

Community Activator Programme: An Independent Evaluation

**Programme delivered by
Central YMCA for the Well London Alliance**



**John Chapman, Leisure Futures
December 2010**

INDEX

Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
Aims and Methodology of the Evaluation	13
Well London	17
The Community Activator Programme	19
Experience of the Activators	21
Constraints	30
Impacts	33
Success Factors	41
Sustainability	44
Conclusion	46
Appendix One: Case Studies	47
• <i>Mike, Croydon</i>	
• <i>Claudette, Camden</i>	
• <i>Sarah, Southwark</i>	
• <i>Yama, Greenwich</i>	
• <i>Diane, Hounslow</i>	
• <i>Lenora, North Kensington</i>	
Appendix Two: Research materials	48
• <i>Training questions</i>	
• <i>Activator semi-structured interview questions @ 3 months</i>	
• <i>Activator semi-structured interview questions @ 6 months</i>	
• <i>Participant survey questionnaire @ 3 months</i>	
• <i>Participant survey questionnaire @ 6 months</i>	

INTRODUCTION

In January 2010 Central YMCA commissioned Leisure Futures to undertake an independent evaluation of The Community Activator Programme. This programme is part of the much larger Well London Alliance's programme being delivered across 20 boroughs in London by a partnership headed by the London Health Commission and funded through the BIG Lottery's (BIG) Well-being fund.

During the course of the evaluation, the author met staff at Central YMCA engaged in the programme, the lead project Mentor engaged to provide specialist support to the Activators, the majority of the Activators themselves, and a number of the people they successfully engaged in regular exercise from within their local communities. My thanks to everyone, but particularly to the Activators, for their time and contributions which were invaluable. All views, opinions and judgements are my own – as are any errors and omissions.

John Chapman
Leisure Futures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an independent evaluation of The Community Activator Programme. It assesses the extent to which the Community Activator Programme achieved its objectives in terms of its outputs and outcomes. It reviews the process underpinning the Programme. It analyses the experience of the Activators and the impact of the Programme on the Activators themselves. And it looks at issues of sustainability for the Programme.

Well London is a pan London three year programme that aims to bring new ways to deliver improvements in the physical and mental well being of Londoners. Between 2008 and 2011 it will have delivered 14 different project-strands in 20 of London's most deprived communities. It is delivered by the Well London Alliance, a partnership of seven independent organisations, and funded by The Big Lottery.

Initial consultation towards the design of the Well London programme showed that, across all 20 communities, physical inactivity and social isolation were issues and priorities to be addressed; issues because of high incidence in these neighbourhoods of poor physical and mental health and low recorded rates of participation (evidenced in surveys such as Active People); priorities because there were few facilities or activities available for and affordable to people in the local neighbourhoods.

In response to the consultation, Well London Partners agreed the need for a programme of physical activity and that CYMCA was best suited to lead this programme. Through some of its own initiatives, (as well as the evaluation findings from the recent national lottery-funded 'Activate England' programme led by YMCA England), the CYMCA Well London team recognised that people are more likely to be engaged and motivated into lifestyle behaviour change by their peers and neighbours – in other words 'people like them' - than by external sports and health development workers parachuted into neighbourhoods. In response, the team developed the Community Activator Programme as one strand of its physical activity themed Well London project, 'Activate London'.

The Programme ran for approximately a year to November 2010 and comprised four elements –

- **Recruitment of Community Activators:** Recruiting individuals from the 20 Well London communities with the personal interest, motivation and potential to engage with local people who are either inactive or insufficiently active for good health (*November to January*)
- **Training in Community activation:** Delivery of an intensive four-day training course. The curriculum and course manual was designed by YMCAfit, CYMCA's dedicated training arm, and accredited by the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority as leading to an National Vocational Qualification (*the course ran over two full weekends in February*)

- **Mentor support:** Each Activator who completed the training course was assigned a personal mentor. The mentors' role was to provide assistance and advice to the Activators with the planning, promotion and delivery of their activities, with record keeping and with planning for sustaining impacts achieved (*Mentors were engaged from February to November*).
- **A budget:** While the Activators gave their time to the programme voluntarily (i.e. un-paid) a budget was made available to each Activator who successfully completed the training. This budget was provided to support the planning, promotion and delivery of the activities and the sustainability of impacts achieved (*a maximum of £3,000 per Activator subject to a process of approvals*).

The CYMCA Well London Project Manager managed the Programme supported by the Project Administrator and, during the recruitment phase, by the three CYMCA Well London Delivery team members. The training elements were designed and managed by the Executive Director of YMCAfit who also led the delivery of the training, supported by a second experienced tutor from the YMCAfit team. The mentors were provided and co-ordinated by Changebox, a private sector training company, supporting organisations that seek to engage, support and accredit young people from socially and economically deprived backgrounds. This independent evaluation was managed by the CYMCA's Head of Public Policy & Campaigns.

The first target was to recruit volunteers from across the 20 Well London areas. In the event, 25 Activators were recruited from across 15 of the 20 Well London areas. 23 of the 25 attended at least one of the four training days, 20 completed the training, and 19 – just over three quarters of those recruited (76%) - achieved the Community Activator qualification. These 19 represented a total of 11 Well London areas across all five London sub-regions (north, south, east, west and central).

17 of the 25 people recruited to the Programme and achieving the qualification standard, then went on to plan and promote activities. Of these, 16 succeeded in activating people in their communities (i.e. 64% of those recruited).

At the outset, to help the Activators to quantify the extent of the commitment of time expected, they were provided with targets to plan, promote and deliver 20 sessions of activity in their communities within six months, and to engage with and encourage 15 to 20 people to register on the Programme.

While a few of the Activators fell short of these targets, most exceeded them by some distance. As at mid-November, 13 of the 16 Activators (81%) had successfully delivered 20 or more activity sessions, with the other three each delivering between 14 and 19 sessions.

By mid-November, the 16 Activators had succeeded in recruiting a total of 380 different people to specific activity sessions. While there was a good deal of variance by individual Activator, as an average, this equates to just over 23 registrations each.

The output summary data collated by Changebox from the individual Activators' session registers shows that the average number of sessions attended per participant was 15. Our own questionnaire surveys of the participants and interviews with the Activators evidence that all who engaged in the sessions exercised for at least 30 minutes at moderate intensity once a week. Half (50%) of respondents to the first survey in July had attended more than five sessions. By November, when the second survey was carried out, four fifths (80%) had attended more than five times, approaching two thirds (63%) more than 11 times and 40% more than 15 times. This indicates that the majority of people stayed on the Programme for at least three months and a significant proportion for longer.

Over half the Programme participants live in a Well London area. Nearly three quarters are female and two thirds are from BME groups. The gender and ethnicity profiles are similar to those of the Activator team themselves. People from right across the age range have taken part. The majority are not in work or full time education or training and do not have further or higher educational qualifications.

Overall, the experience of the Activators has been very positive. They have relished the challenge of realising their own projects. They found the training and the qualification empowering and considered the support and help given by mentors as central to their enjoyment and achievements. Activators interviewed reported improvements in their skills and capacities across a wide range of organisational, social and life skills. Their motivations included a mix of self-development, altruism, belonging (to an area or group) and enjoyment. In nearly all cases, their aspirations and ambitions have been raised.

At mid-November (8 months after completing the Activator training), 13 of the 16 Activators (81% of those who started activating) were committed to continuing to deliver regular sessions of physical activity in their communities and were successfully 'linked in' to local organisations to help sustain the activities they had either initiated or developed. This equates to just over two thirds (68%) of those who achieved the Activator NVQ qualification. Most have also taken the opportunity presented by the programme budget to develop their skills and knowledge by doing additional training. From our interviews, we consider it highly likely that at least ten of the Activators will continue to volunteer in their local communities in some capacity for the foreseeable future.

As a pilot programme, there have been learning points. These should be acknowledged and taken into consideration by CYMCA and other organisations that may be considering running similar programmes in future.

The learning points arising from our evaluation of the Community Activator Programme relate chiefly to planning and communication issues –

- **Be clear about the extent and voluntary basis of the commitment during the recruitment phase.** The pilot Programme suffered a lack of clarity in the recruitment phase leading to miscommunication. For example, some recruited to the training were led to believe they would receive payment, some that the duration of the commitment would be shorter than six months. This resulted in a few dropping out before or on the first training weekend.
- **Recognise the time it takes to effect behaviour change and allow for this in planning the programme.** All but a few of the Activators found it took months not weeks to engage non-participants and that, once engaged, many required constant encouragement to continue in regular exercise.
- **Ensure protocols and arrangements for public liability insurance, CRB checks and use of the budget are in place and communicated to the volunteer Activators before the end of the training.** Failure to do this resulted in delays in starting session delivery for a few of the Activators who were new to this type of work and therefore did not already have a CRB clearance and their own insurance. For these individuals, the delays caused some initial loss of enthusiasm for the Programme post training. They and their mentors had to work hard to overcome this and regain momentum.
- **Make use of technology to minimise paperwork.** Some Activators struggled to cope with the necessary paperwork and others felt it took up too much time. Mobile phone and PDA options are available and proven to work effectively on similar programmes (e.g. Street League).
- **Be realistic about targeting specific areas or communities.** As illustrated in several of the Case Studies in this report, in some instances the Well London model of interventions – i.e. tightly focussed on communities living in specific ‘Lower Super Output Areas’ - has worked very well for the Programme. In some other instances, the geographical boundaries of the Well London areas bear little relationship to the reality on the ground, and the activity has taken place some distance away.

