

Community Partnership 2013-14

Walk it Out

Getting young mums active, finding out about local health services and having opportunities to get out of the house and socialise were just some of the aims of Walk It Out. This project was run by the Hutt City Council in partnership with the local community.

“The idea was to provide a low-key way to engage young mothers in something active that would also connect them with each other and with local services” says Ali van Barneveld, the Council’s Community Recreation Programmer.

The focus was on working in low socio-economic communities in the Hutt Valley — Naenae, Stokes Valley, Taita, Wainuiomata — and attracting young Māori and Pacific mums with small children. “We know that many in these groups are most at risk of poor health and often they are not accessing family support and health services. This project provided an opportunity to offer something healthy, easy and safe with no strings attached.

“It also gave local services a chance to connect with young mums and families that they might otherwise struggle to reach, so there were benefits both ways” says Ali.

Partnering with the community

The walks were free and took place on the last Thursday of every month. Each walk lasted about an hour and ended with some social time. The aim was to make the walks practical as well as fun. Hutt City Council partnered with different community organisations in the area and this proved to be really successful.

“Local ‘Community Houses’ were the key to getting young mums involved. These organisations know their communities, they have established networks and ways of spreading the word. We supported their efforts with Facebook, fliers and other resources.

“On reflection, promotion is essential to making something like this a success — starting early, using multiple ways of reaching people, and being



strategic about how to engage the audience are critical. Investing in key groups and Facebook really worked for us.”

Every walk was hosted by a different ‘Community House’, so the Walk it Out experience varied each month. Community groups and businesses contributed prizes, healthy snacks and give-aways in support.

Connecting with local services

Each route had to be ‘buggy friendly’ and they went past places like a local kindy or health practice so that the participants could see where these places were for themselves.

“We also organised to have a different service walking alongside the mums on each walk. For example, Naku Enei Tamariki (an early intervention home visiting service) walked with the group one day and ‘Green Prescription’ staff joined us on another — that’s an initiative aimed at improving health through physically activity.



“This created an opportunity to chat in a casual way about what these services can offer the mums and their families. We were very conscious to weave this in gently, rather than making the mums feel pressured.”

The services that attracted the most interest were well-known services such as the Plunket car seat scheme and the ‘Bee Healthy’ dental service.

“Most mums had already heard of these and felt comfortable about engaging with the service, but maybe they weren’t sure how to do that – Walk It Out made it easy for them.”

Challenges along the way

One thing that didn’t work so well was uptake of funding set aside to pay directly for primary health services such as dental treatment or GP visits. There was only a small amount of interest from the mums although different approaches were trialled to encourage people to sign up.

“You can only do so much with the time you have, especially at an ‘event’. What we could do was break down some barriers and help make services more personable. It often takes more than one exposure with a service before people are ready to go to the next step.”

Ali says that there was a silver lining to this. “The money that we didn’t spend on these visits we used to develop a Walk it Out kit and strategy for each ‘Community House’ so that this initiative could carry on into the future. HPA were incredibly flexible and happy for us to adapt things if what we had planned wasn’t working.”

The kit contains a raft of useful items needed to run an event – first-aid kits, sunblock, ‘staff’ t-shirts and templates for health and safety, promotional material and event documents.

There has been huge support from the different community partners to keep Walk it Out going and several are poised to begin again, despite the wintry weather. Ali explains that being an outdoor initiative, weather was problematic at times and on a couple of occasions walks had to be postponed.

Keeping the project going

“By the end of this first project we had learned a lot and achieved a great deal. Young mums were out walking, socialising and connecting with their community and we had excellent community ‘buy-in’ to sustain this concept.”

Ali says that now there is a delivery mechanism in place and the momentum and enthusiasm to make this an ongoing success. “We wanted to keep the concept simple so that it could be replicated easily and inexpensively by others and I think we achieved that.

“There were also lots of lovely by-products – new friendships made along the way and stronger relationships between the Council and community partners.”

Top tips

- Partner effectively with community organisations– supplement their existing networks and relationships with your skills and resources.
- Involve family health and social services and keep the messaging friendly so you don’t scare people off.
- Invest time upfront promoting the project and finding ways to successfully engage your audience.