

Push Play Neighbourhood Project

Toolkit

**‘A Community Development Approach to Getting
Communities Active and**

Establishing Neighbourhood Collectives’

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“To develop and facilitate a comprehensive health service to the people of our rohe”



Te Kaporeihana Āwhina Hunga Whara



This toolkit has been developed in order to give a broad overview of the Push Play Neighbourhood (PPN) project in the Rodney District including challenges, major lessons learnt and the benefits to this model. This toolkit will be useful for anyone considering implementing a similar community development project around forming community collectives to promote and increase physical activity, sport and recreation.

Forming – assessing ground rules, coming together, agreed purpose, rational

The Push Play Neighbourhood Project is an example of a very successful and innovative collaboration between 6 partners who represented significantly differing sectors of the community who had no previous history of working together: SPARC, Rodney District Council, Harbour Sport, Coast to Coast Primary Health Organisation, Harbour Health Primary Health Organisation and Accident Compensation Corporation. The partners in this joint project sought to work constructively together in order to engage effectively with 4 rural communities in the Rodney district with common goals of:

- increased levels of participation in physical activity and sport,
- increased opportunities for people of all ages to take part in physical activity,
- promoting the benefits of being physically active and,
- raised levels of wellbeing in their communities.

Each partner had specific objectives and goals which reflected their focus and community. The communities chosen to work with were South Kaipara, Warkworth, Wellsford, and Mahurangi East.

The rationale for developing this project was based on international, New Zealand and local research undertaken during the development of the North Harbour Physical Activity Strategy and the draft Rodney Physical Activity Strategy.

The evidence was that some of the best community wide prevention programmes have evolved from the concept that a population, rather than an individual approach is required to enable physical activity to be used as prevention for health issues.

Small rural communities were chosen because although they have fewer sport and physical activity resources and facilities compared to the larger communities, they have more inclusive informal social support networks and are thus more neighbourhood focussed. Higher levels of volunteerism was essential in the development and sustainability of local initiatives as well as partnering with already existing and respected local organisations who had common goals relating to physical activity and sport.

Key to the success of this project was collaboration. In this project there were two levels of collaboration operating. The first was between the six partners who committed resources, finances and delivery support to ensure the project met its desired investment outcomes. This high level collaboration was essential in order to support the second layer of collaboration to occur between the individuals, sports clubs, activity providers, schools, businesses and organisations that joined the PPN Collectives on a voluntary basis to serve their community in a united manner.



Critical Success factors in collaboration between partners.

- Partners needed to have shared goals/objectives and vision of what the project could achieve in the community and commit to working collaboratively together with ongoing buy-in.
- Financial investment from all partners was essential.
- Even though the investment by each partner was not equal, a partnership of equals was essential.
- Well written contracts and documents which clearly outlined expected outcomes and responsibilities but which had a degree of flexibility to respond to community needs.
- A strong governance structure was in place from the beginning with regular steering group meetings.
- A good project manager who was able to maintain an holistic overview of a decentralised service delivery.
- The broad range of different skills offered by participating organisations were utilized.

Storming-where conflict can occur, gaining community/partner buy-in

Conflict can occur on 2 levels just in the same way collaboration can. It is important to be realistic about the potential for conflict when a number of varying organisations or individuals within collectives (sometimes representing differing community interests) are attempting to collaborate and set in place processes and structures to assist with managing it.

Challenges

Challenges included the fact that some of the partnering organisations had at times in the past been in competition with each other for provision of services and in attracting funding. Whilst members of the collaboration had worked in varying degrees in partnership with other members before, the 6 organisations had never previously entered into this kind of complex relationship.

Each organisation had its own priorities and while they overlapped and reflected a shared direction through the project, they were not immune from individual organisational demands and changes. The partners were of markedly different sizes and some worked locally, some regionally and others nationally.

Having clear contracts and outcomes ensured that partners could make joint decisions based around the goals and objectives of the project rather than their individual interests. Each partner committed to the guiding principles of project management around integrity, open communication, accountability and innovation which ensured a good working relationship.

The project manager at times found achieving the desired outcomes challenging when the implementation and delivery work at community level was by the coordinators who were employed by the PHOs. There was potential for conflict between project management priorities and the priorities of PHO line management of coordinators. This was worked through by building positive relationships through regular meetings, regular contact in intervening periods and having clear quarterly reporting against desired outcomes.



There were challenges around the time frames to achieve certain outcomes. For example the time frame to establish a Collective and then for it to become incorporated was unrealistic. Quarterly and 6 monthly reporting kept track of progress and ensured that the project kept focus.

