



Sports Partnership Herefordshire and Worcestershire's Strength and Balance Classes

Background of Project

The Worcestershire County Council Public Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identified that in Worcestershire there were an estimated 500 fallers in the 65 plus population each year with half of these leading to an admission to hospital.

Postural Stability Instruction (or PSI as it is more commonly known) was commissioned by the Worcestershire Public Health team as it has been subject to the highest level of research and shown that it is the most effective intervention to reduce the risk of older people falling.

Why?

The Sports Partnership Herefordshire and Worcestershire saw this project as an opportunity to diversify the work that we do. Worcestershire has an ageing population and we used local insight from the Active People Survey, which suggests only 11% of people in Worcestershire over the age of 65 are taking part in sport or recreational activity three or more times a week, to drive the tender.

We were contracted to deliver the Postural Stability Instruction Service for two years following a successful tender, and have since rebranded the classes we run as Strength and Balance Classes to help with consumers' better understanding of what the service is.

The classes are highly complementary to our existing work and vision of increasing participation and engaging older adults in activity or helping keeping them active. They now form an integral part of our Active Ageing campaign.

Although this is very different from anything we have done before we felt that there was a great synergy between our participation programmes. We also believe it allows us to offer more support to older people who 'graduate' from a strength and balance class helping them into more mainstream activity – increasing our reach!

The contract value is up to £200,000 which helps towards the Sport England diversification target budgets.

What are the classes?

Strength and Balance exercise classes are for people who feel unsteady on their feet or have had a fall. The benefits of the classes include improvement of balance and co-ordination, increased functional capacity, increased bone and muscle mass, improved confidence to reduce the fear of falling, and a chance to socialise.

Held at community venues around Worcestershire, the classes are run Monday to Friday, generally between 10am – 4pm and each class lasts an hour. There is no minimum age for the classes, and people from their 50's all the way up to their late 90's have attended.

The classes run for 33 weeks and once a class comes to an end attendees are encouraged to join a maintenance class (which many of the instructors run privately) as well as being directed to other sporting activities they could get involved with such as bowls.

These classes are available on referral through a GP or Health professional, meaning as part of the project, the Sports Partnership Herefordshire and Worcestershire has increased their reach and diversified their stakeholders by engaging with health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and district nurses. This not only allows us to promote this programme but gives SPHW the chance to network and engage with more NHS professionals to highlight the other work we do and how it could be beneficial to their

patients. We also work closely with other community and voluntary organisations such as Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society to increase awareness of the scheme and other sporting opportunities.

Participants can also self-refer into the programme so there is also an element of B2C (business to consumer) marketing and brand awareness with the scheme.

Results

Since taking on the contract in April 2015, the Sports Partnership has been able to significantly increase the number of classes available and currently have over 30 courses running, with nearly 300 people attending of the 700+ referrals that have been made.

Previous research has found that of those taking part in classes, 76% of people feel more confident, 72% are more able to do things and 95% are planning to continue exercising, which is our ultimate aim.

As part of the development of the project we have provided CPD training for existing instructors to ensure they are continually improving their practice, progressing their classes and that the attendees are receiving the best instruction for their health and fitness.

The project is being delivered across the whole of Worcestershire and is assisting us in demonstrating that we are an organisation that can deliver complex projects with very specific requirements effectively and efficiently.

Karen Wright, Public Health Consultant for Worcestershire County Council said, "We commissioned this project to the Sports Partnership because they have a proven track record of delivery of successful programmes and they demonstrated that they had the skills, experience, business model, and enthusiasm to develop and deliver a successful programme.

"We are very pleased with how the project has developed since the Sports Partnership has taken over. They have invested the right staff to lead and develop and deliver the programme, they are implementing new approaches to increase levels of participation as well as building on these partnerships to embed the model of delivery more effectively into the overall falls pathway. Consequently we are seeing the results and the delivery of well-run courses in a range of settings across the county."

Challenges

The main challenge, as with many referral schemes, is getting Health Professionals to refer due to the amount of other services knocking on their door. One of the ways we have tried to overcome this is through the introduction of the self-referral with approximately a third of referrals now coming through this route.

Our biggest challenge going forward will be capacity due to the demand and popularity, we are running out of instructors to deliver. So we are looking at increasing the workforce around these classes.

Testimonials

Jean Bolter, who attends a Strength and Balance Class at Crab Tree Court in Bromsgrove said, "I joined the exercise group after discussing the matter with my G.P. I had sustained a fall which upset my balance and I was having difficulty in walking generally, due to arthritis in both my ankles causing my hamstrings to tighten. I am definitely more confident than I was before joining the classes and feel safer walking around on my own now. Since joining both the classes in Bromsgrove, I have met some lovely new people and made a few friends as a consequence of this."

Linda Adey another participant at the Strength and Balance Class at Crab Tree Court, Bromsgrove said, "Following chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant and months of inactivity, I suffered from severe breathlessness, I was hardly able to walk and couldn't climb stairs due to muscle atrophy. A friend told me about these classes and my GP referred me. Initially I found the classes quite difficult and exhausting, but was always encouraged to only do as much as I was able. Within a few months my muscle tone and balance had improved such that I was able to resume some low level activities between sessions, including climbing the stairs so that I could sleep in my own bed!"