

Expert Testimony presented to the NICE Programme Development Group on community wide approaches to preventing obesity 4th October 2011

Background

In 2007 BIG Lottery Fund awarded the Well London Alliance (WLA), a multi-sectoral partnership of seven statutory and charitable organisations that had not previously worked together, £9.46m to deliver *Well London*, a community action for health and well-being programme, in 20 of London's most deprived neighbourhoods.

All 20 first wave target communities were defined by lower super output area (LSOA) which each have around 1,500 to 2,000 residents. We worked with a total population of 34,508. All 20 LSOAs were selected from amongst the 11% most deprived in London as measured by the index of multiple deprivation.

The programme was developed around five themes: Healthy eating, physical activity, mental well-being, healthy spaces, culture and tradition. Programme activity started in October 2007 and finished in March 2011.

The Approach

The Well London Alliance developed a locally focussed, integrated, community-led approach that improves community health and well-being, and is effective and sustainable in even the most deprived neighbourhoods. It is designed to

- empower people to build and strengthen the foundations of good health and wellbeing in their communities.
- build individual and community confidence and skills and the capacity of local organisations to deliver activities
- significantly increase community participation in health and wellbeing enhancing activities
- stimulate the development of formal and informal community and social support networks
- integrate with and add value to what is already going on locally.

The programme comprised a suite of 14 projects

Six projects were termed "Heart of the Community" and focused on community engagement, training, capacity building, and capturing and sharing information. They were key to sustainability. Eight projects were developed around the five themes of Well London. Projects were designed to be fun, bring different people together, help people develop skills and confidence and encourage them to pass on their learning to family and friends.

'Heart of the community' projects

CADBE

Well London Delivery Teams

'Themed' projects

Activate London

Buywell and Eatwell

Youth.com
Training Communities
Active Living Map
Wellnet

Healthy Spaces
DIY Happiness
Be Creative Be Well
Changing Minds
Mental Well-being Impact Assessments

Evaluation

Given the lack of evidence as to what works in addressing health inequalities within a community setting, Well London was specifically designed to test out the efficacy of the model and generate robust evidence about its impact, as a community action model, on health and well-being. University of East London has designed a cluster randomized controlled research trial in consortia with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and Westminster and Loughborough Universities. It has secured significant additional research grant funding from the Wellcome Trust. The results from the CRCT should be available in spring/summer 2012.

As well as giving valid estimates of cost and effectiveness, analysis of the data should provide:

- unique intelligence on health and behaviour in some of the poorest communities in London
- new understanding of how the structural and area based factors support or constrain health and healthy lifestyle choices.

What benefits came from being part of a wider programme and what has been the impact once funding has reduced/ceased?

The substantial amount of funding, £9.46m, enabled sound planning and sustained deployment of activity. The length of the programme (3.5 years of project activity in each area) provided time for project staff to develop relationships of trust with local residents, stakeholders and organisations. It also enabled the partnership to develop and fine tune the overall approach

The partnership comprised organisations that combined strategic level influence with extensive community level experience and ability to deliver across London. They also provided intellectual capital and some new and innovative projects.

The interim evaluation has shown the following Impacts and outcomes

- 14,722 participants
- 79% reported an increase in healthy eating
- 77% reported an increase in physical activity
- 82% reported feeling more or much more positive

Wider outcomes that are also key to the **sustainability and legacy** of the programme include

- Significant increase in volunteering; *eg. Over 400 in 'Well London Delivery Teams' project alone (target was 200)*

- A wide range of local groups and enterprises established and now delivered by local residents ranging from parent support groups to football academies.
- Improved or new community facilities or open spaces
- Significant numbers accessing training and qualifications and moving into work Eg the Training Communities project provided over 800 training opportunities
- Reported increases in
- More joined-up working on part of both statutory and community and voluntary sectors

Key success factors to ensure sustainability

- Communities set the agenda and define the issues to be addressed
- Community leadership and 'ownership' of the local programme
- *Initiatives that develop individual and community capacity - the 'Heart of the Community' projects.* These Build new networks and connections in communities to a) transform the way people feel about themselves, each other and the places they live; b) shifts norms of behaviour within the communities, and c) build new skills for self organisation and capacity for mutual support
- Building on and integrate with other local programmes/initiatives
- A consistent, integrated and coordinated local approach
- Orientation to a different way of commissioning and working for local professionals
- Project/programme management and governance at local and strategic levels
- Local focus on natural neighbourhoods
- Strategic support eg from local authority and/or local NHS

How much does success depend on individual staff?

The seven partners, 14 projects, ongoing development of the approach and 20 target areas initially made the programme feel quite complex so effective leadership from senior level partners and particularly the London Health Commission was critical.

In areas where Well London partners were able to build strong relationships with both the statutory and community and voluntary sectors this made a significant contribution to the success of the overall local programme.

At community level the peer to peer approach which used local residents to promote Well London to others in their neighbourhoods proved to be a key element of the overall approach and was just as important as the role of staff.

How much does the partnership approach cost (in very basic terms) eg budget/staff costs/number of meetings?

Well London resources and activity were aligned to the suite of 14 projects that were agreed in 2007 with BIG Lottery, and the funding was distributed across the seven WLA organisations.

The budget for the central management team, based within the LHC and hosted by the GLA, was slightly less than 10% of the overall funding. The budget also included funding for the evaluation and central communications activity.

Each of the other partners were able to spend up to £75k per year on management costs. The WLA partnership comprised 7 very different organisations ranging from a university and NHS Foundation Trust Hospital to a small charity. Each partner had different financial systems and methods of calculating their management costs. For this reason guidelines on what constituted management activity were drawn up in order to ensure consistency across the partnership.

Each partner organization had staff who were responsible for delivery of the programme. Regular meetings took place between senior partners to discuss the strategic direction of the programme, and between project management staff to discuss operational issues.

Experience of working with commercial partners (eg food or sports industry, weight management services)

The Buywell Retail Project was developed as one aspect of the broader Well London food project, which aimed to make it easier for people living in Well London areas to buy good quality, affordable and healthy food locally. This initiative, developed and led by LSx and their delivery partner, Sustain, helped 15 local convenience stores (six in Well London target areas and nine stores in Tower Hamlets) to make changes to help them sell more fresh fruit and vegetables. Each retailer received an individual store development plan, business support, fresh produce training, Change4Life marketing materials and a launch event.

Fruit and vegetable sales increased by an average of 60% across the fifteen stores. The customer evaluation showed that more people were buying fruit and vegetables from the stores after the changes and were positive about their local store. Two key elements of success were having a store manager with good community links, and/or having a store manager who agreed to invest in a new chiller for displaying fruit and vegetables.

Conclusions from the evidence so far

- All lines of available evidence suggest that Well London has been successful in delivering improvements in healthy eating, physical activity and mental health and wellbeing
- Supporting people to organise themselves to use community assets to address common local issues transforms the way they see themselves, each other the places they live and the way they live
- The Well London approach provides a useful model for integrated local interventions to improve wellbeing across the board.

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