

RESIDENTS GET FIT FOR LIFE

FUNDED BY: The Fit for Life project was funded by Greets Green Partnership, Sandwell Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Sandwell Children's Fund. It was delivered by staff from Sandwell PCT, George Salter Collegiate Academy and Newtown Primary School.

PROJECT BACKGROUND: The increasing incidences of childhood obesity was and still is a key concern for both central government and local authorities and the topic also receives considerable media scrutiny. Evidence suggests that the inadequate diets and low activity levels of many children probably contribute to this rise.

However, there have been few instances reported where children are followed throughout their school life to assess the long-term outcome of food and exercise interventions. A food and physical activity project carried out at George Salter High School (now George Salter Collegiate Academy) and interviews with small groups of pupils (in the Summer term of 2003) provided real evidence of the need for an imaginative scheme to improve the health and fitness of pupils through food and exercise.

To test out and assess the long-term outcome of food and exercise interventions, Greets Green Partnership funded the PCT to initiate the development phase of the Fit for Life at George Salter project within the school setting. Later on, additional

December 2008



Children at Newtown Primary School have fun getting fit.



funding was received from Sandwell Children's Fund to launch the Fit for Life at Key Stage 2 at Newtown Primary School. This proved so successful that further funds were secured to ensure that all primary schools in Greet's Green could take part in Fit for Life.

PROJECT DETAILS: The aim of the Fit for Life project was to address the low activity levels and inadequate diets that contribute to the high incidence of obesity and poor health in young people (through a series of pilot interventions and activities). The project hoped to make it easier for children in Greet's Green to make healthier food choices and to take part in more physical activity so that they have a better future.



Shaleen Meelu, Fit for Life Development Officer.

Shaleen Meelu, a registered nutritionist, was appointed Fit for Life Development Officer in October 2005 with the brief to help pupils, parents, teachers and the wider community get fit for life at George Salter. "My role was to introduce activities focusing on healthy lifestyles, sport, physical activity and food technology, involving pupils, parents, teachers and local communities," says Shaleen. "I also co-ordinated the collection of height, weight and fitness data."

In May 2006, Birmingham University Fitness Services began measuring the body mass index (BMI) of all pupils in Years 5 and 6 at Newtown Primary and all Year 7 students at George Salter High School.

The aim wasn't to collect and report on individual data, but to highlight the key statistics for each school. By regularly measuring pupils' BMI, the Fit for Life team planned to see whether pupils were becoming more healthy as they progressed through school, thus exploring whether or not interventions were having an impact.

Since then, the NCMP (National Child Measurement Programme) was launched. This year, legislation was passed to feed back individual data to pupils. Through a collaboration with Sandwell Medical Research Unit (SMRU) the methods developed at George Salter are being used to monitor longitudinal changes in weight and body composition amongst children here in Sandwell and abroad in India and other Asian countries.

A number of 'quick win' activities have been completed. These have included curriculum support such as cookery classes, science workshops, and using statistics in maths and debating in English to raise awareness of the multiple factors contributing to the food choice children make such as advertising, taste and price.



A number of out-of-hours activity programmes have also been trialled to encourage girls and those least likely to participate in school sport, to start to take part. Shaleen said: “We divided the initiatives into three areas - curriculum based activities, lunchtime activities around food and out-of-hours activities. This meant we were delivering the message throughout the day and over the weekend.

“Because George Salter is an extended school and has a large number of pupils going in on Saturdays, we were able to work with them throughout the week. We needed to raise awareness of physical activity and food so that pupils understood their importance.”

PROJECT IN ACTION: A wide range of activities have taken place through the Fit for Life project and hundreds of pupils at George Salter Collegiate Academy have been learning to lead a healthier life. In science, professionals came in to the academy to talk to pupils about diet. The children responded positively and were intrigued and shocked to learn how diet is related to ethnicity and problems such as diabetes.

In maths, youngsters learned some basic statistics by calculating measurements. They were able to understand BMI and waist circumference but in a maths context. Pupils looked at what normal weight actually means and what would happen to those at the extremes of the curves.

Children were given the opportunity to debate food and advertising issues in literacy classes. They also worked with an advertising executive and graphic designers and looked at how marketing messages can be confusing. Pupils were set a project to promote healthy food for kids and designed a campaign to increase water consumption.

A range of other activities were also staged. Design technology classes looked at food technology, while pupils with special educational needs learned how to cook a healthy three-course meal for their families. A ‘Junk Food Roadshow’ proved popular with pupils who learnt what goes into junk food and how they can make healthier options of burgers and pizzas at home.

On Saturdays, activities were carried out with specific groups, including a group of pupils who had recently arrived from India. Research carried out with these pupils revealed that they had already started to eat fast food when they got home from school and were putting on a lot of weight in their first year in the UK. Through the Fit for Life project, they began to keep food diaries and look at the impact of what they were eating. They were shown how to eat more healthily and



George Salter pupils tuck into their healthy lunches.





