

# **EVALUATION OF**

## **Community Sports Development Initiative As part of Sport Northern Ireland's Community Sport Programme**

**On behalf of Age Concern Northern Ireland**

**June 2008**

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About the authors: FKB Consulting was established in 2001 with the aim of delivering research and evaluation activities from an ethically-based approach. We engage with a number of constituencies across the public and community / voluntary sectors delivering research and evaluation on themes including sports, physical activity, equality and peace and reconciliation.

## **SECTION 1- INTRODUCTION**

This reports details the evaluation of Age Concern Northern Ireland's Community Sports Development Initiative funded through **Sport Northern Ireland's (SNI) Community Sport Programme which is funded by the Big Lottery Fund (BLF).**

**Age Concern Northern Ireland (ACNI)** is one of the leading charitable organisations working with older people in Northern Ireland. The organisation's strategic priorities include defeating ageism and recognising diversity, reducing poverty and fighting disadvantage, promoting effective public services and addressing social exclusion and community safety. ACNI's vision is of a society where older people are valued, respected and participate as active and equal citizens. In 2005 it sought funding from SNI for a Community Sport Development Initiative (CSDI) for 7 Council areas in Northern Ireland. The ethos underpinning the CSDI programme is that providing this opportunity for participation to older people promotes social development and health benefits to an otherwise disenfranchised and underrepresented group.

The CSDI was established in 2005 to provide opportunities for older people to increase their physical activity levels through sport and physical activity sessions. The programme is funded through Sport Northern Ireland's Community Sport Programme. The main work areas of the initiative were to encourage and support local councils to offer sport and leisure services to older people through regular physical activity sessions; provide Age Awareness in Sport and Physical Activity training and produce and distribute a 'good practice guide' for Sports Development teams working with older people.

The evaluation will examine the outcomes of the CSDI and identify key issues related to the development of the project. It will assess the model of practice used for the implementation and delivery of the project and identify the impact of the programme on the local authority councils involved.

The evaluation will focus on the way the programme has progressed from initial taster sessions to established older people's physical activity groups/ clubs. It will also highlight how each of the partner areas have received the programme and the

impact the programme has had in each area identifying areas such as participation levels, organisational benefits and any barriers related to the programme.

The evaluation will also identify the impact of the age awareness training and how the good practice guide has been received in each area.

### Report Structure

The report is structured as follows: section 2 describes the methodology used in the evaluation. Section 3 considers the strategic and policy context under which it developed. Section 4 details the development and implementation of the programme, before section 5 moves on to reflect upon the views of those consulted through the evaluation. Finally section 5 presents recommendations and conclusions.

## SECTION 2 – METHODOLOGY

At the outset of the project the evaluation team met with representatives from ACNI to discuss research methodology, key questions and stakeholders to be interviewed.

At the beginning of the evaluation we conducted a review of available documentation; this formed the starting point of the **desk research**. This included a review of the project's own internal monitoring and evaluation data as well as monitoring reports to the funder. We also considered relevant strategic and policy initiatives, these are detailed in the following section.

The evaluation team then **interviewed** key individuals who provided insight into the project and the context within which it operates. The interviewees comprised staff from ACNI, representatives from each Council area and SNI:

- Elma Greer, ACNI
- Michael Cooke, ACNI
- Alan Herron, ACNI
- Jackie Mullen, Lisburn LeisurePlex, Lisburn City Council
- Jim Murray, Lisburn LeisurePlex, Lisburn City Council
- Conleth Donnelly, Sports Development Lisburn City Council
- Andrew Steenson, Sports Development, Belfast City Council
- Ray Gorman, Falls Leisure Centre
- Stephen McCartney, Sports Development, Coleraine Borough Council
- Claire Weir, Sports Development, Craigavon Borough Council
- Derrick Harris, Newry Sports Centre
- Denise McBride, Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens Consortium
- Dermot Russell, Recreation and Sports Development, Newry and Mourne District Council
- Angharad Bunt, Sport Northern Ireland
- Paul Donnelly, Sport Northern Ireland

**Five focus groups** were held with participants employing a semi-structured questionnaire approach<sup>1</sup>:-

- Coleraine Leisure Centre May 8<sup>th</sup>
- Lisburn LeisurePlex May 13<sup>th</sup>
- Watson Centre, Craigavon May 15<sup>th</sup>
- Newry Sports Centre May 21<sup>st</sup>
- Bawnacre Centre, Irvinestown May 23<sup>rd</sup>

No fieldwork was conducted in Belfast as no active groups could be identified at the time that the fieldwork was conducted.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for copy of questions

## SECTION 3 – POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In this section we consider the key policy and strategic documents of relevance to the CSDI.

### Sport

In terms of the strategic environment the key document currently is **the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017<sup>2</sup>**, (Consultation draft – final document is due in June 2008) which outlines the Government's commitment to sport and physical recreation. The new strategy will underpin the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland up to 2017.

The definition of sport presented in the strategy is very broad sense, taken from that employed by the Council of Europe i.e. 'All forms of physical activity which through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competition at all levels.' This definition deliberately ties together sport and physical recreation and complements well the definition employed by ACNI i.e. "Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that result in energy expenditure.<sup>3</sup>"

The Strategy, in taking action that will develop sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland, sets out a range of commitments for Government working through Sport Northern Ireland, the lead body for the development of sport and physical recreation, and in partnership with a variety of public, private, sporting and community organisations.

The Strategy defines a new concept of physical literacy as 'the ability to use body management, locomotor and object control skills in a competent manner, with the capacity to apply them with confidence in settings which may lead to sustained

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<sup>2</sup> The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017 (Consultation draft), Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Sport Northern Ireland

<sup>3</sup> Bouchard et al, 1990, from Age Concern Northern Ireland, Promoting Physical Activity with Older People, 2007

involvement in sport and physical recreation', and ties the concept closely to that of 'Lifelong Physical Activity'.

For older people (aged 60+ years) and younger people (<60 years) the report suggests that while up to 64% of people under 60 years of age have participated in sport (including walking) at least once in the last 12 months, this drops to 28% for people aged over 60 years. Furthermore increasingly busy lifestyles and the ageing nature of the population suggest that we are less likely to participate in sport and physical recreation.

**Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2007-2010<sup>4</sup>** states that it's Vision is: *"Through sport, to contribute to an inclusive, creative, competent, informed and physically active community"*. In practice, this means SNI creating and developing programmes and partnerships that will contribute to increased participation in sport and physical activity, improved sporting performances and improved efficiency and effectiveness in the administration of sport. Increased participation is not focussed on any one particular group, but is directed at those who do not participate regularly.

For SNI a key task in the forthcoming years 2007-2010 will be to develop effective relationships with key partners that deliver sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland. In partnership with district councils, SNI hopes to develop closer working with partner organisations in relation to community based sport and physical recreation. This includes engaging with the Neighbourhood Renewal programme and using the model of community planning. SNI has also focussed on the need to overcome barriers in access to physical recreation and sport for different population groups in tandem with the need to improve personal wellbeing and reduce the number of obese and overweight people, as well as the need to create safe, secure and enjoyable sporting environments for all participants. It should be noted that SNI's strategic direction will need to take account of the new Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017 once the final version has been accepted by the Government. This will mean it will be

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<sup>4</sup> Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) Corporate Plan 2007 - 2010



expected to deliver on increasing target groups many of whom will fall into the Older Persons category.

### **Overarching Strategies and Policies**

In March 2005 Government launched **“Ageing in an Inclusive Society”: A Strategy for Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People”<sup>5</sup>**.

The Vision in the Strategy is *‘To ensure that age related policies and practices create an enabling environment, which offers everyone the opportunity to make informed choices so that they may pursue healthy, active and positive ageing.’*

The Strategy was accompanied by action plans covering the period up to 2008 which translate the Strategy into a programme of work for government departments. Key aspects of the Action Plan included an Older Advisory People’s Panel which includes representatives of older people, key voluntary and community organisations, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The Strategy also outlined the role of a Champion for Older People to have a strategic responsibility for co-ordinating actions to improve the lives of older people in Northern Ireland. The post of interim Commissioner for Older People has just recently been advertised, with an appointment expected to be made later this year.

In the 2005 – 2006 Action Plan for this Strategy a key element had been the development of the Investing for Health Strategy (2002) to support older people to live healthy and active lives, including home safety clubs<sup>6</sup>, falls prevention and physical activity, as well as improvements in the achievement of targets to substantially reduce waiting times and modernise acute hospital services.

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<sup>5</sup> OFMDFM Older Peoples Strategy, ‘Ageing in an Inclusive Society’

<sup>6</sup> See Investing for Health update report, 2006 – based on a project from Western Health Action Zone in which a home safety officers scheme targets households most at risk of accidents and located in disadvantaged areas

**Investing for Health (If)**<sup>7</sup> was the cross-departmental public health strategy, published in 2002 which tackled the wide range of complex and inter-related factors that can impact on the health of the population. The Strategy was built around two overarching goals, which had been identified in pursuit of the aims of improving health and reducing health inequalities.

The IFH update reports are a good source to identify the range of initiatives, incorporating or focussing on the 50+ group, developed at regional and Council level, e.g. in May 2006 the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB) launched **Older People, New Opportunities: The Older People's Health and Wellbeing Strategy**. This outlines Board area strategy for commissioning health and social care services for older people until 2016. The Action Plan which emerged from this process – **Healthy ageing: interaction plan- EHSSB area 2006–2009**, outlines action by a range of organisations aimed at improving services for older people and improving coordination of existing services.

Also of relevance in this context is a strategy published by The Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister entitled **Lifetime opportunities**, (2006) which addresses the issues of poverty and social exclusion.

In accepting that government policy should focus on the different priority needs at different times in peoples lives, *Lifetime opportunities* defines specific goals and targets for four key stages in life: - Early years (0–4); Children and young people (5–16); Working age adults and older citizens, wherein the goal is to ensure older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community.

