

Culture, Leisure and Health

Health and Well-Being Briefing Paper (no. 5 of 8)

Introduction

This briefing paper, on tackling the wider determinants of health in relation to culture, leisure and health, is one of a series of briefings aimed at local authorities and other local partners in the West Midlands. It was developed using best available national and local evidence and guidance,^{1,2} and local case studies are included which demonstrate good and effective current practice in support of the Public Health role of Local Government. The briefing serves as a legacy of the extensive range of work done to date across the West Midlands led by the Regional Public Health Group. It is cognisant of the needs in the West Midlands and suggests how local areas and Health and Well-Being Boards can work in partnership to tackle local public health issues using innovative and effective approaches in tackling the wider determinants of health and health inequalities. These approaches can help to protect against current and future threats to health and well-being and help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local partnership working to improve the quality and quantity of people's lives.

Areas for Partnership Action

Health and Well-Being Boards can:

- Support an increase in the number of adults in the West Midlands achieving the recommended levels of physical activity, sport and active recreation per week and use physical activity initiatives to prevent the early onset of diseases and avoidable conditions,³ improve people's quality of life and save money and reduce demand for more intensive services later⁴
- Improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of cultural, leisure and play opportunities and facilities for residents
- Secure a long-term health and physical activity legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games for the West Midlands, and use it as an opportunity for physical activity initiatives⁵
- Maximise the use of knowledge and creativity in the cultural sector in developing environments that support the delivery and uptake of modernised services and the realisation of health priorities; whilst enriching the lives of patients, the wider community and staff and enabling cultural change

Key Facts: West Midlands

- 10.1% of adults in the West Midlands are physically active compared to the England average of 11.2%⁶
- The percentage of people being moderately physically active for at least 30 minutes at least 3 times per week falls steeply with age, with less than 10% of those aged over 75 engaging in this level of physical activity.⁷
- 48.4% of children in the West Midlands are physically active compared to the England average of 49.6%⁸
- In 2009/10 67.3% of adults in the West Midlands were very or fairly satisfied with sports provision in their local area which is a significant increase from 65.3% in 2007/08. In 2009/10 the average number of people who were satisfied in England was 69%.⁹
- The proportion of people who visited a museum, gallery or archive increased from 35.3% in 2005/06 to 42.4% in 2009/10. During 2009/10, 69.7% of adults participated in or attended an arts event at least once.¹⁰



Culture: A Strong Force for the Common Good

Culture describes a way of life and it surrounds us in our everyday lives and is reflected in building design, the natural environment, our historic environment and our communities and contributes to quality of life.¹¹ The cultural sector in the West Midlands can contribute to and complement the health agenda in a number of ways:

- Providing leisure, recreation and community facilities and enhancing the use of green open spaces
- Improving the built environment through architecture and arts and design programmes
- Ensuring our historic built and natural environment is maintained for future generations, including historic sites, canal networks and urban parks
- Improving mental well-being and quality of life through leisure and recreation opportunities from sports to arts and learning services
- Inspiring people to discover positive alternatives to drugs, crime and anti-social behaviour

Cultural facilities such as theatres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and tourist attractions provide a huge opportunity to get health messages across. For example through community programmes and volunteering opportunities, the provision of healthy eating options for customers and staff, encouraging 'active travel' when visiting the facility, and providing opportunities for local social interaction.

Pubs, restaurants and nightclubs are also important, providing opportunities for social interaction, the development of community cohesion and the local economy. There are links between the health, community safety and the cultural sectors in ensuring that these opportunities are maximised and that adverse behaviours like eating unhealthily, binge drinking, substance misuse, fighting and street crime are tackled through coherent, joined up approaches.