The key to success is for the Activator to work within his or her own peer networks and to establish trust and a personal following. There are also advantages to be gained from attracting a wider base of participants from beyond the boundaries of an estate or a noted area of deprivation. For example, it can help overcome misconceptions and social barriers. A wider draw can also help sustain the activities established.

The Community Activator Programme was evaluated against:

Four issues of process i.e.

1. The identification and recruitment of Activators by the CYMCA Team
The Author considers the recruitment was largely successful in that almost two thirds of the individuals identified and recruited have become successful trained volunteer community activators operating in more than half the Well London boroughs.
2. The YMCAfit training and its component elements
The Community Activator training course and its component elements, including the training manual, was very well received by the Activators, including by those attending who did not achieve the required standard.
3. Post-training support provided to the Activators
Similarly, with one or two exceptions, the Activators have greatly appreciated and valued the mentoring support provided – and the availability of a programme budget – which, together, have worked to support their activities and their continuing personal development and training. The exceptions relate to frustrations caused by not having the necessary insurances and CRB checks in place in March and a lack of clarity on the approvals processes for use and release of funds from the programme budgets. The Author considers these support issues, while causing delay and a loss of momentum for some individuals at the time, were a failing of programme planning not the mentor team. In the event, while resulting in extended the timescales, these issues were resolved with little impact on the programme outcomes and provide valuable learning for the planning of future programmes.
4. The process for assimilating feedback from the Activators
The main element of the feedback process – i.e. regular contacts between the Activators and their mentors, plus bi-monthly written feedback prepared by the mentor to guide future support – worked well. Despite efforts in the Programme planning and set up phase to ensure the monitoring forms were as simple as possible, maintaining the registration and session attendance paperwork proved problematic for several of the Activators. In the Author's view, efforts should be made in future similar programmes to eliminate paperwork through use of mobile phone and PDA technologies.

The Programme was also evaluated against four specific outputs i.e.

5. The number of Activators who go on to activate others
In the Author's opinion, the 'hit rate' achieved of 64% is high given the lack of prior experience of a significant proportion of the volunteers recruited to the training.

6. The number of Activators who continue to use the training
After three months, all 16 of those who started activating continued to use the training and deliver sessions. At mid-November (8 months after completing the training), 13 of the 16 Activators were committed to continuing to deliver regular sessions of physical activity in their communities and were 'linked in' to local organisations to help sustain the activities they had either initiated or developed.
7. The number and profile of individuals recruited into activity
The 16 Activators succeeded in recruiting a total of 380 people into specific activity sessions. In the Author's view, the average of over 23 registrations per Activator is evidence of a high level of success. The profile of the individuals recruited shows a good match with the area BME profiles and clear success in engaging people from low participating groups in activity – particularly females and people with low incomes.
8. The number continuing in activity
The majority stayed on the Programme for at least three months and a significant proportion for longer. Encouragingly, over three quarters of respondents to the second survey in November (78.9%) said they would continue to exercise regularly if their Activator session were to end.

And against two outcomes i.e.

9. Impacts of the Programme on the Activators themselves
The author's interviews with 13 of the Activators and the feedback from the mentor team evidence that the Programme had a very significant impact on most of the Activators. In addition to the improved motivation, confidence, knowledge and skills of individuals that has resulted from the Community Activator training and qualification, most have also grasped the opportunity afforded by the Programme for further training and capacity building. Between them, the Activators have completed 22 additional training courses during the course of the Programme. This capacity building increases the likelihood of their continuing in community activation in either paid or voluntary capacities in the future.
10. Impacts of the Programme on those recruited into activity
*Similarly, the quantitative evidence indicates that the Programme has been successful in encouraging participation by people in the Activators' communities and impacted positively on their levels of physical activity, their eating choices and wider aspects of their well being including making friends and motivation and confidence.
The evidence also suggests that a proportion of these positive impacts will be sustained. As for the people the Activators have engaged in physical activity and more healthy lifestyles, many of these have gained the habit of exercise as a result of the Programme and these individuals will continue to spread these positive messages with friends, family members and neighbours in their communities.*

The key success factors underpinning the Community Activator Programme were –

- **The Activators themselves:** The commitment, perseverance and personal qualities of the individual Activators who were recruited to the Programme have been the fundamental factors behind the success of the Community Activator pilot. The prior knowledge and experience of the YMCA of working in deprived areas with hard to reach communities and the skills and personal qualities needed for effective community engagement contributed to successful recruitment.
- **The Programme design and its component elements:** The Project Team brought this knowledge and experience fully to bear in the design of the Programme and its component elements. This resulted in the focus on high quality training and mentor support and a programme budget to support delivery. The decision to name the role ‘Community Activator’ has proved empowering for those less experienced volunteers by affording a status in the local community and something to live up to.
- **The quality and relevance of the training:** The overall quality and relevance of the training was rated very highly by the Activators both immediately following the course and some months later when their view was informed by their experiences delivering the Programme.
- **The revenue budget:** Having a revenue budget was critical to the Programme’s success. While the size of the budget was a little larger than was needed for some of the initiatives (particularly the lower cost health walk projects), the availability of the budget was critical to many of the activities taking place at all. It is certain that the new indoor activities established by the Activators require a modest but sustained budget to continue long term.
- **Mentoring in the early months:** Where the Activators had no or little prior relevant experience, the mentors have been central and crucial to their achievements both in terms of the outcomes they achieved for participants and their own confidence and development, particularly in the early months.
- **External Support:** Without exception, the Activators have benefited from support in what they have set out to achieve from people in locally based organisations (in both voluntary and public sectors) and/or the local Well London programme coordinators. This external support has helped the Activators locally, both in getting ‘linked in’ during the early days and in finding ways to sustain the activities generated beyond the Programme timescales.
- **Allowing freedom to make and learn from mistakes:** A notable strength of this pilot, highlighted by several of the Activators, was the level of responsibility placed on their shoulders and the learning that resulted for being allowed to make their own mistakes.

Most of these elements can easily be replicated by other organisations though local support is dependent on the existing capacity of the community in the targeted areas now that the Well London programme is coming to an end.

Looking to the future

In terms of sustainability, the potential possibilities for new funding to support the continued delivery of those sessions where the Activators have not succeeded in 'mainstreaming' the sessions with another organisation could include:

- **The Sport England 2012 Legacy Strategy 'Places, People, Play'** - 40,000 new sports and physical activity leaders to be funded under the 'People' element of the strategy
- **Big Lottery Awards for All England** – grants of up to £10,000 for health and wellbeing programmes engaging disadvantaged groups and in areas of deprivation
- **Sport England Small Grants** – grants of up to £10,000 for recognised sports programmes where applicant affiliated to the sport's national governing body
- **The Mayor's Sports Participation Fund** – This fund has a balance of £1.6m available. The next application round is to open in Spring 2011. Grants to total value of £2.4m were awarded to 18 projects in December 2010 including several initiatives aimed at engaging volunteers in helping to stimulate regular participation in sport and physical activity particularly in the most deprived areas of London e.g. *Access Sport: 50 'new model'* (volunteer-led, open access) sports clubs in the Olympic Boroughs; *Active Communities Network: six 'Sport for Social Change Networks'* providing estate-/community-based participation programmes, volunteering, mentoring and training opportunities; *Reach & Teach: volunteer training, coach education etc.* leading to formation of new community basketball clubs across London.

Access to grants will be subject to Activators partnering with an eligible applicant organisation. CYMCA and other third sector organisations could also consider making funding applications to these and other funding bodies, either alone or in partnership.

Looking to the longer term, the Community Activator model fits well with the Government's Big Society cultural change agenda. Four current pilot projects include one in the London Borough of Sutton.

One of Sutton Council's Big Society pilot initiatives, based at its new Life Centre, is *'to train a new generation of active citizens who can support the creation of neighbourhood groups particularly in deprived areas'*.

Subject to the success of this project in Sutton, the other pilot projects and the progress of the Government's financing proposals for a Big Society Bank to make available to social organisations money from dormant bank and building society accounts, there may be an opportunity for CYMCA to secure funding from this source for future Community Activator programmes.

There is also the opportunity to sustain the impacts through the more successful of the Activators acting as ambassadors or mentors talking to agencies and organisations about their experiences on the pilot and using their expertise to help develop similar programmes.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

The overall aim of the evaluation is to assess how successful the CYMCA Community Activator project model was at engaging people in the more deprived communities in London in physical activity and in sustaining participation.

The scope of the evaluation was to cover issues of process (i.e. how the programme was delivered), as well as the outputs and outcomes achieved.

More specifically, the scope of the evaluation was:

1. Process

- The identification and recruitment of the Activators by the CYMCA Active London Team
- The YMCAfit training and its component elements
- Post-training support provided to the Activators – i.e. development budget, mentoring
- The process for assimilating feedback from the Activators – e.g. success factors (what works), barriers and how best to overcome these

2. Outputs

- The number of Activators who went on to make use of the training to activate others
- The number of Activators who continued to use the training after 3 months and after 6 months (i.e. sustainability)
- The number and profile of individuals recruited into activity by the Activators
- The number continuing in activity after 3 months and after 6 months

3. Outcomes

- Impacts of the programme on the Activators themselves
- Impacts of the programme on those recruited into activity.

