

FIRST ISSUE!



National News

Connecting Health Champions

July 2010



Taking the plunge together



INTERVIEW
Mike Grady
from the Marmot Review Team

The proof is in the evidence

Knowledge empowers



Welcoming the nation

I am very pleased to introduce the first issue of Altogether Better National News. It has been published to put a national spotlight on the great potential of community empowerment to bring about improved health and wellbeing across the UK, so please read it and get involved.

Martin Gibbs, Local Government and Communities Manager, Health Inequalities Unit, Department of Health

Taking the lead

In response to the Department of Health asking the Altogether Better Programme to take a lead on connecting and showcasing Community Health Champions from around the UK, we have launched this first issue of our national newsletter.

We began as a unique programme with community and workplace projects throughout Yorkshire and the Humber, all of which are empowering Community Health Champions to improve the health and wellbeing of their own communities and workplaces.

Beginning in 2008, Altogether Better already has over 7,000 Community and Workplace Health Champions who we estimate are supporting at least 43,000 family, friends, work colleagues and other community members.

In a time of significant external change and challenge it will be essential that we work together to pool our knowledge, resources and voices so please send your contributions and ideas for the newsletter to

altogether.better@yorksandhumber.nhs.uk

Connecting champions across the UK is a vital element

“It seems that the time has arrived to embrace the idea that people within our communities are an immense hidden resource. These people have the power to help transform services and strengthen our neighbourhoods at the same time.

Not coincidentally, and as a result of us engaging with influential stakeholders to promote our regional programme, Altogether Better has been asked by the Department of Health to lead on the Community Health Champions agenda nationally.

Reinforced by review

It's a very exciting time for us, because we know that empowerment is key to reducing health inequalities – a fact that was strongly reinforced in the recently published Marmot Review: Fair Society, Healthy Lives.

One of the review's key messages is that effective local delivery requires participatory decision-making at local level and that this only happens by empowering individuals and communities.

We know this ourselves – we have seen it in action and we have the evidence to prove how effective it can be. We have also seen some amazing stories from Community Health Champions in other parts of the world following our international networking activity with people who are working together to develop practical solutions and shape health systems.

The Altogether Better Community Health Champions are being recruited to tackle specific issues around healthy eating, exercise and mental health. As we all know, however, there are much broader benefits. Empowerment can lead to engaged and cohesive communities that become involved in civic life.



‘Effective local delivery requires participatory decision-making at local level’

An important element of our work in connecting champions will be around creating networks and sharing and learning about best practice across the country, so let's use this newsletter to mutual benefit.

Systematic approach

Without a systematic approach to support active participation and community empowerment, it will be very tough indeed to reduce the gap in health inequalities. If we harness our collective wisdom, energy and enthusiasm, we can influence national policy and practice and generate genuine system change.”

Alyson McGregor
Altogether Better
Programme Director

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For Mike Grady, it all boils down to a matter of justice. Health inequality, he says, is simply unfair.

Mike, a major contributor to the Marmot Review: Fair Society, Healthy Lives, which was published earlier this year, is now tasked with supporting the implementation of its findings throughout the country. So far about 30 local strategic authorities have signed up to putting its recommendations into practice.

The review estimates that if everyone in England had the same death rates as the most advantaged, people who are dying prematurely as a result of health inequality would have between 1.3 and 2.5 million extra years of life.

He says that Altogether Better's principles of building community confidence and capacity coupled with their approach to commissioning, reflected the review's findings.

"We need to create the conditions where people can take control of their own lives," he says. "National policies will not work without effective local delivery systems that empower individuals and local communities."

Mike has seen plenty to substantiate the significant effect that empowerment can have. More than 1,000 pages of evidence were collected for the review from cases in the UK and abroad where the empowerment approach produced a dramatic

result on people's health and wellbeing.

"I think most of us can look back and identify a key mentor who inspired us. It can be very powerful.

