

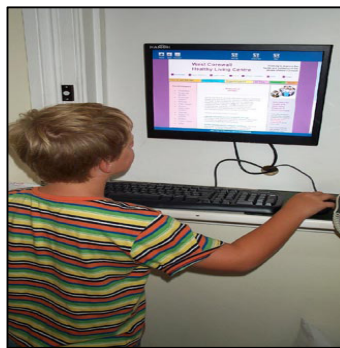
Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being

GPs, the VCS and volunteers working together to improve the well-being of local people

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This case study forms part of the Big Lottery Fund National Well-being Evaluation. CLES Consulting was commissioned in 2008 with nef to undertake the evaluation. This case study is one of nineteen case studies that will be completed throughout the lifetime of the evaluation, which runs from December 2008 to September 2013. For more about the evaluation please see the [well-being pages of the CLES Consulting website](#). Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being is one of the portfolio of projects within the South West Healthy Living Alliance (SWHLA).

Background to the project



The Pathways to Health and Well-being project aims to work in partnership with GPs, health professionals and VCS organisations/groups to support people to improve their health and well-being in a holistic and proactive way. Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being is part of the Cornwall Healthy Living Centre (CHLC) and is a multi-partnership project. Penwith Community Development Trust (PCDT) is the lead organisation and accountable body for CHLC.

PROJECT NEED

The project is set up to address four key issues:

- 1) to reduce the number of people presenting at GPs with non medical conditions and to help people take more control of their health and well-being. Local GPs expressed concern about the high number of people coming to them who *'didn't really need medication'* such as people presenting with problems such as mild depression, isolation and addiction. The Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being team felt there was a need to direct these people towards appropriate support and advice which, in many cases, was not a GP. Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being aims to provide lifestyle advice and guidance to people to help them take more responsibility for their health, to better manage long term chronic conditions, provide alternatives to medication and GP visits, and view health and well-being in a holistic way. Stakeholders commented:

'A little support in one area can lead to people starting to address other things. Perhaps they might start to think 'oh, I ought to lose some weight' or 'oh I should pay more attention to how I cook'. It is a long term strategy though, and no one is thinking that one cooking lesson will turn a person's life around.'

- 2) to make it easy for members of the public, service providers and VCS bodies to find out what is on offer, in terms of healthy living activities and services, and to signpost people to it, thereby acting as a conduit for information and facilitating access. One local GP commented that:

*'All communities have a myriad of initiatives and activities that might have potential health benefits, ranging from weight management classes, Green and Blue Gyms, walking groups, badminton clubs and allotment associations, to knitting groups, play reading groups, carer support groups and voluntary employment, but keeping track of what is available is simply not possible for a busy GP. So when Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being was set up, the idea of having a well-being facilitator was developed. The aim was to have a single portal referral for lifestyle interventions.'*¹

By overcoming this, Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being is acting as a broker between communities and service providers, whether that is the local council, NHS or VCS organisations;

- 3) to ensure that people living in rural and sparsely populated areas can still access and make use of healthy lifestyle services. The projects are aimed at people living in rural Cornwall so there is no benefit to having a physical headquarters or one central building. Instead they use a network approach with lots of online activity, including the well-being database;
- 4) to improve the skills, confidence and self-esteem of people living in deprived areas of West Cornwall. By helping people to learn new skills, providing a counselling service and reducing social isolation, Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being aims to help people to feel better about themselves, feel more confident and valued, and more able to contribute more to their local community. Project staff commented that:

'This is best done by teaching people a new skill and how to interact with people.'

'We want to address 'the cycle of deprivation... kids whose parents are poor, who have no aspirations. Our projects are about helping people to take the little steps, build their confidence, address isolation and pointing people to other sources of support.'

THE ACTIVITIES

Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being works in collaboration with other key partner organisations – Cornwall Council, Penwith Volunteer Bureau, Volunteer Cornwall, Stennack Surgery and Bodriggy Health Centre to deliver the following activities:

- ❑ GPs and other health professionals to refer patients to the well-being facilitator who provide advice, support and guidance on activities, lifestyle and behaviour which may assist the person to live a healthier, fuller and more rewarding life. For the most part, the relevant lifestyle and well-being activities are either organised or delivered by local VCS organisations;
- ❑ the well-being database/website is installed in GP surgeries to enable patients and members of the public to search for activities and information they need to improve their health and well-being in a more holistic and proactive way;
- ❑ volunteers are recruited as mentors, befrienders and buddies to provide a network of support for individuals in order to promote positive lifestyles; and also to improve confidence and self-esteem for individuals through volunteering;
- ❑ well-being activities such as lifestyle advice, mentoring/coaching, life skills activities, confidence and self-esteem training, and physical activity/exercise (e.g. yoga and healthy eating/cooking advice are all provided by the project);
- ❑ a free counselling service is provided at the Penwith Centre in Penzance, Camborne Library, Helston Children's Centre and St. Elvan's Children's Centre in Porthleven for local people, especially those who are unemployed and disadvantaged or live in deprived communities;
- ❑ a summer programme of sports taster sessions for people with mental health problems is delivered in partnership with the NHS and other community organisations called We Can Get/Keep Active.