The evaluation was carried out as follows –

- Initial briefing discussions in January with members of the CYMCA project team to clarify and agree the evaluation aims, to gather information about the programme, its management, recruitment activity and results to date, and to scope and agree the detailed evaluation approach to include a mix of session observation and interviews with a sample of Activators and quantitative surveys of a sample of participants.
- Liaison with the Executive Director of YMCAfit and initial desk and background research on the Community Activator Training Package.
- Liaison with the Director of Changebox to clarify the arrangements put in place for mentoring support, the programme budget to be made available to the Activators and directions for its use.
- Support to CYMCA and Changebox in developing programme monitoring tools for use by the Activators, namely a Participant Registration Form and a Session Register to record who attends each session.
- Development of research tools for the evaluation (see Appendix Two) including:
 - Semi-structured interview templates for use with the sample of Activators after three months and after six months
 - Short questionnaires for use with the trainee Activators at the start and on completion of the YMCAFit training course
 - Questionnaire forms for use with participants after three months and again after six months.

The three and six month timescales were agreed with the client as providing a good proxy indication of the sustainability of outcomes, based on evidence to suggest that, for most people, it takes at least three months for a habit of regularly exercising to become established. The interview templates and questionnaires were agreed with CYMCA prior to commencing the fieldwork. The questionnaires were designed so as to also provide data required for the overall evaluation of the Well London programme. Consideration was also given in the design process to the opportunity to collect common data to that being collected by The University of Westminster from participants in the CYMCA's 'Workplace Activator' programme.

The semi-structured interviews with the sample of Activators included some questions that asked the Activator to rate aspects of the Community Activator Programme on a five-point scale.

For instance, Activators were asked to rate the relevance of the content of the training course with 1 = Content Not At All Relevant, 2 = Some Content Not Relevant, 3 = No View Either Way, 4 = Content Quite Relevant, and 5 = Content Very Relevant. This approach helped to establish the extent to which there is a consensus amongst the Activators on aspects of the programme.

- Observation of the final day of the YMCAfit Community Activator training course held at One KX, introduction of the Leisure Futures programme evaluation team and the evaluation process to the delegates, and conduct of exit survey of the trainees at the end of the day.
- Meeting individually with 13 of the Activators in their communities in late June and July to conduct semi structured interviews and to brief the Activators concerning the conduct in August of the first survey of participants they had succeeded in engaging at this stage of the programme (circa three months for the majority). In the course of these meetings, the author observed some sessions and spoke with participants about how they became aware of the programme, why they decided to take part and the perceived benefits.
- Interim progress review meeting in August at CYMCA including selection of six Activators to track as case studies to provide a spread of examples by London sub-region, by age and prior experience of the Activator and by activity type (health walk, circuits, dance etc).
- Follow up contacts with the Activators to secure responses to the first survey of participants. A total of 84 completed forms were received for data input and analysis.
- Case study visits to six projects including observing the sessions, talking with the Activators, partners and participants, and organising photos and consents in liaison with professional photographer.
- Follow-up interviews by telephone with Activators in October / November (including three who left the programme in September) to review their experiences and ratings and to explore sustainability of impacts.
- Distribution of a follow-up questionnaire in October / November to further test the sustainability of the outcomes among participants. A total of 78 completed were received for data input and analysis.
- Liaison with Changebox concerning the summary output data collated from the participant registration forms and session registers. Review of this data and of the bi-monthly 'feedback sheets' provided by the mentors on each Activator on the programme.

This evaluation includes quantitative data where available from the output summary and from the questionnaire survey of the Activators post training and of participants in their sessions. However, it is primarily a qualitative evaluation. As such, it focuses on the experience and views of the Activators (recounted mainly in the Case Studies of individual Activators at Appendix One), the structure of the Community Activator Programme, the impacts and achievements of the programme, the constraints which limited these outcomes or made them more difficult to attain, the success factors underlying the programme, and whether the programme could be sustained post-BIG funding.

To ensure that the programme was assessed on what it set out to do, the impacts and achievements of the Community Activator Programme were assessed against the aims set out for the programme. These are –

- To encourage and support people living in the Well London areas to become active citizens within their communities
- To develop the skills, capacities, confidence and qualifications of those active citizens who volunteer towards achieving their potential as activators
- To engage with and encourage residents in the Well London areas to achieve a range of 'behaviour change' outcomes, most particularly take up of regular physical activity.

WELL LONDON

Introduction

Well London (WL) is a pan London programme that aims to bring new ways to deliver improvements in the physical and mental well-being of Londoners. The aim is to deliver co-ordinated, sustainable grass-roots projects in 20 of London's most deprived communities.

WL is funded by The Big Lottery (BIG) and delivered by the Well London Alliance, a partnership of seven independent organisations –

- London Health Commission
- Groundwork London
- London Sustainability Exchange (LSx)
- Central YMCA (CYMCA)
- University of East London (UEL)
- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM)
- Arts Council England, London (ACE, London)

Gestation and Development of Well London

The gestation and development of WL is complex. In 2006, different agencies in London mounted separate expressions of interest for funding from BIG's Well-being Fund. In response, BIG brought the agencies together to discuss their bids and, from this initial meeting, the agencies agreed to form a partnership (which became WL) so that together they could take a holistic approach to health and well-being.

At this stage, UEL came in to help develop the concept and approach. A model of intervention was designed to track explicitly the health impacts of WL. To do this, two similar 'Lower Super Output Areas' in each of 20 London boroughs were selected. All were amongst the 11% most deprived LSOAs in London. One LSOA in each borough was then selected randomly to be the target for all WL programmes in that borough; the other LSOA would act as a baseline or comparator: research at the end of the WL programme would determine the differences in health and other indicators in the two LSOAs as a guide to the impacts of the WL programmes.

(A LSOA typically has around 2,000 population and is the smallest 'building block' for census and demographic research purposes. Three or more LSOAs are then grouped into SOAs which in turn are grouped into wards and borough-wide units. However, while suitable for census and research purposes, the geographical borders of LSOAs rarely fit with local perceptions of community.

Inevitably, LSOAs also vary in terms of local resources in their area – both facilities (e.g. community centres and halls) and community organisations – with some WL LSOAs being strikingly deficient in these resources.)

The WL bid to BIG was for approx. £20 million. In response to this, BIG offered funding of approx. £10 million. In the light of this offer, WL Partners decided to scale back their programmes across the 20 boroughs from Hounslow in the west to Barking & Dagenham in the east, from Enfield in the north to Croydon in the south.

In total, the seven WL Partners are committed to delivering 14 different project-strands of two kinds, ‘Heart of the community projects’ and ‘Theme projects’ –

Heart of the community projects

- **CADBE** (UEL)
- **Youth.com** (CYMCA)
- **Well London Delivery teams** (LSx and CYMCA)
- **Training communities** (SlAM)
- **Wellnet** (LSx)
- **Active Living Map** (Groundwork London)

Theme projects

- **Be Creative, Be Well** project based on the Culture and Tradition theme (ACE, London)
- **Buywell** and **Eatwell** projects based on the Healthy Eating theme (LSx)
- **DIY Happiness, Mental well-being Impact Assessment, and Changing minds** projects based on the Mental health and well-being theme (SlAM)
- **Healthy Spaces** project based on the Healthy Spaces theme (Groundwork London)
- **Activate London** project based on the Physical activity theme (CYMCA)

In addition each LSOA is managed by one of the Well London Partners, through a ‘Borough Co-ordinator’ for that LSOA. Project priorities are based on the community engagement process.

The WL programme is a three year programme and will run until April 2011.

THE COMMUNITY ACTIVATOR PROGRAMME

Initial consultation towards the design of the Well London programme showed that, across all 20 communities, physical inactivity and social isolation were issues and priorities to be addressed; issues because of high incidence in these neighbourhoods of poor physical and mental health and low recorded rates of participation (evidenced in surveys such as Active People); priorities because there were few facilities or activities available for and affordable to people in the local neighbourhoods.

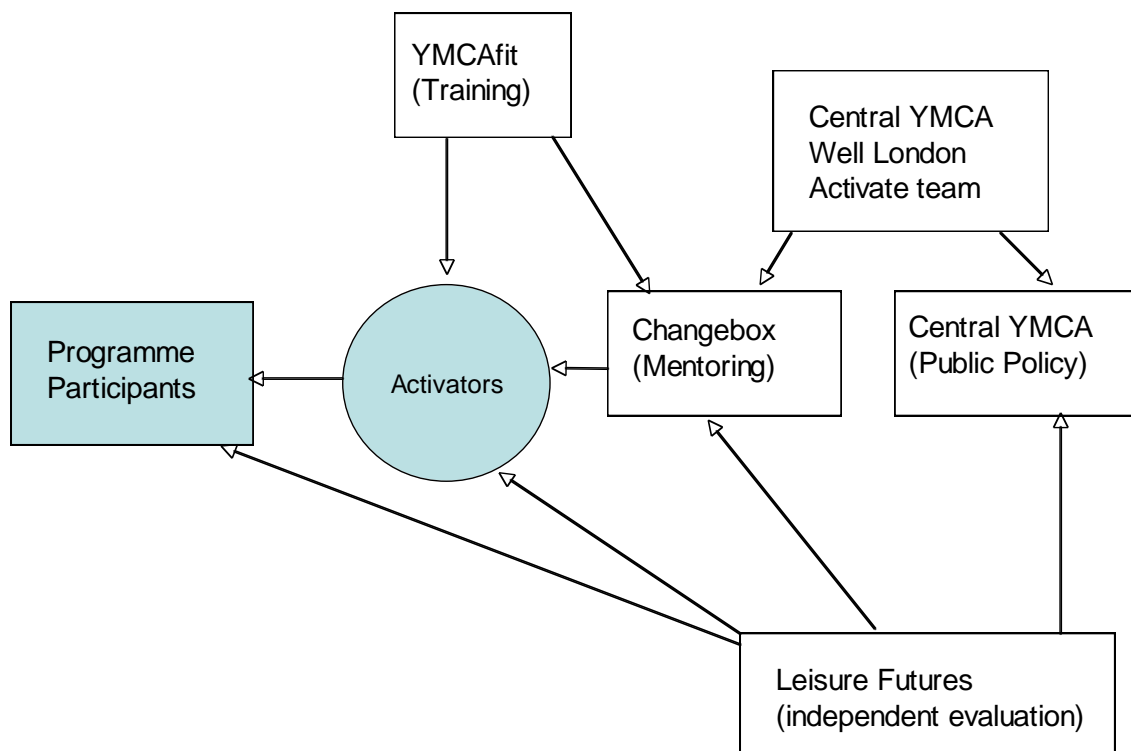
In response to the consultation, Well London Partners agreed the need for a programme of physical activity and that CYMCA was best suited to lead this programme. Through some of its own initiatives, (as well as the evaluation findings from the recent national lottery-funded 'Activate England' programme led by YMCA England), the CYMCA Well London team recognised that people are more likely to be engaged and motivated into lifestyle behaviour change by their peers and neighbours – i.e. 'people like them' - than by external sports and health development workers parachuted into neighbourhoods. In response, CYMCA developed the Community Activator Programme as a strand of its physical activity themed Well London project, 'Activate London'.