Recently the importance of regular physical activity and the benefits of it for maintaining good health and wellbeing were reemphasised by The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA) and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) when the organisations signed an agreement entitled '**The Northern Ireland**

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<sup>7</sup> Investing for Health, 2002 – present and update reports

**charter for enhancing health through sport and physical activity'**<sup>8</sup> which tasks both bodies with the aim of promoting the significance of physical activity and sport at all levels for the good health and wellbeing of the population. The Charter defines an agreed vision between the two bodies – 'we will have a fit future in which everyone will be motivated to and be supported in their desire and ability to be active.'<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that older people are a key target group for the Health Promotion Agency.

### **Area Based Strategy**<sup>10</sup>

**The Lisburn Sports Development Strategy 2004-2009**<sup>11</sup> provides a framework for the development of sport and active recreation in Lisburn, incorporating the strategic vision of the Sports Development Unit which is 'to promote and provide residents of Lisburn with equitable choice to access, and participate in, sporting activities and opportunities via support for, and the active promotion of, clearly targeted and sustainable policies, programmes and structures' (P3).

Although much of the strategy is predictably and laudably focussed on greater engagement with the younger age groups, and particularly girls and young women, there are aspects of the strategy within which provision, or the lack of it, for older people may fit, although as a group they are not specifically highlighted in the strategy. For example within the strategic vision context there is mention of 'directly addressing inequalities in sporting provision (i.e. enhancing provision for groups/areas with identified lower levels of sporting participation)' and of 'targeting resource at areas where there is a clear and defined deficiency or shortfall. Additionally in the Strategic Focus section there is mention of the delivery of 'focused programmes targeted at key groups and areas with identified levels of low sporting participation or high deprivation' (P20).

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<sup>8</sup> The Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (HPA) and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), '*The Northern Ireland charter for enhancing health through sport and physical activity*'

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sportni.net/pacharter08.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Information was requested from all Councils but none was provided other than Lisburn City Councils.

<sup>11</sup> Lisburn Sports Development Strategy 2004-2009, Lisburn City Council

## Related Publications

ACNI, through its '**Ageing Well Factsheets**'<sup>12</sup> published in partnership with Health Promotion Agency, has clearly demonstrated the linkages between physical activity and a range of direct and indirect benefits including physical, social, health and well being, the prevention of falls, as well as highlighting barriers to participation and good practice guidelines for the leisure industry. Recommendations for physical activity include a total of at least 30 minutes a day of at least moderate-intensity physical activity on five or more days of the week, whilst reinforcing the message that any physical activity is better than none.

The Factsheets draw together evidence from a number of sources to demonstrate that regular physical activity can improve the physical and mental health of all older people, and can assist in the promotion of independence and wellbeing in later life. They also highlight the fact that 'whilst the benefits of physical activity for younger and middle-aged people receive public and media exposure, less emphasis is placed upon the fact that the need for physical activity does not end with later life'.

Social gains reported include enhanced social integration, the formation of new friendships and the widening of social networks, increased levels of volunteering, increased intergenerational activity and the overall promotion of a more positive and active image of older people.

A range of statistical information drawn from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey in 2001 is presented which stated, inter alia, that physical activity levels decline significantly with age. 'Among the 55–64 age group, 31% were reported as being sedentary, this number increasing to 42% among the 65–74 age range, and to 63% among the over 75 age group. Sedentary behaviour is generally higher among older women'.<sup>13</sup>

Also considered is the link between physical activity and mental health and wellbeing, noting a body of evidence to support the notion that 'regular physical

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<sup>12</sup>Age Concern Northern Ireland and Health Promotion Agency, Ageing Well Factsheets 1-6,  
<http://www.ageconcernni.org/factsheets.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland and Health Promotion Agency, Ageing Well Factsheet 1, Page 3

activity can contribute to the promotion of good mental health and can be an effective element of an overall programme to treat some existing mental health problems. Both aerobic and resistance type activity have been shown to enhance mood, decrease symptoms of depression and improve wellbeing, self-efficacy and quality of life, and reduce the risks of cognitive impairment'<sup>14</sup>.

Recommendations for the leisure and recreation industry to assistance in providing high quality, safe, enjoyable and rewarding physical activity opportunities for older people include;

- Leisure and recreation providers are in a strong position to increase physical activity opportunities for older people; Listening to and involving older people in the planning and delivery of programmes will increase programme effectiveness and adherence.
- Understanding what the older person wants – the range of positive experiences, opportunities for learning and achievement, socialising, meeting friends and having fun may be more important than the activity itself; In programming activities, there is a need to take account of other commitments such as family commitments, grand-parenting, caring, and other non-active leisure pursuits

Factors which can assist in promoting participation include;

- Providing easy access and choice, including lifestyle activities
- Authoritative advice and education
- Skilled, experienced and sensitive teachers and leaders
- Ensuring high quality physical activity programmes, and
- The importance of increasing self-efficacy ( i.e. an individual's sense of control over his or her environment and ability to function effectively)

As an educational tool the information in the Factsheets can be used in conjunction with ACNI' s '**Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A Resource for**

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<sup>14</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland, Factsheet 2, Page 2

**Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres'**<sup>15</sup> which is a direct product of the CSDI . The publication highlights a range of issues pertinent to this evaluation.

The report begins by presenting relevant statistics:-

- At present people of pensionable age make up 16.3% of the total population
- By 2040 the proportion of people over 60 in Northern Ireland will double.
- By 2040 there will be a 57% increase in the over-75 population as people live longer and healthier lives. (NISRA, 2007)
- Among the 55-64 age group 31% are reported as being sedentary, this number increases to 42% among the 65-74 age range, and to 63% among the over 75 age group
- In the over 70s, 25% of women and 7% of men do not have sufficient leg strength to get out of a chair without using their arms

The range of potential benefits is outlined in terms of physical, psychological and social to support the argument develop in the publication that 'exercising regularly and attaining a reasonable degree of physical fitness would help an older person meet the demands of their daily routine'<sup>16</sup>.

Additional information is presented in terms of targeting older people, planning activities for older people, methods of engaging the older age groups, ways to make leisure facilities more accommodating, guidelines for safe programmes, marketing and training opportunities.

In its 2008 Review<sup>17</sup> ACNI assessed the impact of older people's issues in the public policy arena, concluding that the restoration of the Assembly and local accountability had led to improved outcomes for older people. In its assessment of the policy environment ACNI concluded that there were areas where real progress

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<sup>15</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland's 'Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A resource for Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres'

<sup>16</sup> Promoting Physical Activity with Older People, Age Concern Northern Ireland, P7

<sup>17</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland 'Public Policy for Older People – The Age Agenda for Northern Ireland 2008'

had been made e.g. debates on free personal care, an older person's commissioner and free public transport for everyone over 60. ACNI also set out a number of challenges to the Comprehensive Spending Review; stressed the need to address systematic inequality and age discrimination; and noted the lack of progress in Promoting Social Inclusion, Lifetime Opportunities the Review of Public Administration.

A successful ACNI Programme with direct relevance to this evaluation is the **'Actively Ageing Well'** initiative developed as a five year programme by ACNI and the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland in 2002 which aimed to promote better health and wellbeing for older people through "adding years to life and life to years". Funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the Initiative was recently evaluated by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland<sup>18</sup>.

The evaluation added to the body of research based evidence that shows that physical activity can have direct physical, psychological and social benefits for older people; research also shows that a more active lifestyle in later years can enhance quality of life in other ways, including improved self esteem, a sense of wellbeing, better capacity to cope with stress and improved mental health<sup>19</sup>.

The Actively Ageing Well Initiative was developed as a direct response to the Northern Ireland Physical Activity Strategy. A key factor highlighted in the evaluation was that Actively Ageing Well has begun to develop links with key strategic stakeholders including policy-makers, leisure and sports professionals, health professionals, the community and voluntary sector and the media to promote more positive attitudes and information to, and about, older people and physical activity.

In terms of future development the evaluators of Actively Ageing Well suggested that the ACNI and HPANI raise the profile of the benefits of more active lifestyles

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<sup>18</sup> Evaluation Report of the Actively Ageing Well Initiative, Community Evaluation Northern Ireland, May 2007

<sup>19</sup> Physical Activity: An Investment in Public Health: The Northern Ireland Physical Activity Strategy Action Plan, 1998-2002.

for older people by further promotion and dissemination of the evidence and practice learning and continue to challenge negative attitudes to ageing. Both organisations were encouraged to undertake ongoing development of programmes to promote more active lifestyles amongst older people in response to the most up-to-date evidence of the benefits to be gained. ACNI and HPANI were also encouraged 'to use their influence to encourage further development of a well-informed and well-resourced approach to providing safe opportunities for more older people to participate in active pursuits on an ongoing basis across Northern Ireland'<sup>20</sup>.



## **SECTION 4 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Background to Funding Programme**

In 2003 Sport Northern Ireland secured £2.4 million from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) to deliver the Community Sport Programme with the specific aim of improving the health and well-being of those communities most at risk of low levels of participation in sport and physical recreation.

The BLF funded Community Sport Programme builds on a pilot of six projects that were jointly funded by SNI and DCAL, and is designed to create, develop and manage opportunities that enhance the development of community sport and physical recreation within disadvantaged communities. The Programme aims to improve the health and well-being of individuals and build community cohesion through increased participation of children, young people and adults in areas of high social need and groups traditionally marginalised in sport and physical activity and in particular:

- To increase levels of sustained participation in sport and physical activity among under-represented groups;
- To improve the health and well-being of programme participants;
- To develop capacity and build community participation and cohesion; and
- To establish and support the development of structures to sustain longer term provision for the Community Sport Programme across Northern Ireland.