¹ GP involved in the Well-being Facilitator project

IMPACT

We spoke to a range of beneficiaries, volunteers, staff and stakeholders as part of this evaluation and they highlighted that the Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being project was generating a very wide range of positive outcomes, including those linked to healthy food and diet, mental well-being and physical activity. These are all explored in more detail below.

A better understanding of the importance of healthy food and diet

At the Healthy Living Centre based in Redruth Volunteer Centre, volunteers are promoting healthy living and well-being. They have used their window display to raise awareness of the issues, highlighting certain health themed days/weeks that are taking place nationwide. There is also a range of literature available that covers a wide range of topics to enable the public to make informed healthy lifestyle choices.

Currently, anybody who comes into the volunteer centres will be offered some fruit to tie in with the 'five fruit and veg a day' campaign:

'We hope that this is just the first of many campaigns which hopefully get our message across whilst keeping things light, therefore making people realise that improving their health can be simple and enjoyable.'

'There will be entertaining and informative campaigns including the 'smoothie bike'. By pedalling the bike and getting exercise, the blender kicks into action and you can reward yourself with a delicious fruit drink!'

Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being volunteers have received training in healthy eating and diet, and are on hand to provide advice and guidance to people and signpost them to further support. This element of the project aims to provide information and help to the general public, as a means to help prevent future health problems occurring:

'When I started I was sent on all the healthy living courses and activities (e.g. diet, exercise, stress management) so now when people ring up or come in for information I can tell them what it's all about... and a little of how it helped me. I learnt a lot on the courses; especially the healthy diet/cooking one.'

'Volunteering did two things: it gave me something to do; and the courses reminded me about the importance of eating healthy and looking after yourself... I'm careful what I eat now. The volunteer office always has fruit in, so when you snack it's on that.'

Facilitating well-being

Another core element of the Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being project is the well-being facilitator. The facilitators work with GPs at Stennack Surgery and Bodriggy Health Centre to signpost patients to well-being activities to benefit their health. Projects include Green Gym type projects and walking and cycling schemes run by the Primary Care Trust and community groups, such as the choir or tennis club.

Support is offered to establish contact with the organisations, and the well-being facilitator follows-up patients by phone a few weeks after to further encourage participation in activities if required.

Comments from those who have been referred included:

'I attended the Steeple Woodlands project, I'm enjoying meeting new people and working outdoors as part of a team.'

'I have gained confidence and [am] living life to the full, it was very helpful.'

An aspect of the well-being facilitator's role is to encourage patients to take an active part in their own health and well-being, so that they are not simply passive receivers of a service, but are engaged in actively making choices about their own health.

One stakeholder also mentioned that the wide-ranging benefits of the scheme to the individual and to society as a whole should make it attractive to commissioners:

'We would like to see a well-being facilitator become part of the standard portfolio of services within primary care.'

Accessible and alternative exercise options

Beneficiaries of Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being, which is part of the South West well-being portfolio, also noticed improvements in their physical health and exercise habits. The project has just started a community yoga programme; one of the beneficiaries who regularly attend the yoga sessions told us she might like to do something like that for a little while:

'The leaflet I picked up was the prompt to do it... it was really straight forward finding out more and, in any case, the information was on the leaflet.'

She also spoke about the appeal of yoga over other forms of exercise:

'I had done yoga before, but this appealed because it was drop in. Before it was cheaper if you paid for a block of ten lessons but then you'd end up missing some or whatever. I have just had chemotherapy and so any exercise has to be gentle and the drop in meant if it wasn't good or I struggled, there was no commitment to continue... Plus the class is only one hour which is long enough for me.'

'You can just come along... it's not intimidating and easy for beginners. If you have health issues/injury you just let the teacher know.'

'It's also a good way to end to the week... it's good to stretch out and it puts you in a good frame of mind.'

Beneficiaries also reported that they always sleep well after the yoga and there are regulars as well as new people at the classes each time.

