

Breaking Through

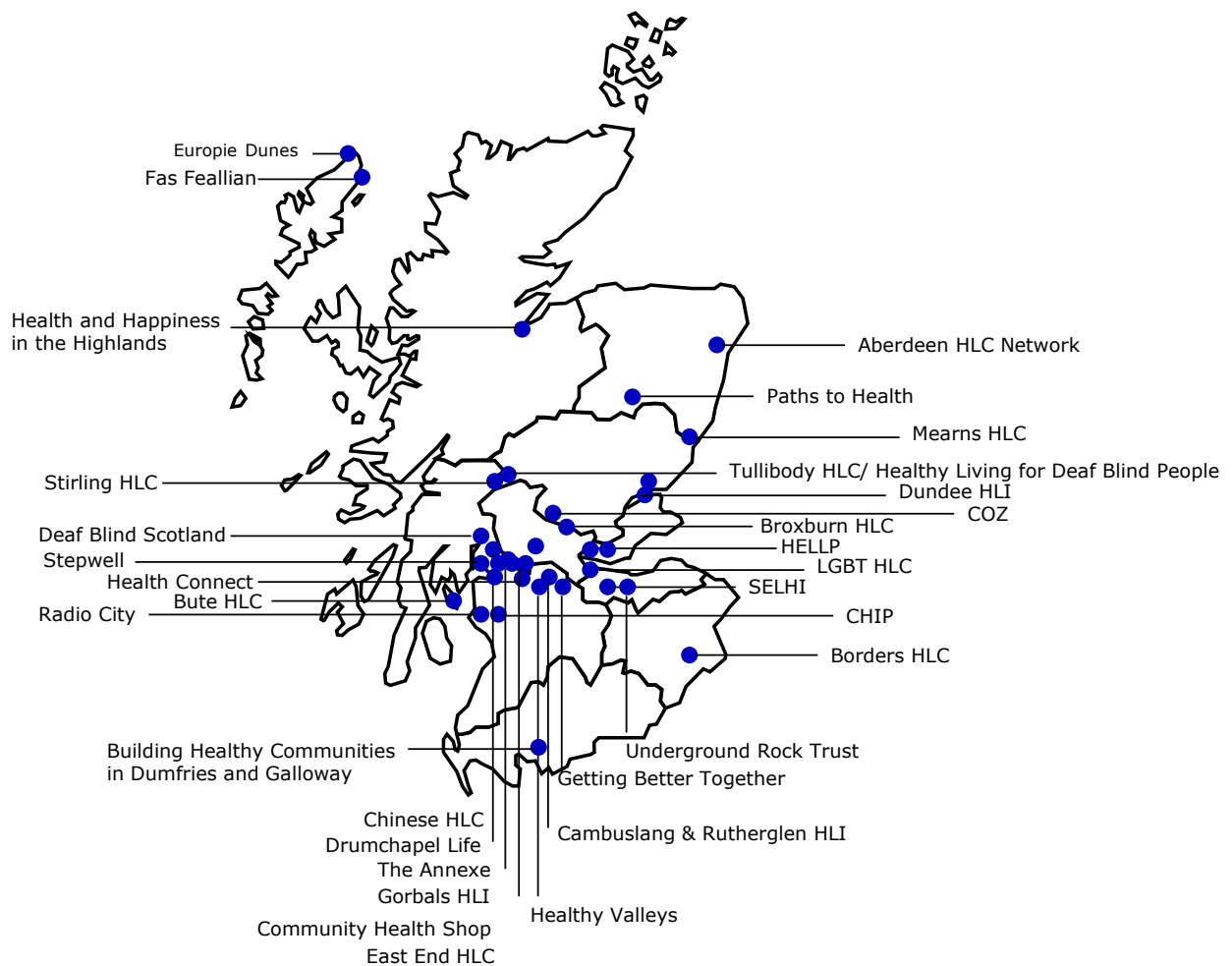
Healthy Living Centres: Removing Barriers to Wellbeing



chex

D. Alexander '09

HLC Map of Scotland



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Introduction

This series of excellent and engaging articles highlighting the work of Healthy Living Centres (HLCs) in Scotland has been produced by **Community Health Exchange (CHEX)** one of the leading agencies in Scotland that provides a resource in supporting community development approaches to health improvement and challenging health inequalities.

CHEX is part of the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) and is funded by NHS Health Scotland. The articles demonstrate that one of the most effective ways of addressing health inequalities and increasing the health and wellbeing of a community is to listen and act on needs identified by the communities themselves. For the last seven years HLCs have been working alongside communities to influence services and develop programmes which have made significant inroads to improve their health and wellbeing. The articles highlight the importance of developing long-term relationships and actions which build the skills and confidence of community members to take greater control of the services and issues which are most important to them. In short, HLCs owe much of their success to providing bespoke services which are responsive to identified need and developed through trusted relationships with disadvantaged communities.

The Big Lottery Fund's (then New Opportunities Fund) investment of £34.5m in Scottish HLC infrastructure from 2002 onwards and the continued investment of the Scottish Government through the 'Transition Fund' in 2008 and 2009 has

created and supported effective, expert organisations with dedicated workers, volunteers and board members who are committed to tackling health inequalities in Scotland's most disadvantaged communities. The success of HLCs can be measured in many ways from the effect on service users, which is often substantial, to the impact across Scotland as a whole. A recent survey (carried out by the HLC Alliance in November 2008) of 25 Scottish HLCs revealed that:

Since March 2008, HLCs have levered in substantial additional resources to communities including £5.6m over and above their core funding to develop new and existing programmes, this has provided services for some 131,529 beneficiaries and supported 1,218 volunteers and 256 board members in Scottish communities.

The positive influence of HLCs has been highlighted by numerous evaluations over the years including Edinburgh University's Research Unit in Health, Behaviour and Change (RUHBC 2007) who state: "The effectiveness of HLC approaches in tackling inequalities seem to be based on a combination of ability to target disadvantaged groups successfully and obtain their participation and the fact that this participation has proved effective in improving the health of the individuals [and communities] concerned."

The articles effectively demonstrate that HLCs are helping communities to change and grow and give local people the opportunity to come together in new ways to undertake new activities and to release

new energy and resources. HLCs adopt a social model of health which recognises that there are many complex social and environmental factors which affect people's health and that communities themselves hold the key to better health and wellbeing. Basically, the projects have been effective in identifying local need, galvanizing local solutions, reducing social isolation and improving the health and wellbeing of those involved from local volunteers and board members through to recipients of the services themselves. As the article on the Mearns HLC (Aberdeenshire) demonstrates, the real skill of the HLC is to listen to the community and deliver services which are trusted and appropriate; this seemingly simple approach is revitalizing community spirit. Service users, volunteers and Board members report that involvement in the Mearns HLC network is a stepping stone not just to greater personal independence, but also a wider sense of connectedness with their community.

This approach to health improvement has an extremely good fit with recent public policy and practice. For example, 'Meeting the Shared Challenge' is supporting both statutory sector and community organisations to gain a better understanding of, and strategic commitment to, a community

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Articles written by Kerry Thomson - www.21miles.com

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Graphic design by Ecrú Design - www.ecrudesign.com

led approach to health improvement and health inequalities. Better Health Better Care talks about a commitment to improving the capacity of the third sector to reduce health inequalities. The 'Equally Well' pilots echo the work and practices of HLCs, for example the need for joined up working and partnership working which involves the community and many of the priorities including drug and alcohol abuse, mental health and wellbeing and reducing cardiovascular disease and cancer. Dundee Healthy Living Initiative are already playing a significant role in one of the pilot areas. And lastly, the Performance Management Framework to meet the shared outcomes for NHS and local authorities sets out targets with clear parallels to the activities of HLCs including 'Inequality and Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Tobacco, Alcohol, Obesity and Early Years.

The articles in this magazine will demonstrate the impact that this type of community led activity is having on: urban and rural communities; the most vulnerable in our society and highlight that HLCs have a continuing role in the Scottish Health system and are well placed to develop new appropriate services and training which compliments mainstream NHS and local authority provision.

Meeting an age old challenge

MEARNS AND COASTAL HEALTHY LIVING NETWORK

From relatively simple interventions, like helping with shopping, hosting a lunch club, or even changing a light bulb, this HLC shows that support can be low level and yet high value.

Mary Goodfellow*, 83, was living in darkness. When a phonecall came in from the pensioner living on the outskirts of Laurencekirk, a small rural community in Aberdeenshire, Ed Garret and his team knew exactly how to help. Mary wasn't depressed, she hadn't fallen down the stairs and she wasn't phoning to discuss a health problem. "She simply needed the light bulbs replaced in her living room. The house felt gloomy and she could hardly see what she was doing. She simply didn't have anyone else to ask," explains Ed Garrett, project manager at the Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network.

Since 2002, the Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network have been using small steps like these to make a big impact on the lives of older people in Aberdeenshire.



The Laurencekirk based HLC uses a practical, hands on approach, making the most of the skills and support frameworks in local communities to promote and encourage a healthier, happier way of life for older people.

The success of the Network demonstrates that 'health' isn't just measured by a blood pressure reading, the need for medication or even life expectancy. Conventional indicators show one side of

the coin and Ed Garrett and his team of over 60¹ volunteers, have seen another side: the impact of confidence building, friendships and supported independence.

Through the provision of a range of flexible and dynamic services, older people can be supported and encouraged to take more control over their own well being. Simple but effective steps can enhance social 'connectedness' and, quite literally 'light up' lives.

WHEN INDEPENDENCE EQUALS ISOLATION

People are living longer, healthier lives than at any other period of history. In fact, research from the Scottish Government's March 2007 action plan, All Our Futures: Planning for a Scotland with an Ageing Population, showed that by 2031 the number of people aged 50+ is projected to rise by 28% and the number aged 75+ is projected to increase by 75%. Scotland is changing in a fundamental way and older people form an increasing proportion of our population. However, despite the overall health improvements, and growing numbers of older people, they are still disadvantaged in many ways.

A community consultation in the late nineties identified older people's health issues as vital in the Mearns/South Aberdeenshire area. In this area particularly, an aging population combined with a rural landscape often means dispersed communities, transport challenges and in some cases, extreme physical and social isolation. There is an interesting irony here. The Mearns area is not one of social deprivation, low employment or poor health outcomes. In fact, many of the traditional sociodemographic indicators would suggest that the South Aberdeenshire region is doing reasonably well on the health front². But whilst the issues may be harder to quantify, they are certainly there and isolation and loneliness are

huge obstacles for many older people in the locale.

In the Mearns South area particularly, physical access to services is difficult for many. Old farmhouses are located in rural, dispersed locations often with poor or no transport links. Ed and his team say the community structure has altered dramatically over the last few decades and fewer old people have family living nearby and many are widows/widowers. Many are retired and no longer feel part of the social network which a job often brings. Mainstream facilities whilst plentiful; tend to be centralised in neigh-

bouring cities, Aberdeen and Dundee. For older people, all these factors combined can lead to reduced social participation and, over time, can lead towards depression, inability or unwillingness to self care, and even malnutrition. As a result many older people feel extremely vulnerable.

Whilst living alone and out with any sort of residential care can be desirable and indeed preferable for many older people, without the appropriate support networks, such 'independence' can prove isolating.



Volunteer and service user reviewing the shopping list together

WHAT THEY'RE DOING AND THE DIFFERENCE THEY'RE MAKING

The Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network focuses resources on the things that older people themselves say are important. Sometimes that means the most fundamental of services, for example, helping an older person head out to the shops with a volunteer and choose their own fruit and vegetables or meeting new friends at a tea dance. In addition, because of the social connections made, the Network acts as an information service. Ed explains:

“For some older people, the actual process of accessing information, whether it’s on mainstream health services, social care or general day to day household questions, can be stressful. Often, information channels depend on a person being able to go on the internet or travel to a library or a doctor’s surgery – these seemingly small barriers can unintentionally discourage older people from asking for help. Sometimes just ‘finding out’ is a problem for older people especially those that have little or no support and those that have dementia.”