Following the open application and assessment process, 20 investment awards were made in October 2004. The investment awards to projects covered a range of statutory, voluntary/community organisations and charities and following project initiation meetings, the recruitment process for the Community Sport Development Officers began, with awards live from the first day of employment<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> SNI (2007) Community Sport Programme- End of Year Report, Year 2 (of 3) 2006-2007

## **The Age Concern Northern Ireland Community Sport Development Initiative (CSDI) Programme**

The Age Concern Northern Ireland CSDI programme received its funding in 2005, with the current funding due to end in June 2008. The funding included small programme costs for each centre as well as funding for a Development Officer as a central resource, giving support in relation to the types of activities suitable for older people, an important aspect to the work as many of the sports officers had not previously been involved in working with older people. The Development Officer therefore had a key support and advisory role in the initial stages of the programme, advising on, for example, and appropriate activities for particular age ranges.

Year 1 of the programme entailed developing partnerships in each of the 6 council areas that had agreed to take part in the programme - Belfast<sup>22</sup>, Coleraine, Craigavon, Fermanagh, Lisburn and Newry and Mourne<sup>23</sup>. Year 2 aimed mainly to continue programme development and to provide support to the development officers in each area. In Year 3 the focus shifted to include considerations on making the programme sustainable and assisting Councils maintain the work developed to date.

The format for development was similar for each area (later pages outline the profile of each club). A multi agency **Steering Group** was established, drawing its membership from various sectors including representatives from the community and older people's groups, Sport, Leisure/Recreation, Health and Council representatives.

The Terms of Reference for each Steering Group were as follows:-

- Advise on the direction and development of the Ageing Well / Community Sport Initiative in your area within agreed objectives

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<sup>22</sup> As detailed in the following pages the programme in Belfast took longer to develop than the other areas, with consultation and taster sessions occurring in spring 2008.

<sup>23</sup> A seventh, led by Derry Age Concern, withdrew at an early stage.

- Promote coherence and continuity between Ageing Well / Community Sport Programme and local projects or initiatives
- Good communication, open decision making and avoidance of unnecessary duplication and building of healthy alliances
- Advise on sources of information and contacts
- Support and give guidance in order to achieve overall project aims
- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation systems are in place
- Receive progress updates and annual reports

Typically two meetings were held in each area in the first year of operation. The Steering Group was tasked with a wide range of responsibilities in relation to the management of the project; it was responsible for the design and delivery of the programme including ongoing project monitoring and evaluation and target setting, ensuring that all the partners are actively involved in the design and delivery of monitoring and evaluation. The Steering Group also leads a range of work designed to tap into local initiatives, to foster collaborative working relationships, and the development of partnerships between community and voluntary, statutory and local business sectors. As part of this engagement a Terms of Reference was devised for the Steering Group.

In terms of strategic outcomes it was expected that the Steering Group would give the 50+ age group a much needed voice in each area, to assist with appropriate community interventions, to increase the levels of user involvement from this age group, to build greater confidence in the older age group and greater engagement between the older citizens and sport and leisure providers with a view to increasing social capital, increasing networking opportunities and maximising community empowerment.

Having established a steering group in each area a **needs analysis and mapping out of services** already in existence was carried out. Following consultation with the steering group a programme of **taster events** was then organised which was promoted in the local media and through each councils list of community and over 50's groups. In total 16 centres held taster events between March and April 2006 with over 2,000 people attended these sessions. Information and good practice on

development of safe sustainable physical activity programmes was provided at the taster events alongside a photo exhibition displaying creative and inclusive images of older people participating in physical activity and sport. Information included clubs already in existence such as walking and swimming clubs to help promote their services and avoid duplication of services requested by the target groups. Following completion of the taster events in each area a report was compiled with details on activities, participants, follow-up activities and programme development opportunities. (Monitoring reports indicate an increase of 30% participation in leisure centres following taster events)

Following these planning stages a programme was launched in each area. In the following section we consider each area in further detail. Before that, however, it is important to note two outputs from the CSDI.

To facilitate the development of the wider CSDI, ACNI delivered a **training programme**, 'Promoting Physical Activity to Older People' to nominated staff in Councils leading on the initiative in each area. The training programme was designed and implemented by ACNI, with delivery occurring in January 2008. Nine individuals attended the training from 5 council areas. The aim of the training was to provide staff with skills and increasing their knowledge of dealing with the target group. It was also expected that the training would then be delivered to those working directly with the participants from the programme in partnership with the councils own training staff. Whilst this has not happened to date Lisburn and Craigavon both anticipated that the training will be delivered to relevant staff in due course in their areas. The position of other councils was unclear in this regard.

As noted in Section 3 another key element of the CSDI programme has been the production of a good practice guide **Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A resource for Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres**<sup>24</sup> drawing on lessons learned from the programme and further afield. This was formally launched in January 2008, with 300 guides printed and distributed to

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<sup>24</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland's 'Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A resource for Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres'

sports development officials and leisure officials. Information has also been made available on access for small grants to assist with the development of Physical Activity programme

The CSDI end of year reports to SNI note the following strategic outcomes facilitated by the programme:

- More opportunities for older people
- Increase in leisure centre activities
- Programme development led by local council
- Develop new partnerships
- Building on existing partnerships
- Needs led approach incorporates service user involvement
- Supports work on local SDO and CSDO and adds value
- Supports and develops confidence of leisure centre staff to work with older people

### **Monitoring Reports to SNI**

In this section we present monitoring data and details of specific programme activities as outlined in annual reports to SNI.

The data presents a quantitative profile of both participants and coaches, outlining age, gender, and ethnicity data where available.

In year 1 of the programme over 80 health referrals were made from local HSS Trusts. In addition the year 1 report notes that cost in kind contribution was received from all councils involved in the programme and that in overall terms there had been an increase of 30% participation in local leisure centres following taster events. Additional funding was also sought from providers such as Sports Relief for inclusive games training and equipment for Newry and Mourne, in partnership with Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens Consortium.

<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Of note...</b>
<b>Participants</b>	
Over 2000 involved	20 from Chinese ethnic group
1400 female, 600 male	240 with disability
2000 aged over 50	No details were provided on the community background or previous physical activities before started programme or change since started programme
<b>Coaches</b>	
112 coaches	No further details were provided in the report on the profile of coaches

In the year 2 report it is noted again that cost in kind contributions were received from all councils involved in the programme. Additional funding was also sought from providers such as sought from EHSSB PA group for inclusive games training and equipment.

<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Of note ...</b>
<b>Participants</b>	
215 direct beneficiaries	215 ethnic group – white
190 female, 25 male	70 with disability
115 aged 45-64; 100 aged 65+	No details were provided on the community background or previous physical activities before started programme or change since started programme
<b>Coaches</b>	
10 female, 5 male	15 coaches white ethnic background
12 aged 25-45, 3 aged over 45	No details provided on qualifications of coaches

In year 3 the key activities as noted above were the delivery of training and the production and circulation of the good practice guide alongside the ongoing implementation of the programmes in each council area. In addition grants have been received from the Northern Bank and Sport Relief.

<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Of note ...</b>
<b>Participants</b> 261 direct beneficiaries	ethnic group 186 – white 1 - Traveller 3 – other 71 not recorded
171 female, 19 male 71 gender not recorded	21 with disability
7 aged 25-44; 67 aged 45-64; 116 aged 65+  71 age not recorded	community background noted as mixed (neither over 605) Previous physical activities before started programme or change since started programme not recorded.
<b>Coaches</b>  15 coaches	  ethnic background not stated
No data on age profile of coaches recorded	7 NGB qualified, 7 General qualifications, 1 unqualified

## **Description of Each Club**

### **Belfast**

A programme of Taster Sessions was delivered in 2006 which was then followed up by the development of a working relationship between ACNI and Belfast City Council through its Leisure Services Unit; however the programme has developed slower than in other areas. Belfast City Council established an 'Older Peoples Working Group' six months ago as part of a strategy which has seen a change of a key focus from children and young people to one which encompasses the older age range. In partnership with ACNI initial survey and consultation work has been completed (March 2008) and the feedback has provided a range of data on which days and times centres would be needed, what activities would be popular etc. ACNI and BCC are now encouraging the 8 leisure centres in Belfast to start Active Lives Clubs – with ACNI providing coaches. Eight 8 taster days are planned for the near future.

It is important to note that whilst an overall CSDI programme has only recently been developed in Belfast there have been examples of working with the older person's age range in for instance Falls Leisure Centre. This Centre currently runs a Wellness Class on Mondays for which ACNI has provided a coach over the past

few weeks covering Boccia and Aerobics. Additionally the Leisure Services Unit is putting together sessions aimed at the over 50s and preliminary work has been done to gauge what relatively active and fit over 50s would want in the Leisure Centre sessions. Two staff members from the Falls Leisure Centre have independently undergone training aimed at familiarising them with coaching the older age group.

Falls Leisure Centre has a close connection to the Maureen Sheehan Centre which in terms of participants acts as a feeder for the Leisure Centre; recently ACNI provided a coach for a Wellness class for participant in the Sheehan Centre for 12 weeks - these participants are now a target group now for the Leisure Centre.

**Due to the later development of the Belfast component of the programme the following sections focus on reviewing the operation of the programme to date and consider in detail the clubs based in Coleraine, Craigavon, Fermanagh, Lisburn and Newry and Mourne.**

### **Coleraine**

The club was established in April 2007 in the Coleraine Leisure Centre in partnership with Coleraine Council Sports Development Unit. The Club operates on Thursday mornings. It is targeted at all 50+ groups in the council area and has a core membership of 45 members. An additional key partner is Coleraine 50+ Forum which acted as a key agent in recruiting participants.

### **Craigavon**

The Watson Centre 65+ Club, a community based facility, was established in March 2007 in partnership with Craigavon Borough Council Sports Development Unit and the Community Services Department. Based in The Watson Centre the Club runs on Thursday mornings followed by a luncheon club. The club targets people aged over 65, the majority of whom are from Day Care Centres in the council area. Over 20 participants are currently registered.



