

Executive Summary

Sporting Equals is one of five national partners for the Age UK **fit as a fiddle** cascade training programme. Between 2009 and 2012 it delivered the national **fit as a fiddle** faith and community strand which was supported by Big Lottery Wellbeing Programme funding. This project engaged with over 5,500 people through training and roadshows and as a result of its success Sporting Equals was awarded a year's extension funding under the Supporting Impact and Change Project.

Sporting Equals is an independent body established to promote ethnic diversity in the area of sport and physical activity. Sporting Equals aims to raise awareness of the needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and to promote inclusion and diversity across the sport and health sectors. This project has enabled Sporting Equals to work intensively across three community groups and develop bespoke training materials to help support BME older people. The objective of the project was to help support older people in improving health and wellbeing through activities organised around physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing.

Sporting Equals worked in partnership with Eastern Lives (Age UK Lancashire), Polish Senior Citizen Group (Midlands), Chinese Community Centre (Midlands) and Chinese Mental Health Association (London) to engage with South Asian, Chinese and Polish communities. The project was delivered over a 12 month period and ran from July 2012 to July 2013.

This report provides an end-of-project summary of the **fit as a fiddle** Supporting Impact and Change Project with particular emphasis on how the project has engaged with communities and the impact and difference the project has made to their lives.

Project overview

The aim of the **fit as a fiddle** Supporting Impact and Change Project was to devise three bespoke training modules to help support South Asian, Chinese and Polish older people to enable opportunities for physical activity and wellbeing through supported interventions. The project worked with local partner organisations to deliver a bespoke training programme for volunteers and a package of activities aimed at those aged over 55. The modules were developed to sit alongside the national training pack, which was developed through the cascade training programme, and to act as supplementary resources for organisations working with these target groups.

Sporting Equals worked with four delivery partners to deliver the training to staff and volunteers. In total 137 people received the training and 43 people went on to attend the 'train the trainer' training. In addition 21 people were mentored through training development meetings and 4 people went on to deliver part of the two day volunteer training alongside the Sporting Equals Project Officer. To support learning a webinar was delivered on 19th March 2013 to develop



learning and disseminate information to wider partner organisations.

Feedback from partner organisations suggests that all three groups (Chinese, Polish and South Asian communities) enjoyed the social aspect of the group activities. The Chinese groups enjoyed Tai Chi and dancing the most, the Polish enjoyed walking groups and dancing whilst South Asian groups enjoyed stretching and toning exercises. The added value aspects included delivery partners working with other agencies to provide additional advice and targeted support.

Key findings – impacts on equality and diversity

It is clear through feedback from partner organisations and Sporting Equals' research¹ the need and importance of focussed interventions which take into account the faith, ethnicity, age, cultural and traditional beliefs of an older person. The development of these bespoke modules recognises that BME communities are different and often a 'one size fits all' approach does not work. The modules which have been developed enable greater insight for each target audience, enabling volunteers to tailor interventions to meet the cultural sensitivities of these client groups.

The profile of participants shows the Supporting Impact and Change Project has been successful in engaging with a large number of older people from a wide range of ethnicities and faith backgrounds. The South Asian groups consisted of a mixture of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi participants who were mainly from the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh religious groups. The Polish groups were mainly from White Other backgrounds and were mainly Christian, Roman Catholic or did not have a religion. The Chinese groups were either Buddhist or Christian.

A higher proportion of females took part in the project compared males. Age ranges for both males and females varied from 55 through to 81+. There were 14 females and 7 males aged 81+ who took part in the project. Around a quarter of participants felt they were not in good health due to a long-standing illness.

Similar to the national project, a key message reported from partner organisations participating in the **fit as a fiddle** project was that supported interventions are often needed to help support community groups to effect a change in behaviour.² Often faith and community partner organisations do not offer health and wellbeing activities and do not understand how to encourage older people to lead healthier lifestyles. The training provided, along with capacity support through volunteers, often creates cultural change within organisations which changes behaviour and enables wider thinking around how organisations should be supporting older people alongside other work they are doing.

Key findings – impacts of volunteering

In total 137 volunteers participated in the training programme and went on to deliver a range of activities which supported older beneficiaries. In general, the volunteers found their experience to be a positive one and feedback from the Sporting Equals Interim Two Day Volunteer Training Report suggested that volunteers particularly enjoyed the social aspect of training and sharing of good practice.

'As I am White British, the volunteer training has really helped me to gain an understanding of how people from different faiths and cultures approach health and wellbeing and how their faith and culture can impact on their decision making.' – Eastern Lives Learner

The majority of volunteers receiving the training (63%) were new to volunteering, and only one in five (20%) indicated that they had previously been involved in volunteer activity; emphasising that in the majority of cases the training was reaching those volunteers without any previous experience of the issues being covered.³

The Ecorys Development Report states that volunteers identified a wide range of benefits in taking part in the training programmes; these included increased confidence, an increase in skills and knowledge and greater experience which has supported them in other aspects such as employment and training.³ Volunteers were also implementing what

¹ Sporting Equals, fit as a fiddle Supporting Impact and Change focus groups delivered by the Sporting Equals project officer July-December 2012

² Sporting Equals final evaluation interviews with partner organisations, May 2013

³ Ecorys, Volunteer Development in Eastern Lives and Sporting Equals, fit as a fiddle Supporting Impact and Change Evaluation Report, Jo Barham and Louise Scott, July 2013

they had learned through their training in their personal lives to improve the health and wellbeing of their family and friends.

