

'Catch Me Before I Fall'

Project Summary Report



A Communities for Health Project
developed and delivered by
Walsall Council Creative Development Team

Introduction

‘Catch Me Before I Fall’ - sometimes known as ‘The Great Project’ - was developed by Walsall Council Creative Development Team to encourage people with a learning disability to become regular users of existing leisure services in Walsall.

It came about as a result of a previous project called ‘SORTED!’, which highlighted the fact that many people with a learning disability do not access mainstream leisure services once they have left school or college - either because they do not know they exist or they feel they don’t ‘fit in’.

‘Catch Me Before I Fall’ was financed by a Communities For Health (Public Health) fund and the Creative Development Team worked in partnership with Walsall Learning Disability Partnership Board and third sector organisation Mencap to deliver the project.

Project’s main aims

To develop a database of leisure activities suitable for people in Walsall who have learning disabilities, that can be easily recognised and understood to promote increased use of facilities across the borough; to inspire people with learning disabilities to know about and make better use of what’s on offer; to educate service providers about the needs and abilities of people with learning disabilities.

Process

The project was launched in October 2009, with Ruth Swallow appointed project researcher, pulling together relevant information about leisure services in the Walsall area - largely those run by the Council and other accountable organisations. She has subsequently put together a short but comprehensive directory of activities that would be suitable for and relevant to this group of people within Walsall borough at www.walsalleisure.cswebsites.net

The information was gathered over the first six months of the project and forwarded to Sam Davies (of the Walsall Learning Disability Partnership Board) who constructed a website specifically tailored to the project's target group. The site makes use of picture information where possible, and is as simple and easy to use as possible. It will become part of www.walsalltogether.net which is planned as a 'one stop' portal for people in Walsall with learning disabilities.

Peter Chaplin was appointed project artist, to run workshops from October to December with a small consultation group (of Mencap service users) to find out more about them and what sort of activities they already enjoyed, and those they might like to try out in the future. During the course of the workshops the group created a 'Great' symbol which could be used by visitors to the aforementioned website as a rating system for activity providers. The symbol is designed to indicate whether those using the site feel comfortable accessing particular facilities in a bid to encourage more young people with learning disabilities to give them a try.



Some of the young people involved in the project visited a variety of leisure facilities they had never tried before, accompanied by film maker Richard Coyne who then produced a fly-on-the-wall film about their experience.

Participants were interviewed about which of the activities they had enjoyed and a voice-over told the viewer about the health benefits of being active and involved (script attached, Appendix 2). The slogan for the film is: “Get up, get out, do something and enjoy it”.

Activities featured were go-karting, ten-pin bowling, sailing, swimming and a visit to the cinema. Project workers learned that there are some activities that would need one-to-one assistance for learning disabled people. As much as the project would strive for inclusion, it has recognised that there are limitations.

The finished film promotes a range of activities and the fact that keeping active is good for both physical and emotional health. The DVD has been used at promotional events and for training service providers, to show them that people with learning disabilities often only need a more personal approach to make full use of what’s on offer.

Drama worker Alison Belbin delivered workshops in the borough’s community bases (formerly day centres), developing scenarios based around what it is like to visit a place where you don’t feel welcome.

Participants acted out role plays of leisure facilities they had attended and how they had been treated. They watched the film of their peers enjoying a range of local facilities and they were introduced to the on-line directory.



Activity providers from nearby organisations had been invited to attend these sessions but none did.

Project Round-Up

Initial consultation found that people had never tried, but had a desire to try:

Going to the cinema
Go-karting
Canoeing
Sailing
Rock climbing
Quad biking
Horse riding
Bowling
Swimming
Football
Golf

Some workers in charge of places where learning disabled people spend their days were shocked that participants joined in and could so easily express themselves, once engaging techniques such as drama were employed. Workers on the project had been told to expect very little response, yet participants in general were very responsive and in some places very eloquent.



project and engaged with it.

Film-maker Richard spent time with the film participants before he began, getting them used to filming and being filmed - developing their interviewing and camera-handling skills. Despite being introduced to several new faces at once, the participants were enthusiastic about the

October 2010 saw seven community bases around the borough, where people with learning difficulties can access services, host the 'leisure road show'. The inspirational DVD was shown, along with movement workshops and a thought-provoking consultation between project workers and people with learning disabilities.

CDT's Kim Fuller, leading the events, told participants of all ages and across all areas of disability: "We are here to say that you are welcome in all of the leisure facilities in Walsall and it is our job - all of us - to make sure we are welcome wherever we go."

A purpose of these events was to involve activity providers in the consultation, to demonstrate the leisure needs and aspirations of this client base and how they could be encouraged and facilitated to participate. However, despite invitations being issued to activity providers in the locale of each community base, no one attended.

