

Background - setting the scene

The idea of a community gym for the (Plymouth 2020) neighbourhood of Stonehouse had been discussed for a number of years; initially as part of the longer term aspirations of the community directors on the Millfields Community Economic Development Trust and more recently as part of the regeneration initiatives within the Millfields and Royal William Yard sites. Discussions however, never progressed because of the difficulties surrounding both the identification of a suitable site and the necessary capital and revenue funding.

The initiative was resuscitated at the beginning of summer (June) 2006 in discussions between the Community Public Health Practitioner and local St Peter and the Waterfront Councillors, as a possible project for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. Support to develop the project for funding was provided by the Community Development staff working for the St. Peters Ichthus Society Ltd.

In order to realise the project, Stonehouse Community Gym recruited Stonehouse Creek Community Development Trust Ltd. to manage the project for the period of the funding and Plymouth YMCA to provide expertise around the staffing and delivery of appropriate weight management and exercise activities.

The Neighbourhood

The 2005 Neighbourhood Index of Deprivation for Plymouth ranked the neighbourhood of Stonehouse as the most deprived within Plymouth (within the top 3% nationally). When considering specific indicators nationally; child poverty is within the worst 1%, employment within the worst 2%, with both housing and health indicators within the worst 5%.



“I expected the gyms to be large multinational ‘body building type affairs.”



Maps that depict Stonehouse as an important area which is still as true today.



Out of 43 neighbourhoods at a local (Plymouth) level, the individual ranking in the five key determinants are:

Health	Rank 1	Education	Rank 3
Worklessness	Rank 1	Housing	Rank 18
Crime	Rank 2	All themes	Rank 1

This overall rank is in spite of the neighbourhood including properties within the Millfields (former Royal Naval Hospital) and Durnford Street; and the quality of the social housing stock in Stonehouse, which is relatively good given specific regeneration initiatives that have targeted these properties in the last 6 years.

These measures of deprivation are reinforced by a housing landscape that is predominately flats with limited living space, and this lack of accessibility is true also for children who have few gardens, parks or areas of green space in which to play. Where activity clubs, leisure and recreational facilities exist locally, these are often at a cost that is prohibitive to local parents, and accessibility to residents of facilities outside the neighbourhood is limited.

Community regeneration and the public health context

Tackling such levels of deprivation was the focus in 2001 of the government's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. The vision outlined was to "narrow the gap between the most deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country so that within 10-20 years no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live" (NRU, 2004). Key to the success of this vision was the recognition that turning a neighbourhood around required support from public and private agencies, local residents and community groups alike.

This recognition and requirement for a more holistic approach to tackling inequalities reinforced changes made to the public health agenda with their shift away from personal approaches to improving health towards a social model. "The social model of health takes the focus for tackling health inequalities away from health care alone to incorporate individual lifestyle factors, social and community influences, living and working conditions and overall general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions" (LGA, 1998).

Funding for the project was granted in 2006 via Plymouth 2020 (Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) with additional benefit-in-kind from NHS Plymouth and other partners. Continuation funding for the project was secured in 2008 for a further three years.

Why are we different?

Stonehouse Community Gym recognised that to make the gym successful and attractive to clients from the neighbourhood meant marketing was key to residents wanting to use the facility. It has already been documented that Stonehouse residents have always wanted a gym they could call their 'own', hence the name, which suggests local ownership and not a private enterprise. Physical access to the facility was an important factor in that it is on a main bus route and has a lift.

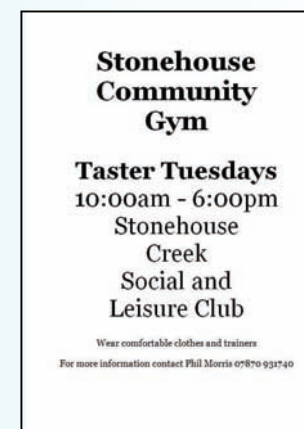
The gym has also been aware that levels of physical activity are known to be low in the neighbourhood and that many residents have limited 'disposable' income. The gym offers affordability, flexible packages and reward schemes that are tailored to the individual. It also offers varied programmes to different community groups and adapts according to need or requests where possible. The instructors provide a highly individualised service and their friendliness, enthusiasm and encouragement is valued by gym members. The staff have a good understanding of the neighbourhood they serve and of the residents themselves.