The programme ran for approximately a year to November 2010 and comprised four elements –

- **Recruitment of Community Activators:** Recruiting individuals from the 20 Well London communities with the personal interest, motivation and potential to engage with local people who are either inactive or insufficiently active for good health (*November to January*)
- **Training in Community activation:** Delivery of an intensive four-day training course. The curriculum and course manual was designed by YMCAfit, CYMCA's dedicated training arm, and accredited by the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority as leading to an National Vocational Qualification (*the course ran over two full weekends in February*)
- **Mentor support:** Each Activator who completed the training course was assigned a personal mentor. The mentors' role was to provide assistance and advice to the Activators with the planning, promotion and delivery of their activities, with record keeping and with planning for sustaining impacts achieved (*Mentors were engaged from February to November*).
- **A budget:** While the Activators gave their time to the programme voluntarily (i.e. un-paid) a programme budget was made available to each Activator who successfully completed the training. This budget was provided to support the planning, promotion and delivery of the activities and the sustainability of impacts achieved (*a maximum of £3,000 per Activator subject to a process of approvals*).

The CYMCA Well London Project Manager managed the project supported by the Project Administrator and, in the recruitment phase, by the three CYMCA Well London Delivery team members. The training elements were designed and managed by the Executive Director of YMCAfit who also led the delivery of the training, supported by a second experienced tutor from the training team. The mentors were provided and co-ordinated by Changebox, a private sector training company, supporting organisations that seek to engage, support and accredit young people from socially and economically deprived backgrounds. The independent programme evaluation was managed by the CYMCA's Head of Public Policy & Campaigns.

This Programme structure is illustrated in the following diagram:



EXPERIENCE OF THE ACTIVATORS

Recruitment

The CYMCA Well London Delivery team recruited volunteers onto the Programme through their contacts in the Well London areas including the Borough Well London coordinators and local partner organisations. This ensured, as far as possible, that the Activators were from the LSOA and 'representative' of people in the LSOA.

A few of those recruited were living outside the boundaries of the LSOA but with a personal interest in the area through work or other connections. One or two others were former long-term residents who had recently moved out of the area.

Around a half of those recruited had current or prior experience of working in community health and physical activity roles on a voluntary or professional basis or both. The other half were inexperienced but were identified as being interested and engaged in community matters either through their local neighbourhood forum, community centre, SureStart Centre working in their Well London area.

Motivations for joining the Programme were varied including:

- To secure a budget and support to set up an activity session to meet a known demand in the area (*e.g. Toya, White City Estate, girls dance*)
- To expand and sustain an activity the person had recently initiated in the area (*e.g. Winston, Handcroft Estate Broad Green, boys and youth football; Mike, Broad Green, health walks; Diane, Cranford, health walks, yoga*)
- To use professional skills and experience in a voluntary capacity to benefit people with health and exercise needs in the area (*e.g. Megan, Cranford, a physiotherapist; Lenora, North Kensington, a nurse working with adults with learning disabilities; Sarah, Nunhead, a teacher*)
- To improve personal fitness and confidence (*e.g. Sheila and Amanda, South Acton Estate, walks and circuits respectively; Lenora, North Kensington*)
- Professional development (*e.g. Altesse, Broad Green, a professional sports coach and volunteer at a local church, seeking training and a qualification in a complementary area*)
- To give others in the area the opportunities they themselves had experienced in the last year through attending Well London activities (*e.g. Yama, Barnfield, health walks; Melissa, Wormholt, aerobics*)

Training

At registration, the delegates were asked to note a few words about:

- What they wanted to get from the training
- How they hope to use the training in the community
- Any worries or concerns they had about the training

At the end, they were asked to complete brief feedback forms, one specific to the course and the other a generic feedback form used by YMCAfit for all its course evaluations.

Both these evaluations showed a consistently positive view of the training. The detailed results are at Appendix Three. The headline findings are summarised below:

- All but one (95%) of the delegates answered 'yes' to the question 'Did you get what you hoped for from the training?' and, on a scale of 1 – 5 (with 5 the highest rating), the delegates rated this aspect very highly at 4.7
- The relevance or usefulness of the training to what the delegates came on to the course wanting to do afterwards was also rated highly at an average of 4.5. Two rated this aspect as only moderate (i.e. a score of 3) explaining they had hoped the training would cover specific details about aspects of the Programme management (permissible uses of the budget, how the mentoring arrangement would work etc.) in addition to the course content.
- The overall quality of the training was rated very highly by the delegates at an average score of 4.85 out of 5. Only three gave a score of 4, the rest gave the maximum score.
- Only five of the twenty delegates noted down on the form any specific worries or concerns about the training at the start. At the end of the course, a total of 12 of the delegates indicated that were 'fully reassured' about any worries or concerns they may have had at the start. A further 5 checked the 'partly reassured' box. Just two of these five had noted down concerns before the training started; the first of these was only partly reassured about his or her confidence concern (i.e. '*will I be able to lead?*'); the other was looking for '*more detail within the course on how the programme will be managed*' (as second bullet above).
- Just over half the delegates put forward suggestions for future similar courses. In the main, these related to the intensity of the course (e.g. '*long sessions / days, short breaks*'). A few made specific suggestions related to the curriculum content (e.g. '*time management skills, core stability work like pilates at a basic level*').

- Interestingly, nearly three quarters of those on the course stated that their understanding of the role of a Community Activator had changed as a result of the course. A clear pattern or theme running through the comments noted on this final question was a clearer appreciation and understanding of the complexity and challenge of the task.
- The headline results from YMCAfit's standard course feedback form were:
 - 84% of those on the course stated the knowledge and skills they gained on the course met their expectations; that the teaching techniques were varied and appropriate; that the task instructions were always clear; and that the course was well managed
 - 89% felt the information, advice and guidance received was helpful and appropriate to their learning needs
 - 90% felt the resources (course manual etc.) were informative and easy to use

We also tested whether the Activators' view of the value and relevance of the training changed over time through experience of the Programme, whether they felt any aspects were missing from the course, and whether any content was superfluous. Overall, in July the interviewees rated the relevance of the training at 4.65 out of 5 on average. When this question was repeated in November, the average rating score increased to 4.80. The only suggestion for change from the interviews was for resources and guidance to be provided on equipment sourcing and purchasing (e.g. quality, good value suppliers). This suggestion was made by several of the Activators interviewed.

Retention

At mid-November (8 months after completing the Activator training), 13 of the 16 Activators (81% of those who started activating) were committed to continuing to deliver regular sessions of physical activity in their communities and were successfully 'linked in' to local organisations to help sustain the activities they had either initiated or developed. This equates to just over two thirds (68%) of those who achieved the Activator NVQ qualification. Most have also taken the opportunity presented by the programme budget to develop their skills and knowledge by doing additional training. From our interviews, we consider it highly likely that at least ten of the Activators will continue to volunteer in their local communities in some capacity for the foreseeable future.

The few who dropped out of the Programme part way through did so for a variety of reasons ranging from childcare commitments, financial difficulties and family illness to, in one case, deciding that they did not suit the Activator role and moving onto other types of voluntary work in the area.

Functions

The voluntary functions taken on by the Activators varied from individual to individual depending on the starting position (e.g. whether engaging with a new group of people and setting up a new activity OR expanding an existing group or activity). Broadly, the Activator functions fell into five categories:

(1) Planning – Establishing a clear project aim and action plan either independently, or with support from their mentor and/or from their Borough Well London Coordinator or other local contacts.

(2) Set Up and Promotion – Securing venues, carrying out risk assessments, sourcing and purchasing equipment, completing additional specialist training as required (e.g. pilates, Zumba fitness), programming the sessions to suit the target audience, preparing publicity materials, networking with community groups and organisations in the area, securing press coverage, leaflet distributions, and, in one case, preparing and submitting an application for additional funding to pay for bikes for a new children's bike to school project in Hounslow.