Feedback from partner organisations suggested that the volunteers were also telling other people of the health and wellbeing activities which encouraged more volunteer involvement and an increase in volunteers coming forward from the South Asian, Polish and Chinese communities. Partner organisations have, as a result, acquired a stronger volunteer base for future interventions alongside volunteers who have been trained to deliver the package of training independently.

Key findings – impacts on older people

In total 379 older people were supported through activities carried out by Eastern Lives, Chinese Mental Health Association, Chinese Community Centre and the Polish Senior Citizen Group. All of the delivery partners stated that they had made progress in supporting the older people in understanding the links between healthy living and their health and well being. They reported that they have seen an increase in participation on days when certain activities are planned. They have observed enthusiasm and self motivation in many of the older people and the activities have given them a social aspect to look forward to in the week.

Danehouse Resource Centre stated that they 'had noticed that the timings and days of the activities were an important consideration when planning activities. For example, as all of the older people they support are of Muslim and/or of Pakistani background, they avoided planning activities between 12:30pm and 1:30pm including Friday afternoons due to prayer times. Activities had to also start from 10am and finish by 2:30pm due to the women having family responsibilities.'

In general the delivery partners all stated that initially they found it challenging to change the mindset of older people. However once the training and volunteer support was in place this equipped them with the knowledge and confidence to introduce new ideas and activities. The overall impact has been

significant with older people now thinking a lot more about what they eat, how active they are and what they can do together as a group.⁴

Key findings – impacts on partnerships and sustainability

In total Sporting Equals worked with four delivery partners across three regions. The delivery partners in turn worked with external partners to help deliver some of the activities and to provide additional advice and support. These partners included the NHS, sports organisations and faith organisations who helped with the recruitment of volunteers. Some of the partner activities included health presentations, health checks, cooking workshops and exercise activities etc.

Funding was an issue for each of the delivery partners as most activities had a cost attached, however apart from the individual physical activity instructors, the delivery partners sought to work with organisations such as the NHS and community based organisations that were able to deliver services free of charge, thereby ensuring long term sustainability. The impact of partnership links stated by organisations included stronger working relationships, referral links, befriending services, staff awareness of user needs and agencies which could continue to support activities in the future.

In terms of sustainability, there was general enthusiasm amongst partner organisations for keeping project activities going. The 'train the trainer' element of the project has enabled partners to equip staff and volunteers with the necessary skills to deliver the training independently and continue to run the project in the future.

Key findings – economic value of the project

Survey respondents reported a wide range of volunteer hours during a typical month. The shortest time reported was two hours per month and the longest was 170. The resulting median contribution was 16 hours per month per volunteer. To calculate the input of volunteers, consideration can be given to the skills/knowledge of volunteers. If we estimate that once a volunteer is trained they would

⁴ Sporting Equals final evaluation interviews with partner organisations, May 2013

be paid a median hourly rate of a semi skilled person (£8.68), this would produce a monthly value of £138.88 for an 'average' volunteer delivering 16 hours per month. Further information and economic costs are identified in the Ecorys evaluation report.⁵

The added value of a sustained volunteer base, ongoing delivery of activities and sustained partnership links have also brought a number of additional economic benefits which need to be considered in light of the project as a whole.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Supporting Impact and Change Project accessed 637 people in total, training 137 staff and volunteers and supporting 379 older BME people. Through capacity building staff and volunteers Sporting Equals have enabled more people from older Chinese, Polish and South Asian communities to improve their lives in the three key areas of physical activity, healthy eating and wellbeing.

The training focussed on the areas of developing staff and volunteers in raising awareness and broadening their knowledge of religious, cultural and traditional values which could result in people leading healthier lifestyles. This project has resulted in an increase in volunteers coming forward from the South Asian, Polish and Chinese communities which has in turn resulted in partner organisations having a stronger volunteer base for future interventions. The added value from the project has resulted in some volunteers acting more generally as champions for promoting healthy living in their local communities.

The Ecorys Development Report reveals how volunteers have stated that receiving the training has improved their self esteem and confidence, has improved their skills as well

as their understanding of different religions, cultures and traditions in particular in the context of health and wellbeing.

Due to the Sporting Equals approach and experience, knowledge, key links and cultural sensitivity, the Supporting Impact and Change Project has been a huge success leaving its beneficiaries of staff, volunteers and older people with a positive impact on supporting older BME people in the main key project areas of physical activity, healthy eating and wellbeing. The project has demonstrated a clear need for specialised modules for key BME groups to support similar targeted interventions.

The recommendations of the training included offering a condensed version of the training to be delivered over one day rather than two days. Flexibility in timings should also be considered to reflect other commitments of learners and the option of modularising sections of the course. It is also important to support learners who are unable to speak English through project staff or other volunteers who speak community languages.

Sporting Equals role in reaching out to communities, research and development has played an integral role in developing these bespoke training modules. Its key links into, and knowledge of, the disadvantaged communities, along with its experience of faith and cultural sensitivities has made this project a success and well placed for delivering similar interventions in the future.

Sporting Equals

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⁵ Ecorys, Volunteer Development in Eastern Lives and Sporting Equals, Fit as a fiddle Change and Impact Evaluation Report, Jo Barham and Louise, Scott, July 2013



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