In order to avoid the misconception of gym and fitness centres 'not being for me' and you need to be 'healthy and fit and wear lycra' to go the gym the team had to strike a balance between advertising it as a 'gym' on one hand but an acceptable place to come with very high standards and professionalism on the other that doesn't require lycra but trainers are essential.

So marketing has been important in a 'softer' approach with additional health enhancing opportunities such as stop smoking advice and health MOTs. It also differs from conventional gyms in that outreach work into the community is part of its core delivery, and also the only gym in the city with exercise equipment for wheelchair users.



***“ I liked the self esteem
and confidence that I
was gaining.”***





“It helps me with my depression, I would like to continue and come everyday”.

Who do we deliver to – who uses our services?

Access to the Stonehouse Community Gym is available to all residents aged 11+ who wish to increase their levels of physical activity; this may be through the provision of cost effective and accessible opportunities within the fitness suite sited in the HQ Building on Union Street or through participation in Stonehouse Community Gym delivered (or supported) outreach activity.

Within this however were specific target populations who it is recognised would not traditionally access facilities like those provided. Whilst this would include children and adults who are over-weight, pre-obese, obese and where this is already impacting upon their health and well-being, the project has also targeted residents who have or suffer with;

- Medical conditions, which would benefit from increased activity levels (e.g. high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiac rehabilitation)
- Homeless (Shekinah Mission/SHiP Hostel and Lawson House)
- Learning disabilities (St Georges' Training Centre)
- A mental illness (with or without a formal diagnosis)
- Been excluded from school or in danger of offending (Positive Action for Young People, Stoke Damarel Community College)
- Young people living in supported housing (Plymouth Foyer), and
- Asylum seekers and refugees (START).

Many of these residents have limited access to exercise or fitness activity, but would benefit from improved well being, mental health, confidence and self-esteem.

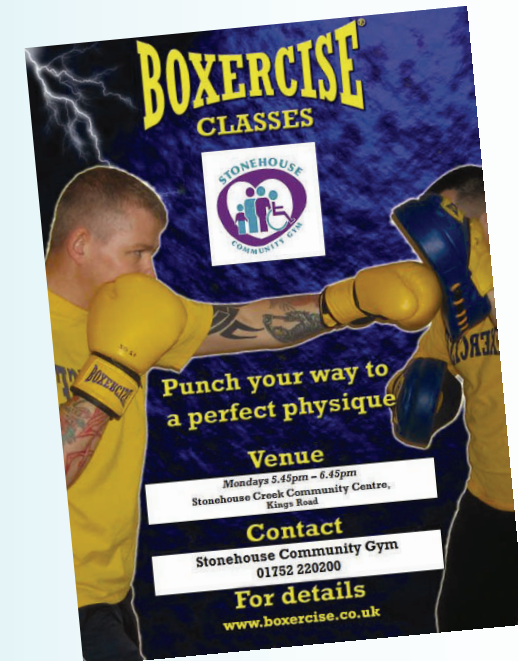
All activity developed and delivered by the Stonehouse Community Gym contributes to the reduction in the health inequalities faced by residents, based either on where they live or their personal circumstances.

What do we deliver?

Along with the exercise and physical activity provided by the static equipment which is normally associated with a fitness suite, the Stonehouse Community Gym has also developed a menu of activities, which can be delivered both within the fitness suite (ours or others) and other community venues to residents;

After/Out of school activity clubs for children aged 5-7, 8-11, and 11+	Specific sports coaching – football, basketball etc.
Girls Allowed/Boys Own – fitness suite based activity for young people aged over 11	Fitness for Sports – activity to improve team fitness and cohesion aimed at children and young people aged 8+ (including pre-season training)
Circuit class	Baggy T-shirts
Boxercise	Exercise to music
Parents and pushchairs	Pre-services club
Surfs specific	Walking – exercising outdoors
Healthy Living Course	Level 1 equivalent – introduction to exercise and fitness in a gym environment

Dedicated staff time is also given to the Stonehouse Sharks junior rugby club for their out of school, holiday fit camps.





Our Home



Gym Opening Ceremony

Where do we deliver activity?