For many isolated older people, getting help depends on knowing where and how to get it, which in turn depends on having information, which can become increasingly difficult if they become removed from mainstream social contact. Ed and his team are working to remove these barriers and so far the results have been encouraging. Much of the information is passed on in a very practical, community spirited way. Ed explains: “An older person might receive help from us in terms of getting assistance with their weekly food shop, but because of the way our volunteers are involved in the community, a trust and even a friendship is often built up.

“This means the older person feels more comfortable to chat informally and in doing so it’s often the case that other needs or gaps are identified. That same older person might then realise they could also benefit from attending one of our exercise classes or could get help from our handyman.”



Cooking healthy meals for local people

In essence, it’s an old-fashioned method – formalising a framework for what might once have been called ‘community spirit’ but applying it in a very up to date, appropriate and effective way.

“Some of the services we provide might sound quite low level but we sometimes find it’s the people who are out with the mainstream system who sometimes need practical help the most. Actually, many of these older people have no idea where or how to receive practical help. That’s where local knowledge, local relationships and a local sense of community are vitally important. It isn’t just about providing a service, it is about providing the right service in the right way,” explains Ed.

And the same ethos is in evidence when it comes to the Network’s social and educational activities. An extensive programme of classes

and events is delivered by the Network's team of 60 volunteers – the majority of whom are older people themselves. Computer, art and exercise classes are extremely popular, as much for their social impact as their educational or health benefits. "With the exercise classes, the health aspect is almost a by product," smiles Ed. "People come along because it's a good day out; they're enjoying the chance to meet friends, discuss news and air any concerns. It's not just about keeping the body agile; it keeps the mind and spirit healthy too."

The Network's guided computer classes are a popular choice for the community's older population. Whilst various local learning centres and colleges run IT classes and a range of adult education courses, Ed says the word 'appropriate' again remains at the fore. He explains: "Many of our service users have told us they could've gone to a local college course or enrolled in an IT class a long time ago, but it simply didn't feel right for them, it wasn't the right setting. It isn't just about service provision; it's about delivering something in a way which is sympathetic to the needs of the audience."

Interestingly, Ed says many of the older people who attend the various classes, or avail of the mini bus service which helps overcome transport difficulties, are happy to pay a small fee: "Yet again, it comes down to what feels appropriate for the older age group. Many older people feel there's a stigma attached to receiving 'charity' and, although perhaps wrongly, they see 'free help' as something which labels them as being on the receiving end of some sort of hand out. By accepting a small fee, we find that the majority of older people retain a sense of personal pride and they're happy to feel they're contributing."

It's exactly this sort of intuition for the sensibilities of the local community, as well as the fact that the services are driven and in the case of some of the volunteers, delivered by the very people who use them, that make the Network so well placed to respond.

'CAPACITY BUILDING' – MORE THAN JUST JARGON?

Linking communities, creating new opportunities and forging new networks is an integral part of the capacity building ethos in Mearns. As with many of the other Healthy Living Centres across Scotland, collaboration and partnership working is vitally important and it is strong links with organisations across the voluntary and public sectors which have helped the Network gain momentum. For many old people in the area, involvement with the Network turns out to be a stepping stone not just to greater personal independence, but also to a wider sense of connectedness with their community.

Right at the start of the project back in 2002, service users set up their own Older People's Network which consists of representatives from groups and communities throughout the area. Meeting every six weeks, it acts as an important way of promoting the Network within the community as well as guiding the work



Tea and a chat are core to inclusion

of the project. The Older People's Network has taken part in several consultations including one on new planning legislation with Planning Aid Scotland. In fact, it was the Older People's Network which took a lead role in the decision to extend the reach to include a wider coastal area, taking in communities south of Stonehaven and instigating the name change from The Mearns Healthy Living Network to Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network.

It's an example which has been replicated and several other 'offspring' groups and activities have been borne out of the original Mearns Healthy Living Network. Ed explains: "Volunteers and service users are really involved in the development and setting up of new groups and there is also support for groups who want to go it on their own like the tea dance group has recently done.

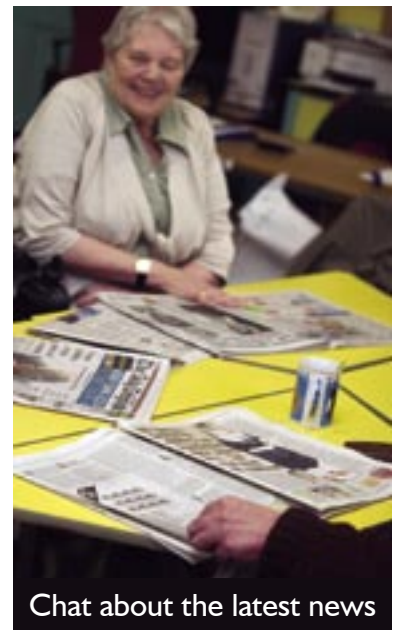
When a service works well, it acts as a stepping stone and gives older people the incentive to go on and run with something themselves. That's when capacity building becomes more than just jargon – it really is creating the right atmosphere, the correct framework and context to change the way communities take control of their own needs." As well as supporting its own service users, the Network helps support other older peoples' groups in Aberdeenshire and advises them on issues such as

funding, finance and sourcing volunteers.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Network. Around 60 volunteers support more than 120 service users each week. "Our volunteers are mostly what we call 'younger older people'. They are part of the older population and to a large extent they themselves are our target audience, but they're also extremely keen to be part of driving the direction of the services. As older people themselves, based in local communities, they are ideally placed to help," explains Ed. Almost all the classes are run by older people for older people.

"I get even more out of it than I put in," is a common claim from many of the volunteers, says Ed. Undoubtedly, there are important social and health benefits to being a volunteer: "The very act of volunteering can be extremely empowering. Many of our volunteers are retired; having worked all their lives there's now a substantial gap. If this gap isn't filled, loneliness and isolation can creep in. Volunteering helps connect people and for many, increases self-worth," he adds.

Many volunteers have experienced the same geographic and social isolation as the service users themselves. They are experts by experience in their capacity to empathise, and have a natural intuition for what's appropriate and achievable locally. On a wider community devel-



opment level, the Network's extensive volunteering opportunities are plugging a huge gap – in fact, there are very few opportunities to volunteer on such a local, tangible level in this part of Aberdeenshire.

The Board of the Mearns Network, all of whom are volunteers, is also well integrated with wider opportunities for community development. Ken Fairweather, himself 72, is Chairman and the rest of the board, nine members, are also older people. As well as heading up the Board and liaising with the Network's two members of staff and volunteers, a Board member sits on The Partnership Group.

This group consists of representatives from Aberdeenshire Council Social Work and Community Learning, NHS Grampian, the CVS Network, Age Concern and the Healthy Living Network and their role

is to look at the strategic development of the Healthy Living Centre network and contextualise it in relation to health and social care and community learning.

Ken explains: “Working with other organisations and by sharing good practice, we’re seeing a real difference in what it means for older people to live independently in this area. Independence need not mean isolation. It can be a ‘supported independence’, one where community relationships act as a framework for huge improvements in a person’s wellbeing.

“We are completely focused on older people and on listening to their needs – but we’re also facilitating the way for older people to take control themselves and gain a sense of confi-

dence and pride in their own ability to really make things happen. Older people are not just the recipients of services; they are a force for change.”

But one Healthy Living Centre can only do so much. The Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living Network, like many of Scotland’s HLCs, is empowering communities to ‘pick up and run with it’. It’s a hands-on, grassroots approach and it works. An emphasis on local relationships and a practical, common sense response to the demographic changes in local communities is paying dividends. For many older people in Aberdeenshire, the ‘will’ is there and this Healthy Living Centre is showing the ‘way’.



*Service user names have been changed to protect privacy

REFERENCES

1. From Mearns’ annual report 2006-2007
2. <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/statistics/census/tables.asp>
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Getting better together

SHOTTS HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE

Together with its communities, Shotts Healthy Living Centre is combating anti-social behaviour, undoing stereotypes and showing how 'an apple a day' does more than keep the doctor away...



The tabloids have plenty of names for them, yobs, hoodies, neds...but June Vallance, project manager at Shotts Healthy Living Centre has another description: 'kids with nothing to do'. Over the last six years, June and her team have witnessed the sort of transformations normally reserved for feel-good films. At the Shotts 'Getting Better Together' (GBT) project, sports, exercise and activities aren't just improving health – they're turning young peoples' lives around, transforming stereotypes and giving the youngsters of North Lanarkshire opportunities which previously excluded them.

"We've had mums and dads come up to us and thank us, practically with tears in their eyes, because they've imagined the path their kid's life could have taken and they're seeing just how dramatically differently things are turning out. Health in communities isn't about handing out advice or preaching to people about how to live their lives. Healthy communities support, recognise and reward potential and we've really seen the benefits of what can happen when communities pull together," says June.

It might pull on the heart strings, but the success at Shotts is more than sentimental. Strathclyde Police's Alfie Jones, North Lanarkshire's community safety co-ordinator, confirms there's more to the project than anecdotes:

"The project has reduced the number of calls we received from the local community with regards to youth disorder by over 35%. Youth crime on Saturday nights has fallen by more than 30%.¹"

Getting kids off the streets and enjoying exercise with confidence is just one aspect of community development taking place in Shotts thanks to buy-in from the whole community. When it comes to healthy eating, the Shotts HLC doesn't just 'talk the talk'. Since launching in 2004, the GBT Food Co-operative has sold well over 1 million portions of fresh fruit and vegetables to locals in the Greater Shotts area. By making nutritious food easily accessible, it's promoting as well as providing health options.

The GBT project shows what can happen when a community really invests in a project and genuinely wants it to work. Not just because it's a good cause, or because it's improving quality of life– but because it's knitted into the very fabric of that community. Or, as June so succinctly puts it: "allowing the community to create something they can't live without."



The HLC Building, in the heart of the community

IF IT CAN WORK HERE...

Located south-east of Glasgow in North Lanarkshire, in the 1960's Shotts was an industrial hotbed and boasted 22 coal mines. All are now closed. In this particular community, educational attainment among school leavers is lower than the Scottish average, as is household income, while unemployment and the proportion of Income Support claimants are both higher.² Much of the success of the GBT project lies in an intimacy with its audiences and a very localised knowledge which allows it to involve the community every step of the way.

But it's also a courageous project, pushing boundaries and challenging ingrained perceptions about what it means to be healthy. The success of the GBT project shows well-being doesn't have to depend on being 'well-off'. June explains: "Everything we do is inspired by and informed by the practical needs of the people on our doorstep. They tell us what they want to see happen and they work with us to deliver it. We couldn't do what we do if the community and our local partners weren't 100% on board. This isn't a project for the local community. This is a project with the local community."

Testament to this ethos, the GBT Board are all local people– the Chair also chairs Lanarkshire Links and is a retired mental health nurse and the remaining members include those with experience on disability groups and Community Councils. Their professional experience is impressive, but June says it's their personal passion which is even more vital: "Our Board want to make this project work for the community because they are the local community. Their kids go to school here; their grandkids will grow up here. They have a very genuine vested interest. You can't quantify that sort of experience."

The Board represents youth as well as experience. Two members are local young people from Shotts. Aged 15 and 19, they also sit on the GBT Youth Committee, headed up by the Centre's youth worker, Hannah Weddell. "Their contribution is invaluable," says June. "It's all very well us thinking we know what young people want to see happen here, which classes we think they'd enjoy – but with Leanne and Carly on the Board we get a very honest, grassroots, input. They're the voice of our young people."

A SPORTING CHANCE

Football, basketball, rugby, dance, cheerleading, swimming, boxing, yoga- Strathclyde Police have said GBT's activities for young people are reducing antisocial behaviour and constitute one of the most positive elements in the fight against local crime. The young people of Shotts say it's a good laugh and gives them something to do at the weekends.

And therein lies the success of GBT – it listens to what young people want and it works with them to deliver an attractive and appropriate solution. June says the term 'getting kids off the streets' can be misleading: "It almost sounds like we are persuading them, or telling them what to do – that's not how or why the GBT project works. We're working with young people to create a better option so that suddenly hanging about the street corners definitely isn't the desirable alternative." The GBT solutions don't preach at young people or lecture them on how to behave. They simply makes things happen.

