



PEOPLE'S HEALTH TRUST - ACTIVE COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY

# Horizon Church Sutton - Horizon Hub & The Circle

## Introduction

This case study focuses on how the Horizon Hub and The Circle projects were developed, and what they aimed to do and achieve, as part of the evaluation of the Active Communities Programme managed by People's Health Trust. The report draws on interviews with the project staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, and the monitoring information submitted as part of the programme's six monthly review cycle.



## About the projects

Horizon Church Sutton was established in 2010, it is an Assemblies of God church, which is affiliated to the Evangelical Alliance. As well as having its Sunday Services, it also runs a wide variety of other community groups and activities including Selah coffee drop-in, Twiglets parent and toddler group, Mumbles group for mums with young children, and Giants youth group.

In 2014, Horizon Church Sutton secured two years of funding from People's Health Trust under the Active Communities programme to deliver two projects in parallel:

- ➔ Horizon Hub - homework / youth club
- ➔ The Circle - seniors' lunch club

Horizon Hub was designed to fill a gap and provide learning support, mentoring and social interaction opportunities for young people living on the St Helier Estate. Through their street survey of local young people, Horizon Church Sutton identified that there is a lack of suitable places for young people to socially interact with each other through games and activities and to get help with their homework.

*"We have kids that come along who are maybe not used to doing homework at home they just kind of forget about it or they don't have people at home that are really able to help them sometimes. The main principle is to be able to help kids with their work and give them a place to play games and have some toast, hang out and have a bit of fun."*  
(Volunteer)

The Circle was an existing seniors' lunch club (offering only sandwiches and cold food), which was run by the previous church which occupied Assembly Walk Chapel. When Horizon Church Sutton took over Assembly Walk Chapel, they

promised to continue running the seniors' lunch club. The Church recognised that it played an important role in supporting local seniors, and that it could offer somewhere seniors could go to access affordable, good quality cooked meals, as well as to benefit from the social interaction and other activities on offer such as quizzes, crafts, board games and computers.

The projects specifically targeted St Helier Estate in Carshalton, Sutton. St Helier Estate experiences relatively high levels of social disadvantage characterised by limited access to employment and social infrastructure. While both young people and seniors are at risk of social or emotional isolation, young people in particular are at risk of low educational attainment and offending.

*"The only youth service in the borough has been axed as of last month. There aren't any community halls, there's only a library, but there is nowhere the community can gather and do things. So we really wanted to do something on the estate to meet the needs of the people. Also when you look at the area there is a high level of economic disadvantage here for elderly people and isolation is a massive thing for elderly people now."* (Project staff)

## Main findings

- ➔ Through their engagement with the project, seniors have improved social links and support networks. More widely, the project has helped seniors to make new friends, improve their wellbeing, and to feel less socially isolated than before.
- ➔ By working with and for the local community, the projects are providing a range of ways for young people and seniors to

contribute to project delivery that are proportionate and appropriate, such as volunteering. As a result seniors felt able to have a say in how things are run and were satisfied with the amount of 'collective control' they had.

- ➔ Building on local contacts and knowledge of the community, the project team has designed a project that clearly meets the needs of seniors who are socially isolated and young people who were at risk of low educational attainment and had a lack of learning support outside of school, and in doing so, has filled a gap in service provision.



## Who is involved?

Young people who live on the St Helier Estate were invited to attend Horizon Hub and seniors were invited to attend The Circle. The projects attracted young people and seniors via word of mouth, through fliers distributed in the postcode area covered by the projects, and through advertising through the church's online events page and social media.

Horizon Hub aimed to reach 20 young people, and ended up attracting 35 young people over the span of the project. However, only around 4 to 6 young people attended regularly each week during term-time. Other young people only attended for short periods, or on the odd occasion. Some had stopped

coming when it started to get dark after school or because of friendship fall outs at school. The Circle aimed to reach 30 seniors and has attracted 49, with around 30 seniors attending regularly each week. The beneficiaries of both clubs were of different ages and backgrounds which reflects the diversity of the local community.

Those that attended regularly came to Horizon Hub and The Circle because they enjoyed the practical and supportive nature of the sessions. Horizon Hub provided a space for young people to get their homework done with the support of experienced tutors in a friendly and non-judgemental environment. It was also somewhere safe for young people to 'hang out' and socially interact with each other over games, activities and free toast. The Circle is a friendly and welcoming place for seniors to come together over coffee, to take part in various social activities and enjoy a cooked lunch.