(3) Delivery - Developing and delivering their own projects. These range from a boys and youth football project in Croydon leading to development of a new local league; girls' dance sessions in White City; Zumba dance sessions for adults with learning disabilities in North Kensington; seated exercise for care home residents in Nunhead; plus various health walks, circuits, yoga, pilates and exercise to music classes. In most cases, throughout the delivery phase, the Activators found they needed to maintain regular personal contact with individual participants in order to ensure their continued attendance.

(4) Monitoring of outputs – Completing of registration forms (including basic health screening), session registers and periodic updates of action plans in liaison with the mentors.

(5) Sustaining the outcomes - 'Signposting' participants to other free opportunities available in the area (e.g. Borough Health Walks), ensuring some of those engaged in the activity are themselves trained to lead activity (e.g. as walk leaders or exercise to music instructors), and/or seeking the support of community centres, churches, SureStart Centres and other local organisations to continue to host the activity sessions. Other actions by Activators to sustain the Programme outcomes have included 'up-skilling' through taking additional specialist training, and looking to partner with a host organisation in order to make funding applications.

Of these five functions, unsurprisingly the last - sustaining the outcomes - has proved the greatest challenge although at the time of writing, ten of the Activators are committed to continuing to deliver activity sessions themselves to their groups of participants on a voluntary basis. These Activators, either independently or with support from their mentor, 'linked in' to other organisations prepared to offer free space and/or publicity.

Views of the Activators

The difficulty of the challenge: The Activators' own views on how difficult they found it to achieve what they set out to do reveal something of the scale of the challenge. Just one of the 13 we interviewed in July said they were finding it easier than they had expected to before starting on the Programme, while half of the others were finding it harder than they had expected and the other half about the same as expected. By November none were still finding it easier than they had expected and a higher proportion than in July stated they were finding it harder. The main challenge, particularly for the more inexperienced among the group, was the community engagement aspect. Persuading people to act on their good intentions and actually come along having said they would, was the most cited barrier to success. As one of the volunteers said who came onto the Programme with no prior experience:

"I had not realised at the outset quite how much ground work would be needed to break through the inactivity barrier – for many people it is deeply ingrained and it is easy to push too hard too soon, and to lose heart".

Impacts on community: Ten of the 13 Activators we interviewed in July (77%) expressed confidence that they had already made a positive impact in their local community. One, for various reasons, had yet to start delivering any activity while the other two had only recently got started and felt it was too early to be sure. By November, 90% were confident that they had made a difference. A good example is the project in Barnfield, Woolwich where the Activator reported: *"Now more people speak to their neighbours, knock on each others' doors and ask if they are coming on the walk".* Another is a boys and youth football project in the Handcroft Estate in Croydon. *"Our local Ward Councillor talked to me about a nuisance problem of boys playing football on the estate disturbing other residents. The football project we set up in Wandle Park and then expanded into a little league through the Activator Programme has largely overcome this problem".*

Just one Activator considered she had failed to make any real community impact and left the Programme in September. She said: *"it has not taken off in the way I hoped and, while I know I have had a really positive impact on two individuals, I have not had any wider community impact".* A second Activator, who also failed to engage many people in her sessions on the South Acton Estate and stopped in September, was more positive about the wider community impacts of her work: *"I may only be getting between six and eight women coming along but they are all from different cultural backgrounds - Somali, Lithuanian, Black African, Black Caribbean, Maltese – and across a wide age range. None would have talked to each other before meeting at the sessions. Now they are going together to a second yoga class in the Community Centre. It is also having a ripple effect as they talk about the benefits to their friends and other family members".*

Impacts on participants: Unsurprisingly, all the Activators felt the encouragement and opportunities to exercise they were providing were having a positive impact on the individuals with whom they engaged. Having overcome the initial barrier of getting people to come along, most found the next big challenge to be how to pitch the intensity of the exercise to match the very different physical health and ability levels in the group. With a few exceptions, most groups spanned a wide age range and levels of physical mobility and flexibility. The Activators we interviewed felt that the training was particularly useful in providing ideas and strategies for addressing this particular challenge.

The types of impacts the Activators felt they were making are illustrated by the following quotes:

- *“For at least three of my group, the project will have changed their lives for good in terms of their awareness of the importance of regular exercise to their health and well being – these three have really got it!”*
- *“I have read medical research saying that getting seven people regularly active who were not before will save one life each year – several of this walking group who are not in the best of health have got the habit and are now walking regularly and say they feel less breathless as a result.”*
- *“I feel I am not just offering opportunities for women to exercise and learn about healthy lifestyles – I provide a befriending service. Many women are lonely and really value the human contact”.*

The mentor support: The Activators’ view on the support provided by the mentor team was consistently positive. All 13 Activators we interviewed stated that their mentor was a good listener and gave them the opportunity to express their own ideas and views. In July, nine out of the 13 (69%) rated the support provided by their mentor as ‘very useful’ and, in November, this proportion had grown to 80%. Where any dissatisfaction was expressed this was largely around issues to do with delays in securing insurance and payments from the budget, i.e. factors resulting from inadequacies in the Programme planning, unrelated to the mentors’ role.

The budget: Unsurprisingly, all the Activators stated they found having a programme budget either ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’. In particular, they valued the opportunities the budget afforded to:

- Buy equipment that will enable the activity, or the promotion of physical activity, to be sustained long-term
- To provide the participants with small incentives and healthy refreshments (thereby reinforcing the behaviour change messages), and
- Paying for additional training towards both their own personal development (thereby helping to sustain their commitment as active citizens)

In terms of the size of the budget, it was seen as quite generous by most of those we interviewed, particularly those who succeeded in securing free premises or were activating outdoors exclusively. In all cases where there is a hall hire charge, this and the low incomes of most of the participants, prohibits the activities from becoming self-sustaining.

It was interesting to find that a number of the Activators found sourcing and purchasing the necessary equipment a significant challenge. Several said they would have valued more support and guidance with this aspect and saw an opportunity missed to achieve cost savings from the economies of scale of a bulk purchase from a single supplier of known quality. However, others believed that taking responsibility for this aspect was an important part of their personal learning journey. One said: *“If I buy inferior equipment first time that is not fit for purpose or doesn’t last, I will learn from this mistake and never do it again”*.

Personal development: The Activators interviewed reported improvements in their skills and capacities across a range of organisational, social and life skills including –

- *Communication skills* – with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures, with a group of people, with ‘authority figures’ (e.g. Head Teacher, Ward Councillor)
- *Problem solving and decision making*
- *Organisational* - including project management skills
- *Empathy and understanding* – e.g. different things that make people tick
- *Motivation and confidence*
- *Fitness levels and technical knowledge* - in many cases, through additional vocational training as well as experience gained from delivering sessions
- *A sense of responsibility* - to the people and to the Programme

Typical examples of what Activators said they gained from the Programme were:

- *More patience and tolerance*
- *Career benefits* – e.g. a recognised qualification opening doors and linking into networks and contacts; additional training and qualifications (ditto); relevant learning for ‘the day job’ (e.g. Health Training, Nursing, Sports Development); business ideas (e.g. Personal Trainer, Zumba fitness Instructor)
- *A sense of achievement*
- *Improved personal fitness*
- *Enjoyment and new friendships*

Qualities needed: The words Activators used most when asked for their views on the most important qualities or characteristics of an effective Community Activator fell into four broad themes:

- First Characteristic/Quality: *“Open; Listening; Empathetic; Patient; Non-judgemental”*
- Second Characteristic/Quality: *“Determined; Committed; Resilient”*
- Third Characteristic/Quality: *“Enthusiastic; Positive; Energetic”*
- Fourth Characteristic/Quality: *“Organised; Reliable; Dependable”*

Arguably, those Activators who achieved the most in terms of the numbers of sessions delivered and the number of individuals engaged, possessed all four characteristics/qualities and used them to good effect. Several of the Activators who were less successful recognised their area of weakness – either for themselves or with the help of their mentor – and either sought to mitigate it or to adjust their approach (e.g. stopping direct session delivery, if it was not working, in favour of engaging with people in other ways and signposting them to free or low cost activities delivered by others).

Likes and dislikes about the Programme: In general, all the Activators we interviewed stated they had enjoyed the overall experience of being on the Programme. 90% of those interviewed in November (including three who had left the Programme), rated their experience against expectations as either ‘good’ or ‘very good’. Most felt it had delivered to or exceeded their expectations before they started out. In those cases where there was some disappointment, this related either to the difficulties these individuals experienced in persuading more than a handful of local people to take part, or to the requirement to complete paperwork.

What would change if starting again: The responses to this question were varied. The only repeated themes by more than one individual were:

- *Less paperwork – increases the time commitment*
- *Faster resolution of training course results, CRB checks, insurance*
- *Make available to Activators approved equipment suppliers list and guide prices*

Other suggestions included:

“Impress upon new trainees that setting up a new activity programme and engaging with inactive people takes more time than you think it will”

“Change the focus to befriending as opposed to physical activity. Loneliness is the main problem to be addressed and a wider range of social activities than simply physical activity is needed to address this”

“More guidance on health risk assessment issues particularly where people attending have a known condition”.

Summary: Overall, the experience of the Activators has been very positive. They have relished the challenge of realising their own projects. They found the training and the qualification empowering and considered the support and help given by mentors as central to their enjoyment and achievements. Activators interviewed reported improvements in their skills and capacities across a wide range of organisational, social and life skills. Their motivations included a mix of self-development, altruism, belonging (to an area or group) and enjoyment. In nearly all cases, their aspirations and ambitions have been raised.