Developing an Active Population

Physical inactivity is a major causal factor in the development of chronic disease, and a physically active lifestyle can lead to improved social, physical and mental health and well-being for all ages, yet as a nation we are becoming less and less active. The estimated cost of physical inactivity to the NHS and the economy is £8.2 billion annually. While it is recognised that getting sedentary people more active constitutes a huge challenge it is one that will provide huge gains for public health.¹²

There are many programmes designed to increase activity levels running across the West Midlands, for example green activity programmes, walking programmes, school based sports programmes, dance activities, exercise referral schemes, sculpture trails, community sport programmes and active travel programmes. Employers also have a role to play by promoting workplace activity programmes. Moving towards an active population is a long term aim and requires the development of strong, effective partnerships to drive forward the developments required to achieve this.

Many health organisations and local authorities successfully work in partnership with dance to improve health and well-being in their communities.¹³ For example, in the West Midlands collaborative work has been undertaken with DanceXchange (dx) to raise the profile of dance as a good way of undertaking physical activity and engaging in cultural activity.¹⁴

Dx is an organisation which provides artistic support, education, performances and participation opportunities, and advocates for dance at all levels. The DanceXchange team acts as an interface between artists, educators and the public ensuring the successful delivery of a wide range of dance-based activities. Further details about dx can be found at: <http://www.danceexchange.org.uk/>



The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games and Health

The forthcoming Olympics provide an opportunity to inspire a generation and leave a lasting legacy and produce economic, social, health and environmental benefits for the whole of the UK.

The infrastructure for ensuring that the West Midlands benefit from the games is dependent on strong partnerships existing at all levels together with strategies and plans. It is imperative that the opportunities to improve health and well-being that the Olympics present are seized.

Alongside this focus on harnessing an Olympic and Paralympic legacy there will also be huge potential to deploy other high profile sporting and cultural events to meet wider health and participation objectives.

Cultural Opportunities

Cultural opportunities are important to our quality of life and play their part in determining the way in which we grow older, enabling us to maintain our interests, independence, social networks and cognitive functioning.

The importance of culture within strategies to tackle health inequalities, increase community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour should not be underestimated.

The proportion of older people contributing to cultural activities is increasing.¹⁵ Access to cultural and social opportunities is important to enable the maintenance of independence, quality of life and involvement in the local community.

Engaging the cultural sector with the planning, environment, health, social care, children's services and education sectors is key to ensuring that community needs are integrated within planning processes to increase opportunities for play, creativity, learning, leisure and social interactions.

Creation and Improvement of Healthcare Settings

Within the cultural sector in the West Midlands partners can increasingly work with the health and well-being sector to enable improved or new environments for health care within local communities.

Evidence shows that the integration for arts in capital developments delivers significant health benefits, for example postoperative stays are decreased and immune-system function in cancer patients is boosted due to reduction of stress.¹⁶

Similarly, art can improve staff recruitment, retention and productivity.¹⁷ Shorter hospital stays and reduced drug usage translates into real cost savings for the NHS.¹⁸

Artists and arts organisations, architects, master-planning teams and communities can be engaged from the outset of developments to maximise on the benefits of connecting the arts and the built environment whilst addressing the needs of the community and fostering community ownership. This can lead to increased uptake of services, decreased vandalism and contributes to wider social, physical and economic regeneration.

The use of cultural venues for the delivery of patient focussed services in the community is becoming more widespread. For example the Bookstart scheme, which is run by Booktrust (an independent charity dedicated to encouraging people of all ages and cultures to engage with books), promotes a lifelong love of books. Health visitors and clinics issue packs to parents or guardians, which include children's books and information about local library services.¹⁹

Bookstart is coordinated, resourced and delivered locally via enthusiastic local public services professionals, including health visitors, library staff and early year's professionals.²⁰

The routine of sharing books, stories, songs and rhymes helps to build pre-literacy skills. It also provides a special time and place for parents and guardians to build a strong and loving relationship with their child.²¹

Even at a very young age, the benefits of Bookstart are evident where Bookstart children of 2- to 3-years-old were compared with a sample of children who didn't receive Bookstart packs. Bookstart families share more books and the quality of the interaction between the parent and child is enhanced.²²



Case Studies

West Midlands West Midlands for 2012

The Heart of England has embraced the London 2012 Games as a unique opportunity to inspire and engage its communities, as well as raise its profile both nationally and internationally as a centre of sporting and cultural excellence.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games provide a stimulus to realise some important economic and community objectives and add value to them. It creates new and exciting opportunities for partnership working.

