



PEOPLE'S HEALTH TRUST - ACTIVE COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY



# Eastside Community Centre – On Your Doorstep

## Introduction

This case study explores how Eastside Community Centre's Active Communities programme was developed, its structured approach to collective control, what it delivered and what was achieved, as part of the evaluation of the Active Communities Programme managed by People's Health Trust. The report draws on interviews with the project team and participants, observation of the group in session and the monitoring information submitted as part of the programme's six monthly review cycle.

## About the project

On Your Doorstep is a programme of activities and support to the whole community, with sessions for schoolchildren, parents, older people

and the general community. It was developed and delivered by Eastside Community Centre from the centre itself.

Eastside Community Centre was already providing a range of services for its community in an ad hoc, uncoordinated way. The will and ambition was there to develop a broader programme of support but there was a recognition that a dedicated post was required to move them forward.

The project is aimed at residents of the east side of Whitby, providing a wide range of community activities from the project hub. These activities include craft activities, a luncheon club, support in finding employment and after school activities. They aim to address locally identified issues of low

aspiration and achievement, health inequalities, poor access to services and a lack of formal community activity. Whitby is located rurally and local people often have to travel long distances to access services.

## Main findings

- ➔ Charging a nominal fee has been effective in challenging a culture of receiving things for free – encouraging participants to understand that they either need to pay a fee or deliver the services themselves.
- ➔ Working with and through the community was essential to break down barriers to access and to better understand community need. The project has established different processes for collective control offering residents the opportunity to engage on an ad-hoc basis or through a structured fundraising committee.
- ➔ Hosting a range of vital community services such as the credit union, job search and an IT

café enabled the members of a rural community experiencing isolation to participate more fully in society.

## Who is involved?

Eastside Community Centre is a non-profit organisation which aims to improve the lives of people living on the east side of Whitby and the Helredale estate in particular, through providing activities and use of facilities that support the enrichment of the community.

The project is overseen by the directors of the community centre and supported by representatives of the local CVS and Scarborough Borough Council. This group meets monthly to monitor the project and supervise its staff and volunteers.

A project worker was employed for 20 hours a week to develop and manage the project. Her time is spent directly with groups, or reaching out into the community to promote the project. Paid sessional workers were used for the after school club and performing arts clubs, supported by volunteers.

*"The development worker, we struggled to start with the find the right person, but once in post her input was absolutely fantastic – she created a number of extra [activity] groups and worked with existing groups to make them stronger."* (Project staff)

A regeneration officer from Scarborough Borough Council, who was also a volunteer at the centre, used her expertise to lead on the bid and support the governance, oversight, monitoring and reporting of the project.



## What opportunities does the project offer?

The project offers a range of activities with the aim of engaging the whole community. Many focus on children and their parents, as there is a high proportion of young parents with children in the area. The Jobmatch project targets people who required support in finding work.

Bringing together strands of previous work, the project lends its coherence and impetus from the recruitment of a project worker. The funding also supports improvements to the building to support the larger scale of the activities.

Much of the project design has built upon what they knew the community already wanted or valued. But additionally for this project there was informal discussion with people coming in to the centre – as participants or volunteers – to discuss what they would like to see. The project successfully created an open and responsive atmosphere to facilitate collective control. This led to ideas such as the luncheon club, the IT café, the after school club, need for additional storage space and the need for a new cooker hood.

Community involvement in the centre has since been formalised through the setting up of a fundraising committee, a form of collective control, to organise activities to raise money for the

centre and feed ideas in for activities. Committee members include two former participants of the Jobmatch and after school club activities who now help to deliver sessions.

Activities have included:

- After school club for children aged 5-11 to provide food, a safe environment to do their homework and an opportunity to improve their communication skills;
- Performance arts sessions for the same age group as a positive play activity to improve confidence and self-esteem;
- A luncheon club for all to enjoy a healthy meal once a week for a small charge of £1.50.

In addition to the project worker role, funding mainly went towards sessional workers. For activities such as a trainer in mindfulness; in other activities groups are self-sustaining.