Activity originally started in the main hall of Stonehouse Creek Social and Leisure Club in January 2007. Space within the project's preferred venue, the HQ Building on Union Street did not become available until September 2008 with the fitness suite open for business 3 weeks later on the 1st October 2008.

Along with these two main venues, the gym also used a variety of additional community spaces both in Stonehouse and beyond. To ensure a safe working environment for both staff and clients, risk assessments were completed on each of the venues utilised by the gym, these included child protection and safeguarding considerations. Copies of these risk assessments were left with each of the venues used.

Given limited capital resources, care was taken when purchasing the exercise and fitness equipment for the project to choose items which could be used both in the fitness suite and during activities delivered within the community. Protocols for the safe transport of gym equipment were established in order to minimise the possibility of damage in transport and injury to staff. The use of more than one venue and transport of equipment was reflected in the increased insurance cost paid.

When does activity take place?

The Stonehouse Community Gym fitness suite is open 9:00am – 7:00pm Monday – Thursday, 9:00am – 6:00pm Friday and 10:00am – noon Saturday. As a minimum requirement a Level 3 – CYQ/NVQ accredited gym instructor is on duty at all times; a second staff member is always present during activities delivered to children and young people and vulnerable adults. All staff and volunteers hold enhanced CRB disclosure.

What else?

The decision to start both the Stonehouse Community Gym and the Stonehouse Shape-Up programme on the same day was a deliberate choice; the intention being that each activity would support the work of the other and referral pathways between each was established.

The importance of timing Stonehouse Community Gym activity to support other organisations has always been integral to the project's strategic plan and activities have been developed as part of;

- the local (NHS Plymouth) MEND/Weight Management Service activity for residents of Stonehouse; this includes the 12 week 'SHINE' Plymouth programme run three times a year
- NHS Plymouth's Smoking Cessation Service and Community Public Health Campaigns targeted within the neighbourhood of Stonehouse (e.g. health MOT's etc.)
- Stonehouse Sharks adult and junior rugby club out of school (holiday) fit camps
- Manor Street Children's Centre (Keyham Community Partnership)
- Plymouth Foyer – healthy living activities
- Shekinah Mission (Re:fit and Re:solve) – healthy living programme
- The Zone (young people service) – fit 4 life programme
- High Street and Pilgrim Primary Schools – “being healthy” weeks, and
- the alternative curriculum for young people at risk of exclusion from secondary school (Frederick Street Centre – SDCC).





“It’s increased the bond with my daughters. I’m keen to bring them to the gym to the “Girls Allowed” groups. I want to increase their confidence”.



Along with supporting activity the Stonehouse Community Gym has also invested resources, time and staff to participate in other one off events happening within the neighbourhood of Stonehouse and for health promotion activities beyond for example Men’s Health Day.

Where else?

While for the purposes of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding the primary target neighbourhood for this project was the Plymouth 2020 defined neighbourhood of Stonehouse, in recognition of existing NHS Plymouth’s work, support would also be given to the neighbourhood of Efford.

Given this, the project has also delivered activity for staff and other organisations (private/public and community);

- Efford Youth and Community Work team – a pilot 4 week circuit programme of activity for boys only/girls only; further exercise and fitness activities have continued to be delivered to this neighbourhood through Plymouth YMCA supported by Stonehouse Community Gym
- City College, Plymouth – health awareness days
- Stoke Business Park – summer health awareness programme – a series of health awareness days
- Southway Youth and Community Centre – fitness suite based individual programmes for young people aged 16-21 accessing the fitness equipment purchased,
- Morice Town Positive Futures (PAYP) young persons’ group
- Working “Introduction to Health” first steps basic literacy/numeracy programme aimed at residents from North Prospect, Barne Barton and St Budeaux
- Plymouth City Council – promoting healthy activity day (Plymouth Pavilions)

Delivering high quality services

The initial lack of a permanent base from which to offer the community gym/exercise activity meant that the project's success had to rely upon the experience and professionalism of the staff with a balance being struck between the need to purchase appropriate equipment and the sessional hire of venue space. The initiation of an activity programme for primary schools necessitated bringing in additional sessional staff from the YMCA with the specialised skills and experience.