"Currently, only four per cent of the NHS budget is spent on preventative measures. We need to scale up the prevention to bring down the cost of ill health in this country."

The report says that inequalities in illness account for productivity losses of £31-33 billion per year, £20-32 billion in lost taxes and benefits and £5.5 billion to the NHS.

"We know that information leaflets alone don't work and we know that empowerment and capacity building are effective tools. We need to invest in

'We need to create the conditions where people can take control of their own lives'

people to create sustainable, healthy communities of the future – to create an enabling society that maximises individual and community potential."

Critics of the review say that it is ideological, but Mike points out that it is ideology backed with evidence. "This is also one of the great strengths of the Altogether Better Programme – they are putting resources and emphasis on gathering and evaluating the evidence. It's absolutely essential to enable us to move away from a culture

of short-term funding of isolated projects."

While the Marmot Review states that initiatives must not be purely focused on the most disadvantaged, and that health and wellbeing issues need to be tackled from many different angles, Mike believes Community Health Champions have a vital role to play.

"Champions could become a valuable part of a whole system approach that is grounded in democracy involving sound civic, political and executive leadership," he said.



Dr Mike Grady: Senior Research Fellow at UCL with the Marmot Review team

To access the Marmot Review's key findings
[CLICK HERE](#)



Going swimmingly: Carol, left, with Mavis in the pool

'You can't just sit at home and watch TV'

Champion in at the deep end

When Mavis Kennedy first met her friend Carol McKenny, she was clinging in terror to the side of a swimming pool in Leeds.

"I got in the pool and I could not move away from the edge," said Mavis, who had signed up to a course of swimming lessons for the over 60s. "Coming from the West Indies, which is surrounded by water, it felt ridiculous that I couldn't swim. It was Carol who got me off to a start. She held on to my hand and just said: 'Don't worry.' It worked – though I must have squeezed her hand black and blue!"

"She was petrified," agreed Carol. "For some reason, I must have given her confidence."

Older and Active project

Carol's route to becoming a Community Health Champion at the poolside began after a health trainer she was seeing about losing weight told her about the Older and Active Project.

"I work at Chapel Allerton Hospital in Leeds as a ward housekeeper, serving the breakfasts, cups of tea and preparing dinners," she said. "Working there, I became more and more attached to the elderly patients and told my health trainer Tara that I would like to do something

voluntary to help older people. I didn't know what I was letting myself in for!"

Older and Active aims to promote healthy and active life in older people throughout Leeds using their version of Community Health Champions – Community Health Educators (CHEs) – to motivate and empower them. CHEs work with groups of older people to encourage active living and promote and lead basic activities. They also provide basic advice on healthy eating and local availability of fresh food.

It was just what Carol had been looking for and, after taking her initial CHE training, she quickly got involved with exercise sessions using Nintendo Wii video game consoles in local nursing homes.

Her involvement with the over-60s swimming course was only supposed to entail paying taxi fares and providing general help. But, true to form, she jumped straight in at the deep end. And then she met Mavis.

After being thrown together in the pool, the pair discovered they had similar backgrounds. Like Carol, Mavis had

worked in hospitals throughout West Yorkshire, spending the last 25 years of her working life as a nurse in an intensive care unit in Leeds.

"After that, you can't just sit at home and watch TV," she said. "I'm 68 but I don't feel it."

Training to be a champion

Carol believes she helped to bring Mavis out of her shell, and now Mavis is also training to become a CHE too and accompanies Carol to help out at her weekly chair-based exercise classes.

Carol, meanwhile, has continued to branch out on her own as well, passing an NVQ level 2 and taking charge of physical activity sessions with older people at

another nursing home.

"I thought I'd never be able to sit in front of 10 people and do this," she said. "But I love it and they all look forward to me coming."

"I feel much happier now. I had been depressed but being a Community Health Educator has been wonderful for my health."

After taking a course in dementia through Older and Active, Carol is now considering a career working with people who have autism or dementia.