Both sessions were held at Assembly Walk Chapel which was accessible and conveniently located in the St Helier Estate near to the local schools and other local services, such as the library and local medical centre.

The Trust's funding was used to provide two project coordinators, one to oversee Horizon Hub and another for The Circle, and a manager to supervise both project coordinators. The volunteers for the Horizon Hub included qualified teachers and people with experience of tutoring young people. The volunteers for the Circle were local people with experience of working in care settings. Staff and volunteers working in the kitchen also received Level 2 Food Safety & Hygiene for Catering training.

## What opportunities do the projects offer?

Each weekly Horizon Hub included up to an hour of homework / learning support followed by games, activities and toast. Alongside the learning support there were educational games and group activities available. For example, young people had the opportunity to develop their computer, numeracy and Spanish language skills.

Every week The Circle would meet at 11am for tea and coffee, followed by activities, crafts and an opportunity to learn or to brush up on their computer skills, before having lunch. The lunches provided were cooked on site in Assembly Walk Chapel's newly refurbished kitchen. The Church has been awarded a Food Hygiene Rating of 5 (Very Good) by London Borough of Sutton. Traditional British meals are served which are nutritious and affordable (there is a charge of £3 per meal).



## What have the projects achieved?

Through positive and sustained engagement with the projects since they began in September 2014, young people and seniors have benefitted in many ways. For young people, attending the Horizon Hub has helped them to increase their attainment levels at school (a key outcome for the project).

*"It's really noticeable the difference that some kids develop towards how*

*they actually start learning different skills and actually wanting to put in the effort to do their homework, as they realise coming into school having done their work feels a lot better than not having done their work."*

(Volunteer)

*"At the start of the hub, the majority of kids didn't do their homework at all, it was interesting that they even came to the club, as they weren't particularly there to do homework, we really had to firmly encourage them to do it, but then some of them did change, they did spend more time doing their homework and were much more interested in what they were doing."* (Volunteer)

It has also given young people a place to do their homework, especially if there are too many distractions at home which make it difficult for them to concentrate. It has also provided them with support and encouragement, as some of the young people attending did not have any support with their homework at home.

*"The stuff we do at school, my mum didn't get taught that at them times. When she was young she got confused most of the time, so she can't really help me with my homework."* (Beneficiary)

*"No, would not have been able to do [my Spanish homework] without her, she helps me to pronounce the words, and if I get it wrong, she helps me."* (Beneficiary)

*"If I get some homework I need to do over night, then I do it at home, but that's not very likely, so I do it here most of the time. I have too many distractions at home and nobody helps me."* (Beneficiary)



It has helped young people get into a good routine with doing their homework and to get on better at school as the project has helped them to improve their motivation and interest in learning.

*"If I didn't come here I wouldn't do my homework, as I just can't be bothered to do it as I find it a bit boring doing it a home."* (Beneficiary)

*"I mostly get my homework on Thursdays, so it's good I can get it done here and give it in the next day, so I don't have to worry about it after that. Then I can go and get on with other activities like my dancing."* (Beneficiary)

Horizon Hub has helped to increase young people's confidence and self esteem. Young people were more able to share their views and had become more confident in their ability to learn and to try new activities.

*"I get literacy and maths homework. They help me a lot with my times tables, especially with how to do long multiplication. We also play games like pass the pigs where we throw the pigs and have to add up the score based on the way the pigs land. I like maths more now and I think I'm pretty good at it."* (Beneficiary)

*"There was one boy who hated counting and couldn't do it, but we had a family fun day where there was a competition to see how high you can roll the pigs to get certain points. His mum was playing and he was shouting out all the points for her and really well. He had obviously managed to learn how to do it without even realising and he was really confident at it."* (Volunteer)

For some young people, it has helped them to improve their grades, move up to a higher set for certain subjects and receive fewer detentions for not completing their homework or for bad behaviour.

*"I used to stress about my homework. I used to go to school worried that I would be told off, but now I can just go in and show my homework and not be worried... It helped me get a level up in all of my subjects."* (Beneficiary)

For the seniors, the project has helped them to develop greater social links and to feel less isolated (a key programme outcome). It has helped to develop their support networks both within the group itself and with the staff and volunteers.

