



## PEOPLE'S HEALTH TRUST - ACTIVE COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY



Two Castles  
Housing Association 



# Upperby Court Residents' Association - Health for the Elderly

## Introduction

This case study focusses on Upperby Court's Active Communities project Health for the Elderly. It covers how the project was developed through an ad hoc and informal approach to collective control, what was 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 that was submitted as part of the programme's six monthly review cycle.

## About the project

Health for the Elderly is a 21-month project of social activities within a

residents' association in Carlisle. The project benefits from the free use of a community centre to which all residents have access.

The project builds upon previous activity by the residents' association in providing different social opportunities to address isolation and loneliness. The additionality from the grant is mainly in monthly minibus trips to places of interest and occasional meals out.

The project answers a need for funding to deliver activities for residents to get them out of their houses and engaging with each other. It aimed to engage all 37 residents of the complex through a diverse range of social activities.

## Main findings

- ➔ Interviewees all agreed on the importance of a committed lead to drive the project forward and encourage residents to engage with informal processes in place for collective control by suggesting and signing up to activities. Health for the Elderly is led by the existing resident's committee which provides a structure for collective control.
- ➔ Participants all valued the new opportunities and means of getting out of their houses to engage with other residents and as a result they improved social links and ties. They particularly welcomed transport support to reach shops they would not otherwise be able to access.
- ➔ Food-based activities were found to be the most effective for engaging a wide range of people, including those who might not otherwise be willing or able to participate in other activities.

## Who is involved?

Health for the Elderly was designed and delivered by a residents' committee of Upperby Court sheltered housing. It is clear that the drive of the project lead has been the key to securing funding and in engaging the residents to take part in activities. The line between participant and volunteer is often blurred with residents contributing according to their skills and interests, for example by helping with catering and running the bingo.

*"We'd all be floundering if it wasn't for [the project lead]."* (Participant)

Project participants are the 37 residents of Upperby Court, with turnout usually in the region of 14-28 people per activity. Participants are not charged for taking part.

Activities are coordinated by the association secretary and treasurer. Residents are invited to express preferences for activities and sign up to suggested activities on a communal noticeboard to gauge popularity and viability.

## What opportunities does the project offer?

The project continues many activities the committee has been running since 2009 through other funding. As a result there was already a clear idea about what the residents generally like to do. At committee meetings residents are asked to suggest ideas for new activities for discussion and agreement.

Activities were primarily based in the community building in the centre of the complex and shared the theme of bringing the residents together for social activity. They included fish and chip suppers, bingo, quiz nights,

scrabble, and a reading club. The project funding additionally enabled participants to take monthly minibus trips. These included recreational days out to local places of interest (for example a day out in Blackpool), as well as trips to out of town retail complexes.



## What has the project achieved?

Approximately two thirds of the residents are engaged in at least some of the activities on offer. Engagement varies by activity – offering a diverse range of activities to appeal to different interests was considered as a feature of effective practice.

Volunteers are not formally recruited but rather residents are given the opportunity to support in delivery where they are willing and able e.g. support with catering and compering the bingo.

All individuals interviewed were unreservedly complimentary of the project. The main outcomes were that they were able to get out of their house and engage with the other residents, having previously

experienced isolation. This includes being able to access free transport to go to shops they wouldn't otherwise be able to access. Going with the group on a minibus also means they are able to buy more than they would otherwise as others can help them load it on to the bus and then unload it into their homes.

Many residents expressed the view that engaging in social activities was important for staying active and welcomed the opportunity to get out of their homes.

*"It's really excellent – I'm really grateful its happening. People can't just sit back and grow old."* (Participant)

*"You can't sit in looking at TV all the time."* (Participant)

It is clear that residents felt able to give their views and shape the activities they do; most activities are suggested by the committee and then signed up to by the residents. This is likely a result of the well-established nature of many of the activities. Participants valued not feeling pressured to contribute or participate.

*"It's nice that you can join in if you want to."* (Participant)

An important contextual factor for the project's success in engaging participants is that the residential complex has free use of a dedicated hall big enough to accommodate events for all residents. Residents interviewed who had previously lived within other sheltered housing complexes noted that this is an uncommon bonus for the project. All residents have a key to the hall and are within easy reach, meaning that the project has a free venue that is available at all times and that is accessible and familiar to all of the project's target participants.

## What has worked well?

- ➔ Food-based social activities: The key lesson learned was the value of food-based social activities – including fish suppers, meals out, and meals at the centre for residents on special occasions (Christmas, Easter, residents' significant birthdays (80<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup> etc.) These events are always the most well attended and so are effective at bringing the whole community together. In addition for residents who are not willing or able to attend these activities at the centre, the food is taken to their house which was said to be gratefully received.
- ➔ Ensuring a variety of activities: Interviewees also described putting on a range of activities to suit a range of interests as a feature of effective practice. The

project's reading group was very cost-effective, with a £35 per year budget used to buy books from a charity shop to be placed on the bookshelf in the community hall for all to borrow and discuss.

- ➔ Offering some free activities: Project staff were passionate about not charging residents for any of the activities in order to maximise engagement. They recognised that this approach may also pose a threat to sustainability if continuation funding is not found.

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

- ➔ The future: Engaging everyone in processes for collective control: Project staff reported

that it is difficult to engage residents in this process of suggesting potential activities. The residents we spoke to told us that they prefer the core committee team to come up with the programme of activities and are happy to sign up to the activities that most interest them.

*"It's not possible to engage everyone... some people just don't want to take part."* (Project staff)

## The future

The committee plans to continue its core activities of bringing together residents for community activities. It will seek further funding to support the day trips which have proven so popular and that will not be possible without outside funding.

