements in comparison to recent large scale surveys, although there are small differences in the measures adopted. For example, the NPHO study (2009) found that 72% of respondents reported that they were in 'good' or 'very good' health.

### Mental Health

Taking part in the programme is associated with considerable improvements in mental health. Overall,



63.6% of participants report improved mental health. The percentage of participants reporting significant depressive symptoms fell from 35.6% to 18.5% during the course of project activities. This compares to 20.8% of the adult population in England.

Knowle West Health Park's Fit 'n' Fab is a support group for people who have experienced mental health and wider social difficulties. The group decide on weekly activities, such as mental relaxation and healthier eating, that are all themed around personal well-being. Jan, a participant, says *Fit 'n' Fab has been a way for me to get to know lots of people. It's a place where you can come and just let go. You can just come in, and unwind. It's a bit unique. At the start I felt I had to come every week...I feel a lot more confident now: like I don't have to come every week.*

### Physical activity

Beneficiaries taking part in SWWB activities are likely to be more active and to take part in more frequent

and intensive exercise. Using the GP Physical Activity Questionnaire, the percentage of respondents classified as being 'active' increased from 13.8% at baseline to 32.4% at follow up. 45% of participants recorded an improvement their physical activity using the 28 day 5x30 minutes exercise measure.

### Diet and healthy eating

The proportion of individuals taking part in activities with a focus on healthy eating who were meeting public health 5 a day guidelines on fruit and vegetables rose from 25.5% to 39.5%. This compares to 29% for a comparable age profile in the England population. Overall 31.7% reported eating more fruit and vegetables.



Healthy Living Wessex focused its weight management activities to appeal more to men – a group that tended to make less use the team's specialist services. By cutting the length of sessions, using more practical advice and gadgets, and marketing alongside local TV listings the team doubled the percentage of male take up. Howard and David (pictured above) are two beneficiaries who lost 21 and 14 pounds respectively.

### Personal well-being

Overall satisfaction with life as a whole, a recognised measure of well-being, showed significant positive change from an average of 6.1 at baseline to 7.0 at follow up. The UK average score is 7.2. This represents 47.4% reporting improved overall life satisfaction.

At the same time, the proportion of participants producing ratings of 'moderate' or 'high' on the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale rose from 57% at baseline to 73.7% at follow up. This represents 60% reporting improved personal well-being.

### Social well-being

The evaluation also found statistically significant positive changes in terms of wider aspects of social well-being, including perceptions of belonging to a community, regularly meeting socially with friends



and relatives, and perceptions that people in the local area help one another.



As an expectant mother with experience of depression Kate found that Westbank's 'Bumps, Mums & Pushchair Walk' group provided the sort of informal support she needed *I was welcome straight away, and met lots of people who had been through all sorts of different pregnancies, and was able to chat about all of my questions and worries as they occurred with people who weren't experts but could share their own experiences with me. I felt like I had all the support I needed. Still today I wouldn't be without my weekly walk with the group.*

### Conclusions

The evaluation finds that mental and social well-being are strongly linked to the programme goals of improving healthy eating, physical activity and mental health. Taken together, these findings support the SWWB holistic service models and suggest that work in one area can deliver wider health benefits for participants. However the limitations of the findings need to be recognised: for example, further study would be needed to determine associations with longer term and sustained behavioural changes.

The evaluation has also identified organisational learning based upon the experiences of SWWB programme's consortium members. These highlight how an alliance of healthy living organisations has worked with the BIG Lottery's 'portfolio' model, while also reflecting the learning derived from wider research on partnership working.

SWWB programme is a model that holds a number of attractions for commissioners of civil society and health improvement initiatives. The format has kept

overheads low, promoted prompt front-line delivery, directed efforts and managed quality assurance.

As a NICE Good Practice Award winner in public health, Upstream's team of mentors reach out to older people across central Devon to promote mental well-being through creative activities. Upstream's Winter Project involved multiple groups to create a giant picnic exhibition out of recycled fabric. Iris, who has muscular sclerosis, says *"This is a chance I get to get out and have some fun. I'm very determined to keep fit you know!"*

The South West Well-being programme has sought to deliver a community focus on promoting capacity for well-being – as opposed to the management ill health and disease. To do this, SWWB placed volunteering, mentoring, peer support and social networks at the heart of its work.



For the evaluation reports go to <http://www.southwestwellbeing.co.uk>

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