

# Dudley Healthy Retail – Living Well West Midlands

## Introduction

This report details the findings of case study research undertaken by the national evaluators of the Dudley Healthy Retail project, established and run by the Dudley Public Health Department. The project is funded under the Living Well West Midlands portfolio and targets schoolchildren and parents in order to increase the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables in a low income area. Ultimately, it is hoped the project will improve attitudes to healthy food and eating.

## Background and rationale

In 2006, Dudley Public Health Department submitted a proposal to the National Social Marketing Centre to become a national demonstration site. The National Social Marketing Centre is a strategic partnership between the Department of Health and the National Consumer Council. It was formed in response to the Government's *'Choosing Health White Paper'* (2004), which made a commitment to a national review of social marketing.

The proposal was successful and in the same year that Dudley was chosen as a national demonstration site the Big Lottery Fund's well-being portfolio – Living Well West Midlands – was launched. The Dudley Public Health Food and Nutrition Team then proposed a programme of activities to the portfolio, based on a social marketing approach.

Living Well West Midlands is supported by the West Midlands Regional Assembly and is currently in the process of delivering 29 innovative health and well-being projects across 14 locations in the West Midlands. The projects are delivered through a partnership of public, voluntary and private sector organisations and focus on encouraging people to participate in exercise and eat more healthily in order to improve physical and mental well-being.

Working to ensure that Dudley residents have access to healthy, affordable food has a long history in the area. The Dudley Food Network, a joint research project between Dudley Priority Health and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council first started to both examine and tackle the issue in 2003. A number of food co-operatives were implemented across the Borough; these co-operatives were predominantly volunteer led and aimed to buy fresh produce in bulk and sell it on at cost price. Unfortunately, due to the intense time involved and heavy commitments on volunteers of retailing fruit and vegetables, the initiative floundered.

As a result, the multi-agency Dudley Food for Health Action Plan (2004-2007) focused on the need to support local shops operating in deprived areas to develop healthy retailing practices. This was reinforced in the Dudley Food for Health Action Plan, 2007-2010.

Social marketing is an approach to health improvement and health services design that uses the:

'Systematic application of marketing, alongside other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals for a social or public good.'<sup>1</sup>

Taking a social marketing approach to health improvement is a new approach for Dudley Public Health specialist promotion teams which have traditionally focused upon health inequalities, empowerment and the social determinants of health. This has included advocating for and engaging with individuals and communities to develop social capital and seek changes within systems using participatory techniques. The advantage of social marketing techniques is that they include a very strong health focus and the success of initiatives is measured in terms of behaviour change.

In light of this, before the project was designed in full, a series of research activities were undertaken which ensured that whatever form the project took it would be grounded in local need.

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<sup>1</sup> French, Blair-Stevens, 2006

In the 20% most deprived areas in Dudley, primary research was undertaken on levels of fruit and vegetable consumption and geographic mapping of food retail outlets was also undertaken. Food for Health advisors also visited food outlets to explore the availability and quality of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Following on from the primary research, three specific research areas were focused on:

- 1) areas characterised by high levels of deprivation;
- 2) areas with perceived poor access to fruit and vegetables;
- 3) areas with low fruit and vegetable consumption.

The geographic areas were Hawbush in Brierley Hill, Gads Green in Dudley and Fatherless Barn in Halesowen.

Qualitative research was then undertaken in each of the areas, supplemented by stakeholder interviews. The research found that the parent-child dynamic had a major influence on levels of fruit and vegetable consumption. Issues included:

- many parents not being fully aware of the benefits of consuming fruit and vegetables or how to prepare them;
- wastage of food and money, with less healthy options easier to prepare;<sup>2</sup>
- many families had irregular meal times and a culture of snacking throughout the day;
- supermarket deals were of utmost importance;
- vegetables were boring and did not satisfy feelings of hunger.

Further scoping was then undertaken with:

- parents with children of primary school age;
- the children themselves;
- the wider community around the school.

The area ultimately chosen for the project was the Hawbush Estate. This choice was based on several reasons, including that the area had:

- the highest proportion in the Dudley Borough of Year 5 and 6 pupils who ate only one portion (or less) of fruit and vegetables per day;
- the highest proportion of overweight and obese children in Year 6;
- the highest proportion of lone parent households;
- low proportion of households without access to a vehicle;
- highest concentration of fast food outlets and takeaways within the Brierley Hill area.

Discussions with the community about potential solutions focused on a mobile shop and a school fruit and vegetable stall. Additional pre-testing was undertaken which concluded that the mobile fruit and vegetable shop was not an option due to the cost and staffing involved which may have had an impact on project sustainability. In light of this research, it was decided that a fruit and vegetable stall, based twice a week in the playground of the Hawbush Primary School, was the preferred option for tackling the underlying rationale for the project.