It's this sort of practical, hands on initiative that spies an opportunity when it sees a local leisure centre, the only one for 12 miles, closed to the public on a Saturday night. When a consultation with Strathclyde Police and North Lanarkshire Leisure Trust showed problems with kids hanging about the streets at weekends, those

with local knowledge at GBT looked to the empty leisure complex. Working with both organisations, June and her team launched a 10 week pilot project called Saturday Sportscene. Opening up the leisure centre's facilities from 6-10pm, Saturday Sportscene was laid on for free and led by the GBT team.

Providing free, professional coaching in several sports, Saturday Sportscene targets the under-18s in Shotts and has been extremely successful, with over 400 registered participants. Such was the popularity of the Pilot at Shotts Leisure Centre, it has been extended to include Friday Football, football training on a Tuesday night, a GBT dance class and a Soccer Arena which comes to town every Wednesday in Dykehead, one of the more deprived areas in Greater Shotts.

Thanks to effective partnership working with North

Lanarkshire Leisure, the GBT's fitness classes have been rolled out and now, in addition to the 600 participants at Shotts, include over 2000 young people over five areas. "It's a great example of how local best practice can be extended into other communities," says June. An Action Plan is currently being investigated which would see more of the GBT's activities delivered across six North Lanarkshire areas. The fact that all this fun combats anti-social behaviour and makes for safer, happier streets in Shotts is, at least in the young people's eyes, a very happy co-incidence.

Partnership working has helped the GBT to reach more young people than was ever imaginable when the project began. In fact, if ever there was a case of 'bringing the mountain to Mohammad', it's with the GBT/North Lanarkshire Leisure and Sidekix partnership. The collaboration with 'Sidekix', a



Fun training events

sports and personal development company who provide portable football facilities, has allowed the game to reach areas where there wasn't even as much as a set of goal posts! Together the two organisations have seen hundreds of young people participate in regular sessions and receive expert tuition from professional coaches.

With the support of Strathclyde Police, GBT, North Lanarkshire Leisure and Sidekix have also formed the Shotts League, where recently on Wednesday and Friday evenings young people have been competing for the coveted 'Player of the Year' award. "You just had to see the expressions on the kids' faces and listen to what some of the parents were saying the night we handed out that award to know how worthwhile it all was," adds June.

It's not just perceptions of young people that have been transformed by the GBT projects – the Centre's collaboration with Strathclyde Police has also helped breakdown barriers and dispel myths surrounding the role of the authorities in the community. June explains: "It's easy for young people, unfairly, to see the Police as the 'bad guys'. If they only have one context for when they see the Police, i.e. when someone's getting into trouble, then it's not difficult to see how an 'us' and 'them' divide builds up. Our football nights and the fact that the Police are so enthusiastic about the GBT project have

really helped change perceptions. It perhaps isn't something people talk about very much, but there's definitely a significant shift in attitude." Members of the local Police assist with football tuition and have helped facilitate several of the recent sports competitions.

As well as participating in the activities, young people here are delivering services to their own peer groups. Local girl and Young Scot Award winner, Lianne Rundell, 19, works tirelessly with the GBT project to spread her passion for sport among other young people in her community. She volunteers weekly at Calderhead High School, where she has set up a girls' football team and leads training sessions every Tuesday evening in conjunction with the GBT project. Similarly, young people have

an input at a strategic level; the GBT Youth Committee encompasses the views and experiences of ten local young people, two of whom feed into the main adult Board on the project.

Nurturing the enthusiasm of young people has been vital to the project's success, but they're by no means the only target audience, explains June: "Yes, many of our classes for young people are based around exercise– but there's a really strong social aspect to the activities. We create a talking point. The youngsters come along to the classes, but often parents will drop them off, so it becomes a hub for mums and dads as well. Our activities for the young people create a lot of 'incidental' contact points with other members of the community." It seems by capturing the imagination of local young people, the GBT is capturing the attention of entire families.

The impact of the various youth projects has also captured local authorities, many of whom see GBT's work as a shining example of what can be achieved through innovative partnerships. In fact, the GBT's work with Sidekix and North Lanarkshire Leisure scooped the COSLA 'Best Team Award' in recognition of its success. "It isn't just a morale boost for the GBT project, it's a boost for the whole community. It's their success, we just helped put it in action," smiles June.



Building the capacity of the local community and workers



Healthy options in the HLC Café



A 'FARE' CHOICE?

“With its fuchsia pink skin and spiky scales it looks more like a cactus than something you’d eat for dessert,” laughs June, recalling the first visit she made to a local nursery for a fruit handling session. The GBT approach to healthy eating is nothing if not hands-on. As a way of demystifying fruit and vegetables and encouraging parents to make informed choices when feeding their children, the GBT Food Co-operative project visits local nurseries and lets the children play with and taste fruits and vegetables which they might not otherwise encounter. June explains:

“It all might sound like a bit of fun, but our work with schools and nurseries has very serious implications. By getting kids interested in nutrition and stimulating their curiosity, chances are they’ll go home and talk to their parents about what they’ve learned, or point out certain fruit to mum or dad when they go shopping. It’s all about finding small but significant ways to influence attitudes to what’s perceived as healthy and dispel the ‘healthy equals boring’ perception. We’re encouraging kids and parents to make better choices – not because they feel they should, but because they want to. It’s a subtle but important difference.”

When the Food Co project was in its infancy, June visited Glasgow schools to learn about their Free Fruit schemes. The discarded apples and a playground strewn with half-eaten bananas told a story; giving fruit away for free wasn’t working. She chatted with a janitor who was cleaning up the fruit debris: “It’s because it’s free. Kids don’t place any value on it,” he confided. After more research, June and her team began selling fruit to local schools, allowing the schools to sell it on to the kids – it was a valid business model that quite literally encouraged ‘buy in’ from all parties.

In its first year the project’s work with nurseries and primary schools was responsible for the creation of healthy eating Fruit Tuck Shops in six local primary schools and the start of several Breakfast Clubs across the Greater Shotts area. These Breakfast Clubs have now been picked up and are being operated by North Lanarkshire Council. As a result, fruit and vegetables have been supplied to local nurseries and schools since October 2004 with over 90,000 portions being purchased. The popularity of Fruit Tuck Shops has contributed greatly towards this with a local high school purchasing all ingredients for their home economics department from the Food Co.



Jobs for local people

The GBT is promoting healthier eating in schools but it's also providing the actual food. Housed within the GBT Centre is the main Food Co-operative shop. Here, as well as a healthy eating café where locals can socialise and discover more about the Centre's classes and activities, there's a huge selection of competitively priced local produce, fruit, vegetables and basic healthy ingredients. Staff at the Food Co Shop are also on hand to advise on recipe ideas and even let shoppers sample foods they're unfamiliar with.

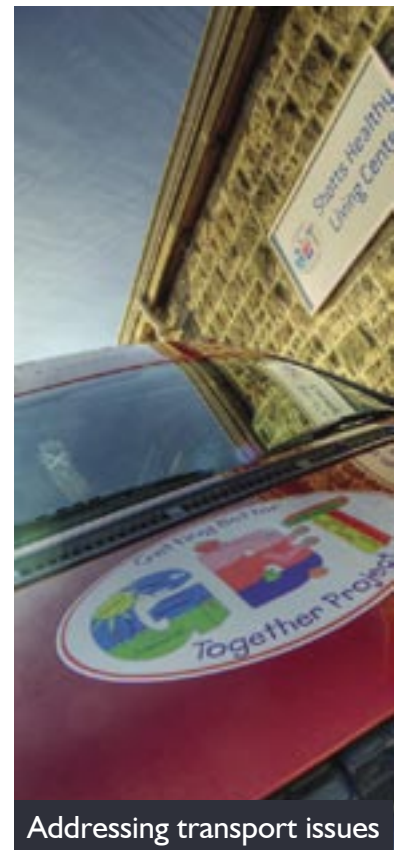
"Again, it's about breaking down invisible barriers," says June. "If you live in Shotts and you don't have a car,

it's difficult to get to a big supermarket or find a good selection of fresh produce. Here, we have the quality, selection and value that local people crave - and it's convenient." Like the GBT exercise classes, the Food Co Shop and café act as a hub for locals. June laughs: "I've lost count of the number of visitors who've ended up signing up for yoga when they only really stopped in to buy a banana!" Even the staff at the Food Co café are benefiting. Most staff are volunteers and as well as adding their enthusiasm and local knowledge, they benefit from staff development including access to training including first aid and food hygiene.

Access, affordability and availability are all tackled via the Food Co - it confronts not just the cost of shopping but also the difficulties which many locals on low incomes experience in getting to the shops. The Food Co also has three satellite shops which operate on a mobile basis in a local community hall and within two sheltered housing complex. Like the Food Co Shop at the GBT Centre, these services are using food to help develop other community skills, June explains: "The Food Co ethos is about so much more than buying oranges and apples. They're a real focal point for the community. They encourage social interaction and help to engage locals in all the other aspects of the GBT project."

GOING PLACES

"You can't get out of Shotts after 6pm unless you have your own means," states June. It's a stark truth and one which has a huge impact on access to some of the most basic services and facilities. In an area with high unemployment, it's difficult, if not impossible for those who do not own a car to easily attend job interviews or indeed travel to work. Many evening classes or other routes to work are in neighbouring areas and take place at night when transport is unavailable. Most local families cannot afford to rely on a taxi. "Even visiting a relative in hospital, or making arrangements to attend your own hospital appointment is hugely problematic if you don't have reliable transport," says June.



Addressing transport issues

It's another one of the fundamental needs which the GBT project has been able to address. After securing funding from North Lanarkshire Key Fund and working with members of the local community, they've devised a timetable of essential local routes, sourced volunteer drivers and recruited a full time local driver, to run a GBT mini bus service. "You miss out on so much if you can't afford transport. It is about more than getting from A to B – it's about feeling in control of your life and being in a position to make choices about where you go and when.

"Transport helps people fulfil their aspirations. That might sound over the top but you just have to speak to members of our local community for whom situations have improved dramatically because they're now able to get to an adult learning class, or visit a loved one in hospital. It's these sorts of small changes that add to the well being of a community. It isn't 'health' in the most conventional sense, but it has a huge impact on individuals' self-worth and sense of potential," adds June.



Time and space to meet and chat

CHANGED PERCEPTIONS

The impact of the GBT Project is vast – as well as the Food Co, combating anti-social behaviour and alleviating transport worries, the Centre also hosts a Citizens Advice Bureau, a Credit Union, a Smoking Cessation Group, an NHS Weight Management class, Family Planning advice service, Counselling for drugs and alcohol abuse, Disability advice and touch-screen computers for those with limited IT skills. Every aspect of its service delivery is supported by volunteers from the Shotts community and is informed by the needs and aspirations of local people.

Buy-in at every level, from young people, their parents and the entire local community, as well as positive input and vision from all the agencies involved has been the

key to the project's success June sums up: "It's all too easy to paint a stereotypical image in an area like Shotts – to speak about poor diets, kids hanging about street corners, and general apathy. That is not how people in this community wish to live their lives and it's not what the hundreds of people who come into the GBT Centre every week experience. This is a community where lives are changing, confidences are growing and young people and their families really are 'Getting Better Together'.

"A great deal of energy, time and money has been invested in this project but perhaps the biggest investment has been the 'buy-in' we've had from the community – that's priceless."

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More than bricks and mortar

BORDERS HEALTHY LIVING NETWORK



In The Borders it's called a Healthy Living Network, not a 'Centre', and its definition as such is integral to the approach.

Will it be a sausage supper or a fudge doughnut? How do you run a healthy Lunch Club in the outskirts of Hawick in the Scottish Borders, when the only places to 'eat out' are a chippy and a bakery?