## **Fermanagh**

The Fermanagh Active Lives Club, which started in January 2007, is based in the Bawnacre Centre in Irvinestown and has been developed with Fermanagh District Council and the Senior Citizens Consortium (Sperrin Lakelands) based in Omagh. The Consortium has a long standing relationship with most of the groups from which the participants are drawn most of whom are based in the north Fermanagh area. Originally this participant group met in Enniskillen but took the opportunity to re-locate to Irvinestown as it is more accessible than Enniskillen, given the areas from which participants are drawn. Since the move to the Bawnacre Centre, which is viewed as a better location and a better venue, participant numbers have increased.

## **Lisburn**

The Lisburn Active Life Club was established in Lisburn LeisurePlex in partnership with Lisburn City Council Sports Development Unit, in March 2007. Initially the Club ran for 12 weeks and targeted all 50+ groups in the council area. Its main aim is to get older people involved in physical activity, encouraging them to “forget the years and keep active”. Active Lives is open to men and women of all physical ability and aims to introduce older people to new sports they may not have tried before as well as enabling them to meet new people. The project operates on a Tuesday morning from 10.30 to 12.30. An additional key partner is local 50+ Forum which acted as a key agent in recruiting participants.

## **Newry and Mourne**

The Newry and Mourne project is located in the Newry Sports Centre (in which participants have access to a privately owned fitness suite during Club hours) and was developed in partnership with the Recreation and Sports Development Unit of Newry and Mourne District Council and the Newry and Mourne Senior Citizens Consortium. The project originally ran only on Wednesday mornings but has recently added a Monday morning session due to popular demand from participants. All sessions are led by the same two instructors ensuring continuity in all the Active Lives sessions - it is considered a key aspect of delivery to have the same coaches at every session. It is worth noting that the Newry Sports Centre has a history going back some years of engaging with this age group as

well as a range of minority groups including disability groups as the Centre has a policy of targeting minority

## **Promotion and Management**

### Overview

As noted above Belfast developed slower than other areas and is only now beginning to roll out the project. In the remaining areas a similar pattern occurred.

Following the establishment of a Steering Group and the delivery of a Taster Programme in each area the development of the local Active Lives Clubs followed similar lines. In Lisburn the local Ageing Well initiative acted as a key conduit for promoting club activities to potential participants, whilst in Fermanagh the project was promoted through the Senior Citizens Forum and the Senior Citizens Consortium, in Coleraine through the 50+ Forum. In Craigavon promotion was undertaken jointly by the Council Sports Development Unit, the Craigavon and Banbridge Trust and the Watson Centre in tandem with the local Ageing Well initiative. In terms of project management the model developed in each geographical location is one of self management wherein the local group works closely with the host organisation / venue to ensure that the operation of the Club satisfies all expectations – from the time and day the Club meets to the activities made available to participants.

### **Coleraine**

The project began in spring 2007 located in Coleraine Leisure Centre operating in partnership with Coleraine Sports Development Unit. Having invited all the local over 50s groups to the initial sessions to project grew from being attended mainly by participants in Coleraine to a wider geographical coverage and as a result numbers more than doubled in the second year of operation. Many participants reported that they first heard of the project via the 50+ Forum. One of the participants is the secretary of the 50+ Forum in Coleraine which was involved in the initial planning stages of the project, enabling the Forum to act as a major recruiting ground for the project. Other participants reported learning of the project through word of mouth whilst others became aware of it through the local advertising campaign.

## **Craigavon**

The Active Lives Club in Portadown was formed in March 2007 following the initial taster sessions held in Portadown and North Lurgan. There are 18 people registered with the Club with a core group of regular attenders of 12 to 14. As the Club focuses on the over 65 age group (the oldest participant is 96) the Craigavon and Banbridge Trust, a partner in the project, provides a nurse to cover the session. The successful establishment of the Club was viewed as being strongly related to ACNI's active role locally in the area and its strong working relationship with the Council through the Craigavon and Banbridge Actively Ageing Well Co-Ordinator. Additionally there are approximately 70 groups locally working with the elderly and the Sports Development Officer has a remit which covers many of these groups. The management of the Club is a partnership between the Council, ACNI, the Trust and the Watson Centre which has a track record of targeting this age group.

The Manager of the Watson Centre is seen as playing a key role in the operation of the project and its overall success can be gauged by the fact that the Centre has a waiting list of potential participants who have learned of the Club from participants.

## **Fermanagh**

Many of the participants reported that for them the starting date of the project was three years ago, at which time they were involved in physical activity sessions organised through the Senior Citizens Forum in Enniskillen. From that time there had been a fairly seamless progression to the Active Lives Club in Bawnacre. The instigation for the move to the current project location came from discussions between participant groups and the Senior Citizens Consortium (Sperrin Lakelands) based in Omagh, as most of the participants are from north Fermanagh. All the groups represented in the participant group are part of the Consortium. As almost all the participants are involved in local groups in and around the north Fermanagh area they viewed Bawnacre as much better venue, both in terms of location (less travelling) and in terms of what facilities the Centre offered. In addition participants noted that the project is offered more support in the current location. In previous years activities were offered every other week

but as a result of the additional funding through the CSDI the sessions are now weekly and the project has grown in terms of participation to a core group of around 25.

### **Lisburn**

Whilst formal promotion of the club has taken place through the media and the councils list of community groups and over 50's groups, a clear factor too has been the role of the Greater Lisburn Ageing Well Group. One of the participants within the Active Lives Club is described as the main recruiter for the programme, a champion for the need to and benefits of participating in physical activity. The Club has operated from the standpoint of being 'self managed' from its earliest days, in that the participants have had the freedom and the opportunity to define programme activities rather than be dictated to by the Centre or Council i.e. club members inform staff of what activities they want to have delivered, an aspect which has helped maintain group interest.

### **Newry and Mourne**

The Active Lives Club commenced in 2007 following a 6 week introduction programme which aimed to build on the work Newry Sports Centre had already engaged in which meant that there was an ongoing over 50s class which ran in the centre on Wednesday mornings. The funding for the new Club generated sufficient participant interest to run a second over 50s group with an average 40-50 participants at each session. Some Club members indicated that they heard about the Club through word of mouth whilst others reported seeing it advertised by the Centre and in the local media. An indication of the strong social side of the Club is the fact they as a group go out for a meal twice a year, in December and in the summer. With an age range of 50-66 the key aims for the groups are social integration and physical fitness.

## Activities

### Overview

<b>Council area</b>	<b>Start date</b>	<b>Club day</b>	<b>Numbers registered</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Coleraine	April 2007	Thursday	45	Keep fit, dancing, swimming, spinning, exercise ball, circuits, badminton, new age curling, fitness suite
Craigavon	March 2007	Thursday	18	Quizzes, exercise, bowls, drafts, basketball, keep fit (chair based), Boccia, Reiki, singing, crystal therapy, yoga
Fermanagh	January 2007	Friday	50	Keep fit, water aerobics, Boccia, new age curling, chair based exercise, and walks
Lisburn	March 2007	Tuesday	66	Line dancing, Tai Chi, swimming, gym, bowling, badminton, aerobics, sauna and yoga, new age curling, Boccia, table tennis, health and fitness suite
Newry and Mourne	June 2007	Monday and Wednesday	50	Tutor led keep fit, circuit training, gym and swimming

### **Coleraine**

A wide range of activities were reported including general keep fit (often dance based), swimming (after 12.30), spinning, exercise ball, circuit training, badminton, new age curling and use of the fitness suite. The first session is 10.30 – 12 which covers a range of activities followed by a second session of swimming. Fitness was a key factor for all in deciding which activities to do, although clearly there was a great deal gained from the social interaction, a chance to chat and have a laugh,

indeed participants indicated that they would often meet up at dances so relationships clearly extend beyond the Thursday morning sessions. All report that the project could not be improved on in relation to activities and unanimously reported that it was an excellent project which provided great value, an important issue as budgets in the group are limited. Most use the project as a basis for greater use of the Leisure Centre after project activities e.g. swimming or sauna. Some felt they would use the club if it was to be organised more than once per week – others reported that once was all they had time for.

### **Craigavon**

A wide range of activities was outlined by participants including quizzes, exercise, bowls, drafts, basketball, curling, darts, keep fit (seat based), Boccia, Reiki, singing crystal therapy and yoga. The group clearly needed more equipment to expand the range of activities it could offer although this was due to be remedied within a week by the delivery of additional equipment funded by ACNI. The main reasons for getting involved with the Club identified by participants were for social reasons, company and friendship. An additional key component of the Club was the provision of tea and coffee as well as a hot lunch and entertainment.

### **Fermanagh**

The main activities offered in the project to date included keep fit, water aerobics, Boccia, new age curling, chair based exercise and organised walks. The current keep fit session had been available for 12 weeks, every Friday morning, for one hour. Funding for the Club is mainly used to hire instructors, with the participants contributing towards venue hire and refreshments. As the Club has now finished the participants hope to raise funds at local club level so that the Club can continue in the near future. The instructors who have engaged with the group are rated as excellent. For participants there was a very strong view that lack of funding is the only issue preventing them being more active. All participants make their own way to Bawnacre by car – so there is the cost of travel to be considered for participants. The social side and the fitness element were both equally important.

## **Lisburn**

The main activities in the programme included line dancing, yoga, Tai Chi, swimming, the gym and use of the sauna. The Active Lives group was offered the opportunity to take part in a wider range of activities in the LeisurePlex but indicated a preference to continue with the large group activities rather than break into small group/individual activities. This has remained their preference since the programme began. Of particular interest has been line dancing, which is currently running and more so the Tai Chi. Participants are keen to see Tai Chi classes resuming although this has provide difficult following the tutor's absence due to injury. An alternative tutor has yet to be identified.