Generally activities were subsidised through the funding – for example football sessions cost the project £1.50 but were charged at £1; the luncheon was £1 for main and 50p for dessert. The rationale for the subsidised pricing was to make activities accessible for all, while also encouraging participants to recognise that they nonetheless have to contribute financially to activities if they are to be sustainable.

*"It was about getting people to realise that everything isn't for free – they were used to having things put on for them [for free] – so setting a price that they wouldn't balk at but they weren't getting it for free. That's been successful, now they expect to have to pay things – they're saying 'how much is it?'"* (Project staff)



The funding also covered physical improvements to the community hub building. The team extended a small piece of concrete at the back to enable toddlers to play outside without risk of injury, for example from broken glass in the grass. The project also converted the mezzanine space into a storage area to better enable the centre to host outside groups to make use of the building; bought a cooker hood in the kitchen to support food-based activities, and purchased four new laptops to enable community use of computers and the delivery of an IT café.

The project was advertised through word of mouth and Facebook, as well as a regular article in the Whitby Gazette. They issued press releases to announce any major new activities. Word of mouth was considered the most effective for generating lasting engagement.

## What has the project achieved?

The project has been successful in attracting a large and diverse range of people, with approximately 300 new participants. To build on this success the centre is now planning

an extension to manage demand and enable the team to deliver multiple sessions at the same time.

*"We've been getting huge numbers – the building can't really cope with them now... it's becoming harder to manage in one room."* (Project staff)

The improvement to the concrete area will enable the community centre to host more outside activities, improving the centre's reach and sustainability.

Participants developed confidence, knowledge and skills to engage with the community and to search for jobs. For some, the opportunity to get out of the house was a key outcome. One older person had experienced isolation as a result of staying in the house with his wife, who had had a stroke. By working closely with him the project has enabled him to develop the confidence to let a carer look after his wife while he attends to the luncheon club. He then takes a portion of food back for her.

The project has developed approximately ten new volunteers for the centre who contribute time regularly at least once a week, increasing capacity. There is additionally a wider group of participants who contribute more informally.

*"There's quite a lot of people who wouldn't say they are volunteers but go around picking rubbish up, digging the garden – they don't think they are volunteers but they are."* (Project staff)

By bringing a range of community services into a community hub, the project has succeeded in addressing barriers to access.

*"It's made a massive difference. This was a community that had not had*

*anything – very few facilities, very little access to services like debt advice, credit union, job match services... some don't have internet at home."* (Project staff)

## What has worked well?

➔ Appointing a local project worker to manage opportunities: This project worker provided the coordination and impetus to further develop the group's activities. This was supported by the fact she is local to the area and was already known to many participants and volunteers through a previous role with a housing association.

*"She made a massive impact because they were almost static in what they were able to do – there were not enough volunteers to do things, and she had a big impact in getting more volunteers in and getting their confidence up."* (Project staff)

➔ Offering processes for and acting on community engagement: Through the project, the team has learned that putting the community at the heart of design and delivery is key to success and sustainability.

*"Listen to the community, don't just try and do the things you think you need to do. Although starting off with a relatively inexperienced community group like this is hard, in the end that's the best way to do it – they're linked in to everything, and everything comes back to you – you find out all sorts of things. The links are so strong and there's no barrier to people coming in. They are coming in to find a friend."* (Project staff)

## What are the challenges and how have these been overcome?

➔ **Managing budgets:** Initially the project had intended to fund a new staircase to use the mezzanine upstairs. After receipt of funding, further investigation revealed that health and safety implications meant it would be too expensive. As a result the team applied for a revision of the capital spend to extend a small piece of concrete at the back.

Overall the programme was considered a perfect fit for the centre's needs and staff interviewed did not report any significant challenges to delivery.

### The future

With the funded period over, activities are still continuing. The centre staff are now looking for further sources of funding to sustain the role of the development worker.

The development worker would engage in outreach work in the community to understand the needs of the wider community and promote the centre as a safe and positive space for all, including for example children who have been excluded from school. The staff are planning to develop upon the capital works undertaken by building an extension to the centre to meet growing demand.