Burnfoot is just one of five regeneration areas across the Borders where a Healthy Living Network is rising to exactly these sorts of local, practical challenges. For the Borders Healthy Living Network (HLN), the focus isn't on buildings, health centres or shiny new facilities; it's about working within the mainstream frameworks and community resources which already exist across the dispersed Borders communities and using them to best advantage. Fiona Doig, depute manager in Health Promotion, explains:

"For people who don't normally engage in main-

stream activity, healthy living isn't as simple as providing a service and expecting people to use it. If people in the Borders are to have equitable access to a better quality of life, improved health and ultimately a more positive outlook, then you have to acknowledge that inclusion must recognise diversity and it must be realistic. Not all members of the community can be included in the same way, there's no one size fits all approach, particularly in dispersed communities."

Over the last five years, the Borders HLN has attracted interest from, and supported thousands of people from across the region; last year alone the project worked with around 2500 locals. They've achieved this by listening to the needs of communities and taking a holistic approach to community development, one which pivots around

the simple ethos of 'working with what you've got'. Such resourcefulness has included innovative partnerships with Community Learning providers, pairing up with local heritage groups, and inviting key social welfare organisations to a local village community hall to create a hub for local families. The success of the project demonstrates how mainstream approaches and the work of Healthy Living Centres can work well together towards common goals – particularly when communities are dispersed.

None of these initiatives could have been achieved without collaboration and a 'can do' mentality. It's a mentality which works alongside local families and individuals to challenge preconceptions about what is achievable even when the obstacles seem insurmountable. The 'fudge doughnut' anecdote may sound comical, but the health challenges facing communities across the Scottish Borders are no laughing matter.

‘COMMUNITIES’, NOT A COMMUNITY

The Scottish Borders encapsulates a huge area geographically – from Heriot in the north to South Hawick and from Eyemouth in the east, to West Linton. Inhabited by more than 110,000 people, the Borders has an extremely dispersed population which as well as taking in bigger towns like Galashiels, Peebles, Hawick and Selkirk, includes many peripheral towns and coastal villages. Within the Borders there’s no city forming a central focal point. Hawick and Galashiels are the main towns but over two thirds of the Borders population lives out with these and one third lives in outside settlements where the population is less than 1500.¹ “To say the population is dispersed is an understatement,” says Fiona. “That’s why we need solutions which are community based and accessible and which sit comfortably within individual towns and villages,” she adds.

The five key areas where the Borders HLN’s three project workers and volunteers operate, Eyemouth, Langlee, Selkirk, Walkerburn and Burnfoot, are designated as the most deprived in the Scottish Borders. Here, residents have witnessed the negative economic effects of the demise of traditional Borders industries like milling and farming and, for many, employment prospects have dwindled. The sheer distance between the towns across the region brings specific challenges; there are no dual carriage ways or rail links. Whilst several bus services operate, geography dictates that often two or three changes are necessary to get from A to B. Given the higher than average aging population, transport difficulties are exacerbated and can lead to isolation and people becoming less willing to leave their physical and emotional comfort zone.

“Transport and geographical realities mean our Network needs to work from lots of different locations. We have to come to the community, not the other way around,” explains Fiona.



Local walking group

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“It all started with homemade soup and filled rolls,” laughs Fiona. Making the links between nutrition and good health has always played a substantial part in the activities at the Borders HLN, but more recently food has been used not just as a way of promoting good health, but also as a method of engaging those who might not otherwise have shown interest. Fiona explains: “In Burnfoot and Walkerburn our Drop-in Lunch Club is about so much more than talking about healthy foods and handing out recipes. Of course these aspects are important but it’s also about nurturing an interest in the whole concept of what the Borders HLN has to offer and creating the right environment for local people to learn more and put their newly developed skills to use in whatever way they feel is appropriate.”

And setting up the Drop-in Lunch Club in an area like Burnfoot was no mean feat - the current provision consists of a bakery and a chip shop. Nestled within a large council estate on the periphery of Hawick, the ‘Flat’ has become a vital community hub in an area which is low in amenities and high in deprivation.² Working with local volunteers and alongside the Borders HLN Food and Health Development worker, the Flat promotes cookery courses in the local community centre kitchen with an emphasis on shopping healthily on a budget. Fiona says the Flat’s weekly Drop-in Lunch Club is a testament to the huge capacity building potential of a seemingly small venture:

“We’re supporting a Local Community Plan which is looking into the feasibility of opening a café for Burnfoot residents, but in the meantime we’ve worked with locals to develop the Lunch Club. It has become the missing link to a truly invaluable range of resources for local people, offering informal access to advice and counseling right across the community. It’s not just about soup and sandwiches.”

Boasting an office, a therapy room, living room and kitchen, it’s a familiar ‘household’ setting which works well: “It’s fairly basic, but very homely and the fact that the main ‘activity



Healthy eating in Burnfoot

room’ is actually a living room and has that feel to it, makes people feel more at ease and folk are more likely to strike up a conversation than if they were just strangers sitting across from each other in a formal waiting room scenario,” explains Fiona.

Particularly attractive to the Burnfoot community’s older residents, the Flat serves as a valued point of social interaction. With the Borders HLN’s support, older people who had been coming along to the Lunch Club started a Reminiscence Group. The group now meets fortnightly and links in with local schools, encouraging older folk to tell local youngsters what they remember about growing up in the area. The group has made particularly strong links with Hawick High School and with the Heritage Hub in Hawick. Fiona says this sort of intergenerational activity has bolstered confidences:

“It’s a really innovative initiative and one which local people are getting so much out of. Forging links between the generations and learning from past experiences is really valuable not just to the younger generation but to the older folk too. For them it’s a real boost and a great reason to be out. It helps foster mutual respect between generations and gives older people the chance to pass on their knowledge and skills; for example, they led a baking class

in the local school. Plus they're meeting young people who they might not normally encounter in such a positive light. These sorts of activities break down barriers and help make the whole Burnfoot community feel more inclusive."

Responding to the specific, localised needs of various communities is something which Fiona and the Borders HLN team are well equipped to do. They regularly collaborate with Community Learning Partners across the Borders to assess the demand for particular types of food related classes. One such class is the popular 'Cooking Skills for Men' course. The six week practical course runs regularly in Hawick and Eyemouth in both local community halls and the training kitchen of the Borders College. "We've seen lots of interest from men who are notoriously more difficult to engage. So far the classes are attracting, amongst others, male single parents and also male carers," says Fiona. Importantly, the Cooking Skills for Men classes focus not just on recipes and cooking but also on portion control and food labelling. "It's cooking skills in the broadest sense and we're trying to encourage participants to become more intuitive about the link between food and wellbeing."

The HLN also works closely with the Food and Health Team at NHS Borders Health Promotion HQ in Melrose. In fact, a partnership agreement with the Health Promotion team has facilitated cooking skills training for several Borders HLN volunteers who have subsequently gone on to deliver cooking courses themselves, using the facilities at the Borders College training kitchen. Fiona adds: "It's about being innovative with the resources and partnerships which already

exist and thinking laterally – often the skills are there, the various buildings are available and the desire to take a plan forward is in place – but it all needs to be pulled together. That's the real challenge." With more than 400 people participating in cooking classes operating over the last year alone, it's a challenge Fiona and the HLN team are rising to.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS - PARENTS AND PARENTING

"It's one of the toughest jobs going, yet there's no job description, no salary and often nobody teaches you how to do it!" smiles Fiona. Becoming a parent and meeting the demands of raising a young family is another area where the Borders HLN is working as a Network in the most literal sense, making the most of the frameworks and support structures which already exist for young families but adding a localised expertise.

Building on original work started by a health visitor in Selkirk, the Borders HLN now links in with NHS Health Visitors from across the Borders. The HLN team identifies expectant mothers and those who have recently had babies and together, with the support of Community Health Visitors, deliver a series of weaning sessions. The Borders HLN has effectively removed the barriers to participation by offering free classes to parents and their babies in venues which are local and accessible, Fiona explains: "Parents can feel quite bewildered when it comes to weaning. Traditional family structures are not always what they used to be and it's often the case that new mums and dads don't have close family nearby who they can go



View from outside the HLC venue

to for advice. By pairing up with the Health Visiting Team, our weaning courses inform parents of current recommendations and answer their queries accurately, backing up advice already given by midwives and other mainstream health professionals.”

It’s not all talk – as well as speaking with parents and discussing weaning options, the Borders HLN provide a hands on approach. Blenders and ice-cube trays are part of the service provision and parents are given the opportunity to practise making baby foods and devise their own healthy recipes. “It’s a very realistic approach, led by the individual needs of the parents. We’re not teaching people how to be good parents; we’re equipping families with skills which help build up their confidence and we’re doing it within a framework that already works well,” adds Fiona. Throughout 2007 the Borders HLN, working in partnership, delivered more than 40 weaning sessions for approximately 200 parents and carers.

Whilst the HLN’s weaning advice is helping the Borders’ youngest residents get the best start in life, the classes also have a positive knock-on effect for parents. Fiona explains: “By talking about food in such detail and introducing parents to recipe ideas, we’ve found they’re taking a closer look at their own diets as well as that of their babies.”

The success of the weaning sessions fits well with national and local objectives such as NHS Borders Food and Nutrition Strategy³ and the Infant Feeding Strategy for Scotland Consultation paper⁴ (2006), and the Borders HLN has based their programmes around these in order to give children the best possible start. With the appointment of a National Infant Feeding Co-ordinator it is hoped that in the future programmes can link even more into National strategy.

Eating habits are just one aspect of parenting where the Borders HLN is having a significant impact on local lives. As well as tapping into the mainstream health network which already exists (via the Health Visitors), Fiona and her team are bringing external agencies together and helping disseminate their expertise. The Walkerburn ‘One Stop Shop for Parents’ is testament to the power of good collaboration. Each week the Borders HLN facilitates the opportunity for organisations such as Social Work, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Health Visitor and Community Learning Partners to ‘set out their stall’ in a local village hall. Refreshments are provided and the One Stop Shop has an informal, drop in feel.

The One Stop Shop layout encourages parents to collectively access a huge range of advice and this type of approach often helps identify other needs and propagate

new ideas. Fiona explains: “Two parents are on the partnership planning group for the initiative and sometimes just the act of bringing lots of parents and organisations together helps catalyse ideas and spark interest in other aspects of healthier living. As a result of evaluation and consultation with the parents at the One Stop Shop, we’ve seen a cooking skills group start up and several parents have also decided to start their own aerobics class. The ripple effects are extremely positive. There’s a real desire for change and a willingness to take ownership of, and responsibility for, local quality of life.”

Such has been the success of the Walkerburn approach plans are being investigated to deliver a similar One Stop Shop in Selkirk, where it’s hoped the facility could tie in with an existing parent and toddler group in a local library. “It all comes back to bringing the service to the community, tapping into what already works well and looking at how that can be used and sustained most effectively,” adds Fiona.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY – HIGH IMPACT, LOW RHETORIC

“We’re not training classical ballerinas or Olympians of the future; we’re simply and sensibly trying to introduce local people to the notion of enjoying physical activity. We want to give locals the chance to try out classes, get out and about, meet new friends and generally feel good,” says Fiona.

In the Borders, the broad emphasis is on ‘activity’ rather than ‘exercise’. Based around the concept of taster courses and short programmes, it is range and scope the HLN is aiming for, not an in depth training programme. Practicality is key to the ethos and again, the approach revolves around knowing the needs of the local communities, listening to their requests and coming up with a solution which fits. Where possible, Fiona and the HLN team try to link in with Community Learning resources – using their buildings as a venue for activities and signposting locals to any existing community classes –making the most of what’s already on offer.

Good relationships with Borders Council have encouraged the HLN to work closely with the Council’s ‘Paths to Health’ scheme called ‘Walk It’ – a partnership which has spurred several volunteers to enrol on a Council funded Walk Leaders course. In Burnfoot, walks are organised by a staff member and one local HLN volunteer has successfully completed the course and now supports a series of walks for local enthusiasts. “It’s all about broadening local peoples’ horizons and showing people what’s available. With all our activities, we provide an initial batch of taster classes free of charge, and then if the community like them and want to run with it, they have the option to add some money to the pot. This way the classes can be picked up and delivered in the long term,” says Fiona. It’s yet another practical approach that has served this HLN well. From belly dancing in Hawick and kickboxing in Walkerburn to Pilates in Selkirk and archery in Eyemouth, the Borders HLN has opened up a whole new range of activities which local people might not otherwise have had the chance to enjoy.