In order to gain the confidence of members of the public it was agreed that staff should wear clothing that reflected a professional appearance but at the same time promoted a degree of friendliness and informality. This has been accomplished by the gym logo on sports tops, which are worn by all staff and volunteers. As well as the logo these tops were also printed with information that would enable clients to identify the qualified gym instructors, volunteers and the Community Public Health Practitioner.

All individuals participating in Stonehouse Community Gym activity undertake an initial health screen involving a pre-exercise activity questionnaire and blood pressure check with qualified exercise staff. Particularly noticeable were residents presenting with high blood pressure and other health issues such as high resting pulse rates, back and joint pain.

Additional health screenings and support were provided by the Community Public Health Practitioner who attended each of the sessions held at Stonehouse Creek Social and Leisure Club. Since operating from the HQ building regular health screening/cholesterol checks from the fitness suite have been made available and other health professionals have provided health promotion services to Stonehouse Community Gym which have provided invaluable information, advice and guidance.

Callum



Mark



Phil



Tania



Rhea

With whom?

Partnerships with other organisations and agencies have developed during the lifetime of the project. Initial difficulties with establishing the fitness suite necessitated a more flexible approach being adopted and this has been reflected within the partnerships created.

The strength and purpose of these partnerships vary depending on circumstances and representatives of the gym participate in the following:

- Millbay Advisory Forum – information accrued from this forum resulted in a workshop on the “Future of Millbay” being delivered to local NHS community staff and support for section 106 monies being allocated to the NHS family
- Stonehouse Professionals Forum
- Stonehouse Extended Schools Forum and extended services activity days promoting health activity to children and young people aged 5 – 19
- Neighbourhood Learning Consortium Ltd.
- Weight/obesity management workshop (NICE guidelines)
- Millfields Community Economic Development Trust (CEDT) planning sessions and open days
- Plymouth City Council promoting participation days for young people aged 11 plus
- Plymouth Foyer promoting health activity/health awareness days
- V-involved – promoting volunteering opportunities
- Voluntary & Community Sector Children and Young People’s Forum – promotion of healthy opportunities for children and young people, and
- Local Government Information Unit’s research and dissemination training on health inequalities, childhood obesity, physical exercise and fitness.

We have also been part of other organisations events and activities promoting opportunities to participate in physical activity.

Auditioning for the cast – recruiting volunteers

A key component of the Stonehouse Community Gym's project proposal was the recruitment of local residents to support the delivery of activity across the neighbourhood, and 10 residents (4 women, 6 men) have to date volunteered with the project.

Each volunteer is taken through an induction process and is asked to commit a minimum of 8 hours volunteer time a week for a probationary period of 6 weeks. The initial in-house training provided combines the practical use of the fitness equipment (for familiarity and confidence), with an understanding on the benefits to health of exercise and fitness and how exercise effects the body. As part of this process, and to "give back" to volunteers each is given 1:1 support time with a qualified member of staff and "free" exercise sessions. The rationale for doing this is to provide volunteers with a realistic understanding of what work in the fitness industry will be like and advice on alternative opportunities should they be required.

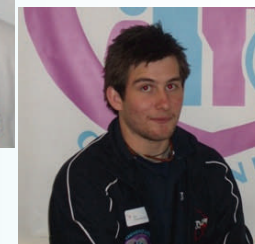
If at the end of these 6 weeks residents are still interested in volunteering, more formal accredited training opportunities are explored through Plymouth YMCA.

The Stonehouse Community Gym provides three types of volunteering opportunities;

- 1 Personal development – for residents looking to "try" something new within a safe, supported environment. Work with residents focuses on increasing self confidence, belief and abilities, improving communication skills and personal achievements. Care is taken to enable residents to set their own targets and understands that for this group of residents, volunteering with the project is a stepping stone to their eventual goal.
- 2 An introduction to the fitness/leisure industry – for residents who have not followed the traditional route of school, further/higher education to employment; the project has developed an alternative learning by doing "on-the-job" curriculum. Progression onto accredited training is facilitated by the project (time and resources) and provided through Plymouth YMCA.