"Some people think old people can't do anything," she added. "But they're human beings with skills, knowledge and abilities just like anyone else."

Older and Active is funded by the BIG Lottery's Altogether Better Programme until March 2011. Project staff are working hard to ensure longer term sustainability to develop the successes of Older and Active's Community Health Champions in Leeds. For further information contact Hillary Stoddard: Hillary@fgfleeds.org



Knowledge means empowerment

Housebound diabetics from Croydon in South London have been enjoying the bright lights of the West End, thanks to an inspirational Community Health Champion.

The sights of Oxford Circus, a cinema visit and a meal out are all part of the annual day-trip organised by Hawa Koroma, who helps run a support group for diabetics in the capital.

Hawa, originally from Sierra Leone, has diabetes herself and set up the group after seeing others struggling to cope with the condition.

“There was, and still is, a lack of knowledge, so I decided to do something about it,” she said.

Building on her own experience, she became a Community Health Champion in 2008 through Croydon Voluntary Action, which delivers health champion training on behalf of the Healthy Croydon Partnership.

Three times a week

Supported and funded by Croydon Council, the support group meets three times a week. The annual trip to the West End is just one of the many benefits that Hawa and the group have provided.

As well as helping housebound diabetes sufferers with their shopping and running errands, members also assist cancer sufferers, including those with prostate cancer, which has a high incidence in local ethnic minority groups.

- **The Healthy Croydon Partnership was set up in 1999 to provide strategic leadership for health and social care services in Croydon. It commissioned Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA) to deliver the Health Champions course in 2007.**
- **CVA has supported 30 people over 4 courses and participants have the option to gain Open College Network accreditation to level 2.**

The group has also seen a sharp rise in the numbers of homeless people and travellers coming for assistance.

“New Addington is on the travellers’ route, but when they arrive they are frequently in need of medical assistance,” said Hawa. “Their blood sugar levels are high or they haven’t taken their medicine, so we have to call an ambulance and send them either to hospital or specialised agencies in the borough.”

Following a number of emergency incidents, the group is actively campaigning for a dedicated diabetics medical centre in Croydon.

The overwhelmingly positive response to the diabetes group has encouraged Hawa to set up New Addington People’s Day to promote greater community integration, with an annual picnic in which people bring and share their food.

“It is very popular with people from all kinds of backgrounds; last year we had people from Australia, Lebanon and Peru,” said Hawa, who cooked some of her own specialities for the occasion, including pulses, beans, and seasoned rice with vegetables.

Supporting healthy living, eating and exercise, People’s Day has

proven to be so popular that neighbouring boroughs have taken up the idea.

Working together

Hawa has been involved in organising another health event, ‘Health in the Heath’, and has also been invited on to the diabetes section of a community panel with the local primary care trust, meeting four times a year and working directly with organisations such as Diabetics UK.

By putting others first – and becoming a Community Health Champion – Hawa has also benefited herself.

“There is one man in the group who comes along and is very knowledgeable about diabetes and I’ve learned a lot from him about looking after myself and eating more healthily,” she said.

“And my weight has dropped from 17st to 13st 7lbs!”

For further details about this project please contact Audrey Beckford at Croydon Voluntary Action on: 0208 683 5917

‘There was, and still is, a lack of knowledge, so I decided to do something about it’

Championing improvements in diabetes care:
Hawa Koroma

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Evidence means influence

The Altogether Better Programme is determined to show that Community Health Champions can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing.

It is distinct from many other community empowerment initiatives due to the emphasis it puts on evaluation and evidence, and it has caught the attention of influential policy makers in health and government as a result.

The team is working on a comprehensive package of evaluation and evidence building with the aim of effectively demonstrating the outcomes and impact.

Sarah Frost, Altogether Better Learning Network Manager, said that sharing the evidence with the wider world was an important element of the programme's influencing work.

Essential link

"It's essential to link the evidence from our projects with the broader evidence base around community empowerment in health and well-being to ensure that our findings are robust and can be backed up by other sources."