Reduced stress and anxiety, and feeling more positive about the future

Alongside the well-being facilitator, Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being also offers a free counselling scheme. As part of our research, we spoke to one of the volunteer counsellors who had been involved since the start of the service. She was keen to emphasise the effectiveness of the scheme and how accessible it was to people looking for counselling. She felt this was in part due to how well managed it was and the great supervision of the volunteer counsellors:

'We feel that counselling has been of great value for the clients... who are often under privileged and vulnerable and do not have close family or friends who they can share their inner thoughts with. Clients have acknowledged that receiving counselling has been a positive experience which has benefited their psychological and physical health.'

For reasons of confidentiality, we were not able to speak to any recipients of the counselling service, although we were able to access testimonials from clients:

'I started the counselling sessions with an open mind and no expectations but what I have gained from them has changed my life for the better, my future now seems so much more important than problems from my past.'

'The counselling has improved my health and well-being, confidence and self-esteem, reduced stress and anxiety, and I feel more positive.'

'I found the sessions invaluable, most definitely a very positive experience for me which has really changed my thoughts of the past and my future.'

'The most helpful thing about the counselling I received was being able to talk and for someone to listen without judging me; to trust my counsellor enough to talk about things I've never been able to in the past.'

When we interviewed one of the volunteer counsellors, she also commented further on the impact of the service on beneficiaries:

'I am continually in awe of the way that I have seen clients change their way of being in a positive direction from even a small number of counselling sessions and the power that a loving and nurturing therapeutic relationship has. It may be individuals that come for counselling but the positive changes have a ripple effect on all those around them including relationships with their children, parents, partners, work colleagues.'

Greater self esteem and confidence

On a similar theme, the Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being project also runs a volunteer befriending scheme. The scheme works by recruiting local people to provide support and companionship for individuals and to actively promote a positive lifestyle. It also helps to improve the confidence and self-esteem for individuals through volunteering.

Positive social interaction

The befriending project that forms part of Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being is also crucial to the overall success of the project as it promotes the benefits of positive social interaction and provides opportunities for volunteers as well as matching up those in need with a buddy. As part of the research we spoke to both volunteers and beneficiaries. Rose has been visiting Bill almost every week for two years; she got involved through the Penwith Volunteer Bureau having initially thought she might use her computer skills to help at beginner IT classes, but was asked if she was interested in the Penwith Pals scheme.

Rose and Bill commented:

'We hit it off straight away and we can talk about anything, politics, the lot.'

Rose helps Bill to do some of the things he used to like doing but would otherwise struggle to do, such as the crossword, talking to someone and just getting out of the house:

'Most weeks we'll do the crossword together as Bill would struggle to read it if he was alone. Sometimes I use the internet on my phone when we get stuck. We drink tea and we chat.'

'Everyone needs a daily challenge and talking can be a beautiful challenge.'

Rose also feels that:

'Volunteering is something good to do when you have the time; it's a good way to meet other volunteers and hear about the experiences.'

Feeling motivated and energised

Volunteers involved with the Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being project also reported increases in overall well-being and life satisfaction. In particular, they suggested they have more motivation and energy after becoming a volunteer:

'I volunteer three days a week at the volunteer office at a centre for disabled children, a local library and at a local history society. Often I am the only volunteer and people find it really interesting, they ask lots of questions about how, why, what I volunteer for.'

'When I'm volunteering I feel cheerful and healthy, it's good to get out of the house.'

'I feel very lucky that it was so easy for me to find volunteering opportunities... the routine is motivating, when you have a volunteer role you've got to get up, get out... because they rely on you. It keeps you healthy.'

Supporting 'Big Society' and community cohesion

A significant knock-on benefit of Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being is that it raises the profile of lifestyle and health in the community and, by encouraging greater participation in social activities, contributes to community cohesion. It also supports voluntary and community sector organisations, helping them to recruit and retain members and volunteers.

Helping people to stay active in retirement

Volunteers with the Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being project noted that becoming a volunteer had helped to keep them active and raised their awareness of activities or projects they could join. One volunteer spoke about her volunteering as a way to stay motivated, meet people and gain new skills:

'Getting involved has been great because when I retired there was a big risk of becoming a couch potato, not bothering with cooking or exercise.'

'It's easy to become de-motivated in retirement but volunteering in the office is good because you are in a lively environment and there's always conversations going on... I've benefited because being in the office I've had to get used to using computers, I had been a bit wary but was helped and encouraged... and now I even have broadband at home.'

WHY THE PROJECT WORKS

From our interviews with staff, stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries we identified a number of reasons why the project is successful. These are outlined below.