Carron



Rob



Amber



Geordie



Qualifications and Certification

CYQ Level 2

Gym Instructors Award

CYQ Level 3

Advance Gym Instructors Award

CYQ Level 2

Studio Instructors Award

Exercise to Music (ETM)

CYQ Level 3

Training in Different
Environments (TIDE)

CYQ Level 2

Children's Health Related Exercise

Wright Foundation Level 3

Referral Programme

Consultant

(GP Referral) Boxercise

NVQ Level 2

Instructing Exercise and Fitness
(Gym Based)

NVQ Level 1 Numeracy

NVQ Level 2 Numeracy

NVQ Level 1 Literacy

NVQ Level 2 Literacy

NUCO First Aid

(4 Day in the Workplace)

Criminal Record Bureau

Enhanced (children and adults)

3 Work based learning experiences with clients outside those normally found within commercial establishments – this may be as part of a student placement or post qualification.

50% of the volunteers recruited have been residents of Stonehouse and 50% were users of the fitness suite.

Training

Stonehouse Community Gym voluntary sector partners recognise the positive impact that having qualified staff has on the quality of the services that can be delivered. This is reflected in the importance placed by the project in providing staff and volunteers with opportunities to develop their skills, increase their qualifications and to promote the benefits of healthier lifestyles, exercise and fitness to local residents.

In-house training sessions are held regularly with all staff e.g. smoking cessation, exercise in the over 50's, supporting clients with mental health issues, etc. as part of a rolling programme of learning activities. 1:1 staff supervision and the annual appraisal system are used to identify individual training needs, like any organisation these are considered in light of statutory compliance, organisational need and available resources.

Priority for training is given to volunteers and local residents of Stonehouse and additional external funding has been sought to enable workforce development and the creation of appropriate training for local residents and staff.

Qualifications and Certification

Childhood Obesity, Physical Exercise and Fitness; Raising Young People's Aspirations; Performance Management; 14-19 Educational Transformation Agenda – Beyond March 2010; Reducing Bullying in the Workplace; Reducing Health Inequalities; Continue to Strengthen Safeguarding Services; Quality in Study Support and Extended Services; A1 Assessors Award; Practical Tools to Measure Impacts & Outcomes Effectively; Reducing Accidents and Injuries; Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS)

Rewards

The Stonehouse Community Gym operates a policy of “rewarding” residents who make positive lifestyle changes as a result of either attending a number of (minimum of 6) sessions in the gym, on completion of a shape-up programme or as an incentive for achieving a personally set target. Residents attending the gym were not initially informed of the rewards scheme. After attending the first three sessions, residents were issued with a loyalty card; this is stamped each week, with the reward issued on completion.

Rewards earned by/given to residents included free sessions for the following activities;		
Swimming class	1:1 personal training/programme	Exercise to Music class
Spinning (cycling) class	Body combat class	Yoga class
Fitness suite sessions	Personal exercise equipment to help continue their physical activity	Beauty therapy session (CFE)

This policy also applied to activity delivered in primary schools. Schools participating in the programme were not aware of this when agreeing to work with the project and the reward was given to the school not individual pupils who were issued with certificates of participation.

Successes – our version of the Oscars

The new partnership has been developed between two voluntary organisations committed to the delivery of a high quality, accessible exercise and fitness facilities.

An accessible community based fitness suite now exists within the neighbourhood of Stonehouse.



"This is the longest I've stuck with it; I've been going through different fads, really proud to have stayed with it for so long".



"All round feeling good about oneself, I just feel better and fitter; it was what I was after".

A successful project launch (January 2008) and host to visits by Tessa Jowell MP, Minister for the Olympics (2009) accompanied by Linda Gilroy MP, and Plymouth City Council's Adult Social Care and Health overview and scrutiny committee (January 2010).

A flexible programme of both in and out fitness suite activity has been created, many of these programmes piloted in Stonehouse have also been delivered in/for the City Centre, Efford, Honicknowle, Morice Town, Stoke, and Southway neighbourhoods and at Citywide events.

On-going "buy in" of the Stonehouse Community Gym activity has been made by a range of organisations including High Street Primary School, Plymouth Foyer, the Shekinah Mission (Homeless Charity), Working Links (employment and training agency), and The Zone (young people's services).

10 (time-limited) activity clubs were delivered in 5 local (Stonehouse) primary schools during the first 18 months of operation, with a further 5 (time-limited) clubs across a further (Stonehouse) primary and 4 secondary schools.

More than 325 children aged 5 – 16 have participated in one of these "school" clubs.

A junior membership (11-16) system was initiated 1st February 2008, with two young people only out of school clubs "Girls Allowed" and "Boys Own" created.

