

Winner of Health Improvement Initiative of the Year Award – The Black Country Sport & Physical Activity Awards 2009.

Health Improvement Initiative Awards Submission

Overweight and obesity amongst young people is a problem across the UK, threatening the current and future health of our population. Within Walsall the problem is even greater with 35.7% (National Average is 32.6%) year 6 pupils being classed as overweight or obese (National Childhood Measurement Programme – NHS Walsall). These high rates may increase reports of bullying and children with low self esteem, and if the problem is not dealt with, increased diagnosis of Type 2 Diabetes, Heart Disease, and some Cancers.

Traditionally Walsall has also had problems with adult males accessing preventative services. For example the new weight management service in primary care only saw 19% of referrals being from Walsall's male population.

In response to these concerning statistics Sport and Leisure Development Services Walsall Active Youth Team set out to run a young person's Weight Management Clinic called Fun 4 Life at Walsall Football Stadium in partnership with the clubs community team. With the knowledge that Walsall Football Club sell between 80 – 85% of season tickets to men it was felt that a themed clinic held at this venue would attract Fathers as well as help engage young people especially those with an interest in football. Funding was from Active England and the Football Foundation.

Walsall Football Club Fun 4 Life was open to young people between the ages of 8 and 16 who were overweight or obese. There was a big onus on family involvement to ensure that any changes made by the young person were sustained whilst at home and after the clinic was completed. The intervention was based on a model developed by Leeds Carnegie University, but adapted to work most effectively on a local level. Fun 4 Life offered a mixture of fun physical activity and lifestyle advice in a supportive and non-judgemental environment. Also the parents completed their own set of lifestyle sessions. For those young people and parents who completed the majority of the programme they were given the opportunity to meet Walsall Football Club player, Paul Boertien, and their picture to be taken with their certificates on the pitch on match day.

The outcomes of the clinic were extremely positive with various health related factors being monitored throughout the course of the programmes. 85% of attendees reduced their waist circumference, with the remaining 15% maintaining it. A reduced waist circumference ultimately puts young people at a lower risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes, Hypertension, and Cardio-Vascular disease as an adult. 100% of attendees at least maintained their body mass index – stabilisation of BMI means that as a child gets older their BMI centile would reduce. The programme also helped to decrease the

amount of sedentary behaviour of the young people with average television viewing time being reduced from 29.2 hrs to 21.5hrs. Research in the past has shown that reduction in sedentary behaviour can have more of an impact than actual increases in physical activity (Epstein et al 1995). 100% of attendees increased their confidence to continue physical activity after the program had finished and 60% joined an after school club or community based activity session. Finally there was a 300% increase in the amount of fathers attending compared to other clinics delivered throughout that year.

It should be noted that Fun 4 Life is delivered at 50% of the cost of some high profile, private organisations delivering weight management programmes nationally.

Due to the success of the Walsall Football Club Fun 4 Life programme another clinic is due to start in September. This clinic will link to the National Childhood Measurement Programme (NCMP) delivered by NHS Walsall, to ensure that the most appropriate young people are referred into the clinic. Walsall is one of the first areas in the country to be utilising the results of the NCMP as a means to identify and signpost young people into Weight Management Programmes.

“I’ve made friends and realised you can have fun while losing weight”

A comment from one of the young people

“We all cook at meal times more healthily and include everyone in the family in physical activity”

A comment made by one of the parents.