Dundee, focusing on the most disadvantaged communities across the city.

Green exercise including walking, jogging and pram pushing groups are an important part of the wide range of activities through which Dundee Healthy Living Initiative (DHLI) provides opportunities and support to enable communities to address their own health issues and needs.

Health benefits
- 88% of DHLI’s physical activity survey respondents reported positive changes in fitness and physical health, which in turn will help reduce risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity and muscular skeletal conditions.
- 92% of survey respondents reported improved mental well-being (25% reported improved mood and 22% increased self-confidence).
- Weight loss with consequent physical health improvements.
- Children benefit from improved well-being of parents through pram walking groups and other activities.

Keys to success and learning points
- Partnership working with other agencies is key to achieving the project’s aims of improving and promoting community health and well-being. However, the most important partners are the community.
- A holistic community development led approach to health improvement embracing all aspects of, and influences on, health and well-being is fundamental to success.
- Identifying community health needs on an ongoing basis, and effective demonstration of health benefits of the project, has been highly influential in securing and maintaining funding.
- Built-in monitoring and evaluation is essential in demonstrating how the project contributes to strategic priorities from Dundee’s Single Outcome Agreements, which include:
  - Our children will be safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included
  - Our people will experience fewer health inequalities
  - Our people will have improved physical and mental well-being
  - Our people will have high quality and accessible local services and facilities
- Stories from the heart, with participants recounting their own success stories as a result of being involved in the DHLI, are very effective in convincing others of the real benefits of the project.
- Joint brainstorming sessions with other organisations, such as the NHS, help identify how community-led health improvement can be integrated into other organisations’ delivery mechanisms and enable the benefits of the DHLI to ripple out much more widely than would otherwise be possible.
More about the project

Dundee Healthy Living Initiative started in 1993 as a small community health project. Successful demonstration of the benefits of this project helped secure Big Lottery funding in 2003 to establish a much more ambitious and wide-reaching multi-agency partnership project with the aim of providing a range of accessible, locally based, enjoyable, health promoting activities for people living in disadvantaged communities. On expiry of the four-year Big Lottery grant, funding was secured from NHS Tayside and Dundee City Council, supplemented by project specific funding such as smoking cessation services.

DHLI’s holistic approach to health improvement is reflected in its multi-disciplinary team which includes community health workers, nurses and a volunteer development worker who work alongside administration, monitoring and management staff in organising activities, offering lifestyle advice and signposting to other agencies. Community engagement and involvement has been integral throughout, encouraging people to identify their own health issues and needs, and supporting them in finding solutions to these. An initial survey asked 1400 local people to identify community health needs, and then invited suggestions as to what could be done to improve health and well-being. Key issues identified included social isolation, poor mental well-being, high incidence of smoking, lack of exercise opportunities, life circumstances and lack of advice and information. Over 70 weekly activity classes and health information points have been developed in direct response to local interest and demand. In 2010/11, 6,737 individuals benefitted from involvement in DHLI, of whom nearly 2,000 participated in physical activity groups.

Outdoor activities such as weekly walking groups attract hundreds of participants each week, providing something for everyone, regardless of their age or ability. Participants range in age from 18 to 87, some using wheelchairs or brought by minibus from a nursing home to enable them to join the walks. Others may have learning difficulties or conditions such as Asperger’s Syndrome, and many simply appreciate the opportunity for social interaction as much as the physical benefits of the walks.

Short, safe, easy weekly walks of 10-15 minutes in city parks offer an ideal starting point, and also appeal to those facing significant mobility challenges. Participants may then choose to progress to longer walks or more challenging activities, such as group jogging or Nordic walking. Establishing and maintaining a high community profile, continuity of walking groups and staff are all influential in attracting people to the walks. Some people may be signposted by GP practices or the “Keep Well” project which aims to maintain health in 40-64 year olds. Many participants are prompted to join the walking groups by word of mouth recommendation, or in response to regular publicity.

Emphasis throughout is on community led activities, with most group walks led by trained volunteers, the majority of whom are walking group participants. Some physical activity groups go on to be sustained through other organisations. A Keep Well health coach service for people referred by GPs or practice nurses offers motivational interviewing techniques to support patients in addressing lifestyle and well-being issues. The DHLI is being used as the delivery mechanism for a pilot social prescribing scheme linking people with poor mental health and well-being to non-clinical sources of support.

Activities are promoted through DHLI’s “What’s On” leaflet which is widely distributed around health centres and through other organisations. Community health fairs, roving stalls and information points in shopping centres, community flats, pubs and at galas and other public events are also important in signposting people to suitable activities, advice and opportunities. As well as green exercise, DHLI also runs many indoor classes including belly dancing, tai chi, swimming and cooking.

Health checks available at health information points run by DHLI monitor key indicators such as blood pressure. Statistics are fed into databases set up by DHLI which in turn help with evaluation and demonstration of the project’s many health benefits. Weight loss is also regularly monitored through Winning Weighs classes. An annual physical activity survey completed by a large sample of participants in indoor and outdoor activity contributes to project evaluation, helps shape future health promotion and development of activities targeting specific needs.

Future developments include the DHLI working with Ancrum Outdoor Activity Centre, Dundee to offer volunteers development opportunities by further training in Outward Bound Leadership and the opportunity of gaining the Discovery Award for the over 50s.

"Developing skills to help people help themselves is what this project is all about. What really matters is developing something sustainable rather than dependent on us."

"Most people don’t have one single health issue, it’s often more to do with lifestyle, so we work with individuals on a more holistic basis. We encourage people to prioritise for themselves not only their health issues, but also what action they will take to improve their physical and mental health and well-being."

Further information

www.dundeelifehealth.com

Beverley Black, Dundee Health Living Initiative
Project Manager
Tel: 01382 435848 Beverley.black@nhs.net

To find out more about SNH’s work on encouraging green exercise, and the work of the Green Exercise Partnership, visit

www.snh.gov.uk/snh-for-you/health-professionals/

© Scottish Natural Heritage 2012