CONSTRAINTS

Introduction

It is to be expected that there will be some constraints and lessons to be learned from piloting a new programme concept. Indeed, this is one of the purposes of a pilot. Inevitably, in attempting something new, there is a risk that not all aspects and issues are predicted and dealt with effectively in the planning stages and, once the pilot has been completed, there is an opportunity for these issues to be acknowledged and recognised for the future. The Community Activator Programme is no exception.

The learning points relate chiefly to programme planning and communication issues as follows:

The Recruitment

Due to a lack of clarity in the early planning stages of the Programme, mixed messages were given to the recruits prior to the training course as to the minimum length of time they would be expected to commit to the programme and, more fundamentally, whether the programme budget included allowance for any payment to the Activators themselves. Two individuals who were recruited and attended the first day of the training course, subsequently dropped out as they had been led to believe they would be paid for their time.

Clearly, this was unfortunate and resulted in some confusion for a short while which was a constraint in the early stages of the Programme.

The Programme Budget

It was communicated in the recruitment phase that the Programme included provision of a budget of £3,000 for each Activator. Advertising the budget in this way may have attracted a few people to the project for the wrong reasons – i.e. not so much how they could best use the budget to activate their local community but more how could I further my own career through access to this scale of funding. While we do not feel this was a major constraint on the success of this pilot, for future similar programmes, it may be preferable at the recruitment stage to make it clearer that a budget of ‘*up to £x,000*’ could be made available to support delivery of activity provided expenditure is justified against a business plan approved by the Project Manager. This would allow better for the different budget needs of different types of activity (e.g. health walks generally less than hall or studio based activities), and avoid the temptation to spend up to a fixed limit.

The Programme Length

All but a few of the Activators found it took months not weeks to engage non-participants and that, once engaged, many of their participants required constant encouragement to continue in regular exercise. This was often a matter of calling or texting each week on the day before the activity.

In at least one case, the Activator found the best way to draw people out each week was to physically walk around the estate knocking on the doors of those on her register just before the programmed start time.

For those Activators not already linked in with existing local community groups and agencies, getting known by, and support from, key people in these local organisations also takes time. Establishing these links is not just important to getting local people to engage and start to participate, it is also critical to securing a 'host' for the activity at the end of any formal programme of funding support, thereby sustaining in regular participation the people the Activator succeeds in engaging. The lesson to take from the Activators' experience for the planning of future programmes is to make sure the duration is sufficient to allow for these factors. From the experience of the pilot, six months should be the minimum.

Public Liability Insurance, CRB Checks, Budget Protocols

In the planning stages it is apparent that insufficient consideration was given to the issue of securing public liability insurance for the Activators. More specifically, the start of the Programme was constrained by a lack of recognition of the time it would require to secure insurance for what was a newly accredited training course. A secondary issue was a lack of planning as to whom in the project team would take responsibility for this issue. This resulted in a delay of some weeks to the start of the project for those Activators not already insured through other work they were involved in. While those affected were able to get on with their project planning and promotion, a few we interviewed stated that this delay was unfortunate as it meant that their enthusiasm immediately following the end of the training was not capitalised upon and the wait to get started impacted on their motivation.

A similar issue related to securing enhanced CRB disclosure clearance for those who did not already have one in place. The time this took following the training contributed to the delay to starting from some of the Activators and, as with the insurance issue, it was not sufficiently thought through early enough who would action this.

While it was not possible to secure the insurance and CRB disclosures before knowing which individuals had successfully completed the accredited training, the delay could have been reduced significantly had the course results been actioned sooner, an insurer found willing to accept the newly accredited Activator course in advance of the students completing the course, and the CRB checks requested as soon as possible once it was known which individuals had qualified.

Similarly, The management of the budget and process for Activators to seek approval for planned expenditure and then release payments was also not considered sufficiently early in the project planning process.

As with securing an insurer, with hindsight, the budget protocols should have been determined before the training so that this could have been explained at the outset rather than developed 'on the hoof' which resulted in some confusion.

Paper records

Some Activators struggled to cope with the necessary paperwork even with support from their mentor. Others at interview felt it took up too much time and needed to be reduced or simplified. The necessity of carrying out registrations and a level of risk assessment and health screening was generally well understood by the Activators. So too, was the need to maintain records of expenditure for purposes of budget reconciliation, and to keep session attendance registers and a measure of feedback from individual participants in order to contribute to the learning from the Programme (i.e. the evaluation). Despite this understanding of its role and importance and their best intentions, several failed to keep up with the paperwork. It would appear from this that paperwork, or at least fear of it, is likely to act as a constraint on recruiting people to similar programmes in the future. One option to overcome this would be to consider use of mobile phone and PDA technologies as an alternative to paper records. These are now available and proven to work effectively on similar programmes (e.g. Street League).

Tight geographic boundaries

As illustrated in several of the Case Studies in this report, in some instances the Well London model of interventions – i.e. tightly focussed on communities living in specific 'Lower Super Output Areas' - has worked very well for the Programme. In some other instances, the geographical boundaries of the Well London areas bear little relationship to the reality on the ground, and the activity has taken place some distance away.

The key to success is for the Activator to work within his or her own peer networks and to establish trust and a personal following. There are also advantages to be gained from attracting a wider base of participants from beyond the boundaries of an estate or a noted area of deprivation. For example, it can help overcome misconceptions and social barriers. A wider draw can also help sustain the activities established.

Setting tight geographic boundaries for projects of this type can be a constraint on success. It is important to be realistic about targeting specific areas or communities.

IMPACTS

Introduction

This section discusses the impacts and achievements of the Community Activator Programme against the ten elements identified in the evaluation brief for assessment. These elements centre on outputs and outcomes relating to (a) the Programme **process** such as the recruitment and the training, (b) **the Activators** themselves and, (c) **the Participants** (i.e. the people who engaged with the Activators in the target communities).

1: The recruitment of volunteer Activators

The recruitment of volunteers to work to get more people more active in the target communities was largely successful. This judgement is based on the fact that almost two thirds of the individuals identified and recruited have become successful trained volunteer community activators operating in more than half the Well London boroughs.

Table 1: Number of volunteers recruited going onto to deliver activity

Recruited to training	25 (from 15 WL areas)
Delivering Activity	16 (from 11 WL areas)
Conversion rate	64%

Source: Training register, Project Output Summary

2: Training the volunteer Activators

The Activators rated the training highly, including those not achieving the required standard. This is evidenced by the views of the delegates themselves at the conclusion of the course in February, partway through delivery of the Programme in July, and finally at the end of the formal Programme in November.

Table 2: Activator ratings of the training

At end of course	4.70 out of 5
At July	4.65 out of 5
At November	4.80 out of 5

Source: Activator interviews

3: Mentoring support for the Activators

Similarly, with one or two exceptions, the Activators have greatly appreciated and valued the mentoring support provided – and the availability of a programme budget – which, together, have worked to support their activities and their continuing personal development and training.

The exceptions relate to frustrations caused by not having the necessary

insurances and CRB checks in place in March and a lack of clarity on the approvals processes for use and release of funds from the programme budgets. The Author considers these support issues, while causing delay and a loss of momentum for some individuals at the time, were a failing of programme planning not the mentor team. In the event, while resulting in extended the timescales, these issues were resolved with little impact on the programme outcomes and provide valuable learning for the planning of future programmes.

Table 3: Activator ratings of the mentor support

At July	4.60 out of 5
At November	4.60 out of 5

Source: Activator interviews

4: The process for assimilating feedback from the Activators

The main element of the feedback process – i.e. regular contacts between the Activators and their mentors, plus bi-monthly written feedback prepared by the mentor to guide future support – worked well. Three full sets of feedback sheets were completed by the mentors for each of the active Activators based on their liaison meetings and other contacts. These were completed in July, in September and in November.

Despite efforts in the Programme planning and set up phase to ensure the monitoring forms were as simple as possible, maintaining the registration and session attendance paperwork proved problematic for several of the Activators. In the Author's view, efforts should be made in future similar programmes to eliminate paperwork through use of phone/PDA technologies.

5: The number of Activators who go on to activate others

In the Author's opinion, the 'hit rate' achieved of 64% (see Table 1 above) is high given the lack of prior experience of a significant proportion of the volunteers recruited to the training.

6: The number of Activators who continue to use the training

After three months all 16 of those who started activating continued to use the training and deliver sessions. At mid-November (8 months after completing the Activator training), 13 of the 16 Activators were committed to continuing to deliver regular sessions of physical activity in their communities and were 'linked in' to local organisations to help sustain the activities they had either initiated or developed. The Author consider it highly likely that at least ten of the Activators will continue to volunteer in their local communities in some capacity for the foreseeable future.

7: The number and profile of individuals recruited into activity

The final summary of outputs collated by the Mentor Coordinator from the registration and session register data and the mentor feedback sheets shows that 16 Activators succeeded in recruiting a total of 380 people into specific activity sessions. In the Author's view, the average of over 23 registrations per Activator is evidence of a high level of success.

The profile of the individuals recruited shows a good match with the area BME profiles and clear success in engaging people from low participating groups in physical activity – particularly females and people with low incomes.