Flexible projects

The project is flexible and can adapt to meet new or emerging needs and can shape or roll out services as circumstances change. This is because the project is delivered in partnership with several different organisations, works with other VCS bodies and utilises volunteers in many instances. This allows staff and partners to develop the projects in response to need and success (e.g. the well-being facilitator role has recently been extended to Bodriggy Health Centre after being trialled at Stennack).

Easy to engage with

Activities such as yoga, healthy eating advice or the buddy programme are all very easy to engage with and allow beneficiaries the chance to drop in and out of these activities as it suits them. They are also held in central locations that are easy to get to by car or by public transport – crucial in a rural and sometimes sparsely populated area such as West Cornwall. Finally, the activities are also often free or low cost, removing as many barriers as possible.

A single point of contact and information

As the evidence for the role of lifestyle factors for health and illness grows year on year, it is increasingly important to promote lifestyle measures within primary care. A healthy diet and plenty of exercise are known to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, dementia and certain cancers. Exercise can help depression and positive social contact is associated with better psychological health. Simple contact with nature can reduce stress levels and improve mental health. [There is also a short video about this which can be viewed here.](#)

Indeed, GPs see numerous people for whom lifestyle intervention might be beneficial: the overweight, hypertensive, depressed, socially isolated, de-motivated, addicted... Against this background, there is a myriad of initiatives and activities that might have potential health benefits. Some initiatives are sponsored by the NHS or local authority; others are commercial enterprises or entirely voluntary. However, many are supported by time-limited funding, or otherwise come and go. Keeping track of what is available and how to access it is simply not possible for a busy GP.

The key to the well-being facilitator is the single point of contact for referral, advice and support for lifestyle interventions. This not only simplifies the system but means only one person has to collate the information around the opportunities. It also means that the role is no longer left to GPs who are too busy to do this well. The well-being facilitator has the time to talk to people, work out what they would like to do or what might help with their symptoms, and deal with any necessary follow up.

The role of volunteers

Volunteers are crucial to the success of the Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being project, in that they deliver a number of services and offer support to beneficiaries, ranging from free counselling to healthy eating advice to the befriending service, bringing a whole range of outcomes to beneficiaries. However, volunteering also brings benefits for these volunteers in terms of their own personal and social well-being. This mutually supportive relationship is key to the success of Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being.

Supporting both volunteers and beneficiaries

The well-being facilitator collates a database of all health and well-being initiatives and any community activities that might have health and well-being benefits, and matches these to patients referred by GPs. With the support of a well-being facilitator, patients are encouraged to try activities to improve their health and well-being, ranging from training and volunteering to sailing and swimming.

Since it started, the well-being facilitator has helped to refer people to services and support with regard to weight management and smoking therefore helping to improve health directly. However, he has also referred people to projects with less of a direct link but which have nonetheless helped to improve their physical fitness and change their exercise habits. The well-being facilitator at Stennack Surgery commented that:

'Sometimes referrals are very specific but other times not. Sometimes it is straight forward, such as weight management, but other times a bit less tangible and it's a case of meeting up and having a consultation.

'Perhaps the GP hasn't identified these issues due to a lack of time or perhaps the patient hasn't really thought about what might help. I refer to a broad range of services and activities. I look at the underlying causes to the health problems that have caused them to seek a doctor's appointment in the first place (e.g. social isolation) as well as more standard things such as weight management groups. I try to look for things like the walking project, Mobilise, which starts from Stennack and offers people a chance to be active and talk to people too.'

The counselling scheme is also very supportive both for the clients that use the scheme and also the volunteer counsellors who are mentored and supervised well:

'The scheme has offered the volunteers great supervision, much more than we would have received on other schemes and has been very well managed by Dilys and the team.'

'The staff at the children's centre have been a pleasure to work with and over the last year strong links have been built between staff and the counsellors... There is no waiting list so clients can be seen quickly which helps to support clients through crises in a responsive and efficient way.'

Project staff also believe that once a person has been supported in one way they are more likely to be open to others:

'We find that in the groups those who have been helped pass on advice to the others.'

'It's support by word of mouth.'