HLC workers outside one of their community venues

VOLUNTEERS & SHARED VISION – BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The communities in which the Borders HLC works may be spread out but their efforts are held together by the enthusiasm of over 20 volunteers. From low level commitment such as mums helping out at a (HLN supported) local youth club, to more formal ‘sessional’ work delivered by volunteers who have benefited from training through the Borders HLN, volunteers help the Network punch well above its weight. Fiona explains: “Our volunteers really add value to everything we do. They are the community and they’re delivering services to the community - so they’re perfectly positioned to know what’s appropriate and to judge how any new initiatives will be received.”

Whilst many volunteers offer their support on a very informal basis, the Borders HLN has an organisational link with the local Volunteer Centre. Once a person becomes a volunteer they have the opportunity to register with the Volunteer Centre, allowing them to tap into a wider volunteer network and more opportunities. “Of course, not all volunteers would want to avail of this wider network, but the option is there and it has the potential to really add another dimension to what they’re doing. Our link with the Volunteer Centre ensures volunteering has the recognition it deserves. It adds a sense of ‘official’ acknowledgement

to the value volunteers bring to communities and community development,” explains Fiona.

Unlike many Healthy Living Centres, the Borders HLN do not have a Board of Management per se, however they enjoy strong links with the Localities Health Improvement Group and work to agreed targets and a work plan. The Network also contributes to the Borders Joint Health Improvement Plan and liaises closely with NHS Borders and their Health Improvement Team. By working in sync with the mainstream provision which already exists and augmenting

it with a community-led approach, the Borders HLC shows how the various facets of community planning can make progress together.

“Our biggest challenge is trying to manage expectations,” concludes Fiona. “Word spreads quickly in the Borders and the Network is well known for its good work. People can see how much has been achieved and how many obstacles have been overcome, but we can’t possibly meet every request and that can be disappointing – there’s still a long way to go. A lot has been done, but there’s a lot still to do!”

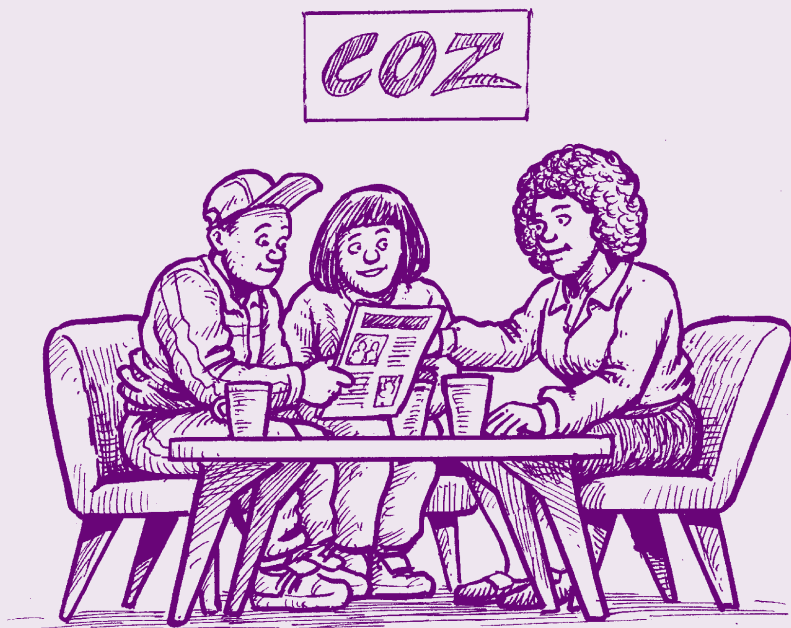
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Sexual healing

BATHGATE HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE: CHILL OUT ZONE (COZ)

It's enough to make most teenagers wince – the idea of adults casting their suits and briefcases aside in a bid to 'get down with the kids'.



At the Chill Out Zone in Bathgate they've avoided the cringe factor and proven the way to make sure young people get the most out of a Healthy Living Centre is to put them at the helm...

HITTING BACK AT THE HEADLINES

At the Chill Out Zone (COZ), a Healthy Living Centre exclusively for young people, a group of teenagers and service staff are sitting around drinking coffee. They're talking about newspaper headlines: 'Young people blamed for rise in STDs', 'Pregnant teens binge on alcohol'. A stern voice pipes up, "So what are we going to do about it?" The question comes not from a health professional, services manager or youth worker, but from 15 year old Jamie McBride*. He's been using the service at Bathgate for two years and is already wide awake to the challenges facing local young people.

It's exactly this kind of ownership and awareness, combined with a desire to make things better that COZ is nurturing among teenagers from right across West Lothian. Last year well over 4000 visits were made to the COZ drop-in services – a number which almost doubled the previous year's figure. Young people's sexual health might well be a hot topic in the media, among local authorities and at Holyrood – but this service isn't about courting controversy. It's about helping thousands of young people make positive choices and empowering them and their communities to turn their lives around. And it's stopping

some of the most vulnerable young people in West Lothian from becoming just another media headline.

Ruth Ritchie, services manager at COZ explains: "We're totally focused on responding to what young people want. In fact, it's not just about responding, it's allowing young people to actually do the responding, to get involved, to devise and deliver the service. For too long young people have been viewed as the problem, COZ is enabling them to be part of the solution. Many local teenagers just need to be given a chance to develop their confidence and really

turn things around, for themselves.” Since 2003, the various COZ services have attracted around 1000 young people each year, many making repeat visits. The ripple effects are born out right across West Lothian communities, with strong partnerships built up with local schools, the Police, community development

associations and even the Scottish Parliament.

“We recently had an open day where we invited the whole community to come along and get a flavour of what we’re all about. One young lad who has been using the service for years prepared a few words about what COZ meant to him. It was read out to a

crowded room and his words still give me goose bumps. He simply said, ‘There’s nobody else I would’ve been able to go to.’ For me and for the whole team at COZ that summed up why we’re here and why there’s a real need for this kind of service. Almost unbelievably, in Scotland, at this level, no one else is doing this.”

AN OLD PROBLEM, A NEW APPROACH

Concerns around the sexual health and wellbeing of young people in West Lothian are nothing new. However with a teenage pregnancy rate above the national average and less young people accessing the Council’s own sexual health clinics and counselling services than in previous years, it became clear in 2000 that the old approach wasn’t working. Ruth explains: “For years we had all been speculating and theorising about what young people wanted and needed. Lots of meetings were held, the Council, CHCPs, schools and parents were asked for their views. But we’d omitted to ask the most important group, the young people themselves.”

Responding to the need to get local young people’s views on board, West Lothian Council held an extensive consultation in 2000 with as many young people as they could get in touch with. The feedback was virtually unanimous – a pressing concern about young people’s health



Working with young people to reduce teenage pregnancy through awareness raising

and the issues they faced. Mainstream services may well have been in place for young people, but their experiences told a different story. The setting just wasn’t right for them and they didn’t feel comfortable accessing ‘normal’ health services, especially when it came to sensitive issues around sexual health. “The overwhelming response from the young

people was they wanted somewhere they could call their own. Somewhere they could access on their own terms, when they wanted, for whatever information and support they needed. Essentially, a young people’s centre with young people at its centre,” says Ruth.

The result was COZ, a Healthy Living Centre

partnership between West Lothian Council, Children 1st and NHS Lothian. Since June 2003 this Bathgate based, West Lothian-wide resource has provided young people aged between 12 and 20 with a drop in centre and healthy eating café, expert advice on sexual health, an out of hours doctor, youth counselling and a whole host of more general health services aimed at young people and delivered in ways which are appropriate to their needs. “It wasn’t a case of consultants sitting in a plush office deciding what the local ‘youth’ might like. We

spoke to local young people about absolutely every aspect of the centre – from its inception, right up to the day to day running and the activities which happen there. They even chose the colour of paint for the walls.” smiles Ruth.

And while on paper it might all sound like jumping on a PC bandwagon, Ruth says that couldn’t be farther from the truth: “When our young people tell us something, we listen. We take their views very seriously and we take action. For example, when young people told us they

would like the centre to stay open over weekends, we saw there was a real opportunity and a danger that many vulnerable young people could slip through the net if the centre was only available on weekdays. So Children 1st applied to the Big Lottery Fund and were successful in obtaining two additional project workers to provide services to young people at weekends. We liaised with staff and actually renegotiated employees’ contracts. That’s certainly not tokenism.”

IT TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE...

No one knows young people better than young people, that’s the ethos behind every aspect of service delivery at COZ. Ruth explains: “It’s easy to make assumptions about young people and about what we think might work well in terms of helping them access advice and information about health issues. But providing information is no guarantee information will be used. You have to know your audience and at COZ the audience are also involved in the ‘production’ so to speak.”

COZ works because it takes into account the fact that each service needs to work in different ways depending on the user. “That means appreciating that, particularly when it comes to sexual health and sensitive subjects such as contraception and teenage pregnancy, there’s no ‘typical’ teenager,” adds Ruth. One of the most popular services at COZ is the advice provided around Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and teenage pregnancy. Ruth explains: “Some of our young people like to just pop in to the centre and have a very informal chat with one of the project workers. They might simply want a bit of advice over a game of pool or a coffee.” For others, that same advice might

come from COZ’s resident GP who holds a regular evening drop in clinic.

Project worker, Rhianna Nuttall, says the different ways of making the same advice available are a direct response to what she hears regularly from young people: “Feedback from young people has told us that many of them feel uneasy going to their family GP, sitting in a waiting room full of people, some of whom they may recognise. So we took this feedback on board and designed a GP drop-in service which runs in the evenings and out with conventional GP hours. We’ve also made it possible for young people to enter through the back door if they feel a little apprehensive about walking through the main communal area in front of their peers.” From April 2007 to March 2008 the medical service was accessed by almost 600 young people.

The same mix of formal and informal approaches has been used with contraception advice. Rhianna and Ruth say that often a light hearted tack works well: “There’s nothing like a game of condom darts to break the ice,” laughs Ruth. “But equally, some young people prefer the

privacy and confidentiality of being able to pop in and speak with our doctor. It all comes back to tailoring everything around what works well for each young person.”

A young people-centred approach to service delivery and development means that everything right down to staff job titles reflects a youth-friendly feel. COZ has a specialist in-house psycho-therapist however her badge bears no such title. “It’s that word ‘psycho’,” laughs Lorna Patterson knowingly. “It doesn’t have a very approachable feel to it, does it?” She has a point. Using the title ‘young people’s counselor’ may seem like a small detail but it’s significant, and pays testament to the down to earth approach and lack of perceptible red tape or formality which Lorna says can scare many young people off. It’s not just her job title which offers a more welcoming approach; the counseling room is painted in bright colours with posters and a sofa. The setting looks more like a student living room than an office. Lorna explains:

“Teenagers are very quick to judge. With them, perhaps more so than with any other age group, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. The fact that I wear fairly casual clothes and we can sit and chat without having to make an appointment or fill out forms is all

very deliberate. Young people tell us that it’s exactly these sorts of formalities which act as a barrier to them accessing mainstream services – even if those services are readily available.” In total, 372 counselling sessions were offered last year.

The centre also recognises that young people can be quick to make judgments about their own peers. Vulnerability is a watchword at COZ and the service has a dedicated member of staff working towards the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people. In response to feedback from local LGBT young people counseling sessions for this particular group are held discreetly and not advertised widely across the centre. “It’s not about hiding this group of young people away from their peers, it’s about being realistic and acknowledging that these are young people who may be dealing with what for many is a very private matter and not something they feel ready to share with their peers at an early stage. Again, we’re working in a way that suits the service user, not trying to make them fit into a pre-set way of how an advice session should run,” Ruth emphasises.

She says it isn’t an exaggeration to claim COZ is a lifeline to some of West Lothian’s most vulnerable teenagers. “Even in very subtle ways our services are ideally placed to help us pick up on the clues which might show a local

young person is struggling – it could be with anything from sexual orientation to making the transition from Local Authority care to independent living.” She describes the free hot meal which the centre provides daily: “While it’s always going to be popular with strapping teenage boys, it’s also a good way of keeping a subtle eye on who’s actively seeking out the meal, day in day out. That often hints at a problem and gives us a very informal in-road to strike up a conversation, even before the young person will tell us anything themselves.”