To date, whilst the Main Hall has been booked for club activities (e.g. badminton), it has rarely been used. Participants appear to be much happier in a group setting within a structured format of activities rather than moving into activities alone or in pairs. This might explain lack of male involvement in the programme as staff in the LeisurePlex noted that that there were many 50+ males who availed of the gym in the Centre as individuals but these individuals showed no interest in being part of the Active Lives group. As noted earlier in the report the high percentage of widowers in the area suggests there are less males in the area from which participants are drawn.

It is significant to note that a number of participants stay on in the LeisurePlex after the club has finished, for example to attend the gym.

## **Newry and Mourne**

Approximately 40 regulars attend the club every week and uniquely in terms of this programme the participant gender divide is approximately 50/50. Whilst the both genders attend the Centre at the same time the sessions are broken down into gender groups – it was reported that the female members are happier with this arrangement. The main activities in the sessions are based on general fitness routines, with a circuits format in a main hall plus the fitness suite upstairs with the men and women rotating sessions. The sessions are all instructor led, one male and one female, and it is considered a key aspect of delivery to have the same coaches at every session, indeed the instructors are described by participants as

friends. The two instructors were very highly praised and many indicated that the instructors were the key to the success of the Club. Many participants also swim regularly in the Centre.

Having presented a description of each club we now go on to consider the impact of the programme and the extent to which aims and objectives have been met.



## **SECTION 5 KEY FINDINGS**

In this section we consider the key findings from our consultation with all stakeholders. These findings are themed under the following headings:

- The extent to which aims and objectives have been met
- Key achievements
- Key challenges
- Views on sustainability
- The role of ACNI

We then move on to consider the views of participants.

### **Meeting Aims and Objectives**

#### **Age Concern Northern Ireland**

ACNI considers the project to be very successful in creating the right environment through which the Active Lives Clubs were established and developed, making physical activity more comfortable and more accessible for older people to engage in, even with the caveat that male participation in several areas is very low. Success for ACNI was also evident in the development of the partnerships throughout the project, particularly with the councils, SNI, tutors and coaches and locally based groups.

#### **Coleraine**

The Coleraine Actives Lives Club is viewed as a success by the Council's Community Sports Unit particularly as the Club has now provided an organised programme specifically designed with its members delivered at a regular time. In terms of membership it has exceeded original expectations. Participant feedback suggests that many are now committed to the Club and regularly attend the Leisure Centre at other times and they take part in a full range of activities in the area, particularly dancing.

### **Craigavon**

Participants and key players all agreed the project has been a success in meeting the aims and objectives of the project which were to increase levels of sustained participation in sport and physical activity among an older group, the over 65s and to provide an environment where the on-going work with the target group could be sustained.

### **Fermanagh**

We have no feedback from the Council officer involved in this project.

For participants the project is viewed as successful in that it enables them to engage in a regular programme of physical activity though they were keen to point out that the limited funding meant that the programme itself was necessarily limited, for example the project covers only one hour a week. Funding primarily has been used to employ tutors.

### **Lisburn**

For all the key stakeholders the project has achieved its aims and objectives. For Lisburn City Council the project is viewed as successfully meeting its aims and objectives in that it has encouraged many individuals in the target group to become involved in the Club and Leisure Centre activities for the first time. The key to this success has been to empower Club members, through the use of the steering group and ongoing management of the programme and activities. The strong working relationship between the Sports Development Unit and staff at the LeisurePlex has also enabled successful delivery of the programme, with a seamless approach to communication and management evident.

### **Newry and Mourne**

Newry Active Lives Club is viewed as a success by the participants, the tutors and the staff of the Sports Centre, achieving its two main aims which were identified as social integration and physical fitness. More than any other Club evaluated the Newry project has a very keen focus on physical fitness and its members are coached through quite vigorous sessions by the tutors. Evidence of social capital building was evident as group members regularly go out on social occasions as well as get together for additional activities e.g. walking clubs. The success of the

Club has meant that activities were extended to a second Monday session in addition to the original one on Wednesday.

## **Achievements**

### **Age Concern Northern Ireland**

For ACNI the key achievements of the overall CSDI programme are the success in getting more older people involved in physical activity and developing local groups to the point where many are now becoming sustainable groups. The Lisburn Active Lives Club, as one of the strongest groups in the CSDI programme, is a prime example of this success. Additionally, the Lisburn Active Lives Club is seen as successful in terms of the ownership by the Council and the older people in the borough. The Lisburn Club participants regard it as 'their' Club; a Club primed and developed by ACNI and its partners, now owned by the local members.

### **Coleraine**

In terms of key achievements a key indicator of success employed by the project is the high levels of satisfaction with the project reported by participants, with particular reference to the fact that membership has increased over the duration of the project. Much of the increased participation is put down to members recruiting friends. The Leisure Centre has also made significant efforts to listen to participants' views to ensure that a broad programme is on offer and that the programme is sufficiently flexible to change when participants need change. Many participants report making new friendships which have extended beyond the confines of the Leisure Centre.

### **Craigavon**

The project fitted well within the wider policy environment in the Craigavon area which targets the over 50s. Participants have enjoyed both the club activities and the luncheon club which provides an environment where the social factor can be enhanced and developed. The working partnership between the local Trust,

Council, Watson Centre and Actively Ageing Well initiative has been a key outcome, resulting in a project in which participants are well supported.

### **Fermanagh**

A key achievement for this project was that it successfully relocated itself to a better venue in the Bawnacre Centre having previously met in Enniskillen. The change of venue meant that the Club had access to a wider range of facilities and the travel time was cut down for many participants. The project also had managed to generate enough interest that the project could be delivered weekly to an average weekly participant count of over 30. The club has managed to maximize the impact of its membership who are in the main part of local 50+ clubs linked into the Senior Citizens Consortium. For participants the social side of club membership is equally as important as the physical aspect.

### **Lisburn**

In terms of key achievements for Lisburn City Council there is no doubt that the level of engagement with the target group has been considerable with 90 individuals registered with the Club and a very impressive average attendance of 45 individuals. Success is not just measured in terms of numbers attending as there is evidence of a strong social dynamic at play, a strong club ethos and friendships formed within and beyond the confines of Club activity. The quality of the coaching staff has also been excellent. In terms of profiling Club members there is evidence from year 1 that many members were not involved in organised physical activities before.

In terms of social and psychological impact there is substantial anecdotal evidence to suggest improved well-being, for example the group had itself organised a walking tour in Donegal (n=40) which is considerable evidence both of physical and social well-being within the group. The social dynamic e.g. a cup of tea and a chat with friends after project activities was also highlighted as a key indicator of success as is the evidence of friendship extending beyond the confines of project activity and the leisure centre. Tutors were identified as key to the programme's success.

## **Newry and Mourne**

A key indicator of success in Newry is that both Monday and Wednesday classes are still very popular with participants. The project fits well with the Sports Centre outlook which has for many years targeted minority groups and the 50+ group. Over 40 regulars participate in the club every week and most notably in this programme, in terms of gender, the divide is approximately 50/50. There has never been a problem in attracting male participants in this project – a factor identified by male participants was that they had access the fitness suite and a tutor. Whilst the groups attend the Centre at the same time the sessions are broken down into gender groups – it was reported that the female members are happier with it this way. Again in this group there is evidence of social capital being created as the group meets socially twice a year and many of the participants also take part in walking groups. All reported increased fitness levels as a result of project involvement. This impression was backed by reports from the two instructors who indicated that the fitness levels in the groups had increased for most individuals – the instructors take a detailed health / fitness assessment of participants at the start of the programme – the only Centre to do so.

## **Challenges**

### **Craigavon**

No significant challenges were identified at project level though in terms of challenges for the programme the main one highlighted was the fact that the programme may have been spread too wide geographically for ACNI to manage. As the programme covered a number of Council areas this meant that there was too little time to focus on project development in each council area. This problem was compounded by the turnover of ACNI staff. For the project there was also an issue in terms of capacity and it was highlighted that there was a waiting list for participants who wanted to join the project.

Additionally in terms of facilities in this area community centres are much better equipped to deliver project activities to the younger age groups rather than the over 50s.

## **Fermanagh**

The immediate challenge for this Club, having relocated to a suitable venue in Bawnacre was the need for continuation funding to keep the Club running, with the additional caveat that with increased funding there is a conviction that there would be many more participants, indeed participants hoped to increase project activity in future to twice a week.

## **Coleraine**

A key challenge identified was that of ensuring that tutors were available to work at the time of day when the Club was organised, particularly tutors or coaches with the ability and experience of working with this age group. The experience of the project is that while there are many coaches who work in the community sector there are relatively few who can cater for the older age group, particularly coaches who can deliver a variety of classes. An additional challenge was the lack of male participation.

## **Lisburn**

For Lisburn City Council a key challenge facing the Club, which has not been overcome to date, is the general absence of male participants. Discussions have occurred on this issue with suggestions that male only sessions be run or that a new campaign of engagement with males be organised locally with other groups. A visit to centres outside of Lisburn which have drawn in male participants has also been suggested.

Lisburn LeisurePlex reported no significant challenges for the project, indeed the programme delivered is described as 'straightforward and successful', probably the only weaknesses were the lack of interest from participants in activities in the Main Hall and the reluctance of males to engage in programme activities. It was noted that there is a general reluctance in the group to change a successful format, however as the group as a whole were happy to continue with programmes the staff were happy to support them in doing so.

## **Newry and Mourne**

No real challenges were identified in Newry and this in part may be due to the fact that the Sports Centre had an existing over 50s group before ACNI funding was available and thus had the knowledge and experience of delivering to this age group. The two coaches employed to work with the Club have also had experience of working with the over 50s. Beyond the operation of the project at local level it was noted that the turnover of ACNI staff members did have a negative impact in terms of developing rapport and relationships with ACNI.