Local children of all ages can try out different activities during school holidays, including trampolining.

do more physical activity. Sessions were held at the academy for girls who might not normally get involved in sport.

Shaleen explains: “We ran physical activity taster sessions and developed an intensive week where pupils could chose to do a number of physical activity options and take part in complementary activities such as beauty and health sessions.”

In the first year of the project, it was decided to try to bring parents on board with a School Health Forum for parents and key members of staff. Its aim was to talk about how the school could be made healthier, to increase participation in physical activities and to help families make better food choices.

The parents proved a harder to reach group, but improvements were made after Jon Nicholson

was appointed as Extended Schools Co-ordinator and reviewed out-of-hours community provision.

Fit for Life in primary schools

The success of the Fit for Life project at George Salter led to Julie Nichols being appointed to work on Fit for Life at Newtown Primary, Great Bridge and Harvills Hawthorne Primary, funded by Sandwell Children’s Fund. The aim was to replicate the work at George Salter at primary school level.

Julie’s work included mapping healthy living provision in primary schools, and looking at food technology, healthy eating and additional quick win initiatives. Measurements of primary age pupils were taken and curriculum-related activities set up. An out-of-hours programme of activities, such as cookery sessions, was also run.

Between September 2006 and March 2008 there were dozens of Fit for Life workshops, including many in primary schools covering subjects such as:

- Diet and Disease – curriculum linked – years five and six
- Fit for Life, Fit for Anything – healthy mind and body
- Food Discovery Days
- Healthy Snacks
- Healthy Eating/Healthy Lifestyle – children and parents
- Healthy Lunch Box – children
- Healthy Lunch Box – parents



- Fruit workshops
- Smoothie workshops
- FAB Food Assemblies - Miss Eatwell play
- Charlie and the Kitchen Cook – play
- Healthy Heart Assemblies with the British Heart Foundation
- Street Dance
- Mini-kids physical activity
- Skipping
- Physical activity weeks

Some involved bringing in experts from outside to lead sessions, while others involved parents joining in healthy eating or living activities together with pupils so that the lessons learned could be taken home.

ACHIEVEMENTS: When Fit for Life was set up it had the following intended outcomes, most of which it has already achieved:

- Collection of accurate data ie Body Mass Index (BMI), physical activity and food diary data of Year 7 pupils
- Increased knowledge of current healthy living interventions provided by a range of partners
- Implementation and evaluation of pilot interventions across Year 7
- Increased awareness of the importance of food and physical activity for health in both pupils and staff
- Increased physical activity through extra-curricular clubs and better linkages across new and existing clubs. Improved links and shared plans with feeder primary schools
- Development of appropriate, sustainable fun activities through discussion with pupils, parents and school staff so that they become embedded in the school ethos

Shaleen explained: “We’ve exceeded our own expectations with the Fit for Life project. The school has adopted a whole school policy towards supporting children’s healthier lifestyle choices.” Many of the activities undertaken are now part of school life or have been taken on by other agencies to ensure they will continue. The initial pupil data was collected, and although following pupils through has proved difficult, it has enabled George Salter to gain an idea of the level of pupils’ physical fitness.

Following the appointment of Jon Nicholson as Extended Schools Co-ordinator at George Salter Collegiate Academy, Rus Smith has now been appointed Community Education & Sports Development Manager, based at the Academy. These two appointments will ensure the good work started by the Fit for Life project will continue to be available for the community as a whole as well as school pupils.



Julie Nichols's post is now Fit for Life Co-ordinator for all five primary schools in the Greets Green area and for George Salter Collegiate Academy which means that there are strong links between the feeder primary schools and George Salter. Shaleen adds: "We have progressed much further than was our original plan. Fit for Life is now actually part of pupils' school life – all ages have really taken it on board."

The physical activity taster sessions at George Salter have now been taken on board by Nathan Moore through Sandwell PCT's Active Lifestyles project. They are run in the Easter and Christmas holidays, and every other week through the school summer holidays, with up to 100 youngsters each week taking part. Jon Nicholson has reviewed community activities at George Salter and more physical activities are now being set up for local adults, including martial arts, TaeKwon-Do and aerobics. Attempts are currently underway to get a five-a-side football league off the ground.



Rob Sims, George Salter's head chef, with his healthy meals for pupils.

Other groups for parents have developed, especially Food Interest Groups for different communities where groups of people get together to talk about food. Successful groups have been set up for communities including the Hindu, Bangladeshi and Yemeni communities. Mothers and daughters' groups also started with the Muslim community. All are aimed at encouraging the making of traditional foods in a more healthy way.