Sarah said that while a powerful case was emerging for the role of Community Health Champions, the evaluation process at a project level had highlighted a number of challenges.

"It isn't straightforward to implement a common evaluation methodology

amongst projects that are not identical and it can be difficult to demonstrate outcomes and longer term impact when projects are short-lived." she said.

Capturing the data

"Other challenges include demonstrating the smaller positive steps made by some beneficiaries and capturing the data on indirect beneficiaries of projects."

"We hope that some of our programme level thematic evaluation work and support given to project evaluation will address some of the gaps presented by these challenges."

Alyson McGregor, Altogether Better Director, said: "The evidence we have built up so far has been crucial in helping inform our influencing role and we would like others to share their experience with us so that we can build a powerful national picture."

Helping to build the evidence:
Sarah Frost, Altogether
Better Learning Network
Development Manager



The five core areas of work that contribute to the programme's evidence building:

1 Leeds Metropolitan University is reviewing the existing evidence base on three areas of programme themes: Empowerment in Health and Wellbeing, Community Health Champions and Mental Health and Employment. Full evidence reviews and summaries will be published later in the year.

2 These evidence reviews will be linked to primary data collected across the 16 projects as part of the thematic evaluation work commissioned as part of the overall programme evaluation.

3 Individual project evaluation to demonstrate outputs and outcomes is being supported by the Altogether Better Learning Network to help illustrate progress at project level.

4 The programme is building a library of persuasive case studies to tell the story of a Community Health Champion's journey and provide a rich source of qualitative data.

5 A Research and Evaluation Advisory Group has been set up made up of key academics and experts who provide a robust challenge to our evaluation and evidence building activities.

For further information, please contact Sarah at the Learning Network:
sef503@york.ac.uk

Do you have any relevant experience that you think would be helpful in demonstrating the outcomes and impact of empowerment and health and wellbeing activity?

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Regional network reaches out in Yorkshire and Humber

An empowerment network led by Altogether Better is looking to attract new members.

Formed in 2009, the Community Empowerment in Health and Wellbeing Network (CEHWN) is encouraging anyone with an interest in the subject, both individuals and organisations, to get on board. The Yorkshire and Humber-based network shares learning, best practice, evidence and information and is building relationships between commissioners, health professionals and communities.

Supported by the Yorkshire and Humber Empowerment Partnership and the Regional Forum, the Network brings together representatives from local authorities, NHS organisations, the third sector and other partners to build capacity and empower

communities to improve their health and well-being.

“We want to create a genuine forum for debate on moving the community health empowerment agenda forward,” said Rhian Harding, Altogether Better Strategy and Partnership Manager.

“There is fantastic activity across the country and in our region that we don’t know enough about. This is a great opportunity to join together and share common aims.

“We need Community Health Champions and community activists on

board as they have a unique and practical insight into the local impact of health initiatives.”

Rhian added that in the current economic climate of trying to achieve more for less, it was vital that we had a true understanding of the needs of communities and the assets they bring to the table when planning and delivering health and wellbeing interventions.

“Networks like this ensure that many voices are represented in the effort to tackle health inequalities in our region.”

If you are interested in joining the network, please contact Sarah Janicwicz: sarah.janicwicz@regionalforum.org.uk

If you would like to contribute to the network meetings or have a similar network in your region that we could connect with, please contact Rhian Harding: rhian.harding@yorksandhumber.nhs.uk

In the circle... Rhian Harding, Strategy and Partnership Manager at Altogether Better



“Sometimes, just a little door can open to someone in a difficult place, and it can inspire the start of a new journey – that’s what’s special about the Community Health Champion approach.

I want to hear from people who have innovative ways of capturing Community Health Champion stories.

Because I have the privilege of looking at a number of projects, I get a sense of the scale of what they are doing and there is a huge amount of positive activity that doesn’t get officially captured or measured as an outcome. People from all over the country need to share their stories so that we have the collective wisdom that can be used as a powerful tool in creating political momentum.”