There were some initial challenges in one PPN due to it already having an established informal group that had recently come together to support health promotion activities. There were differing opinions within this group as to whether or not to support the PPN project. The majority chose to move forward as part of the project which enabled a strong relationship to develop between the PPN collective and the regional sports trust.

For the collectives to move towards forming an incorporated society full buy-in and commitment from individuals was necessary. One coordinator experienced significant passive resistance from certain members of the collective in moving towards becoming an incorporated society. The PPN coordinator persevered with those who were committed and eventually those who were not supportive stopped being involved. It was disappointing to lose people from the collective however those who remained bonded more closely together and formed a stronger unit than what existed previously which was a beneficial outcome.

Norming/Performing- where group cohesion and task achievement occur

In the first year promotion was a critical role for the PPN coordinators. They were involved in community initiatives and events as a way to be seen and involved in the community whilst promoting the PPN project and message.

The PPN coordinators needed to provide leadership and direction. Even though this project was about community engagement and development people still required guidance in order to form a cohesive collective. Time assisted with this as it allowed relationships to develop and trust to be established within the collective. Once the collective was established and became an incorporated society it formalised the group which helped build commitment.

Formalisation of Incorporated Society- Sustainability

A key finding from a previous Push Play Neighbourhood pilot in the region was that the collective was limited by an inability to access funding due to their informal status. Consequently it was determined that each collective should work towards becoming an incorporated society so that external funding could be secured.

The process of writing a constitution and becoming an incorporated society forced people to think about the impact of project on the community and consider broader issues.

Three out of four of the collectives have become Incorporated Societies which is now allowing them to access funding to continue community initiatives in an ongoing manner which facilitates sustainability.

Major Lessons Learned

- A locally based coordinator with extensive community knowledge is essential.
- It is critical for the PPN coordinator to spend time in promotion and networking in the first year.
- PPN coordinator needs to support and embed already existing sport and physical activity initiatives within the community before attempting to start new initiatives.



- Utilising the community development model means accepting time scales that reflect the needs of the community volunteers.
- The outcomes sought at the beginning of a community development project are not necessarily what the community will determine for itself by the end of the project e.g. collectives determining that they want to employ a PPN coordinator on an ongoing basis which is possible if funding is secured.
- Once the collective is incorporated the PPN coordinator needs to step back and hand over greater responsibility to individuals on the collective.
- Once incorporated the development of an annual plan by the collective provides focus, gives direction, aids credibility and supports funding applications.

Benefits to this Approach

- The success of this collaborative partnership has provided a good role model for future joint projects by the organisations involved in similar partnerships amongst themselves or with others.
- An important lesson has been reinforced by the process; that it is simpler and more effective to build onto existing community networks than starting from scratch.
- Significant collaboration and communication between partners due to this project has meant better relationships and understanding of what each other does which has enhanced other projects.
- A united voice to lobby on behalf of the community regarding physical activity and sport. The communities now have groups with representatives focused on what they have in common rather than their differences, instead of seeing others with similar goals as being competitors for limited resources. The collectives are now additional 'community advocacy groups' with skills in working with council and with whom the council can include in future consultations on issues associated with opportunities to increase recreation and sport, both formal and informal.
- It enabled the council to be as effective in its communities as an active sponsor of work in the community as it can as a direct provider of services. This was particularly important in a district that covers a large geographic area with a lot of small communities where it is not practical for Council to invest in large recreation and sport infrastructure in all communities. It also built on one of the assets in small communities - their existing personal social networks. The programme has contributed to an extension of some networks. Collective members have discovered the existence of activities and events they were not previously aware of even in a small community. This has helped add to the social support and cohesion in the communities.
- Being incorporated has cemented the collective as an independent community voice and enhanced credibility. It demonstrated that the community is serious about promoting physical activity and sport and has provided a strong community identity and enabled self-reliance.
- A culture of an "active community" has been built that encourages all ages and fitness levels to participate in sport physical activity.
- People being offered a range of opportunities to be active with friends and family.
- Improved coordination of services and provision of information for the community.



- Having a team of people working in the community for the community around physical activity and sport.
- Building relationships between sport and recreation providers and establishing a network so that they can support each other.
- Having a local coordinator and collective has ensured the inclusion of regional programmes and opportunities in semi-rural areas by way of improved channels of communication i.e. increased presence of regional sports trust in the community.
- This project has given the PHO's the opportunity to work with a community development model in the Rodney District. It has enabled them to create a more supportive environment for community members wanting to make healthy lifestyle choices and become more active. Links have been made between this project and other PHO services.
- Greater resources available for community use.

For further information or questions please contact:

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