Cooking and IT Facilities designed by young people

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

The concept of 'youth versus experience' doesn't exist at COZ. In fact much of the success of the way services run is a direct result of young people putting their own experiences to good use.

Most of the volunteers at COZ are young people, many of them current or former service users. When a new idea comes to light or a new service is being considered, questionnaires are distributed to COZ's young people to formally gather their views whilst more informally, service workers constantly garner feedback from across the drop in Centre. A Young People's Forum comprising a group of teenagers elected by their peers meets regularly to discuss new ideas for service provision, upcoming campaign topics and day to day management issues. They take minutes from the meeting themselves and feedback regularly to the staff and services manager.

As well as keeping the staff informed, the young people at COZ quite literally inform the staff. When any new COZ posts are advertised a panel of young people are drawn from the Young People's Forum and asked for their opinions on the potential new role. Similarly, when potential staff are called for interview, members of the Panel are present and they're given an opportunity to ask the potential employee questions about his or her suitability for the role. Project worker, Rhianna says it's a win-win situation. "It's brilliant experience for the young people, the potential employee has the chance to see exactly the sort of young people they're going to be dealing with and for the existing staff at COZ it gives us extra reassurance that we're finding the best person for the job."

Ruth says giving young people a level of responsibility for the strategic direction of COZ has paid dividends: "Importantly, it's responsibility

and accountability, especially with the Young People's Forum. Many of the young people we speak to tell us they feel like choices are made for them in life. Some young people, particularly very vulnerable young people, feel they have little control over their situation, for a whole variety of reasons. The Forum puts young people in the driving seat. Ultimately the discussions they have and the decisions they make will shape and influence the services they're actually using. It makes sense that they're more likely to take it seriously."

As well as developing COZ's services within the actual drop in centre in Bathgate, COZ is empowering its young people to share their experience out and about in the local community. Local high schools, parents and even the Police have all benefited from the young people's expertise. Working alongside project workers, several young people from COZ have taken part in outreach work in local schools where they have assisted with presentations on sexual health and provided a much needed 'real life' perspective. "It's exactly what the school pupils want to hear, someone their own age talking in 'their language'

about how they feel, what they've encountered and the advice they were given. It's much more effective and appropriate than an older person standing lecturing about safe sex. And for the young person giving the talk it's a real confidence boost to be able to capture the attention of a group of their peers," says Ruth.

More recently COZ also started developing bolt-on sexual health sessions in partnership with several local schools to share best practice and augment the sex education already offered as part of mainstream education. The service has also recently teamed up with Donaldson's School for the deaf in Linlithgow and Pinewood Special School in Blackburn. Here, COZ staff and young people work alongside pupils' parents and teachers to devise a suitable way of advising young people with often severe and complex learning difficulties on their sexual health.

"COZ is very much part of West Lothian's communities but it's also part of a wider community of young people in a very broad sense. We're frequently asked for our opinion on various parliamentary consultations relating

to young people and sexual health and we've built up a good relationship with Lothian and Borders Police who have come to us on several occasions looking for advice on young people's issues more generally. Without wishing to sound boastful, I don't think anywhere else in Scotland has the level of hands-on interaction, knowledge and expertise around young people's issues that COZ is fortunate enough to have," says Ruth.

She adds: "Really, when you look at it that way, and at the thousands of young people who've made good use of COZ over the years, it shows there's a Scotland-wide need for services like this."

Clearly, the confidence coming from that young voice talking about newspaper headlines permeates right through COZ. It's a courageousness which means refusing to sweep difficult subjects under the carpet and being open minded to innovation. In doing all this with the very group it seeks to engage, COZ avoids being patronising or trying to 'get down with the kids'. And perhaps most importantly the COZ version of building life skills recognises when young people feel empowered and positive, all the foundations are already in place.

* service user names have been changed

Sewing the seeds

ISLAY HOUSE COMMUNITY GARDEN, ISLAY

Healthy Living Centres often act as a catalyst but unfortunately funding sometimes comes to an end.

However as the success of a Market Garden on the Isle of Islay shows, when a community nurtures a project themselves the rewards are worth reaping.

“A strawberry you pick right from the garden will always taste sweeter partly because you grew it yourself,” muses Alistair Hutchison, a local volunteer at the Islay House Community Garden. The metaphor isn't lost on him. Like hundreds of other local people on Islay he's witnessed the legacy of a Healthy Living Centre (HLC) and, quite literally, tasted the fruit of its labour. For Alistair and his local community, success tastes all the sweeter because it's the result of personal efforts and a community's collective enthusiasm. In Islay, a community has picked up where the HLC left off. Here, local people have taken the reigns and proven when community development flourishes, you can reap even more than you sew.

Since May 2007, the Islay House Community Garden has been thriving as an independent company, with its own Board of directors, a



Chairman and a Treasurer. It employs a full time member of staff and is nurtured by a team of over 30 regular volunteers. Now onto its third growing season, the Garden which was formerly a kitchen garden supplying the privately owned Islay House, boasts a huge variety of vegetables and fruit. Produce is sold direct from a small volunteer-run shop on site and thanks to the custom of local people, last year it took in around £10,000 in sales.

Entrenched in island life, the Garden attracts local primary schools who visit regularly with their teachers to learn about the growing process and make links with healthier eating. Mothers and toddlers use the area as an informal

meeting place and the island's older people enjoy helping out with gardening chores as a form of keeping fit and agile.

In short, it's a community 'centre' where instead of a building there's soil and rows of courgettes. Instead of a café, there's fresh air and the chance to pick potatoes for dinner. It's a communal, positive space which the community are devoted to and where countless hours have been invested making sure the Garden and its contents flourish. But it didn't happen overnight. The Islay Healthy Living Centre alongside dedicated members of the local community planted the seeds to make this garden grow.



Map of the gardens

AN ISLAND OF OPPORTUNITY: ISLAY AND ITS PEOPLE

A popular tourist destination, Islay is the most southerly island of the Inner Hebrides and is renowned for its natural beauty. It is lauded in tourist brochures as the Queen of the Hebrides, with breathtaking scenery, cultural heritage and hospitality aplenty. But for the people who live here, island life is not without challenges.

The island has eight working distilleries, making the malt whisky industry one of the most vital sources of income and employment for its inhabitants. The whisky heritage has enriched the island's economy but it has also engendered a culture where for generations of families alcohol has been part of everyday life. Islay is home to around 3500 people and with almost 1000 of them living in

Bowmore, the island's capital, it's a dispersed population and many travel at least 10 miles to reach the nearest grocery store.

Unemployment on Islay is higher than the national average as is the cost of living, due to the expenditure difference on motoring and higher fuel prices. Mainstream health services are provided by NHS Highland and supported by services from the mainland. However a large proportion of the health expenditure for Islay is on services which are provided in Glasgow.¹

Rae McKenzie, area officer for Scottish Natural Heritage is based on the island and worked in partnership with the Islay Healthy Living Centre throughout its life span from 2003 to early 2008: "Islay is a wonderful place to live with

an exceptional quality of life, fresh air, open views and a more relaxed pace which is hard to find nowadays. But whilst travel to and from Islay may carry a novelty value for tourists, the reality of being dependent on fluctuating weather conditions, cancelled flights and a ferry service which is weather dependent and seasonal, can lead to a sense of isolation for some residents, not just physically but emotionally. Things residents on the mainland probably take for granted, like supermarkets, farmers markets and access to a good variety of fresh produce are harder to achieve here. However there's a tremendous sense of community spirit and pride in the island and a determination which is difficult to quantify but definitely perceptible."

FROM LITTLE ACORNS: THE LEGACY OF THE ISLAY HLC

“It’s the Catch 22 of working in community development and the concept of Healthy Living Centres – you know it has worked well when you don’t need to be so involved anymore,” smiles Carol Muir, now senior health promotion officer at NHS Highland. Carol and her team were formerly based in Bowmore and she managed the Islay HLC project for five years, until February 2008 when funding ceased. On paper, it sounds negative, a project coming to an end, funding no longer ring fenced, job descriptions changing. The reality is very different.

While the Islay HLC is no more, its legacy continues to thrive. Thanks to the initial skills and time invested by Carol, her team and a range of partnership organisations on the island, a key project has been picked up by the local community themselves – The Islay House Community Garden at Bridgend.

Right from the Islay HLC’s inception, some of the key focuses had been around healthy eating. Carol recalls: “Even as early as 1999, before the HLC started up, there had been thoughts of doing something positive with the then derelict garden at Bridgend. The impetus came from the local community and feedback was consistently telling us local people had a desire for fresh, locally grown vegetables.” Using her local knowledge, good contacts



Young and old enjoying the gardens

and a sense of trust built up from living on Islay for most of her life, Carol in her role with the former HLC, rallied the enthusiasm of members of the community. After months spent looking into various venues for a garden project, she nurtured a lease agreement with the owner of Islay House. In 2005, the lease for the Garden was signed by the community group whose support Carol had garnered, and since then a huge volunteer effort has seen five acres of ground cleared, drainage repaired, land ploughed and the first few seasons’ worth of crops harvested.

“Getting a project like the Garden off the ground was a huge challenge and one which the local community really took ownership of from even the very early stages,” explains Carol. The efforts around the Garden were assisted formally by the HLC until April 2007 by

which time, thanks to the foundations the HLC had laid, a formal Company, The Islay House Community Garden Company, had been created whereby locals could manage the whole process of developing the Garden themselves. The Company directors were a dedicated group of local men and women ‘recruited’ initially by Carol and her team. Gamekeepers, farmers, retired and semi-retired locals fused their different experiences and talents and went on to use their own social networks to recruit more interested parties. A very disparate group evolved, but all had one crucial thing in common – the desire to make a garden grow.

Carol explains: “The words ‘pump-priming’, acting as a ‘driver’ or community ‘catalyst’ get bandied about in health promotion but in Islay we’ve seen the real impact behind the jargon. With the

support of local people, the HLC had taken the Garden project to the point where it really could be self-sufficient and, hopefully, sustainable.” By 2007 the efforts around the Garden were more than simply a well meaning group of local enthusiasts wanting to grow a few vegetables – a Chairman, Treasurer and Board were all in place, regular meetings and community consultations were being held and volunteer recruitment was well underway. Carol

adds: “Ordinary local men and women, many of whom had no formal ‘business’ experience had really taken the reigns and as confidences grew, they were hosting meetings, running the administrative side of developing the garden and even employing a member of staff. It’s a huge achievement and a really powerful example of how short term funding can drive long term impact. It shows community development can be self-propelling.”

