

Greater Manchester Pivot to Active Wellbeing

Addressing health inequalities through the transformation of public sector leisure services

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ACTIVE WELLBEING CASE STUDY: BRINNINGTON PARK LEISURE COMPLEX AND PLACE-BASED WORKING

1 The venue or service

- ▶ Brinnington Park Leisure complex and place-based working
- ▶ Brinnington, Stockport Borough

2 The aim of the project

Outline the project in a sentence or two.

Brinnington Park Leisure Complex officially opened in March 2018 providing a gym, aerobics studio, boxing gym, four court sports hall and an outdoor 3G football pitch. It quickly became a focal point and asset for the local community, with membership sales exceeding expectations in the first few months. But the impact of COVID on activity levels highlighted a need for the centre to adapt and have a greater impact on the local community, which experiences deprivation in various ways:

- It is in the top 2% of deprived wards in England
- 44% of residents living live in income poverty
- Rates of employment and educational attainment are low.
- Brinnington residents have lower life expectancy and lower healthy life expectancy. On average people in Brinnington live 7 fewer years that the Stockport average and the decline in health starts at age 55, compared to 71 in the most affluent areas.
- Brinnington residents have the highest rates of poor mental health in the country and 46% of people with a mental health problem have a long-term health condition.
- Brinnington has three times the unemployment rate of Stockport as a whole.

So three objectives emerged for BPLC:

- How can we evolve the centre into a community hub?
- How did we engage with the disengaged?
- What impact can we have across all parts of the community?

The operator, Life Leisure, took a place-based approach to addressing these objectives, drawing on the guidance and resources of the Greater Manchester Local Delivery Pilot, funded by Sport England.

3 The work undertaken

The first step was to carry out extensive conversations with residents and partners in Brinnington. This required new consultation methods as traditional surveys and direct questions had typically generated with limited interest. So Life Leisure deliberately started with open questions about the area, focusing on the positives, taking a strength-based approach and developing trust and relationships. This gave them key insights from local residents.

The next step was to look at what else the centre could offer. While the peak times were well used for traditional sport and fitness activities, there was plenty of space capacity during off peak hours. This provided an opportunity to engage local people who might not otherwise use a leisure centre. So, bringing together the needs identified by local residents and the opportunities afforded by spare off peak capacity, the centre staff and the Active Communities team worked together to develop the following:

- Partners who could help change perceptions of how and why a leisure space is used
- Community organisations which could host meetings, forums and social groups for local people
- Wider services such as Age UK Stockport digital inclusion, cardiac rehab and weight management programmes
- Engagement opportunities outside the centre which could support referral pathways into the centre
- Removal financial barriers to accessing the centre.

The new services and activities

- Youth engagement with over 50 young people a week, allowing youth workers and Life Leisure staff an opportunity to consult with them on future provision.
- Offices, meeting spaces and workshops for community use. Creating new spaces has changed perceptions of the ways in which the centre is used and what resource is available.
- The 'I Wish I'd Tried programme' was moved to Brinnington to use the sports hall space during the day, in addition to accessing other parts of the facility.
- The expansion of the Life Leisure Kids programme including a refresh of the Mini Movers programme and teenage provision.
- Introduction of the Holiday Activity and Food programme as part of the Life Leisure holiday provision. Free access to enriching activities including sports, games, healthy eating, arts and crafts and media workshops for young people.
- Inclusive by Design principles and support from partners such as the Seashell Trust and the local authority to assess how accessibility can be improved. The knowledge about supporting families with SEND and the barriers that people face when accessing a facility has improved through a training programme specific to leisure spaces.
- Community events led and hosted by the centre staff. The centre has been engaging with families across Brinnington and hosting activities and information utilising the skillsets and expertise of local people.
- Staff at the centre, together with the Active Communities team, have been able to offer opportunities that don't necessarily focus on physical activity. For example, the community room in the centre has hosted resident forums, social groups, community engagement work, digital support and charity events.

- Open social sessions have provided a warm space for residents during the winter months, a setting to tackle social isolation and a place for engaging with the community.

4 The impact

In 2022, usage more than doubled from 4441 visits in quarter 1 to 9537 in quarter 3. But equally important are the qualitative measures and personal stories from local residents:

Carol (local resident):

“Going to the coffee morning has been important to me. One day recently I really didn’t want to come along to the social gym, I was feeling tired couldn’t be bothered, but I didn’t want to let anyone in the group down, and I wanted to see you all, so I came.”

Jimmy (local resident and volunteer):

“We basically wanted to try and get people who were socially isolated, get them involved, get them meeting new people and get them moving on to other groups to expand on their support networks. We have a walking group setup from meeting at the centre and we have the digital drop-in to offer more things to get more people involved.”

5 The learning

The main learnings are:

Behaviour and culture change – the traditional aim of a leisure centre is to increase physical activity over the long-term. But a better aim might be to change behaviours around physical and mental well-being through conversations and social activities.

Creating a social movement – local residents are aware of activities and programmes at Brinnington Park because of personal recommendations and word of mouth. This implies a high level of level of trust, which is essential to grow a physical activity habit which in turn leads to improved health and wellbeing.

Sustainability – there’s a need to support and empower communities to be part of programmes and activities, and ultimately for those communities to take ownership of provision, if those activities are to be sustainable.

Delivery designed by local people – it’s important to focus on ideas generated in the community and to support those ideas through funding and capacity support.

Link community assets and organisations – raise awareness of what local assets exist and support partners to develop their ideas using those assets.

Partners’ understanding and awareness – the diverse use of the leisure centre has introduced some partners to the benefits of physical activity.