It also became apparent that the use of technology in the centres was minimal, if at all. Most do not have Internet access, making it impossible to introduce the web site.

Comments from service users at the events included:

- 'It was all good fun.'
- 'I think the exercise in the chairs is a good thing. To do a bit of exercise together is good fun. We used to do 'chairobics' every day but we don't now.'
- 'I want to go to an exercise class.'
- 'We all enjoyed the film.'
- 'Sometimes when I go swimming they tell me I have to go away and come back when they are not so busy. But I'm a good swimmer and it upsets me.'
- 'People like us get treated different, as if we're stupid. Yes we are different, but we're not stupid. We should be able to go where we like.'

Comments from movement workshop provider Ali Belbin included:

- ‘Everyone had differing abilities within the group so there was an emphasis on individuals doing as much as they were able. It seemed to run very successfully with high participation from everyone.’
- ‘It was great to have the enthusiastic and committed involvement of carers and centre workers in the whole session. It felt like it was a truly inclusive experience.’
- ‘It was a session full of humour and vitality.’
- ‘An inspiring session in an inspiring environment where there was plenty and varied activity already going on. I found the staff and service users very open to what we were doing.’

(See Appendix 1 for Ali Belbin’s full report)

March 3, 2011, saw the final presentation event of the project, at Walsall College, attended by service users, representatives from Walsall Council Adult Services and heads of Leisure Services.

In her introduction, Kim Fuller said: “Health is not just about eating the right foods and keeping active - it is about how happy we are and how much we enjoy being in the company of others.

“As this project progressed we started to find out why some people with learning disabilities don’t go out to enjoy the facilities on offer in Walsall. Some of you have said you don’t really know what is available - so we have compiled the website list to help solve this problem.

“We also found out that some of you go places and aren’t treated very well while you are there. After today, we are going to go and talk to people in the community who run facilities and have a chat with them about the way they treat people.”

To round off the event, those young people who had taken part in the filming were recognised for their contribution by being presented with individual ‘Oscars’.

A significant outcome of the project is that a follow-up series of workshops with Walsall Council leisure providers around the borough is now being organised, facilitated by heads of Leisure Services. Utilising the inspirational film starring the group of service users, members of the Creative Development Team will encourage providers to think more carefully about how they include people with learning disabilities to make better use of the borough's various sports and leisure facilities.

And as a result of the project, Walsall Council Sports Development Team has started Walsall Community Athletics Club.

Although the original intention was to concentrate on activities like football and cricket, with the possibility of setting up leagues for young people with learning disabilities, the end result is an inclusive athletics club offering qualified coaching in running, high, triple and long jump, hurdles, javelin, hammer and shot putt.

The club for over-18s meets at the Walsall campus of the University of Wolverhampton in Gorway Road, Walsall, each Wednesday evening between 6pm and 7pm. The cost is £1 and the club currently attracts up to eight people each session.

Donna Smith from Walsall Council Social Care and Inclusion explained: "We are trying to direct service users into mainstream provision but a lot of these young people don't know what athletics is all about. The purpose of these sessions is to familiarise them with the different branches of athletics before they progress on to mainstream provision."

Information about the inclusive athletics club can be found by going to smithdonna@walsall.gov.uk or webs@walsall.gov.uk

For more information about the project in general, and the work of the Creative Development Team, call 01922 653114 or email fullerk@walsall.gov.uk

Notes on Alison's Sessions (Appendix 1)

MOVEMENT SESSION - RUSHALL COMMUNITY BASE 4 October 2010-10-04

This was the first movement session as part of the 'Catch me before I fall' road show visiting all the community bases in Walsall. It seemed to go pretty well with a lot of involvement by some participants and part-time involvement by others who joined in as and when they felt comfortable.

Eight members of the Base joined the circle to do the session along with myself, Kim and Donna. We began the session sitting down doing some gentle warming up exercises, e.g. rubbing arms and faces and making circles with hands and feet, and progressed to movement from a standing position. There was one older gentleman in the group who was very keen but found it difficult to do too much from a standing position, so we mixed it up a bit. The group seemed to enjoy the more active middle section where they were following me and then each coming up with their own movements for the group to copy. They also seemed to take to 'pass the mime' very well which was a precursor to their own mimes of sports or leisure activities they would like to try. Activities they came up with included sailing, swimming, and football, going to the Arboretum and going to the theatre. We ended the session with some cooling down stretching and deep breathing.

After they had had chance to look at the website, during which there was quite a lot of discussion about dancing, Keith expressed an interest in line dancing. As I had some line-dancing music with me, we put it on and devised a short sequence with some helpful ideas from the centre manager. Another enthusiastic participant joined in with us and it proved to be a good, spontaneous activity for the end of the whole session. It also led to a discussion about

where Keith could access some music - possibly the mobile library or local library. So one potential thread was begun.