A FARE CHOICE: ABOUT THE GARDEN

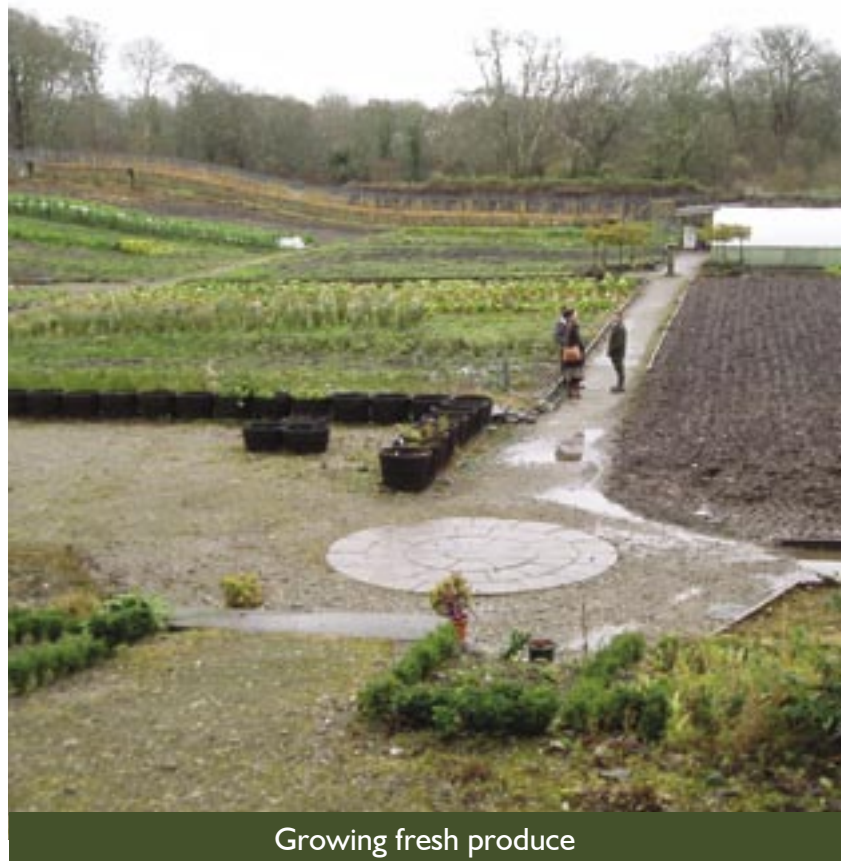
Oval and with white skin, it looks more or less like any other potato but apparently the Sharpe’s Express is a big hit on Islay. It’s this sort of local knowledge that has helped the garden to thrive. Because the people who run the garden are islanders and innately in tune with local life they have an implicit understanding of what will sell well, as local volunteer, Tony Archibald, explains: “There’s just something about Sharpe’s Express potatoes that Islay people love! They’re one of the few good all-rounders, and have a superb flavour and texture.” It takes an intimacy with the nuances of a community to know this sort of detail, but it also takes initiative to act on it and turn it into something commercial.

A community needs assessment originally carried out by the Islay HLC showed that the biggest issue for people on Islay was the cost of living especially in relation to food. The HLC worked for many years in this area to

encourage local people to buy and use local fresh produce. It wasn’t an easy task – until the Community Garden came to life, the main place to buy fruit and vegetables on the island was a small Co-Op store in Bowmore. Now the Community Garden provides Islay with a previously unimaginable selection of fresh produce, including 14 varieties of potatoes, peas

and beans, cabbages, beet-root, salad crops, tomatoes and herbs. There’s a shop on site where locals can buy vegetables fresh from the soil and surplus produce is sold on to local hotels and businesses.

As well as helping to overcome the barriers faced by many islanders in accessing a varied, healthy diet, the



Growing fresh produce

garden and its maintenance is keeping local residents fit. Carol explains: “The actual process of gardening and being out in fresh air, as well as the social side of it has been proven to have enormous benefits towards people’s physical and mental wellbeing. It’s particularly appealing to some of the older people on Islay who come here for a stroll in the fresh air and simply to potter about and help in whatever way they can. It feels less formal than joining a club or taking up a new fitness hobby, but the benefits are very similar.”

A team of volunteers recruited initially by the HLC team but maintained and developed by the Community Garden Company have completely transformed what was derelict ground. “Our community have worked with what’s already there – both in terms of the actual waste land and in terms of gathering together and focusing their own skills and interests around what they wanted to achieve,” adds Carol. The Community Garden Company has also recently employed a local young person, 21 year old gardening student Richard Sutton, who is also attending horticultural college on day release thanks to funding from the Garden.

Carol says the visibility of the garden is important, not just in terms of promoting it as a desirable place to visit and, ultimately buy produce from, but also in terms of what it represents. “The Community

Garden is a very tangible way to demonstrate the power of a community pulling together. Often in health, much of the good work is out of the public eye and hard to quantify – this garden is the complete opposite. It’s a very public space where the success is laid out in rows for everyone

to be proud of. People who would’ve had no reason to speak to each other or get to know each other’s interests have come together and shared their expertise here. It might sound sentimental, but it isn’t just vegetables that have grown here, friendships have too.”



GETTING THEIR HANDS DIRTY: THE GARDEN AS A COMMUNITY FOCAL POINT

Sentiment it certainly isn’t – the strong community links forged around the development of the Garden have allowed it to run as a profitable business and a formidable example of capacity building in action. The Garden’s Chairman, Jack Adamson, is testament to the way the project has captured local enthusiasm. The local gamekeeper has lived on Islay for 30 years and is passionate about what has been achieved at Bridgend and the way it has changed people’s perceptions about what’s achievable: “All sorts of people come here. I’ve got to know so many more new people since getting involved. There’s a real ‘can do’ attitude and no-one’s afraid to get their hands dirty. Even if that means digging for potatoes!” he laughs.

But potato digging is only a small part of it. Transferable skills have been brought to the fore and the Community Garden Company are now well versed in business skills they might not otherwise have encountered. The Company have also main-

tained and built upon strong links with external agencies, developing relationships started by the HLC originally. Organisations such as Young Scot, Paths to Health and the Islay Community Access Group have all played a part in the success of the garden in terms of assisting with volunteers, or in the case of Paths to Health, developing the woodland walk area around the Garden and so encouraging incidental footfall. The Garden and its links with the local community even captured the imagination of a TV production company, Tern TV who filmed a special edition of the popular series Beechgrove Garden focusing on the successes at Bridgend.

Carol says: “The beauty of having so many passionate local people involved is that they’ve used their own talents to make the business side run as smoothly as possible, but because they’re also the same people out planting and digging, they’ve a very genuine vested interest. Everyone involved in this project really wants it to succeed and they’ve developed the skills to make sure that’s achievable. That’s real capacity building.”

The fact that the garden, its need for maintenance and the garden shop brings together a random mix of people, has allowed locals to come forward and use the garden in a way which is meaningful to them. For many, it has helped overcome isolation and is a focal point for a

dispersed community. Senior, experienced local gardeners meet here regularly and pass on skills and knowledge to younger generations, full time mums bring their toddlers here who are safe to run around the play area at the front of the main plant area, there have even been barbeques and a strawberry tea event in a bid to attract new faces. Islanders of all ages and backgrounds are meeting other islanders who might normally be out with their circle of engagement.

It’s not just adults and retired local folk who are getting the most out of growing. Thanks to early links forged with local schools via the HLC, the Garden still attracts groups of pupils with their teachers who visit throughout the year to learn about the connection between field and fork. Resident gardener Richard teaches the younger children how to plant seeds and also works with children with autism and a group of older teenagers from a local youth group who visit every Wednesday to help with gardening tasks. “Parental feedback has been really encouraging. Several mums and dads have told us how their kids who would never even eat peas have come home full of enthusiasm for all sorts of new tastes, simply because they’ve had a fun day out seeing the process behind what ends up on their plate,” says Richard.

Volunteers are key to the Garden’s success – it was

with their help that a soft fruit area was landscaped. The latest addition to the garden’s offerings, the provision of strawberries and raspberries is expected to attract even more custom over the summer months. Again, it’s knowledge like this and a good insight into what local people want that has helped the garden wrack up over £10,000 in sales in the last year alone. “The day we called for volunteers to help construct the soft fruit area we had about 50 people turn up in one afternoon! That’s a tremendous response from a small community. It turned into a really sociable event, with a barbeque and lots of good camaraderie. Plus it introduced a whole new set of people to the garden,” recalls Richard.

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW? :THE FUTURE

There are big challenges ahead for the Islay House Community Garden. How to distribute produce effectively, how to make the most of any new commercial opportunities supplying local business, encouraging more footfall and more volunteers...the list goes on. Maintaining an income and continuing to be profitable is a concern for any business but perhaps even more so for one which depends on unpredictable factors like rainfall and sunshine. Issues also exist around the Garden lease. Islay House is currently for sale and it is likely that the Garden

would form a part of that sale and so far, a community buy out has been rejected.

But whilst the future of this Community Garden may lack absolute certainty, one thing is for sure - much has been achieved here. Lessons have been learned, experience has grown and the enthusiasm and imagination of an entire community has been captured. The momentum which one HLC started on the small island of Islay has so far been unstoppable and whatever the challenges ahead, together this community is better equipped than ever to face them.



The path down to the gardens

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Chinese fortunes

CHINESE HEALTHY LIVING CENTRE (CHLC) GLASGOW

How one project is
Informing, Integrating and
Empowering the Chinese
community in Glasgow



Knowledge is power, or so the adage goes, but only if you know how to acquire it. Glasgow's Chinese Healthy Living Centre is helping the city's Chinese community to do just that. Working in partnerships, through a range of services and activities, the Centre isn't just changing a community's health; it's integrating cultures and empowering communities. In fact, it's changing lives.

This year alone, the Centre's health talks averaged around 80 attendees per session and one particularly successful partnership with Diabetes UK saw almost 100 people attend a seminar on the disease. Over 100 people use the Centre each week and since its inception Stephani Mok, and her team have helped an estimated 1000 people. However, some of the most important and significant outcomes are difficult to quantify. "We've seen lives change and confidences grow. The statistics only tell one side of a very diverse story," says Stephani.

Established in 2004 with support from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Glasgow City Council and the Big Lottery Fund, over the last four years the Chinese Healthy Living Centre (CHLC) has been identifying and responding to the health and wellbeing needs of its communities. That response is tightly focused on what is practical, accessible and appropriate.

Partnership working has been integral to the Centre's success and fruitful collaborations with the Chinese Community Development Partnership (CCDP), West Glasgow Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) and other social welfare

organisations have allowed CHLC to punch beyond its weight. Whilst links with the SCDC and the Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS), as well as the third sector, have provided a support framework.

Prevention is better than cure and not only is the Centre helping to demystify mainstream health services; it's informing these very services. And the results are reaching wider than the Chinese community; through tackling inequalities and increasing confidence levels, they're setting the context for wider community development opportunities.



Service users celebrating the achievements of the Chinese HLC

THE SETTING

There are over 4000¹ Chinese people living in Glasgow City. As a community, they encompass all age groups, and languages include Cantonese, Mandarin and Hakka. Some came to Glasgow in the 1960s and 1970s and have spent most of their adult life in the city; others are second generation Chinese and study at local colleges and universities. Many work long hours in the catering trade, however there are also a high percentage of professionals, fluent in English and working in well paid jobs.

The health barriers faced by Glasgow's Chinese population are as diverse as the group themselves. Stephani Mok, General Manager at CHLC explains: "Whilst there are large numbers of Chinese people living in the North and West of the city, it's a dispersed community and isolation is a significant issue. Language, cultural and institutional obstacles can all make it difficult for Chinese people to get the most out of mainstream health services. "

Stephani says many health

equalities stem quite simply from the embarrassment or confusion associated with not being able to communicate easily in English. A recent Community Needs Analysis² undertaken by the CCDP, demonstrated that one of the most common barriers to accessing 'Health' services stated by the survey's respondents was the 'Language barrier' and 'need (for) interpretation'. According to the survey, respondents experienced several problems in relation to accessing this type of service and many

said they 'don't know where to contact'. But it's not just language which gets between Chinese communities and access to mainstream health services. Cultural and institutional barriers, while often initially imperceptible, are rife.

“Social interaction and having a sense of worth is an integral part of good health, both physically and mentally. Many Chinese people will simply not have the same cultural reference points as those they are surrounded with at work or in a social situation and so, all too often, there's a temptation to avoid those situations and to remain within a comfort zone,” says Stephani.

But it's a comfort zone which, for many, proves far from comfortable. Stephani explains: “Even if you can speak and understand English, in fact even if you are fluent, certain situations demand more than that. It's a confidence that comes with feeling at ease with your surroundings and feeling integrated and part of a community – many Chinese people in the city have never had that experience. They feel isolated and this can make people feel vulnerable. There's a tendency to retract and move away from integrating and, that in turn leads to more isolation and less chance of a feeling of 'belonging'. And even in a city as culturally diverse as Glasgow, racism can be an issue.” According to the

Chinese Health and Wellbeing study³, approximately two fifths of the population (38%) said they had experienced racism in the last year.

Interestingly, CCDP's Community Needs Survey⁴ seems to suggest ease of access to health services isn't a huge problem for the Chinese community. Stephani says it's difficult to speculate here but this could mean several things. Either the existing NHS translation services are proving successful and the CHLC is achieving its goals or, it could be a case of 'you don't know what you don't know'. “Chinese people might think they have good access, but that could be because, due to 'invisible' barriers, they are not fully aware of how much they actually could be tapping into,” says Stephani. In fact, when survey respondents were asked to give reasons

as to why they had berated a service provider's ability to meet their needs, the most common explanation was that they had either 'Never heard of' or 'Don't know' about them.

