

# Healthy Living Network

*Helping to build healthy sustainable communities*

## Aims

- To increase confidence, knowledge and skills to identify and address issues that affect health
- To build capacity into communities
- To raise the profile of health improvement in all organisations and agencies

## Background

Rhondda Cynon Taff has 28 Lower Super Output Areas in the most deprived 20% in Wales. (WIMD 2008) The Healthy Living Network (HLN) is the community health development arm for the Local Public Health Team. They use evidenced based approaches to tackle barriers to health improvement in 28 of the most deprived electoral wards within the county.

## Method

The Healthy Living Networks core value is to develop the notions of social capital, empowerment and ownership through increasing participation and developing capacity in communities. This is achieved by working in partnership to compliment and inform existing services and strategies. An innovative 'staged' model was adapted by the team:

**Stage one** - *Informing/consultation*. Engage with communities through novel and practical means, developing the pre-contemplation/contemplation stage and delivering initial courses on a range of subjects. (Prochaska JO & DiClemente C, 1984)

**Stage two** - *Partnership*. The interventions are franchised out to community organisations to deliver themselves. Community based professionals are trained to become tutors, building capacity and sustainability and also spreading good practice and tackling mixed messages. They are encouraged to identify community members who are interested in becoming tutors.

**Stage three** - *Delegated Power*. Community members take over the franchise. They are supported, helping step by step, building confidence and skills. We coordinate the intervention but they are in local control. (RCT LPHT Health Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy, 2008-2011)

The HLN are representatives for the Local Health Board and Local Public Health Team in communities, sitting on a range of partnerships and supporting Health and Wellbeing groups. These enabled local people to have a mechanism for highlighting local felt and expressed need and prioritising health improvement action. Interventions can then be tailored to communities through courses, training for trainers or modules, e.g. basic cookery skills (Get Cooking), nutrition, walking groups, sexual health training for youth workers, child safety training for parents and organisations to name but a few. These projects are all based on best practice and developed in accordance with local strategies.

## Results, discussion and learning

Since 2006 over 14,000 people have engaged with the team or their interventions, with around 400 people becoming tutors in their communities (as of October 2008)

## **Conclusions**

An independent evaluation is currently underway but initial feedback suggests that the process has been as important as the outcome. The HLN has directly delivered interventions to tackle the barriers to achieving health improvement whilst being successful in enabling communities to be able to meet the basic health needs of their own residents across a range of subjects. Furthermore they have put health improvement on the agenda for a range of different organisations, nurturing a proactive preventative mindset.

## **References**

Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Health Board (2007). *Health Social Care and Well-being Strategy 2008-2011*. RCT LHB

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