Table 4: Profile of individuals recruited into activity (i.e. participants)

Age	% Respondents to Survey One (84)	% Respondents to Survey Two (78)
16-24	24.4%	21.8%
25-44	36.6%	34.6%
45-64	23.2%	28.2%
65+	15.9%	15.4%

Gender		
Female	72.3%	71.8%
Male	27.7%	28.2%

Ethnicity		
White	23.2%	36.4%
BAME	76.8%	63.6%

Consider yourself disabled		
Yes	8.3%	9.1%
No	91.7%	90.9%

Employment		
Yes - Full time	8.6%	13.2%
Yes - Part time	14.3%	11.8%
In education or training	7.1%	17.8%
Housewife/husband or retired	47.2%	26.3%
Unemployed or Unable to work	20.0%	29.5%

Qualifications		
No educational qualifications	20.2%	25.6%
GCSEs/O Levels or equivalent	35.7%	38.5%
A Levels or equivalent	20.2%	16.7%
First Degree or equivalent	15.5%	11.5%
Post Graduate qualification	4.8%	5.1%

Source: Participants Surveys (July & November)

It is also evident from the survey responses that the majority of those engaged

in activity through the Community Activator Programme were previously either inactive or insufficiently active to gain a health benefit. A fifth of all respondents (20%) stated they were taking no weekly exercise at all at the time of registration. Three fifths (60%) were exercising less than the recommended three times 30 minutes a week.

Since joining the Programme, in July, the proportion of participants exercising less than 3 x 30 minutes a week had fallen from 60% to 35%.

8: The number continuing in activity

The evidence gathered from the session registers and from surveys of the participants shows the majority of people stayed on the Programme for at least three months and a significant proportion for longer.

Table 5: Number of sessions attended by participant

Number of Activator sessions	% Respondents to Survey One (84)	% Respondents to Survey Two (78)
1 to 5	49.4%	19.2%
6 to 10	50.6%	17.9%
11 to 15		23.1%
More than 15		39.7%

Source: Participants Surveys (July & November)

Encouragingly, over three quarters of respondents to the second survey in November (78.9%) said they would continue to exercise regularly if Activator session were to end.

Of these pledging to continue, it is interesting to note that two thirds (66%) stated they would look to continue in group activity, 27% said they would choose to exercise with a friend or family member, while only 6% felt they would continue to exercise on their own.

Cost of exercise is clearly a real barrier to people in the Well London areas. 59.7% stated they would only continue if the activity were free to access, 32.3% said they would try to find a group activity costing no more than £1 per session. Just 8.1% opted to pay as you go at a leisure centre or to join a local leisure centre or club.

9: Impacts on the Activators

The author's interviews with 13 of the Activators and the feedback from the mentor team evidence that the Programme had a very significant impact on most of the Activators. In addition to the improved motivation, confidence, knowledge and skills of individuals that has resulted from the Community Activator training and qualification, most have also grasped the opportunity afforded by the Programme for further training and capacity building. Between them, the Activators have completed 22 additional training courses

during the course of the Programme. This capacity building increases the likelihood of their continuing in community activation in either paid or voluntary capacities in the future.

The participants' own ratings of the Activators skills as coaches and empathy with the group in Table 6 suggest that they gained much from the experience.

Table 6: Participant ratings of the Activators

Rating (5 = High)	Skills as a motivator	Skills as a coach	Empathy with the group
1	1.3%	1.3%	0.0%
2	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
3	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%
4	16.5%	22.8%	15.0%
5	82.3%	74.7%	85.0%

10: Impacts on those recruited into activity

Over a third (37%) of all those registering on the Programme completed a questionnaire. 5% of those on the Programme completed two questionnaires, firstly in July and then in November.

In July those participants who were doing less than the recommended 3 x 30 minutes a week of moderate intensity exercise (i.e. 60% of the sample) were asked to identify the main barriers to exercising more. Table 7 below shows the barriers identified most often as either first, second or third choice:

Table 7: Barriers to exercise

Barrier	% Respondents to Survey One (84) based on total count of all choices
No knowledge of what's available	17%
Cost (of activity or kit)	14%
Lack of free childcare	10%
Too busy/ not enough time	9%
Work/family commitments	9%
No one to exercise with	9%
Poor health	9%
Not interested	8%
Lack of facilities/transport cost	5%
Fear or embarrassment	5%
Not fit enough	4%
Other	2%

Source: Participant Survey (July)

In common with the findings of a similar survey we recently carried out of non-participants in the London Borough of Sutton, the most prevalent barriers to

exercise among the Community Activator participant cohort were (in ranked order):

1. Lack of information
2. Cost
3. Lack of free childcare
4. Time

In examining the lack of information issue in more detail, the survey found that the most frequently cited ways of finding out about opportunities to exercise were in ranked order:

1. From friends and family (i.e. word of mouth)
2. From the local press
3. From GP, health centre or surgery

The participants were asked to identify what would help them to exercise more. The most frequently cited options in ranked order were:

1. More activities available in the local area
2. Free/discounted activities
3. Better information

The main motivations for participating were:

1. To get fit
2. To be more active
- 3= To feel less stressed
- 3= To meet new people
5. To have fun

Interestingly, despite the fact that the majority of the participants were resident in some of the most deprived areas, on the whole, their perceptions of their own quality of life and general well being were positive. This is shown in Table 8.

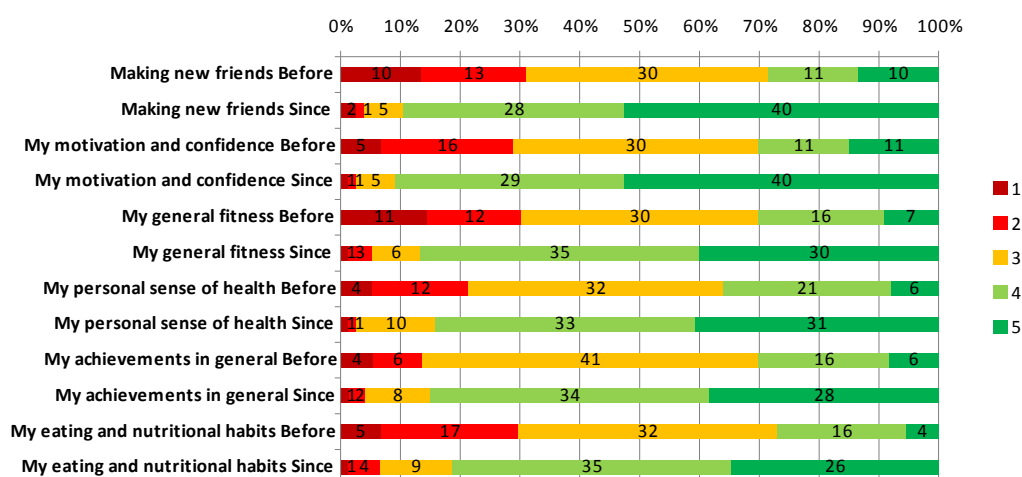
Table 8: Opinions on Conditions of Life

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
In most ways my life is close to ideal	3.8%	5.0%	8.8%	20.0%	21.3%	31.3%	10.0%
The conditions of my life are excellent	2.5%	9.9%	12.3%	9.9%	21.0%	29.6%	14.8%
I am satisfied with my life	2.5%	8.6%	8.6%	12.3%	19.8%	33.3%	14.8%
So far I have got the important things I want in life	5.0%	17.5%	13.8%	7.5%	13.8%	32.5%	10.0%
If I could live my life over I would change almost nothing	11.1%	14.8%	14.8%	18.5%	24.7%	8.6%	7.4%

Source: Participant Survey (July)

In terms of the participants' own perceptions of their general health, just over a third rated their health as no better than *fair*, while the other two thirds considered themselves to be in *good* or *very good* health. This despite the fact that 60% of respondents also stated they were exercising less than the recommended 3 x 30 minutes a week.

As an indicator of the impacts, the respondents were asked to rate six facets of their life on a rising scale of one to five both before and since joining the Programme. The findings (taken from the first survey conducted in July) are shown in the coloured chart below. The much larger green sections in the 'since' rows for each facet, indicate that the Programme has had a significant positive impact on the lives of those taking part. The same questions were asked in the second participant survey in November. Analysis of these findings showed a very similar picture.



From their responses, it is clear that the Programme has had a significant positive impact on those recruited into activity - not just on how healthy and fit they feel, but also how they rate their own motivation and confidence and their achievements including making new friends.

Most critically, given the focus of the Programme on engaging inactive people in exercise, it is clear from the survey results that this aim has been achieved.

Table 9 Has this project helped you increase your levels of physical activity?

	% Respondents to Survey One (84)	% Respondents to Survey Two (78)
Yes	98.8%	96.2%
No	1.2%	3.8%

While exercise was the primary focus of this programme, a large majority consider the project has also helped them make more healthy eating choices.

Table 10 Has this project helped you to make more healthy eating choices?

	% Respondents to Survey One (84)	% Respondents to Survey Two (78)
Yes	92.8%	85.5%
No	7.2%	14.5%

Most encouraging of all, more than three-quarters of those surveyed in November stated they would continue to exercise regularly should their local Activator session end.

Table 11 If this session were to end, would you continue to exercise regularly?

	% Respondents to Survey Two (78)
Yes	78.9%
No	21.1%

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Volunteers recruited to the Programme

The commitment, perseverance and personal qualities of the individual Activators who were recruited to the Programme have been the fundamental factors behind the success of the Community Activator pilot.

In all cases where the sessions have taken off and become well supported, the Activator has brought to the role an infectious enthusiasm for the physical activity itself to make the sessions fun, combined with an empathetic, listening approach so that people of different ages, backgrounds and ability levels all feel comfortable and engaged.

These qualities of enthusiasm and empathy appear to outweigh the importance of prior experience and technical expertise in the activity itself, although the latter does tend to help with issues of confidence.

