

Inspirational Stories – Zest Health Centre, Sheffield



Zest is a development trust working to promote regeneration in the Netherthorpe, Upperthorpe and Langsett areas of Sheffield

The Background

Netherthorpe, Upperthorpe and Langsett, which have a combined population of 11,214 people, have large estates of social housing combined with Victorian and new housing developments. It also has a high number of single parent households and a large proportion of families from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. The area suffers from poor childcare provision and some key health issues.

The Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance (now trading as Zest) was established in 1997 as a community forum and between 2000 and 2006 delivered a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) 6 programme bringing in £15 million of funding for the area. This was designed to add value to an SRB 1 capital investment scheme by investing in people. The main areas addressed by the SRB 6 funding were community capacity, social inclusion, employment and training, community safety and health for the community.

Projects such as the Upperthorpe Healthy Living Centre, One Stop Shop, youth services and improvements to the public realm were established.

The Upperthorpe Healthy Living Centre scheme entailed a £5 million capital/revenue project to refurbish and re-model three linked Victorian buildings: a public swimming pool, library and community centre based in the Upperthorpe neighbourhood centre.

Key Issues

At the time when the Centre was being developed, the local authority was generally moving towards a pool stock with bigger pools generally run by leisure trusts and, consequently, small neighbourhood pools were under threat of closure. Although there was no asset review, Sheffield City Council transferred the building to a the newly established Upperthorpe Healthy Living Centre Trust in 2001 on a 30 year lease at a peppercorn rent. The Trust is tripartite with the City Council, the Primary Care Trust and Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance all forming a part.

It is comprised of three nominees from the Primary Care Trust and the Alliance and one from the City Council. The Trust was able to pull together a £5 million capital and revenue funding package including the Lottery's Healthy Living Centre Fund, SRB and European Regional Development Fund.





In 2007, Upperthorpe Healthy Living Centre Trust transferred full operational management of its centre to the renamed Zest. Whilst the Trust leases the building, it has an operating agreement with Zest. Zest currently employs approximately 80 people and, in addition to the Zest Centre, operates a portfolio of local and city wide services including a city wide children's weight management service, youth services and a one Stop Shop for Employment, Training and Enterprise. Both the pool and the gym employ full time staff and do not rely on volunteers for their operations. Zest operates a Community Healthy Champions volunteering scheme and provides opportunities for volunteers in its café, youth projects and other areas.

Impact and outcomes

The healthy living centre has managed to engage with the local population in different ways and 38,000 people used the pool in 2008 while 18,000 used the gym. The pool caters for a wide range of clients and is very successful in attracting key target groups including the disabled, people on low incomes and people from BME communities. It operates the following programmes:

- Cardiac/rehabilitation programmes,
- GP exercise referrals, disability sessions,
- Intensive swimming classes, women only,
- Aqua gym, men only and over 50s sessions.

However, Zest is not just about running a pool. Although the pool plays an important part, the offering is much wider. Zest seeks to raise skill levels, to provide access to employment, to promote enterprise, to create a culture of participation and progression and to promote awareness of, and access to, appropriate levels of service provision.

In order to take these factors into account, a Local Economic Strategy for 2006-11 has been developed.

The programme is still at an early stage for measurement but attempts are being made to find solutions to this through the Centre.

Key resources involved

The City Council and PCT both have recurrent contracts with the Zest Centre, contributing approximately 50% of its income. The remainder of the Centre's income is through till sales and generated income. In addition, there are a number of services paid for via contracts or funding, for example, the children's weight management service and community health champion's scheme.

The Centre no longer receives lottery or grant funding and has moved to a position where it is sustainable and breaks even financially.



Barriers

TUPE has had to be addressed with some facility employees. Transfer of employment has taken place twice. Firstly, from the local authority to the Trust, and secondly, when the management contract was then transferred to Zest. When the first transfer took place, the costs were very high due to legal costs. The staff that transferred stayed within the South Yorkshire Pension Scheme and it was agreed that if the Trust were to come to an end, the Council would pay the pensions claimable under the scheme. This can pose difficulties for local authorities should future arrangements change.

The important challenge has been ensuring the long term viability of the Centre. The Council and Sheffield PCT have recurrent service level agreements with the Trust which contribute approximately 50% of the Centre's income with the remainder being met through sales membership and admittances. The Trust has a service level agreement for the on-going running of the Centre with Sheffield City Council and a service level agreement with the PCT for running health related activities including a GP Exercise Referral programme, Phase III and IV Cardiac Rehabilitation Programme and Pulmonary Rehabilitation/Care. The tight financial management of the Centre, as with any other business operation, has been of equal importance.

Key lessons

A key lesson for the Zest Centre has been the importance of a partnership approach. This importance is due to the multi-faceted nature of the Zest Centre.

The commitment of the Council, the PCT and the community has been essential. A second key lesson is that of a need for a robust and achievable business plan. Swimming pools are generally subsidised from the public purse and the pre-transfer negotiations with the local authority and other partners regarding service level agreements are critical. Another key lesson concerns the transfer of Victorian buildings which have high maintenance and repair costs. The Trust is continuing to address issues over pool maintenance.