

**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**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**FKB Consulting**  
**60 Glenview Park**  
**Newtownabbey**  
**BT37 0TG**  
**fkbresearch@gmail.com**  
**Tel: 028 90853246 / 07759711515**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document summarises 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. In 2005 it sought funding from SNI for a Community Sport Development Initiative (CSDI) which delivered activities in 6 Council areas in Northern Ireland:- Lisburn, Newry and Mourne, Belfast, Coleraine, Fermanagh and Craigavon. 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 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.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Desk research for the evaluation included a review of available documentation; including the project's own internal monitoring and evaluation data as well as monitoring reports to the funder. The evaluation team interviewed key individuals who provided insight into the project and the context within which it operated. This included representatives from SNI, ACNI and each of the council areas. Five focus groups were held with participants in each of the centres taking part in the programme: Coleraine Leisure Centre; Lisburn LeisurePlex; The Watson Centre, Craigavon; Newry Sports Centre and the Bawnacre Centre, Irvinestown.

## POLICY AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In terms of the strategic environment the key documents reviewed included the **Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007 – 2017**<sup>1</sup>, which outlines the Government's commitment to sport and physical recreation and will underpin the development of sport and physical recreation in Northern Ireland up to 2017. Additionally **Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2007-2010**<sup>2</sup> states that its Vision is: *"Through sport, to contribute to an inclusive, creative, competent, informed and physically active community"*.

In March 2005 Government launched **"Ageing in an Inclusive Society": A Strategy for Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People**<sup>3</sup> which included an Older Advisory People's Panel and the role of a Champion for Older People. This strategy also links to the development of the Investing for Health Strategy (2002) to support older people to live healthy and active lives, including home safety clubs<sup>4</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.

In 2006 the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister published **Lifetime opportunities** which focuses on the different priority needs at different times in peoples lives, including working age adults and older citizens. 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 charter for enhancing health through sport and physical activity'**<sup>5</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.

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<sup>1</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>2</sup> Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) Corporate Plan 2007 - 2010

<sup>3</sup> OFMDFM Older Peoples Strategy, 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society'

<sup>4</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

<sup>5</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'*

## Related Publications

The evaluation reviewed a number of ACNI publications including its '**Ageing Well Factsheets**'<sup>6</sup> published in partnership with Health Promotion Agency, which 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. 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 Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres**'<sup>7</sup> which is a direct product of the CSDI .

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

The ACNI CSDI programme was funded from October 2005 to June 2008. The funding included programme costs for each centre as well as for a Development Officer as a central resource. Year 1 of the programme entailed developing partnerships in each of the 6 council areas that had agreed to take part in the programme. 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 programme developed a **model of good practice** incorporating the following elements. The format for development was similar for each area - 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.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland's 'Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A resource for Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres'

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. 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. 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. 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>8</sup> drawing on lessons learned from the programme and further afield.

<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

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<sup>8</sup> Age Concern Northern Ireland's 'Promoting Physical Activity with Older People – A resource for Sports Developments Teams and Leisure Centres'

## **KEY FINDINGS**

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

ACNI successfully developed the CSDI programme in six council areas and produced both training and resource material appropriate to those working with over 50s in relation to sport and physical activities. Advice and guidance on the 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'. 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.

### **Outcomes and Impacts**

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:

*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'*

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 better 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, (such as males in some centres) and seeking ideas for developing joint funding applications are all opportunities which could be maximised further.

### **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.