Do you have something you would like to say about Community Health Champions – get in touch: altogether.better@yorksandhumber.nhs.uk

Champions conference

Altogether Better is planning the second national Community Health Champions conference. Following the success of the inaugural event held in Leeds last November in partnership with the Department of Health, the team is planning to involve more champions at this year’s event. The aim is to bring together people from across the country with an interest in community health with a view to developing a more systematic approach to supporting Community Health Champions.

If you would like to contribute any ideas, please email:

altogether.better@yorksandhumber.nhs.uk

Voices from Experience

The story and ambitions of the Altogether Better Programme has been published in a new document. Entitled

‘Empowering Communities to Improve their Health and Wellbeing’, the publication is the latest in the Voices from Experience series of reports published by the Yorkshire and Humber Empowerment Partnership and also outlines the programme’s empowerment model.

It can be accessed on line through the following link: www.yhpho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=80085



Amazing place

Amazing stories about Altogether Better’s Community and Work Place Health Champions can now be accessed in one place. The programme team have produced a directory that showcases champions from a cross section of projects.

It can be accessed online through the following link: www.yhpho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=81100

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Norfolk network making connections

A project in Norfolk has recruited 40 Community Health Champions, who are helping more than 120 people to lead healthier lives.

Run by the charity Voluntary Norfolk and funded by NHS Norfolk, the Health Connectors Service covers around two-thirds of the county, focusing on isolated rural communities in the districts of North and South Norfolk, Broadland and Breckland.

It is available to anyone over the age of 60 and to adults with a disability or a long-term health condition, providing one-to-one support for those who want to improve their general fitness, stop

smoking, manage their diet and weight better or reduce their risk of a fall.

Eighty per cent of those taking part have rated the service good or excellent.

Central to the project's success is its network of volunteers, called Health Connectors – Norfolk's version of Community Health Champions – who meet clients for up to six sessions, helping them to set and review their health goals, discussing problems and

arranging for them to use other services. They also carry out research to find out about the health opportunities available locally.

“One of our biggest successes to date has been the number and calibre of volunteers we've been able to recruit,” said Health Connectors Coordinator, Daniel Ingram. “Of all the projects that Volunteer Norfolk runs, this has had the biggest response. It's really grabbed people's imaginations.

“Health Connectors come from all walks of life, bringing a wide variety of skills and experience. They range from retired health professionals to medical students from the University of East Anglia as well as those who just want to make a difference in their communities.”

Accredited courses

All Health Connectors complete a course in Understanding Health Improvement (Level 2) accredited through the Royal Society for Public Health as well as induction training covering subjects including confidentiality, communication skills, basic safety,

equal opportunities, boundaries and rights and responsibilities. They are also offered ongoing support and specialist training where necessary in areas such as fall prevention, stopping smoking and nutrition.

Proactive working

Once volunteers are trained, the Health Connectors team works proactively to link them with local clients by promoting the project in retirement homes and supported housing schemes in their areas. The project also promotes itself through posters and adverts in the local press and clients can refer themselves to the service by ringing the Health Connectors hotline.

The project is continuously evaluated, with clients filling in questionnaires before and after their six sessions to gauge improvements in their ability to lead and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

“The feedback from clients is really positive,” said Health Connector Support Worker, Neil Godfrey. “Volunteers have helped clients to achieve things they wouldn't

have achieved on their own.

“One woman wanted to lose a stone in weight for a wedding and we helped her to achieve that. People are more likely to go for walks and take regular exercise. They might have tried it before on their own but couldn't keep it up. With the Health Connectors Service, they've been able to develop and maintain good habits.”

Daniel can be contacted at: daniel.ingram@voluntarynorfolk.org.uk



‘Health Connectors come from all walks of life, bringing a wide variety of skills and experience’

Recruiting in numbers: Daniel Ingram

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