The other consistent characteristic shared by all the Activators who succeeded in engaging people in physical activity was determination or perseverance. This was particularly important for those who were less 'bubbly' by nature and who did not immediately get results. Several Activators expressed genuine surprise at how hard it was to get people to follow through on their good intentions and actually come along to a session having said they would. Despite the disappointment of no-one turning up for sessions on occasions, most of those who committed to the Programme after the training persevered and tried different tactics until, in the end, people came along.

The final quality that proved important to the success of most of the initiatives was an ability to be sufficiently imaginative and flexible to respond positively to the regular participants' need for variety and challenge in order to keep interested and engaged in the physical activity. In some cases this involved the Activator getting additional training – for example in pilates or Zumba fitness (e.g. Lenora, North Kensington; Megan & Diane, Cranford). In others it was a question of changing walking routes, adding an exercise to music element part way through or setting a goal of completing a long distance linear walk (e.g. Mike, Croydon).

In addition, we have identified several other factors that we feel have been instrumental to the achievements; both the additional community capacity that has resulted from training the volunteers, and the impacts on the health and well being of the people who they have engaged. These factors are:

The Programme Design

The prior knowledge and experience of the YMCA of working in deprived areas with hard to reach communities and the skills and personal qualities needed for effective community engagement was a success factor.

The Project Team brought this knowledge and experience fully to bear in the design of the Programme and its component elements. This resulted in the focus on high quality training and mentor support and a programme budget to support delivery. The decision to name the role 'Community Activator' has proved empowering for those less experienced volunteers by affording a status in the local community and something to live up to.

The Programme Budget

Having a revenue budget was critical to the Programme's success. Most new indoor activities established by Community Activators require a modest but sustained budget or subsidy to continue long term. This to pay for hall hire, the volunteer Activator's annual insurance, and towards any necessary equipment replacements. In planning future Community Activator programmes from this pilot, it should be recognised it is unrealistic to expect indoor activity sessions in deprived communities to be fully financially self-sustaining even with voluntary Activators and/or session leaders. Clearly, outdoor activities, such as health walks, require less revenue to sustain. However, a budget is needed for ongoing walk leader training and insurance and for publicity (if this cannot be arranged via a partner organisation). It is also important to recognise that, for many Activators, the motivation to volunteer includes a desire to gain opportunities for personal career development. Accordingly, a budget allowance also needs to be made for ongoing volunteer training.

The Programme Mentoring

Where the Activators had no or little prior relevant experience, the mentors have been central and crucial to the achievements of these Activators both in terms of the outcomes they achieved for participants and their own confidence and development, particularly in the early months. From our observations of the Programme in action, review of the mentor feedback sheets, and interviews and conversations with both Activators and the Mentor Coordinator, it is clear to us that many of the sessions would not have happened without support from the mentors. Most of the Activators who were not already linked in with local organisations relied quite heavily on their mentors to get established and with the planning and implementation of their projects. Providing confidence and reassurance, alongside guidance on practical matters such as how to source the right equipment and how to prepare effective publicity, were the areas of support most needed. Recognition by the Project Team in the planning stages of the importance of this role was a critical factor behind the success of the Programme. The learning for future programmes is to ensure appropriate mentor support is available in the first months.

External Support

Without exception, the Activators have benefited from support in what they have set out to achieve from people in locally based organisations (in both voluntary and public sectors) and/or the local Well London programme coordinators.

These individuals have helped the Activators locally, both in getting 'linked in' in the early days and in finding ways to sustain the activities generated beyond the Programme timescales. A learning point to take forward into the recruitment of volunteers for similar programmes in future is to try and identify people with established contacts and rapport in their local communities. The experience from this pilot is that these volunteers tended to get results earlier and were less reliant on support from their external mentor as they already had people in their local communities they could turn to. These Activators also tended to be a little less reliant on funding as they found opportunities to borrow or share others' equipment, access to halls etc.

The Freedom to Make Mistakes

A notable strength of this pilot, highlighted by several of the Activators, was the level of responsibility placed on their shoulders and the learning that resulted from being allowed to make their own mistakes. While some mistakes resulted in wasted budget in the short-term (for example from buying unsuitable equipment or failing to proof-read before signing off orders for publicity materials), in the longer term, the gains in personal learning are likely to greatly out-weigh the financial loss.

Replicability

These successful elements of the Community Activator Programme model can easily be replicated by other organisations while there are many individuals with the community development skills who could act as managers and mentors to the volunteers involved. Local support, however, is dependent on the existing capacity of the community in particular the presence and willingness of local organisations to act as hosts.

SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

There are three separate but inter-related aspects to the sustainability of the project –

- The sustainability of the impacts on the Participants
- The sustainability of the work of some of the individual Activators, and
- Using the Community Activator model for future similar programmes

Sustaining the impacts on the Participants

Sustaining the positive impacts of the Programme on those who have taken part will be highly likely, although never fully assured, for those who have got the habit of exercise and who are sufficiently motivated to build regular exercise into their lives as a priority. People in this group, will generally find ways to exercise regardless of the availability of facilities or activities locally, their family or work commitments or even lack of disposable income.

Another group of the participants are likely to remain reliant on the motivation of the group and an enthusiastic leader or instructor – similar to the Community Activator – to continue in regular exercise should the session they currently attend cease to run. For people in this group, other factors such as family or work commitments or lack of income will play a larger role in their decisions as to whether to continue in regular exercise.

It is therefore important that local and low cost opportunities for group-based physical activities continue to be made available in the Well London areas if the impacts are to be sustained for most of the beneficiaries.

Sustaining the impacts on the individual Activators

There are good reasons for assuming that some Activators will continue their work into 2011 and beyond. Some local and Well London Partners have found the resources, or will be able to continue the funding, for the sessions the Activators have initiated or developed during the course of the Programme.

At least ten Activators have expressed their determination to continue working with their groups on a voluntary basis for the foreseeable future seeking funding support to cover costs of insurance, equipment renewals or hall hire as and when needed.

There is also the opportunity to sustain the impacts through the more successful of the Activators acting as ambassadors or mentors talking to agencies and organisations about their experiences on the pilot and using their expertise to develop similar programmes.

In terms of sustainability, the potential possibilities for new funding to support the continued delivery of those sessions where the Activators have not succeeded in 'mainstreaming' the sessions with another organisation could include:

- **The Sport England 2012 Legacy Strategy 'Places, People, Play'** - 40,000 new sports and physical activity leaders to be funded under the 'People' element of the strategy
- **Big Lottery Awards for All England** – grants of up to £10,000 for health and wellbeing programmes engaging disadvantaged groups and in areas of deprivation
- **Sport England Small Grants** – grants of up to £10,000 for recognised sports programmes where applicant affiliated to the sport's national governing body
- **The Mayor's Sports Participation Fund** – This fund has a balance of £1.6m available. The next application round is to open in Spring 2011. Grants to total value of £2.4m were awarded to 18 projects in December 2010 including several initiatives aimed at engaging volunteers in helping to stimulate regular participation in sport and physical activity particularly in the most deprived areas of London e.g. *Access Sport: 50 'new model'* (volunteer-led, open access) sports clubs in the Olympic Boroughs; *Active Communities Network: six 'Sport for Social Change Networks'* providing estate-/community-based participation programmes, volunteering, mentoring and training opportunities; *Reach & Teach: volunteer training, coach education etc.* leading to formation of new community basketball clubs across London.

Access to grants will be subject to Activators partnering with an eligible applicant organisation. CYMCA and other third sector organisations could also consider making funding applications to these and other funding bodies, either alone or in partnership.

Sustaining similar programmes in future

Looking to the longer term, the Community Activator model fits well with the Government's Big Society cultural change agenda. Four current pilot projects include one in the London Borough of Sutton. One of Sutton Council's Big Society pilot initiatives, based at its new Life Centre, is '*to train a new generation of active citizens who can support the creation of neighbourhood groups particularly in deprived areas*'. Subject to the success of the pilot projects and the progress of the Government's financing proposals for a Big Society Bank to make available to social organisations money from dormant bank and building society accounts, there may be an opportunity for CYMCA to secure funding from this source for future Community Activator programmes.

CONCLUSION

The author considers that the Community Activator Programme has been successful in terms of its impacts on the Activators themselves – their ideas have been developed, their skills have been developed and enhanced and they have been provided with opportunities to become active citizens. The process has been a bottom up approach.

Similarly, the quantitative evidence collated in the course of the evaluation indicates that it has been successful in encouraging participation from people in the Activators' communities and impacted positively on their levels of physical activity, their eating choices and wider aspects of their well being including making friends and motivation and confidence.

The evidence also suggests that a proportion of these positive impacts will be sustained – at least ten of the Activators are planning to continue with the activities they have initiated or developed during the course of the Programme through linking with other local organisations or raising further funding. Others from the group are planning to continue in different community volunteering roles using the skills and experience they have developed through their involvement in the Programme.

As for the people the Activators have engaged in physical activity and more healthy lifestyles, many of these have gained the habit of exercise as a result of the Programme and these individuals will continue to spread these positive messages with friends, family members and neighbours in their communities.

John Chapman, Leisure Futures
December 2010

APPENDIX ONE: CASE STUDIES

- ***Mike, Croydon***
- ***Claudette, Camden***
- ***Sarah, Southwark***
- ***Yama, Greenwich***
- ***Diane, Hounslow***
- ***Lenora, North Kensington***

APPENDIX TWO: RESEARCH MATERIALS

- ***Training questions***
- ***Activator semi-structured interview questions @ 3 months***
- ***Activator semi-structured interview questions @ 6 months***
- ***Participant survey questionnaire @ 3 months***
- ***Participant survey questionnaire @ 6 months***