## **Project design and delivery**

### ***Objectives***

The project objectives are clearly focused on addressing the underlying rationale and benefiting the target groups for the project, both parents and their children. The fruit and vegetable stall aims to offer the opportunity for parents to access fresh fruit and vegetables at affordable prices on a twice weekly basis during term-time. The healthy eating message is reinforced to children in school through healthy cookery classes run by the Dudley Healthy Retail project manager. Easy to make recipes using seasonal fruit and vegetables available on the stall (produced in plain English) are also provided with purchases to encourage parents to make healthy recipes.

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<sup>2</sup> Understanding attitudes and perceptions of fruit and vegetables in Dudley: A Qualitative study conducted by the National Social Marketing Centre for Dudley PCT, April 2008

The focus of the project also fits with the wider objectives of the Living Well West Midlands portfolio which are:

- people and communities having improved well-being by providing a proactive approach to promote positive mental health, physical activity and healthy eating;
- increasing the capacity of the community and voluntary sector to engage in the well-being agenda and supporting effective partnership working across the public, voluntary and private sector to support children, parents and the wider community;
- increased sustainability to deliver long term activities that support improvements in mental health, physical activity and healthy eating.

### **Inputs**

The project has received £59,750 of funding from Living Well West Midlands, for the two years of project delivery. The project began in December 2007 and will end in November 2010. There is no match funding, although support is received in kind in the form of the time of teachers to promote the healthy food message and to encourage parents to use the stall. The head teacher at the school also sits on the steering group for the project and is a positive advocate for the project.

Project expenditure has been divided between staffing costs (although these are still a relatively small proportion of the available budget) and funding for the original research to ensure the project would address local need. The fruit and vegetable stallholder also receives a small cash subsidy of £20 twice a week to ensure it is financially viable for him to run the stall.

At the time of writing the case study, the project was slightly behind in terms of project expenditure due to difficulties in recruiting and appointing a suitably qualified individual to take on the project management role which led to a delay in project spend in this area. A project manager who has the necessary experience to be able to run cookery classes with the children and is also a qualified nutritionist was appointed over the summer of 2009. The project now has the necessary capacity to deliver activities to the full.

### **Activities**

There are two main avenues which the project is taking to increase the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables whilst simultaneously seeking to increase the demand for them in Hawbush. The activities which have been undertaken include:

- branding;
- engaging with the local school;
- sourcing a local fruit and vegetable supplier;
- developing a service level agreement.

The research which was undertaken by the food and nutrition team at Dudley NHS, and supported by the National Social Marketing Centre, highlighted that cost was always going to be a key factor for parents in whether they decided to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables. In light of this, the project has been branded as 'Bostin Value' – a fresh approach to food. In the Midlands, 'Bostin' is synonymous with the meaning 'great' or 'fantastic', and it is hoped by branding the project in this manner that parents and children will see the stall as a positive development.

Demand is currently being stimulated through leaflets, free tasters and the provision of free, practical and seasonal food skills sessions. These sessions take place during term time at Hawbush Primary and St. Paul's Community Centre during the school holidays.

Taster sessions have the advantage of offering the opportunity for parents and children to try new foods without worrying about the cost implications or waste. The food skills sessions aim to address skills in the preparation and cooking of seasonal fruits and vegetables and to address the cost issue by exploring budgeting ideas and ways of cooking cheap meals using leftovers.



A local green grocer has been contracted to supply fruit and vegetables at the school and community centre in line with the timings of the practical sessions. Special promotions, such as special offers, ready made up bags of fruit and vegetables and recipe cards for quick and easy meals are also available.

### **Target beneficiaries**

There are currently two target beneficiary groups for the project, the parents of children at the school and the primary schoolchildren attending the school. It can also be argued that the fruit and vegetable stallholder is a beneficiary of the project, as the project is offering a business opportunity, although a subsidy for the stall is needed as profits are not large. The stallholder has extended his reach by supplying a local community centre close to the school which in turn has both boosted the stallholder's profits and enabled the users of the community centre to access affordable fruit and vegetables locally.

In the longer term, it may be the case that the wider community surrounding the primary school benefits as the local shops start to stock fresh fruit and vegetables as demand rises.

### **Performance**

#### **Outputs**

The project's outputs focus on practical steps taken for the project to start implementing and delivering activities. Examples include:

- six focus groups to scope the need and demand for the intervention in the original three target areas;
- the establishment of a project steering group;
- 21 stakeholder interviews;
- production of a scoping report;
- questionnaire development to evaluate the impact of the project upon adults in the area;
- development of project branding and marketing material;
- development of food diaries for local children.