*"That's very hard to quantify as they are very reluctant to admit to being lonely, but in hindsight they say things like 'I come here because I feel so looked after and I've met lots of people'. They won't say that they are lonely, but by saying that they feel better for coming, you kind of realise that it has made a difference."* (Volunteer)

The interviews with the project staff and beneficiaries also suggest that the projects are demonstrating aspects of collective control (another key programme outcome), through collective action and some control over what activities are offered based on their interests.

*"We were looking for ways to engage their interests which were videos, computers, and photography. It's what they said they wanted to do. So we had an idea last year which we discussed with them about getting them involved in making a video project, like a 5 minute documentary about their area, and getting involved in that, interviewing people and having it made by them."* (Project staff)

Young people and seniors were satisfied with the level of control that they had over the projects, as they had had a say in what type of activities they wanted and many were eager to suggest new ideas for activities.

*"We thought we would have an organisation committee made up of seniors, as we thought there would be 4 or 5 people that would want to do that, but actually because of the nature of the group, they are all [part of] the committee because they are all saying what they do or don't want or what they do or don't enjoy in their feedback forms. So we didn't think we could have 4 or 5 to be the voice for the rest, as that would ruin the family feel of it as it creates two levels of people."* (Project staff)

Some young people have also helped out and volunteered for The Circle seniors' lunch club, such as setting up the venue, and helping prepare and serve the food and refreshments, which has encouraged intergenerational interaction between seniors and young people.

*"Some young people were interested in helping out in the kitchen and came along to a training event for adults which we ran for people working in the kitchen. They helped out on Sunday mornings and at The Circle as they were qualified to do so. So that was really good. We also have some*

*that have joined our Giants youth group."* (Project staff)

Some seniors have also had the opportunity to run their own activities such as show and tell and some offered to volunteer in the local community, and learn new skills such as how to use a computer.

*"We are also providing in both of these projects, but especially with the seniors, an opportunity for people to volunteer, who have mental health problems, we have one lady who is a recovering alcoholic and it gives them something to get involved in as a team to build up their confidence and self-esteem."* (Project staff)



## What has worked well?

➔ Horizon Hub was made accessible, friendly and welcoming for young people who would not otherwise receive any support with homework and were at risk of falling behind, as they did not have a suitable environment at home to do their homework. For example, one young person did not have access to a computer at home and had to spend her lunch breaks at school to do her homework, which meant that she missed out on spending time with her friends.

➔ Collective support: Staff attributed the success of the project to listening closely to the views and interests of its

beneficiaries. The projects encouraged collective control through offering a wide range of activities as requested by the young people and the seniors, allowing beneficiaries to choose which activities would be most useful and beneficial to them.

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

➔ **Fluctuations in the number of young people:** The number of young people attending Horizons Hub dropped at the beginning of the term, due to changes in school finishing times on Wednesday, some schools finished at 2pm, while others finished at 4pm. To overcome this issue, the Horizons Hub was moved to Thursdays, when schools finish at a similar time. It has also stepped up its recruitment drive to attract more young people by asking schools to signpost pupils who they consider would benefit from the homework club, redistributing fliers in all the postcode areas covered by the project, and promoting awareness of the club to parents attending its other community groups.

➔ **Restrictive target area:** The project targets particular postcode areas based on data drawn from the Indices of

Multiple Deprivation as set out by People’s Health Trust. This targeting is specific to particular streets, which has meant that the project has had to turn some potential beneficiaries away, which has had an impact on the overall number of regular attendees. The Church has tried to overcome this by carrying out a recruitment drive to attract young people and has lowered the age criteria to include pupils in year 5 and above.



## The future

Both projects will continue to run until September 2016 with People’s Trust funding. Horizon Church Sutton has secured additional funding to continue the Circle and will be launching a pilot Family Hub project in June 2016. The Church recognises the need for the community groups to continue and is actively seeking the necessary funds to make this happen.

The Church had looked at applying for funding from the Wandle Trust through Community Development Foundation who administers their Community Grants programme.

However, Community Development Foundation has announced that they are to close in March 2016, so the Wandle Trust has suspended any new applications and will be reviewing the programme in the summer.

The experience gained from Horizon Hub has allowed the Church to develop the homework club into a new pilot project, a family after-school club, which is aimed at engaging and supporting the whole family early on to improve educational attainment and parents’ ability to support their children with their homework.

*“We are using all we have learnt through running the Horizon Hub and are now targeting support for the whole family. We believe this will be the most effective way of helping children and young people with their educational needs.”* (Project staff)