The lead strategic body in the West Midlands is the West Midlands Leadership Group for 2012. The Leadership Group has launched a brand new regional plan in response to 2012. The plan outlines five key priority themes for the region:

- Business and skills
- Volunteering
- Culture
- Tourism & regional image
- Sport and health

The West Midlands Leadership Group has also identified '50 Ways to Engage with 2012' and how you can get involved with 2012 right now. The London 2012 Games is not just about sport and not just about London.

'50 Ways to Engage' is an initiative launched by the West Midlands Leadership Group for 2012. It is about people in the West Midlands having their own 'Olympic Moment'.

'50 Ways to Engage' covers everything from London 2012 Open Weekend events across the region to how you can sign up to receive regular information to the ways in which individuals and organisations can get involved now with London 2012.

The resource is added to on an on-going basis and the intention is that by London 2012 we will have reached '2012 Ways to Engage with 2012.'

For further details look at the websites below:

www.wmfor2012.com

www.wmfor2012.com/our-plans/50-ways-to-engage

See reference sheet and the other briefing papers in the series:

Planning, Transport and Health
Housing and Health
Environment and Health
Economy, Skills and Health
Safer Stronger Communities
Children, Young People and Families
Later Life

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Cannock Chase The Route to Health

The 'Route to Health' is a colourful and imaginative community arts trail that takes people through woodland at Cannock Chase in South Staffordshire and enables a diverse audience to take their own personal Route to Health.

Objectives

- To use art to encourage physical activity, raise awareness of health issues, and provide free and accessible health and health service information in an informal way
- To produce artworks supported by a health message that direct visitors to further sources of information and stimulate discussions about healthy lifestyles
- To remove barriers and attract a more diverse audience to the site, particularly 'hard to reach' community members (e.g. the inactive, those with mental and physical health or disability issues), and to promote woodlands as a venue for health and well-being by providing a range of different activities
- To develop partnerships between organisations with common agendas

Actions

- The installation of a one mile access-friendly trail with health-based community artworks marking the route with rest stops to aid those with health problems who benefit from gentle exercise
- Annual celebrations onsite in October to re-invigorate the trail and renew interest
- Engagement with 48 different community groups

Achievements

- 2,000 people have engaged in workshops and 50,000 visits were recorded in the first year, a tenfold increase on the number of visits using the same trail before the project started
- An Arts Council England lottery award enabled creation of rest stops
- The evaluation shows that those who take physical exercise less than three times a week have learned more about health issues by visiting the Route, and that visitors feel the trail is a more interesting way to communicate health messages than traditional methods such as leaflets and television
- External organisations are using the trail to deliver their own objectives (e.g. tackling social exclusion)

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Further Information, Organisations and Links

Learning for Public Health www.wmpho.org.uk/lfph	Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk
West Midland Councils www.wmcouncils.gov.uk	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) www.nice.org.uk
West Midlands Physical Activity Website www.pan-wm.org.uk	West Midlands Regional Observatory www.wmro.org
West Midlands for 2012 www.wmfor2012.com	London 2012 www.london2012.com
Advantage West Midlands www.advantagewm.co.uk	Sport England www.sportengland.org.uk
Play England www.playengland.org.uk	Youth Dance England www.yde.org.uk
Arts Council England www.artscouncil.org.uk	English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk
Natural England www.naturalengland.org.uk	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council www.mla.gov.uk
Department for Culture, Media and Sport www.culture.gov.uk	National Children's Bureau www.ncb.org.uk
The Marmot Review www.marmotreview.org	
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts www.nesta.org.uk	

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