#### **Outcomes**

The project is starting to produce outcomes for its target groups. The schoolchildren are benefiting from the healthy food message through the food preparation classes in school and the fact that they receive one fresh piece of fruit a week through a government scheme implemented by the school.

Some of the schoolchildren's parents have participated in the parental cookery classes, leading to them trying healthier recipes at home, which the children have benefited from. Several children consulted as part of the case study research said they could now cook simple recipes from scratch. There was also a broad understanding that fruit and vegetables were a healthy option and something which could be chosen other than crisps and chocolate.

There was also a broad understanding among the children that fruit and vegetables made them stronger and had a knock-on effect in terms of enabling them to participate in physical exercise.

*'I always have a piece of fruit before I go to my boxing club, because it gives me energy.'*

Several parents consulted as part of the case study research said they were using the stall to top-up on fruit and vegetables as a supplement to their weekly shop. Many parents do not have access to a car, and research cited the cost of bus fare was a barrier to buying fresh fruit and vegetables twice a week. The stall is therefore providing an opportunity for parents who would not normally have been able to buy fresh food locally to do so.

The stall first started to offer produce at the school shortly before the summer holidays thus it is still relatively early in sustained project delivery to comment on outcomes. The project manager has started to come up against barriers to parents using the stalls, with price being the main issue; initiatives to demonstrate that the stall is competitive with supermarkets, such as price comparison offers, are planned. To what extent this is a fact or a perception on behalf of parents will need to be addressed before the stall can reach more people.

### ***Impact on wider conditions***

The project has been working with a fresh produce consultant who, in the research stage of the project, visited shops local to the school to examine the quality (where available) of fresh fruit and vegetables. The quality was found to be poor and the cost prohibitive to encouraging local people to make purchases.

Since the stallholder has been visiting the school, local small retailers have started to raise concerns that the stall is taking away from their business. It is difficult to state that this is the case due to the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables available in the shops in the first instance!

In the future, once demand has been sufficiently stimulated, the fresh produce consultant and stallholder plan to work with the shop holders in order to encourage them to stock affordable fresh produce. In this sense, the possibility definitely exists for the project to impact on wider conditions.

### ***Equality and diversity***

The residents of Hawbush are predominantly of White ethnic backgrounds; the backgrounds of the children and parents benefiting from the cookery classes and using the stall reflect this.

### ***Additionality and sustainability***

The project steering group is taking a very practical approach to both the delivery of the project and potential plans for future replication and sustainability. The project is set to continue until November 2010 and a proportion of project time to date has been spent on research and consultation. This is a strength of the project, enabling it to become established on solid foundations, based on local knowledge and local need.

The project is certainly producing additionality for parents who would struggle (outside the supermarkets) to find fresh fruit and vegetables locally. One of the project's strengths is that it is not only increasing supply, but working on increasing demand through project related activities, such as cookery classes for parents. Benefits are also gained from individuals in the community centre, for whom the stallholder visits on the same days as the school.

Although the schoolchildren would get a limited number of cookery classes as part of the curriculum, they certainly wouldn't be in receipt of as many without the presence of the project manager. These classes will also undoubtedly benefit from the delivery of a qualified nutritionist.

Monitoring and evaluation will continue to be undertaken in a systematic manner and, if demand for fresh fruit and vegetables increases, it will suit the fruit and vegetable seller to continue to visit the school. There is also the possibility local shops will start to stock fresh fruit and vegetables once they have worked with the fresh produce consultant. However, if demand remains low the project team will seek to learn from this experience and seek other avenues to pursue.

## **Processes**

### ***Partnership working and the delivery approach***

Taking into account the historical approach to providing access to affordable fruit and vegetables in Dudley, a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary steering group was formed in December 2007 to lead the project, who subsequently played a role in guiding the initial scoping phase. As the project developed, it was recognised that some members of the group would not be required to play as prominent a role.

The partnership now consists of the National Social Research Marketing Centre, the Headteacher from Hawbush Primary School, fresh produce consultant and Dudley PCT team, comprising food and nutrition, public health information, and the public health PR and marketing officer.

The steering group has been a key strength of the project, guiding its work from project inception to the present, and supporting an approach to flexible delivery which has allowed the project manager to keep trying new avenues and means of engaging parents.

The project's relationship with Living Well West Midlands has been good and mainly limited to monitoring visits.

### ***Publicity, promotion and engagement***

The project has a proportion of its budget set aside for publicity and promotion and is constantly seeking new avenues of engagement with parents. The project has produced flyers advertising the fruit and vegetable stall and simple recipe cards which are given out to parents who use the stall.

The project team are also considering other ways of attracting more parents to the stall, including giving away raffle tickets to win a mountain bike with every purchase. Two assistants (who are also parents) to the fruit and vegetable stall are also in the process of being appointed. Working on the same days the stall is at the school they will speak to parents in the playground and take free samples to the parents to encourage them to buy.