### **Overall Challenges**

A number of challenges at programme level were identified by key players at individual project level. Delays to the training programme for instance occurred following the departure of the second Development Officer and the turnover of programme staff in ACNI was an issue raised by several projects suggesting that this factor arrested programme development, at least initially and militated against the development of stronger relationships between the projects and ACNI. The challenge of being geographically spread over many parts of the Province meant that the programme took longer to get through the initial development phases. In overall terms however whilst these challenges may have impacted on issues such as staff training, the overall delivery of the programme has not been affected to any great extent.

In terms of projects' relationship to the other CSDI projects no real networking was apparent although there was a clear interest in swapping experience with counterparts in other areas, for example, Lisburn would be keen to see how Newry was successful in terms of attracting male participants, whilst participants in several projects expressed an interest in meeting participants from other project areas. There was support for the idea that at some stage there might be a half day event organised to bring together all the programme areas to share learning. Additionally it was noted that there would be some value in networking opportunities for participants and co-ordinators.

## **Sustainability**

For ACNI the key issue is that each project within the wider programme has now achieved some level of sustainability.

## **Coleraine**

For the Council there is a clear interest in re-commencing the project following a period where the project can be analysed in terms of member commitment and a range of factors pertinent to the Leisure Centre e.g. financial viability, venue and tutor costs, and broader budget considerations. The Leisure Centre would undoubtedly prefer to keep the project going provided it has the resourcing. The summer period will be employed to explore further funding avenues.

## **Craigavon**

This project has benefitted from a strong partnership between ACNI in the local area, the Trust and the Council ensuring that it is well supported within a competitive funding environment wherein there are as many as 70 groups locally working with the elderly. Based on the commitment of the key players to the project there is a strong belief that it will continue in the post funding period, buoyed by the imminent delivery of much needed sports equipment for the group. As venue hire and insurance are costs covered by the Council the main concern is to access funding for tutor costs as the groups want to try a yoga programme and funding which would enable the group to avail of transport.

## **Fermanagh**

The project, which is a combination of local clubs in north Fermanagh, is currently without funding at the end of May 2008. Initial attempts to access funding towards the end of the project have been unsuccessful. Because of the popularity of the project and the commitment of the members the project is looking at a range of options to fundraise the necessary capital to hire tutors and meet venue costs. This group is particularly keen to quickly re-engage with ACNI to discuss the funding options available.



## **Lisburn**

It is the view of Lisburn City Council that the project is financially sustainable so long as the current level of participation is maintained. The LeisurePlex believes that participant numbers currently are sufficient in the project to sustain the Active Lives Club i.e. should current levels of 40 plus regulars be maintained, indeed it was suggested that the Leisure Centre may consider plans to expand the project, possibly adding another day to the programme, with the caveat that there would be no point splitting up the core group of 40 into two days of 20 core participants, rather the aim is to keep the core of 40 participants on Tuesday and try to establish a core of a minimum of 20 on a Thursday. Whilst ACNI funding is viewed as having been very useful, the success of the project has meant that key players now consider it should be self sustaining.

## **Newry and Mourne**

It is the view of the Newry Sports Centre that the project will continue in its current format regardless of accessing further funding mainly due to the high levels of participant commitment and enjoyment, which is particularly evident in the number of friendships forged and sustained through project activity. The aim therefore would be to keep the project running as long as it is financially viable.

## **The Role of Age Concern Northern Ireland**

As noted in the previous section ACNI's role was to develop the CSDI programme in six council areas and produce both training and resource material appropriate to those working with over 50s in relation to sport and physical activities.

Those who had been on the training had found it useful and 2 of those we spoke to stated that they were committed to ensuring that the training would be rolled out amongst relevant staff within their council (Craigavon and Lisburn).

Advice and guidance on appropriate engagement with older people resulted in the publication of the good practice guide 'Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A Resource for Sports Development Teams and Leisure Centres'. Those consulted through the evaluation had found it very informative and in particular the Belfast project as it is developing is eager to access ACNI's experience and expertise in engaging with older people.

The Development Officers also developed relationships with each of the Councils, drawing on their support and expertise and in turn providing ACNI's expertise. Whilst there was a local Steering Group in each of the operational areas, at which the ACNI Development Officer had an input, there was no single overall Steering Group to manage the CSDI programme. It is important to note however that ACNI had a positive engagement with SNI and the local Councils and there is support within these key stakeholders for developing closer links in the future.

In terms of the role of ACNI played in each of the Active Lives Clubs it is viewed by the key players at project level as essentially managerial and advisory, in that ACNI was the catalyst to get the Community Sports Initiative up and running in terms of generating interest in the six Council areas, following which projects were developed and managed at the local borough level with ACNI in an advisory role. It was evident from discussions with staff and providers in each area that ACNI is not viewed as having any ownership of the programme at club level; in all areas the success of each club and the commitment of club members have resulted in a strong sense of local ownership of this project. This outcome will likely continue in the post-funding period when the link to ACNI will be primarily based on ACNI's role as a specialist training and information provider. Specifically from the point of view of project delivery, a number of key players at project level suggested that the ACNI input into projects could be broadened beyond the role of funder, suggesting that there is a role for ACNI to provide specialist advice and information to the Active Lives Club, in the form of talks and information sessions. It should be noted however that for those projects with an uncertain future in terms of funding ACNI was seen to have a responsibility to ensure that advice and guidance is made available.

In general terms the view at project level is consistent in regarding ACNI as a great support to the project with the one caveat that staff turnover in ACNI impacted negatively on rapport between each project and ACNI and on programme development overall.

In the following pages we consider the **views of participants** in relation to preferred activities, barriers to participation and overall views on the programme.

### **Coleraine Active Lives Focus Group**

All the respondents regularly attended the club which meets weekly on Thursday morning which is broken down into two sessions. All the participants endeavoured to attend every week and reported that typical numbers in a session would be approximately 30. In the previous year they reported that numbers would have been lower, maybe 15 or 16, with the numbers increasing this year after project activities were advertised.

The **main activities** within the programme include general keep fit (often dance based), spinning, exercise ball activities, circuit training, badminton, new age curling, use of the fitness suite and swimming. In terms of attending **other fitness based clubs** most of the participants reported taking part in a full range of local activities, mainly through the local 50+ Club, with dancing / Tea dances the most popular activities around the local clubs available most days.

The **main impediments** to being more active generally were a range of family responsibilities and looking after children which means that for most of the participants their average day is not full of free time. The **key motivation** identified by all the participants was fitness – it is a key factor for all although clearly there was a great deal gained from the social aspect, a chance to chat and have a laugh. Notably respondents indicated that they would often meet up outside the Club at the various dances so relationships were not restricted to Thursday mornings.

Companionship was identified as a key **impact** for all interviewees as well as general fitness, the fun and the friendly set up of the project.

‘It’s a really good lift – something to look forward to’

‘It’s good to be out of the house amongst other people’

‘I can’t speak highly enough of the project’

When asked to consider **how the project could be improved**, all respondents reported that the project could not be improved on, emphasising that it is an excellent project which provided great value which was considered an important issue as budgets in the group are limited. Most utilise the project as a basis for greater use of the Leisure Centre after project activities including swimming and the sauna. Some respondents thought they would use the club if it was to be organised more than once a week whilst others reported that once was all they had time for.

‘I don’t think anything could be done to improve it  
– the staff are all great’

‘For £2.00 its great value – you can be here from  
10.00 in the morning to after 1’

This group had a clear view that **male participation** rates in the Club were low, with only two or three men taking part in club activities,- quite a few of the 50+ clubs in the general area had no male participants at all. One respondent had brought her husband to some of the initial sessions whilst another had tried but failed to convince her husband to come along. The consensus view was that whilst the project was not specifically designed for women, men might prefer a more competitive environment, and that while they thought that men were not keen on keep fit type activity they may be more interested in football etc.

In **overall comments** all the respondents indicated that they were very disappointed that the funding period had drawn to an end and expressed the hope that new and additional funding could be obtained either through the Leisure Centre or by ACNI. There was a degree of uncertainty over Age ACNI’ s role as the funding body for the project although the Secretary of the local 50+ Forum was aware that the sessions had been subsidised by ACNI funding.

Participants were aware that £2.00 they pay for sessions would not cover the real costs of the session and were hopeful that the Council would step in with replacement funding; the general view was that £2.00 per session was as much as they would or could pay. One respondent indicated that a group she was familiar with in Portstewart had heard about this project and was interested in becoming part of the programme, should it continue.

It was noted that as a group they had little or no contact with ACNI and saw the project as one managed by the Leisure Centre.

### **Craigavon Active Lives Focus Group**

All the respondents indicated that they are regular attendees at the Club which meets every week on a Thursday morning. A wide range of **activities** was outlined by participants including quizzes, exercise, bowls, drafts, basketball, new age curling, darts, keep fit (chair based), Boccia, Reiki, singing, crystal therapy and yoga. When asked if they take part in any **other fitness based clubs** four participants indicated that they attend a 'Tuesday Club' in the same venue, whilst one attended a Widows Club.

In terms of **main impediments** to becoming more active generally responses varied, with a number in the group citing a general lack of opportunities, whilst the remainder noted the fact that this single weekly session was sufficient. It is worth highlighting that this group was more elderly than any of the other groups within the CSDI initiative. For all the participants the **key motivations** for getting involved with the Club were for social reasons – company and friendship. Additionally the Club provides tea and coffee as well as a hot meal and occasional entertainment. In terms of the **impact** of the Club all reported that they feel fitter and happier, whilst a 96 year old participant noted that 'it helps you stay alive longer'.

When asked to consider **how the project could be improved** there was a very clear view in the group that equipment was needed to develop the range of activities provided. Success was imminent on this issue as ACNI had funded new equipment which was due for delivery to the Club in May 2008. Additional requirements included additional funding, for both transport and insurance, which

would enable the group to take recreational trips outside their local area. Craigavon and Banbridge Health Trust had previously provided funding, two thirds of which was spent on transport and the remainder on equipment. The Club is keen to engage with ACNI locally and in Belfast with a view to getting advice on funding opportunities. Locally it was thought that funding opportunities would remain very limited as there are about 70 groups / clubs in the area all vying for limited funding.