Over the last four years, Stephani and her team have planned and delivered language classes, health talks and fitness classes all designed to improve integration and empower this diverse Chinese community to take control of their own health needs and gain the confidence and independence to access existing mainstream services more effectively. In short, it's setting a context for people to make the most of, what in many cases, is already there.

Taking into account the heterogeneous nature of this community, the CHLC has honed in on those most



Taster sessions at the local leisure centre is all part of the HLC's 'Mainstreaming Project'

likely to ‘slip through the net’ – those for whom language and cultural barriers seem insurmountable. The two groups encompass what Stephani refers to as the ‘settled’ Chinese communities and new arrivals.

The settled communities are largely people from Hong Kong and the New Territories. This group tend not to have had much formal education and often didn’t have the opportunity to learn English at school. “They are embarrassed by their lack of education and language skills. It’s important to remember that Chinese people have a huge respect for the medical profession and so to not comprehend it can make them feel especially isolated.”

New arrivals are those who came to Glasgow as recently as the last ten years. Stephani says for this group, confidence can be a huge issue. Some will have a degree of English but it is usually minimal and social integration can be difficult. But for both groups, three key areas emerge as crucial: information, integration and empowerment.

INFORMATION

Giving Chinese people the health information they need and facilitating participation in improving their own sense of wellbeing is a vital part of the CHLC’s work. Recent research⁵ showed that only



Discussing the needs of the community

35% of the Chinese population felt they had ‘definitely’ or ‘to some extent’ been encouraged to participate in decisions affecting their health, in comparison to 70% of the Greater Glasgow population. Only 27% of respondents from the Chinese population, in comparison to 65% of the Greater Glasgow population, felt they had a say in the way services are delivered, with 39% of the Chinese population saying they felt they had no say, compared to 24% of the Greater Glasgow population.

“It’s very easy to say ‘information is vital’, but it’s about much more than that. The information has to be delivered in an appropriate way and in an environment which actually makes people feel confident to tap into what’s

on offer,” explains Stephani. Sparking an interest and then nurturing it has been integral to the CHLC’s success. Stephani and her team have organised around 1200 classes and talks over the last 3 years, helping the Chinese community to acquire the habit of physical activity. Yoga, Tai Chi, and dance classes have all featured heavily and enjoyed good attendance levels and a dedicated sports professional, based at the Centre is on hand to provide support and encourage participants.

But good health is about more than physical exercise – Stephani explains: “Feeling excluded from important information; a letter from the hospital or an official letter from a solicitor, a utilities provider or a housing associa-

tion can be extremely bewildering and frustrating. Part of our role involves translating these sorts of correspondences and helping Chinese people to make sense of the situation. We also provide in-depth, accessible information on navigating the benefits system through facilitating discussion between benefits advisers and the Chinese community. This sort of advocacy often provides the missing link between the Chinese community and services which are already in place but which remain a mystery to some of those who need them most.”

Clearly, the Centre’s information remit reaches far beyond health in its most conventional sense – education, childcare and financial support all come under the umbrella of the Chinese Employment Project’s (CEP) Employability Advisor, Mr Shian Xu. The CEP is funded by the West Glasgow Community Health and Care Partnership, in partnership with Glasgow West Regeneration Agency and CHLC. Shian leads the Chinese Employment Project four days a week at the Centre and helps Chinese people progress to employment through vocational training and volunteering opportunities. The Project works closely with the local regeneration agency network, employers, Jobcentre plus and Careers Scotland to improve Chinese people’s competitiveness in the labour market and, equally, to increase the awareness of Chinese

people’s employment issues within Glasgow society.

“A more positive pathway for Chinese people in terms of employment improves their ability to compete and builds a confidence which is too often lacking. The result will be a more diverse, skilled workforce and associated social benefits, not just to the Chinese community but to Glasgow and indeed Scotland,” says Shian.

Signposting at the CHLC is a two way process and as well as pointing the Chinese community in the direction of mainstream services, the Centre also works collaboratively with the NHS to ensure a two way flow of information. Linda Lee is a Multicultural Health Officer at the Centre and is seconded two days per week from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde’s West Glasgow Community Health and Care Partnership. She says it’s not just the Chinese community who’re gleaned information:

“By spending a couple days each week at the CHLC I can look both inwards and outwards. On one hand I can get first hand experience of what the Chinese community are asking for and see where the gaps are – but on the other hand I can see where we as NHS providers can learn from what’s on offer here and tap into the knowledge and resources available. That’s an extremely valuable two way process.”

Linda says through partnerships such as the Scottish Government’s ‘See Me’ campaign, focusing on mental health, the Centre has delivered workshops and, on that particular campaign, experienced the highest levels of participation across all Black and Minority Ethnic groups. “These sorts of wider partnerships are incredibly useful to all parties – not only do the CHLC learn more about their own service users but it means those lessons can be fed back into the mainstream to help improve future development.”

INTEGRATION

“Inspiring, equipping and supporting – that’s the only way we can make access to mainstream services equitable,” says Dana Ho, Development Officer at the CHLC. Along with the team, she is working on the Centre’s ‘Mainstreaming Project’, an ongoing initiative which encourages the Centre’s users to get the most out of what’s already on offer locally.

Signalling a staggered move away from the CHLC’s own organised exercise classes, the Mainstreaming Project provides taster sessions at local leisure centres. These are designed to motivate and encourage Chinese people to continue with their interests with a greater sense of independence. Stephani explains: “Over the last four years our

various in-house classes have nurtured an interest and now we're moving that to the next, more sustainable stage. There is no point in talking about integration, if we're only doing it in isolation, within our own four walls. The Mainstreaming Project is all about getting out among Glasgow's communities and participating in an interactive yet autonomous way."

The impact is much more than physical. Dana says participants have already gained a sense of increased confidence and many have been inspired to go back to the various leisure centres, of their own accord and try out the facilities with their family:

"Integration can only be effective if it's well supported. We held a focus group, prior to launching the Mainstreaming Project, and from that we learned that the barriers are largely about facing the 'unknown'. Chinese people with English language difficulties are understandably nervous about encountering an unpredictable situation. By going along with them and helping with translation and generally demystifying the process, we're making it all much less intimidating. These small, practical steps are making big impact."

Dana and Stephani are also speaking with local leisure centres with the aim of arranging translation of exercise class timetables. Since CHLC began, over three



Fun events for the community

hundred people have started physical activity who had never tried it before.

It hasn't all been plain sailing. Stephani says when service users were initially consulted about a move away from in-house exercise classes and towards mainstreaming, the reaction wasn't wholly positive: "Naturally people were apprehensive. Many of our exercise classes have proven extremely popular shifting to something new was bound to be difficult." However, some interesting initiatives have resulted, Stephani continues: "When one of our popular dance classes came to an end, several of the class participants decided to group together and form their

own dance sessions. With our support, they sourced a dance teacher, secured premises and delivered a series of classes. It showed real initiative and enthusiasm – that's something we're hoping to encourage and in many ways it's a model we hope could be rolled out further. "The CHLC sets the context and empowers its users with the confidence to move to the next stage.

Integration doesn't just apply to service users, the decision making process and the composition of the Centre's own Board, also embraces a collaborative, integrated approach. Boasting a wealth of knowledge, the Board incorporates members

with skills and experience from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Stephani explains:

“The Board mostly comprises members of the local Chinese community; therefore individuals bring with them a high level of empathy for the people they are trying to assist. Our Treasurer is a Chartered Accountant with a sizeable client base of Chinese caterers and restaurateurs, whilst Annie Tse Fong Mead, the current CHLC Chair, is also Chairperson of the Chinese Community Development Partnership and Glasgow Chinese Women’s Association.”

But expertise also comes from out with the immediate Chinese community. Board Member Ann Marie Docherty is Chief Executive officer of Fair Deal, a charity which works with adults

with learning difficulties, whilst Kathleen Yip and Chin Keung Li both work within the main-stream NHS.

The Board’s structure avoids the traditional ‘top down’ approach, due both to the composition of the Board and to the format of the decision making process itself. There is a sub-committee structure which includes a Services sub-committee and Sustainability sub-committee. The Sub-committees take detailed cognisance of issues and then make recommendations for consideration and ratification by the Board. Questions arising at a meeting of directors are decided by a majority of votes.

“Integration needs to be implemented at all levels. It’s a ‘done with not done to’ ethos,” adds Stephani



Professional tutors lead the class

EMPOWERMENT

Working in partnership with the Chinese Carers Group, CHLC has also been supporting the development of the Vulnerable Chinese People and Carers Project (VCPC). An example of effective partnership, the collaboration has seen around 110 Chinese people and their families gain better access to the support they need. Once again, the results are visible not just in health improvement and service user uptake, but also in the increased levels of community confidence resulting from the project.

Funded by the West Glasgow Community Health & Care Partnership (WGCHCP) the VCPC is line managed in partnership with Linda Lee, from the WGCHCP. The project has been running for just over a year and focuses on vulnerable and isolated members of the Chinese community, their carers and families. It provides various services such as home visits, health talks and recreation opportunities.

Feedback has been excellent and a recent participatory appraisal exercise showed that the social aspect to the project had paid dividends and allowed participants to meet a variety of new people, thus feeling better and more positive. Stephani adds: "Time and time again we hear the phrase 'less of a burden'. Feedback from participants tells us that people don't want to feel totally dependent on



their carers and the VCPC project encourages a degree of independence and a greater self-worth."

The VCPC also operates as an information channel and Linda Lee often acts as a mediator between some of the project's most vulnerable users and mainstream service providers. She explains: "Advocacy is an important part of helping people to feel empowered. If people don't understand a letter or are having difficulties making a phonecall due to language barriers, then it's very difficult for them to take control of their health. Often people simply need the reassurance that someone's there to assist if they need it."

Linda says it's those with mild to moderate difficulties who particularly need this level of health advocacy as they are more likely to become 'invisible' and slip through the net. "Although their difficulties may not be severe enough to necessitate a social worker, they're often the very people who have least support around them."

VCPC is also involved with befriending work, for people who are housebound and a weekly Lunch Club started at the beginning of September. "Like the Mainstreaming Project, which is all about building confidence, the VCPC project is empowering those who feel least powerful and helping them to steer the direction of their health."

THE FUTURE

The CHLC is not only reducing health inequalities, it's contributing to broader aspects of community development and capacity building right across the city, including employment, education and general community confidence. And the results speak volumes.

Competence and confidence must go hand in hand if Glasgow's Chinese community is to be able to fully access the appropriate mainstream services. It isn't about reinventing an entire system or even creating a whole new set of services, it's about helping people to access

what is appropriate to their needs in a way with which they feel comfortable.

Partnership working will remain central to the CHLC as it helps Chinese people access mainstream services with ease and self-assurance. But true equity of access must be a two way process. By listening to users and feeding back to providers on how to best respond, the CHLC will not only open up access to mainstream health services, it will allow the communities it serves to influence their future direction.

REFERENCES

1. The 2001 census estimates there are 4000 permanent Chinese residents in Glasgow
2. Chinese Community Development Partnership (CCDP) Community Survey, June 2008, CeIS
3. Chinese Health and Wellbeing Study, Final Report, August 2004, FMR Research, page 4
4. Chinese Community Development Partnership (CCDP) Community Survey, June 2008, CeIS, page 12
5. Chinese Health and Wellbeing Study, Final Report, August 2004, FMR Research. 2005 to 2008 (3 financial years), around 1200 talks and classes have been provided.

Useful web links

CHEX - www.chex.org.uk

Scottish HLC Alliance - www.chex.org.uk/healthy-living-centres

SCDC - www.scdc.org.uk (Meeting the Shared Challenge)

NHS Health Scotland - www.healthscotland.com

Chinese HLC - www.glasgowchlc.org

Dundee HLI - www.dundeehealth.co.uk