An 8 week healthy living course, aimed at residents aged 14+, piloted in the Frederick Street Centre has been developed into a Level 1 (equivalent) Introduction to Exercise and Fitness (Gym Based) course. Progression routes onto Level 2 accredited courses have been confirmed.

The commitment and flexibility of staff to adapt to a sometimes rapidly changing programme of delivery.

Since its inception 588 adults have attended exercise activity delivered via the fitness suite. Retention rates amongst local residents, remains high.

How do we know what works?

Like all grant funded projects formal reporting mechanisms have formed part of the contracting/service level agreement arrangements between the funder (NHS Plymouth) and Stonehouse Creek Community Development Trust Ltd (the management organisation). For the purposes of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and NHS Plymouth, Stonehouse Community Gym activity has been reported on a quarterly basis.

Since its inception a range of monitoring and evaluation techniques have been employed to determine the effectiveness of particular activities and models of delivery. To date this has included:

Formal evaluations of:-

- the project's first six months of operation and recommendations for other organisations considering delivering similar projects (Heart of the City)
- three terms of after-school activities delivered with five primary schools in Stonehouse (Making a Fit Start). These evaluations and supporting documentation were used as evidence to support the Stonehouse Neighbourhood Cluster achieve "Emerging Status" for Quality in Study Support from Canterbury Christ Church University (DCSF recognised)
- the pilot Youth Activity Sessions on behalf of Efford Youth and Community Centre; Healthy Living Course delivered in Frederick Street Youth and Community Centre; Parents and Pushchairs club developed in partnership with Manor Street Childrens' Centre; Health Awareness days held at Stoke Business Park and the V-Involved Volunteering programme/training commissioned by Stonehouse Sharks Rugby Football Club,

With informal in-house reviews completed on all group work/club activity both in and out of the fitness suite some of these include:

- baggy t-shirts – run as a women only, adult weight management exercise club for residents "shy" about coming to the fitness suite. The club provided peer support for women in similar circumstances and provided a programme of exercise and regular rewards



"This gym suits me because of the smaller number of people around and because they are friendly".





Visitors to the gym

“What I like about this gym is that it is ‘laid back’, you can be yourself, be normal”.



Tessa Jowell, Sports Minister and Linda Gilroy MP working out

- 330 – for those wishing to commit to a minimum of 3 x 30 minutes of exercise a week, members were offered a range of promotions and rewards to support them achieve their goals
- Boxercise – combining the skills of a boxer with circuit based exercise, the club provided an outlet for individuals wanting relief from everyday stress, have fun and learn new skills
- Surfs Pacific – held Friday evenings for anyone interested in improving their core stability, motor skills, balance and “how to stay on the surfboard this summer”, and
- SHINE (NHS Plymouth’s young person’s weight management) programme.

All individuals engaged in Gym activity are monitored for attendance via daily entry sheets; where specific personal targets were identified by residents during the induction processes, their programmes are regularly monitored to measure the impact of the physical activity against their targets. For clients registered on the Exercise on Referral scheme the additional monitoring of blood pressure, resting heart rate, weight loss, sugar levels, pain levels, activity and intensity levels etc is undertaken for the duration (maximum 24 sessions) with formal, mid and end point reviews, undertaken by Level 3 Wright Foundation EOR qualified staff.

Along with the activity delivered to individuals and groups, the performances of all members of staff (and volunteers) are subject to a supervision and appraisal system. Staff regularly attend in-house and YMCA fitness department staff meetings, where individual targets are set and new initiatives agreed.

An external SWOT analysis was undertaken as part of a peer review completed by Dr Alison Mackenzie (Public Health Consultant) and Sue Thomas (Community Public Health Practitioner).