There was no clear view on why **male participation** was so low although some in the group felt that further advertising of the Club might overcome the issue. There are four men in this Club which is a reasonable proportion out of 18 members.

In terms of **overall comments** the group confirmed that the project has been very successful and popular with participants. Two of the participants noted that they had been offered volunteer training by ACNI but that it was almost always available in only one of two venues – Belfast or Cookstown – both of which were too far to travel in their view. Locally based training would be much easier to avail of. Participants also paid tribute to a number of individuals who had supported the project including a local ACNI representative from the Actively Ageing Well Centre and the Watson Centre Manager.

### **Lisburn Active Lives Focus Group**

Respondents reported that they were in the main regular attendees, whilst one participant cited family commitments as the reason for not being able to attend more often. The **main activities** currently undertaken in the programme included line dancing, swimming, the gym and the sauna. Quite a few in the group indicated that they swam in the Centre most mornings in addition to attending the Club on Tuesday mornings. One noted that housework was a form of keep fit. Whilst the group were very happy with the activities that they were involved in some stated that they were not fully aware of all the activities available in the Leisure Centre. When asked if they attended **other fitness based clubs** a number reported that they went to a bowling club on Saturdays, other participated in aqua swimming, Pilates and some go to dancing clubs.

The **main impediments** to becoming more active generally were family commitments in terms of child minding and other time constraints. The **key motivations** for being active were both physical and mental health, whilst one respondent suggested it was 'to live longer'. For all the respondents the main impact of the project was the extension of their group of friends, the fun and social aspects of the club. One participant commented that after years nursing a close relative that attending the club had 'helped me get my life back'

When considering **how the project could be improved**, in the main respondents indicated a desire to keep to the format they had become familiar with, with keep fit, yoga and line dancing still firm favourites.

There were no clear views on why **male participation** had been so low, with the group joking that men were lazy, although the sole male participant indicated that there was plenty of exercise to be had in the club, he felt that men would think the club is mainly for women. Some thought that as soon as men heard the words 'line dancing' they would refuse to attend. The group noted that within the Centre generally there were plenty of men who swam, with the majority of the swimming club being men; men also went to the spinning classes and to the gym. As a response to low male participation the group felt that amending the programme of activities to those more physically demanding might be a step towards attracting males.

In the **overall comments** the impact of family responsibilities was highlighted by almost all of the participants; most had a role to play in child minding so school holidays and particularly the summer holidays curtailed opportunities to engage with the club. Two participants felt that the club needed to be better advertised because they had friends who had never heard of the club. Initially they reported that even some staff members in the Centre had not been fully aware of the club though the Council had corrected this quickly. If the club was offered twice per week about half the participants indicated that they would avail of the opportunity though it would depend on the activities being offered; half indicated that once per week was sufficient.

With a view to ACNI the group felt the organisation could do more in terms of information sessions and specialist advice, e.g. in terms of recent price increases and rates etc. as there was currently nowhere in Lisburn to get this advice (though others felt this information was available in CABs).

Additional activities suggested included trips outside the Lisburn area similar to the recent trip to Donegal. Coached activities would also be welcomed, for example archery and bowls and it was noted that this again might help to attract male participants. Some felt health advice would be useful though most preferred to get this from their own doctor. One person thought hair and beauty advice (pampering) would be useful.

Overall the respondents confirmed in their final comments that for them this was a very successful and very popular programme; some would be interested in a second weekly session particularly if it was a yoga class; line dancing is very popular; and family commitments are a main defining issue for group participation.

The group was also very vocal in stating that the success of the Club was as a result of 'the wonderful tutors' and the staff involved in the programme.

### **Fermanagh Active Lives Focus Group**

All the participants identified themselves as regular participants in the Active Lives Clubs which has participant numbers sometimes as high as 40 and as low as 18, with a core group of 20 plus.

With regard to the **main activities** undertaken the current one hour a week keep fit session has been running for 12 weeks, every Friday morning, since February 2008. Other preferred activities include water aerobics, Boccia, new age curling, chair based exercise and a walking programme. With regard to other fitness based clubs the Kesh club (one of the constituent groups) has a walking club on Wednesday, games days on Thursday, Ballinamallard and Irvinestown have lunch club on Fridays. In the summer a walking club operates which involves many of the participants going to different areas on walks (Castlearchdale / local forests



etc.) on a six week structured programme organised through the Consortium. Most of the participants are involved in smaller clubs across north Fermanagh, many of which provide some forms of exercise and walking programmes.

The **main impediments** to becoming more active generally identified within this group are financial with a lack of funding the only issue preventing them being more active. All the participants make their own way by car to Bawnmore by car so there is the additional cost of travel to be considered for participants. The **key motivations** for involvement in the project were identified as both the social side and the fitness element. In terms of **impact** all the respondents noted feeling fitter.

When asked **how the project could be improved** there was a clear message that there was a need for continuation funding to keep the Club alive and furthermore a view that that with increased funding there would be many more participants. Increased sessions to twice a week would be very popular and would help to cater for increased participant numbers should funding be available. Respondents were happy to continue paying £2.00 per session and were extremely happy with venue. Additional activities suggested included water aerobics, an activity many have been involved in over the past two years, but which is considered very expensive. The respondents were clear that they do not want to use a local swimming pool where they would have to share the pool, preferring their own closed session in regulated temperatures with a trained instructor.

Asked why **male participation** was low most of the participants said they are widows and that this is a galvanising reason for Club involvement, the view being that women who lose a partner were much more likely to seek out a Club whereas men they felt were more inclined to stay at home. This phenomenon was true of all the various clubs they are currently involved in.

In the **overall comments** a number of activities were suggested should funding becoming available including a walking programme with sufficient funding for transport. Water aerobics would also be popular in the right venue. As most of the current funding has been used to hire instructors, with the participants contributing towards venue hire and refreshments, the group hopes to fundraise locally so that

it can continue to avail of instructors. The instructors were rated as excellent by participants.

The focus group was conducted on the last session of the current funding period.

### **Newry and Mourne Active Lives Focus Group**

There are approximately 40 regulars who attend the Club sessions every week and in terms of gender the divide is approximately 50/50.

The **main activities** currently preferred by participants include weights- based circuits and a general fitness session which are rotated to cater for two groups, mainly gender based. All sessions are instructor led. When asked if they attended **other fitness based clubs** respondents indicated that they are involved in groups which organise swimming, walking and bowls. Socially a number of participants go walking together every month. A number of people again reiterated the financial aspect of increased participation – for many a key issue was not only the cost of gym membership but the fact that it would mean setting up direct debits, which for many was a non-starter. Most preferred a system of ‘pay as you go’.

The **main impediment** identified to becoming more active generally was very straightforward; finances. The **key motivations** highlighted by all the respondents were fitness and the social side of the club. As a group the Club members make a point of going out socially at least twice a year around Christmas and in the summer.

In terms of the **impact** on participants all reported increased fitness levels and, as noted previously, this impression was backed by reports from the two instructors who indicated that the fitness levels in the groups had increased for most individuals. Additionally respondents highlighted the fun, camaraderie within the group as an important factor. All reported that in terms of their wider social circle they were fitter than their friends who did not attend and less likely to attend a doctor.

When considering **how the project could be improved** suggestions included, costs reductions, no direct debit systems, a pay as you go scheme and additional information to be made more freely available. Additional activities included 5 a side football, Tai Chi, line dancing, yoga, bowling, and tea and coffee mornings, suggestions which were to be acted on by the instructors. All the respondents were very clear that these would be additional activities, not replacing the current format.

In terms of **overall comments** respondents indicated a willingness to move to three sessions per week with the caveat that personal financial restrictions may make it difficult, despite the willingness. There was a strong feeling with a number of interviewees that the Centre needed to reduce costs to attract more older people and the consensus view was that most participants attend the Club and the Centre as often as they can afford to. These comments relate particularly to the costs involved in taking out an annual membership with the club which runs the gym / fitness suite in the Centre (annual membership is circa £50.00) – Active Lives sessions have access to this facility.

Whilst all were happy that swimming was available at no cost, they queried why this could not be the case with all the Club activities (rather than the current £2.60 a session). Some indicated that even a reduced annual gym membership of £15 / £20 would make a considerable difference.

All the participants will continue to attend the Club beyond the funding period and the group was unanimous in stating that the Club was very good and that the coaches are brilliant. The two instructors were very highly praised and many indicated that the instructors were the key to the success of the Club. Participants indicated that they would be keen to meet / visit other Active Lives Clubs in the CSDI. Quite a few in the group, between 7 and 10 have been widowed in recent years and it was suggested that this might be a factor explaining the strong social aspect of the Club.

‘Some sort of funding for this programme is really needed; I think it’s really important’.

A number of respondents indicated that the Club had not been well advertised and that they had only heard about it accidentally; others reported seeing it advertised by the Centre and in the local media, some by word of mouth.

## **SECTION 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary of Key Issues**

In reviewing this evaluation it is evident that the development of information on good practice is viewed as a success as is the training programme on age awareness, though it is recognised that more training programmes could be delivered. A key impact in regard to the propagation of good practice was a recent event held by the Health Promotion Agency and Sport Northern Ireland, a key part of which was a focus on older people, emphasising that learning from the programme is being shared in the wider arena, becoming more mainstream and that the linkages between older people and physical activity are now established. ACNI recognises the important role of the Community Sport Officers who developed the programme in Councils and progressed the wider aims of ACNI in terms of ageing well and developing active living. The project has been able to access many individuals who were not previously involved in any older peoples groups.