Understanding the needs of the communities it works with

The project staff at Penwith Community Development Trust understands the needs of their communities and have worked with partners to help refine them. As a result, they have projects that are designed to tackle social isolation, increase confidence, improve the physical health of beneficiaries, increase motivation and help support people to access other activities and services that exist in the locality. As far as possible, the services and project are all accessible by public transport and there is no headquarters for the projects; instead it is a multi-site, with most information and advice being accessed virtually. Finally, the projects work to strengthen the VCS in the area, realising that these links and services are most likely to be sustained moving forwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- Increase referrals to the well-being facilitators, so that all GPs at Stennack Surgery refer patients.
- Allow the well-being facilitators to work with patients from other GP surgeries in the area and extend the scheme across other parts of Cornwall.
- Recruit more volunteers to support people to access services and activities as recommended by the well-being facilitators.
- Make more organisations aware of the well-being database and update as appropriate – a development role.
- Continue to offer counselling at various centres around West Cornwall, including the valuable supervision and mentoring for volunteer counsellors.
- Have more volunteer socials, especially those who predominately work alone (e.g. befrienders).
- Make befrienders aware of the database of activities so that they can help promote it to the people they work with.

APPENDIX 1: HOW THE PROJECT WORKS

About the South West well-being portfolio

Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being is one of the portfolio of projects within the South West Healthy Living Alliance (SWHLA) funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Ten healthy living centres and fifteen projects across the South West were brought together by the portfolio with the aim of supporting the healthy living and well-being of individuals and communities by providing locally accessible, people focused and holistic approaches to tackling health inequalities, particularly for those people most in need. Westbank Healthy Living Centre is the lead organisation for well-being in the South West portfolio. The focus of this regional project is to: improve mental well-being; improve healthy eating; and increase physical activity.

Project inputs

Costs

The project has received £335,698 from the Big Lottery Fund; the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust also provides £20,000 annually as match funding to the project. The funding is broken down as follows:

Analysis of costs to 30/09/10	%
Salaries, national insurance and pension	65.2
Rent	2.6
General running expenses	4.6
Producing information	3.3
Training for staff and volunteers	0.3
Travel for staff and volunteers	2.1
Consultancy and advice/evaluation	0.6
Organisation overheads – line management	9.3
Organisation overheads – accommodation	0.1
Activity costs	8.4
Evaluation	3.5
Total	100.0

Staffing

Almost all the staff that work for Penwith Pathways to Health and Well-being work part time. The project manager is the Head of Health and Well-being at PCDT. The two well-being facilitators each work 12 hours a week and there is also 10 hours a week given in kind from Cornwall Council to manage the database. Other staff are employed on a sessional basis, such as supervisors for the volunteer counsellors, yoga teachers and other therapists; in addition, a range of other partner organisations give their time to the project, in particular staff at the volunteer bureau.

Outputs

The beneficiary targets for the project are 885 direct beneficiaries and 345 indirect beneficiaries. Staff and stakeholders are confident that the project is in line to meet its beneficiary targets by the end of the projects.

Thus far, the total number of volunteers recruited is 1,276. In addition, the well-being facilitator at Stennack Surgery, despite only working 12 hours a week, has already had 130 referrals. A total of 83 referrals were made by the GPs at Stennack Surgery to the well-being facilitator during the period November 2009 and July 2010. The well-being facilitator had seen 69 clients and 14 were on the waiting list.

Health problem	No. and % of clients who have a health problem
Social isolation	60 (35.9%)
Depression/anxiety	46 (27.5%)
Obesity/heart disease/diabetes	19 (11.4%)
Unemployed/de-motivated	16 (9.6%)
Substance misuse	10 (6%)
Smoking	1 (0.6%)
Other health problems	15 (9%)
Total ²	167

The database is installed and available on public access computers at seven GPs and on the internet. The website has a range of projects, activities and services listed on it under 12 primary topic areas:

- 1) health support;
- 2) emotional support;
- 3) community health;
- 4) housing;
- 5) welfare;
- 6) minority groups;
- 7) families/children;
- 8) young people;
- 9) older people;
- 10) support for men/women;
- 11) sex/sexuality;
- 12) drugs/alcohol.

Overall, the website has generated 20,332 hits and has been accessed by between 731 and 935 unique users each month.

Month in 2010	Unique visitors	No. of visits	Pages viewed	No. of hits
January	910	1,438	4,262	6,891
February	796	1,258	4,451	7,238
March	935	1,514	5,928	8,558
April	823	1,244	3,202	5,484
May	975	1,552	4,747	7,499
June	731	1,140	6,760	9,255
July	776	1,241	6,343	14,861
August	882	1,431	7,367	20,332

Unique visitors are 'new' visitors who have never looked at the site before, as identified by the unique computer 'address'.

Large numbers of users or hits worldwide are not important to the site; what matters is that 'local' people use it for signposting to projects that can help them. These local people might be members of the public, surgery patients/clients, doctors or other professionals, or representatives of the voluntary and community sector.

² Total number for presenting health issues is greater than number of total referrals as many clients have more than one presenting health issue