Pheasey Community Centre - 5/10/10

Today's session went very well with a lot of participation by users of the centre and their workers. There were about 20 in the circle for the session. We started with a warm-up from our chairs and moved onto a 'massage circle' where we massaged the back of the person standing in front of us. Moving on to more active movement brought out a lot of participation in the group. They all contributed a lot of varied and good ideas to the 'copy movement' exercise and had some firm ideas about what kinds of sport and leisure activities they would like to try, which they mimed with gusto in some cases.

I found the workers at the centre very supportive to what we were doing and good at supporting the centre users - enabling and empowering and keeping the atmosphere positive. The space was ideal for an active session like this.

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

I enjoyed the exercises

I enjoyed watching bowling in the film

I liked the film. I thought it looked marvellous

I would like to go sailing again

I'd like to try snooker

I enjoyed acting

Pinfold Community Base - 6/10/10

A very different session today in a smaller space. We pushed back tables and chairs to create the circle we thought we needed only to find far more people wanted to come in than we had anticipated, which was very welcome in a lot of ways and showed a lot of interest from people wanting to know what was out there. About 23 of us were in the room including ourselves, a few carers and service-users.

It was quite a challenge to run a movement session in these kinds of conditions. With little knowledge of individuals and their complex needs and abilities I had to go very gently, with lots of assurance that participants must do what they were able and stop if they needed to. Some people joined in more than others, which is something I would expect with this kind of group in those circumstances. It was more like a 'taster' session to show what's possible. It was clear that, for some, it was an activity they welcomed. That was clear from the comments at the end. We did a lot of good chair-based movement quite successfully; a little bit of work standing up for those who could manage it; some mime including looking at activities they might want to try or had tried in the past. This covered a wide range of activities e.g. visiting the art gallery, bowling, running, riding, canoeing, fly fishing, dancing, swimming etc. Ideally, a session like this is best run with about 10-12 people, so they can have some individual attention as well as being part of the group and the facilitator can get to know them and be safe.

It seemed like the whole session, including the film and website, brought up people's wishes in terms of what they would like to do. This was obviously welcome but I suppose I wonder what will happen now. How can those wishes be turned into a reality? And by whom? As an example, one carer asked me if I ran these sessions somewhere so that people there could come along. I had to say I don't, but probably somebody does somewhere in the borough. It's a question of researching it and linking up with that activity - if you have the resources. My feeling was that these participants would need something more tailored to their needs

while many of yesterday's group could attend many of the low impact exercise sessions being run in leisure centres.

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

I enjoyed the dance movements

All good fun

I liked dancing

I enjoyed saying what I'd like to do

I enjoyed the exercises

The exercise in the chairs was good. We used to do that here. Now they don't do it on a Wednesday when I'm here. It used to be every day. We used to have a relaxation class here as well. That was good.

We went swimming for 10 weeks then it stopped

I used to swim a lot when I was young. Now I have to get this calliper off and it takes a long time to get in the water but once I'm in I can use this arm and leg and swim fine

We need continuity

I enjoyed the film

Moxley People's Centre - 7th October 2010-10-07

Today's movement session involved service users, carers and centre workers - about 16 of us altogether. The group responded well to the initial ice-breaker activity of shaking hands with each other prior to watching the film. Everyone had differing abilities within the group so there was an emphasis on individuals doing as much as they were able, taking a break when they needed to and adapting the movements to their own abilities. It seemed to run very successfully with high participation from everyone. One of the workers 'floated' very helpfully enabling and supporting some participants. I found the group to be really keen to do some

exercise/movement and full of humour in their approach. The session today incorporated some elements from the previous sessions, e.g. warm-up activities, breathing, back massage, and also drew in movement based on swimming and discussion about that as a leisure activity. In addition we did some line-dancing movements in a sequence at the end of the session, which everyone seemed to really enjoy. We used appropriate music to accompany this and the group seemed to enjoy that and the other music in the session. It was great to have the enthusiastic and committed involvement of carers and centre workers in the whole session. It felt like it was a truly inclusive experience.

COMMENTS FROM SERVICE USERS

I enjoyed the dancing

People enjoyed the music

What can we do to keep ourselves mobile?

It was alright

I liked it - all of it

It got me frustrated "she doesn't like to sit in one place for too long."

Faruk liked dancing

I liked the film

The film was interesting

The film was OK

Me and my mum nearly always go to the pictures. She has a special pass.

(one Mom explained how she and her grown up son are often treated badly at leisure centres etc and told to go back at different times if they think they're too busy - but he doesn't need any special attention.)