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. YMCA good base for skills and gives flexibility to the project – the YMCA are keen to continue supporting towards sustainability. 2. A local “modest” facility leads to residents gaining confidence to engage with other physical activity further afield. 3. Primary school based activities – developing a new model of working by bringing external expertise into the school setting improving the quality of the physical activity intervention. 4. Links to MEND 5. Flexible staff that can turn their hand to lots of different activities 6. Volunteer programme – personal development	1. Capacity – limited space and limited capacity of staff to deliver interventions. Once the project reaches capacity will need to prioritise Stonehouse residents. 2. Dependent on current partnerships i.e. YMCA, PHDU, Stonehouse Creek, schools. The service would be diminished if any of the key partners were lost (there is no indication that this is likely to happen at least in the short term).
Opportunities	Threats
1. Gym could act as a “hub” and model of good practice for other neighbourhoods to learn/share from. 2. Aiming to develop into a community business.	1. Lack of long-term funding. 2. Schools to be approached in January regarding funding as they currently receive activities free, which is not sustainable in the longer term. 3. Loss of clients to Brickfields, if community grew to prefer this facility.



“I would like to continue to influence other people’s health behaviour and stay in fitness, I hope the gym doesn’t have to close”.

Volunteer now instructor

“I am happy there, the staff are brilliant. I am hoping to do my Level 2 Fitness training in the next couple of months and being able to put something back into the community”.

Volunteer



“I feel happier, I feel more confident. I’m passing that onto my daughters”.



What did we learn?

The community development approach adopted, whilst takes time to develop, has realised tangible benefits both for local residents, the project’s partners and the funders.

This project would not have been realised had partners not taken advantage of the opportunity that arose with Plymouth having been awarded Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. The initial time, capital and revenue outlay for this type of health intervention however is not insubstantial.

The partners involved brought with them a range of skills beyond those normally found within either the leisure industry or neighbourhood community development work. This range of skills enabled the project to rapidly adapt to meeting the sometimes complex needs of local residents and the community served.

Increasing the number of staff holding the Level 3 Exercise on Referral qualifications has been crucial to the project retaining residents who otherwise would not be able to utilise the facilities provided; external funding has enabled three members of staff to complete this qualification.

Residents presenting with complex health needs require more intensive 1:1 support which has a cost implication for staffing level and qualifications.

Delivering programmes within a fitness suite and with a full after-school activity programme, would not have been possible without the additional support provided by one of the partners. This delivery has however highlighted a range of capacity issues for both organisations; and required suspension of the after-school programme until the start of the 2008/9 academic year.

Pooling limited capital resources initially supported both the after-school (in school) activity and those delivered during the school holidays. Enabling each of the local primary schools

and Stonehouse Sharks to hold their own equipment has contributed to the project's sustainability and flexibility of programme delivery.

The choice to invest in portable equipment enabled the Gym to participate in other organisation's events promoting physical activity in a pro-active hands on approach enabling residents to "have a go".

The project could not have delivered a full range of activities within the fitness suite, after-school and out of school activities without the support of local resident volunteers.

While word of mouth from existing clients works well in promoting some of the project's activity; the need to continuously involve our existing membership and to effectively recruit new members to the project requires on-going publicity and promotion, which has financial implications.

Trying to schedule our opening times around those of the HQ building has not worked as well as the project had originally hoped. In the 18 months since the project opened in the HQ building, we have changed opening times on at least three occasions and now include a Saturday morning to more closely reflect the needs of local residents.

Building relationships with individual GP surgeries takes time and needs to be continually reinforced.

Recruiting corporate membership was unsuccessful.

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What next - the future?

The next steps for the project are still being identified, however from the reviews and evaluations of the existing service currently delivered and conversations with partners, the following have been identified;

- the fitness suite opening/closing times will be changing times to reflect requests made by local residents,
- changes to the staff rota to facilitate the new opening times, has increased the potential for the project to develop and deliver additional activity within the community. Exercise to music classes have already been requested by local residents and a member of staff is being trained for this,
- finalise work on the Level 1 (equivalent) Introduction to Fitness and Exercise (volunteer training programme) and work to accreditation,
- the development of a timetable of GP surgery visits and presentations to both GPs, primary health care teams, and allied health professionals,
- continued work on retaining and building the project's adult and junior memberships.

Recommendations

This model demonstrates that an adaptable, flexible and transferable approach to health, fitness and exercise will work in a neighbourhood, that has not always embraced more traditional approaches to health enhancing behaviours, it is therefore recommended as another approach towards tackling health inequalities.

This form of health intervention that recognises the “ownership” of the residents and community and provides improved health outcomes through lifestyle changes and because of the positive impact on life years gained will have cost benefits. It is therefore recommended that the savings, and increased well being and likely increase in life expectancy will help with possible future investments into the project.