Awareness raising within the programme has been successful particularly through the age awareness training delivered by ACNI allied to the development of the Good Practice Guide, which both reflects good practice and informs good practice. Developed over the three years of the programme this publication will act as a good resource in years to come. This will be particularly relevant over the coming months to inform the development of the new Belfast City Council project. Examples of good practice have been evident in all areas. Another element of success relates to the impact the programme has had in getting local authorities to consider delivering activities for the older age group for whom little or no specific provision had previously been offered. Councils have responded positively to the programme and there now exists a structure for older people to link into.

In terms of key challenges faced by the programme these included the challenge of being geographically spread over many parts of the Province meaning that the programme took longer to get through the initial development phases, an issue compounded by personnel changes for key staff following the resignation of the Development Officer on two occasions as well as changes to the line manager. This meant addressing the challenge of developing the programme initially across

seven different areas. On reflection the programme could have been developed within less geographical areas or potentially another development worker could have been employed. Another resource, the broader Ageing Well network, could have been employed to provide training and support. Additionally a communications strategy for the programme which could have encouraged information and experience sharing initially between ACNI and local projects and between the projects themselves in terms of project promoters and participants, would have ensured a greater flow of information and learning.

Consequently, following the development work in the first two years, Year 3 has been the most successful and has seen many of the projects now running successfully, having had the time and space to work on local agendas and to develop projects which have responded to local conditions.

An additional challenge to programme development and delivery was the fact that available funding for programme costs was quite low, although ACNI regards it as a strength of the programme that project development was not overly reliant on funding streams; and additional funds were made available by Trusts and Councils.

In approaching our conclusions we have taken into account the overall Terms of Reference for the evaluation, as detailed in the project specification. The purpose of the evaluation was to document what the programme has achieved, how was it achieved, the model developed, impacts, what challenges were faced, what lessons have been learnt and to discuss issues surrounding sustainability.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Assess significant areas of the programme such as the external context through which the programme has been developed
- To examine project advancement – taster days, regular physical activity programmes, formation of groups / clubs
- Define the model of practice used throughout the programme
- Examine the way in which the programme is supported and managed
- Highlight examples of good practice from the programme

- Examine how the programme has impacted on each of the areas involved
- Make recommendations based on the evidence gathered in the evaluation

In this section we shall take each objective in turn and summarise the key elements identified in the evaluation.

## **Context**

In sections 3 and 4 of this report we considered in detail the strategic, policy and general context under which the CSDI programme was created and developed. It is evident from the review of key documents that Government has recognised the need to encourage those who do not regularly take part in sport and physical activity to do so. Research points to not only the physical and mental benefits of this but also the social benefits. It is within this context that the CSDI programme was developed with significant support from both councils and key stakeholders such as the Ageing Well Initiative and community and voluntary groups.

## **Model of Practice**

The model of practice in the design and implementation of this programme flowed from the model promoted by ACNI:

- Construction of a Steering Group comprising members of the target group and key stakeholders
- Carrying out of needs analysis
- Use of taster days alongside promotional material showing positive images of older people being active
- Review of taster days
- Design and implementation of the programme
- Training of key individuals on age appropriate activities
- Provision of relevant resource material
- Regular reviews of programme
- Clear communication between project promoters and participants
- Engendering a sense of local ownership amongst participants
- Engendering a sense of ownership in councils

All of these factors combined to make a highly successful programme.

### **Programme Support and Management**

As discussed previously in the report the overall CSDI programme had to at times deal with problematic issues as a result of staff changes within the programme and management of it. It is difficult to quantify the impact this had a project level; where for some projects impact was negligible whilst for others there is anecdotal evidence to suggest it retarded project development to some degree. As noted above each project developed a model of self-management which reflected a partnership between participants and host organisations, seeking advice from councils or ACNI only as and when necessary. One weak point in the programme has been the lack of opportunity to train all Centre staff using the programme developed by ACNI. This is expected to happen in the coming months.

### **Outcomes and Impacts**

As evidenced in the report the programme has successfully reached both those who were active members of other clubs and those who were not part of any club. This last factor suggests that it was able to reach some of those who might be considered socially excluded. There is evidence in a number of projects of improvements to physical and mental wellbeing, whilst it is also clear that on a social level all of those participants in the focus groups we spoke to stated that they had made new friends and widened their social circle as a result of being involved in the programme.

In addition the Councils have gained from engaging in a meaningful and productive way with the target group, developing a programme to meet their needs and providing staff with the opportunity to improve their skills in working with over 50s age group. This is evidenced by the economic sustainability of most of the projects.

### **Key learning points and potential areas for future development**

This evaluation has demonstrated that increasing participating amongst the over 50s age group can be achieved by adopting a model of good practice. The role of ACNI in providing not only funding from the SNI programme, but also the provision



of specialist advice and resources, has helped raise the profile of the initiative in council areas and helped council staff develop projects across the programme. The enthusiasm of staff, tutors and coaches was evident throughout the evaluation. Their commitment to working with the over 50's age group resulted in a strong partnership approach to development and delivery of the programme, engendering a strong sense of local ownership in each club.

It is evident that networking between the other programmes would have benefited both staff and participants. Sharing good practice, discussing ideas for reaching those who do not attend clubs and seeking ideas for developing joint funding applications are all opportunities which could be maximised further. Whilst opportunities for networking were suggested by SNI and explored by ACNI logistical problems and delays to the timetable following staff changes prevented this from happening.

## **Recommendations:**

### **ACNI and SNI**

1. ACNI should explore utilising SNI's Sports Development Network to promote good practice throughout Northern Ireland with reference to the new Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017.
2. ACNI to develop links with SNI more strategically, perhaps in a similar way to the recent HPA / SNI Charter. There may be opportunities for ACNI to develop links within the Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation and to link into networks to deliver the age awareness training pack and monitor its implementation.
3. Networking opportunities should form a key part of any future programme, enabling sharing of good practice, sharing of ideas for reaching hard to reach groups and ideas for developing joint funding applications. We would recommend that the information generated in this evaluation from participants in the focus groups be used to inform the development of future programme content in each area.

4. In terms of future development we would suggest that it would be worthwhile devising or amending monitoring forms to assess levels of physical activity pre-engagement with the projects with a view to assessing and demonstrating the impact on participants' physical wellbeing.

## **ACNI**

5. ACNI should devise and implement a communications strategy to facilitate the sharing of information and experience at programme and project level.
6. ACNI should provide guidance and advice on further funding opportunities to assist project sustainability at local level and investigate potential opportunities to deliver the training at university and college level.
7. A number of the projects are currently reviewing their own programmes with a view to planning future programme delivery following the current funding period. In all cases this will be implemented following full consultation with participants. We would recommend projects following the format employed at the start of the project inception i.e. taster days and review of taster days. We would also suggest that reviews are undertaken on a regular basis to maximise levels of participant involvement and satisfaction.
8. When considering the issue of attracting males to the programme we would suggest that the project in Newry Sports Centre be used as a model of best practice to inform and advise other projects in the programme. This model could inform the programme reviews currently being undertaken at project level.
9. We recommend to the steering groups and project promoters the ACNI guide – 'Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A resource for Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres' as a guide to best practice.
10. From the point of view of project delivery, it is evident that stakeholders and participants across the programme feel that ACNI should have greater input at project level to provide specialist advice and information, including

information about funding opportunities, to local groups, through presentations and information sessions on a regular basis. We recommend that ACNI consider this and seek resources to implement this action, perhaps through links between projects, councils and the Actively Ageing Well Centres.

### **ACNI and Councils**

11. There may be scope for projects in the current review period to consider extending their remit to cater for those participants who are isolated or who have not yet been able to engage with the programme. Projects might consider referrals from other agencies such as from local Trusts or taking advantage of existing networks and contact lists developed by councils in the community and voluntary sector and by other ACNI initiatives.
12. As a number of respondents highlighted the issue of child minding as an impediment to increased / on-going participation. It is recommended that consideration be given to the viability of setting up crèche facilities at the same time as older people's programmes or that an intergenerational component is considered for the programme. Additionally, consideration needs to be given to the timing of programmes.

### **Councils**

13. Continued focus on developing the programme at each Council level should occur alongside identifying new opportunities in Council areas where provision for the target group is poor. The Councils should maintain their promotional approach utilising a variety of access points for the target group such as local community groups and health centres. The Councils should explore links with the local Health and Social Services Trusts to inform key staff such as health development workers, social workers and health visitors about the programme.

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **AGE CONCERN NORTHERN IRELAND COMMUNITY SPORT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE EVALUATION**

#### **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

##### **Non Participants who attend gym**

1. How often do you attend gym?
2. Take part in any organised fitness/ sports/ physical activity programmes?
3. Do you take part in any other clubs?
4. What stops you from being more active?
5. What motivates you to being active?
6. Are you aware of the Active Lives Club? If yes are there any particular reasons why you don't get involved in it?
7. There seem to be less men taking part in group activities for older people – do you have any ideas why that might be?
8. Is there anything the club could do to encourage more men?
9. Any final comments?

##### **Irregular Participants**

1. How often attend Active Lives Club?
2. Are there any particular reasons why you do you not attend more often?
3. Do you take part in any organised fitness/ sports/ physical activity programmes?
4. Do you take part in any other clubs?
5. What stops you from being more active generally?
6. What motivates you to being active?
7. There seem to be less men taking part in group activities for older people – do you have any ideas why that might be?
8. Is there anything the club could do to encourage more men?
9. Any final comments?

### **Regular Participants**

1. How often attend Active Lives Club?
2. What activities do you do here?
3. Do you take part in any organised fitness/ sports/ physical activity programmes?
4. Do you take part in any other clubs?
5. What stops you from being more active generally?
6. What motivates you to being active?
7. What were their motivations for getting involved in the Active Lives Club?
8. What impact has it had on you?
9. Are there any things you think could be done to improve the club?
10. There seem to be less men taking part in group activities for older people – do you have any ideas why that might be?
11. Is there anything the club could do to encourage more men?
12. What further support do groups need?
13. Any final comments?