George Salter has also appointed a new Head Chef, Rob Sims, who has put new healthy dishes on the lunchtime menu. He has found ways of cooking traditional meals, such as cottage or shepherd pies, by adding vegetables to the recipes as well as mince. Youngsters get the benefit of extra greens without even realising it!

Other choices on the menu now include fillings for baked potatoes including peppers, red onions and mushrooms. The academy makes its own pasta sauces so it knows exactly what's going in them, and fish is baked in the oven rather than deep fried. Rob said: "A lot of pupils aren't used to sitting down to a proper dinner. We're getting children interested in healthy foods and they're loving it."

The school has also introduced a cash-less lunchtime payment system. Every pupil has an account and when they've chosen their food, they put their thumb on the till and it takes off the value of what they've spent. It means a record is kept of what each pupil has chosen, and if they eat healthily they can earn bonus



points and win prizes. It also means that the stigma around free school meals has been removed.

“George Salter decided very early on it was going to source its own produce for pupils’ dinners,” says Shaleen. “Now a chef has been appointed who’s trained to a high standard so the quality of the menu is excellent. The Director of Public Health is so impressed with the cashless system that he wants to roll it out in the rest of the Sandwell Borough.” Rob Sims is also teaching pupils how to cook, with after-school cookery classes for sixth formers.

CASE STUDIES

Newtown gets healthy

Children at Newtown Primary School have enjoyed a whole range of healthy eating initiatives as part of the Fit for Life project, with a sports day, visitors from West Bromwich Albion ‘Sport in the Community’ initiative, a run in the park and a penalty shoot out.

There have also been healthy lunchbox sessions and cookery lessons run for Year 5 and 6 pupils. Thanks to Fit for Life, the school started classes where parents and grandparents practised cooking healthy meals alongside pupils at the school.

Julie Nichols, Fit for Life Project worker, said: “We’ve started a six week family cooking session and it’s going really well. Everyone can take home what they’ve cooked and have it for their family meal.”

The class was for Newtown pupils up to Year 5, and the family members cooking with them included mums, dads and grandmas. They also looked at subjects such as healthy lunchboxes and made smoothies to learn about fun ways to get their five-a-day portions of fruit and vegetables.

Diane Purcell attends the cookery classes with her six-year-old grandson Cole. Diane says: "Cole has been coming to stay with me since he was born and we cook a lot but not such specialised stuff! At the school we've done a lovely vegetable lasagne, a fruit crumble and a really good fish pie. The classes are good because they're educating children about what sort of food to eat. We've really enjoyed the classes a lot."

The school also set up a healthy breakfast club which saw children given a healthy breakfast in a fun and safe environment. The pupils also enjoyed tucking



Newtown Primary School children enjoying their cookery lessons.



into a Fit for Life Project Food Discovery Day. Fishmonger Joe Hodson from Asda in Oldbury, and Jim Cooper, who is a grocer with Fresh Solutions, visited the school and chatted to pupils.

Julie Nichols said: “They were both brilliant and the children really enjoyed the day! We also had a butcher’s and a baker’s workshop and the children learnt lots about healthy food and had plenty of fun.”

A tasty garden

Green –fingered pupils at George Salter Collegiate Academy have been cooking up a treat in their new Science garden. The Science Department has been working with pupils of all ages to create the garden and nurture the plants and wildlife.

“We drained and cleared a pond and now have ecology lessons there in the Summer,” says Science teacher, Sarah Baylis. “We also dug out a vegetable patch just before the Summer and planted a range of vegetables including potatoes, pumpkins and tomatoes. All the produce we grow is donated to the school kitchen and used for pupils’ dinners.”

To stop any unwanted guests eating the veg, pupils also made a scarecrow which stands in the garden. “The garden has already been very successful,” explains Sarah. “We’ve sold plant cuttings at school fairs and have collected lavender to make into lavender pouches. Pupils from different year groups help with the weeding and cutting, so it’s a good joint effort.”

Contact: If you would like to know more about the Fit For Life Project, contact Rus Smith, Community Education & Sports Development Manager at George Salter Collegiate Academy, on 0121 553 4665.

Greets Green Partnership was awarded £56 million in 2000 to deliver a 10 year regeneration programme under the Government’s New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative. It has funded over 340 projects throughout the area, covering community services, crime & community safety, health, housing & urban form and jobs & skills. The Partnership area, which is adjacent to West Bromwich Town Centre, is home to just over 12,400 residents living in 4,900 households.

For permission to publish this case study and to request photographs, please call Brian McKinstrie, Greets Green Partnership’s Communications & PR Manager on freephone 0800 953 0215 or email brian_mckinstrie@sandwell.gov.uk

Greets Green Partnership,
Ground Floor, Court House, 335-337 High Street, West Bromwich B70 8LU

Tel: 0121 533 3188

Fax: 0121 533 3168

Website: www.greetsgreen.sandwell.gov.uk