Movement session - Brownhills - 11 October 2010

A very animated session today by all participants - service users and support workers. The space was large, airy and light which was very conducive to a good session. Participants came up with lots of ideas throughout the session which I tried to integrate. These ranged from movement ideas when particular types of music were played, to ideas for mimes of a sport or leisure activity which we did towards the end of the session.

We did some of the movement activities we have done before like the massage circle, breathing and stretching, pass the mime, as well as some new things like 'the elastic circle'. This is a big piece of elastic tied together to make a circle, which everyone holds and uses to make movement. This worked very well for some participants who were able to access the activity in a more involved way. It was a session full of humour and vitality.

Movement session - Willenhall Community Base - 12 October 2010

There was a lot of participation in today's session by service-users and workers. Including ourselves there were 16 in the movement session. Three service-users preferred not to join in formally, but made the odd contribution as we went along which was very welcome. The space was good and atmosphere friendly and conducive to the session.

There were many elements today done in previous sessions - face-pulling, pass the mime, the elastic circle, copy movement etc. I kept the general tone of the movements and exercises quite gentle and low impact to cater for the range of abilities in the group and also because I don't know them and their issues. It was great that one of the workers made notes of what we were doing to integrate into their usual 'keep fit' sessions. The more ideas get spread around the better and it seems like this is partly what this project is about. We had a good time this morning with plenty of fun and humour - it was a playful experience.

COMMENTS BY SERVICE-USERS

I enjoyed it

I'd like to try shot putt again

I want to go to an exercise class

I've done swimming - I've got a lot of medals..... 'er 'as aswell!
(referring to Yvonne)

Thank you for coming

I've got a video for keep fit

2 people had computers at home they used

I can do first aid

COMMENTS BY WORKERS

Years ago all the centres went to a stadium somewhere and had an annual sports day. A lot of people would like to do that again.

Goscote's got quite a bit of land.

It might be a bit uneven!

How much is the Go-Karting? Are there any concessionary rates?

How do you stand on risk assessments and health and safety with all that then?

They've got to be allowed to take risks really, haven't they?

Isn't it difficult to park near the museum?

Movement session - Pleck Community Base - 13th October 2010

An inspiring session today in an inspiring environment, where there was plenty and varied activity already going on. I found the staff and service-users very open to what we were doing. There seemed to be a lot of enjoyment taken from the session and certainly a lot of participation. During 'elastic circle' and copy movement there were a lot of movement ideas generated and much enthusiasm.

When it came to miming activities individuals might like to try , there were some new ones like boxing, meditation and golf but it was also clear much was already happening - like ice-skating, swimming about to start, regular keep fit, fishing and so on.

COMMENTS FROM SERVICE - USERS

I go shopping in Walsall every Saturday

I enjoyed it all

I've brought my own dinner

We all enjoyed the film.

John enjoyed the miming

I like playing skittles

I'm doing my Gold Duke of Edinburgh with Mencap. I did embroidery for my hobby; my voluntary work with the church here; and I've done a diabetic book with Anthony. We launched it. I do crochet as well and I've got the all-clear to go swimming. I can do everything myself.

COMMENTS FROM WORKERS AND CARER

We do cooking here and they take it home for their tea

They go shopping every week for all the tea, coffee and biscuits we use each week.

Exercise - it's important to do a bit every day.

The staff here work damned hard. Phillip goes out regularly now.

He didn't before (Carer)

He sits and watches the bowling now and one day he may have a go he says. One step at a time.

Now we know Glen wants to try golf, we can set that up. We've learnt something from today.

Film Voice-over Script (Appendix 2)

Getting out and about, joining in activities and being active, all help to keep us healthy.

Some people enjoy really energetic activities, like football and running. Some people enjoy more gentle activities like swimming and yoga. And most of us enjoy social activities like going to the cinema, where we can be with our friends as well as being out and about.

All of these things are good for our minds and our bodies.

There are lots of activities to do in Walsall, probably more than you ever imagined. Some of them are free, like walking in the park, and others cost a couple of pounds every time you go. (Script to end of stills slideshow).

(Gym Footage Section)

There are lots of gyms, swimming pools and sports places in Walsall. They are very easy to join and not too expensive. You can really work on your fitness plan there. But there are also lots of other things you could do to be healthy and have fun. Let's have a look at some of them.

(Others pieces)

Going out with your friends can make you feel really happy.

Some activities may be a little scary at first, and you may have to overcome your fears to get the most out of them.

Some places will have their own rules, and they are there to keep you safe. You should always listen very carefully to the rules, and follow any instructions given.

You may need special clothes or equipment for some activities and there is usually someone available to give you a hand if you tell them you need some assistance.

As you have seen there are lots of ways to be active and have fun in Walsall. So get Up, go out, do something and enjoy it.