The project is also tying together the cookery classes for the pupils with seeking to engage with parents by offering samples of food the children have made during the school day; however despite these efforts at this early stage, the project is struggling to get parents to buy from the stall.

### ***Monitoring and evaluation***

The project submits quarterly monitoring reports to Living Well West Midlands, quarterly updates to GHK Living Well West Midlands portfolio level evaluators, and an intensive evaluation is underway run by the National Social Marketing Centre. This evaluation is focusing on:

- ❑ **parents** – self completion questionnaires have been completed in order to collect baseline data. These aim to measure consumption, variety, perceived wastage of fruit and vegetables, and confidence in preparation skills associated with cooking with this food group. This data was analysed by a researcher at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. These questionnaires will be repeated at intervals of six and twelve months;
- ❑ **teachers** – in-depth interviews are planned with teachers in order to gather qualitative information on the food skills sessions and children's engagement with these;
- ❑ **measuring sales** – sales, both in terms of volume and cash, of fruit and vegetables from the stall are being monitored via stock sheets. In depth interviews will be conducted with the supplier and structured verbal questionnaires with customers in order to ascertain the types of people using the stall, what is being purchased and any changes which are taking place in people's fruit and vegetable routines.

The baseline data was collected before the school summer break and will be repeated again before Christmas 2009 in order to monitor change over time.

The project was also nominated by Consumer Focus and The National Social Marketing Centre to win an award at the social marketing learning demonstration sites awards ceremony at the House of Lords. Dudley PCT Public Health and Nutrition Team attended the awards and were one of the successful nominees.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Key lessons***

It is still relatively early days for the project in terms of the measurement of outcomes for parents and children of Hawbush Primary School; however an extensive period of research took place before the project started in order to match local need with project provision. The project has evolved from an original concept of working with local shopkeepers to increase their provision of fresh fruit and vegetables to providing a stall and complimentary cookery classes (for both children and parents) in a community setting. Taking the social marketing approach has been useful, in that the initial hypothesis for the project, providing access to healthy food, was a driver of consumption; however research with residents and stakeholders highlighted the influence the parent-child dynamic has on fruit and vegetable consumption. This can be evident in both a positive and negative sense; negative in terms of 'pester power' for sweets and chocolate and positive in terms of children asking for fruit. This is borne out by research undertaken by the national evaluators. Some children reported hearing their friends asking parents for fruit from the stall, but were told by their parents that it was too expensive.

As part of the research for this case study, the national evaluators spoke with parents who had not yet used the stall. Reasons for not using the stall included not liking fruit and cost.

*'I just don't like fruit, I'd rather eat crisps.'*

To what extent this is a perception rather than a reality remains to be seen; however it is an issue which is constantly being tackled by the project team (e.g. most recently through the promotion of price comparison on the stall with leading supermarket prices).

The flexibility to constantly keep trying new ways to engage with parents and children is a key strength of the project and a supportive project steering group has assisted in the project's development. The project still has over a year of delivery left and it is likely that it will start to make inroads with those parents who are at present reluctant to approach the stall. Hawbush Primary School was chosen because of early project research which highlighted that the area scored highly on a range of indicators relating to levels of healthy eating and negative attitudes to fruit and vegetables. In light of this, the project is working with one of the most hard to reach groups and it is unsurprising that it will take time to shift behaviour.

For those who are using the stall, there are a range of benefits of having access to fresh fruit and vegetables, providing a place to top up during the week when paying to get to the supermarket twice a week may not be an option. Children at the school are benefiting from the healthy eating message which is reinforced by the healthy cookery classes.

### ***Opportunities for the future***

There are several avenues open to the project in the future. If the stallholder starts to make sufficient profit through visiting the school, the £20 a visit project subsidy could be withdrawn. The plan is to implement this from November 2010, but this will be dependent on increased demand, sales and profit margins.

In a sense, this is a pilot project that is taking an approach that has not been undertaken before, and seeking new avenues is part of the process of getting parents to buy fresh produce and cook recipes from scratch. If the project is found to be successful, the model definitely has the scope to be rolled out to other schools in similar areas.

The work of the project has almost come full circle, in that the local shopkeepers whose businesses are closest to the school have started to complain that they feel the stall is taking away from their sales. As previously stated, this is difficult to understand as research by the fresh produce consultant at the start of the project indicated the supply of fresh fruit and vegetables was poor or non-existent eighteen months ago. However, this has provided an opportunity for the project to engage with the shopkeepers who can now gain access to the fresh produce consultant's services and who may start to stock fresh fruit and vegetables as part of the project's exit strategy.