

# fit *as a* fiddle



Final Report May 2012 – The Town & Bridge ActivAge Centre Project  
Eastern Region



fit as a fiddle is a programme run by Age UK and funded by the Big Lottery Fund as part of the Wellbeing programme  
[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk) [www.fitasafiddle.org.uk](http://www.fitasafiddle.org.uk)



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# Town & Bridge Project – ActivAge Project

## Executive Summary



## Town & Bridge Project, Ipswich

### Background

The Town and Bridge (T&B) Project was one of the first multi-agency projects established by the One Ipswich Local Strategic Partnership. The project aimed to help and improve the health of Suffolk's (and probably East Anglia's) least healthy population: those people aged 45-74 living in the town centre and Stoke (Bridge) area of Ipswich.

Research showed that people living in these wards were at higher risk of premature death than in Suffolk overall.

The **fit as a fiddle** Programme was introduced alongside two other Town and Bridge initiatives the People's Community Garden (Green Gym) and Keep on Rockin' (Community Singing).

The funding enabled the development of two ActivAge Centres, which provided a place for people to meet and socialise, as well as offering healthy lunches, a variety of exercise sessions, other activities/outings, advice and information, support and opportunities for volunteering.

### Aim of the ActivAge Project:

**To improve the health and emotional well-being of people aged 50 yrs and over, living in areas of deprivation in the Town Centre and Stoke (Bridge) areas of Ipswich over the period of five years from October 2007 until March 2012.**

**Funding Received** – The Town & Bridge Project was awarded **£93,000** from the **fit as a fiddle** Programme and a further **£2,000** from the British Heart Foundation in support of the ActivAge Project.

**Target Group** – The ActivAge Project was aimed at people aged 50 years and over, 'hard to reach' groups, socially isolated people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, people on low incomes and people from different cultures and communities with limited access to community based facilities.

**Milestones** - To establish and develop two ActivAge Centres in the target area, both providing a healthy, balanced two course lunch and various other activities based around these lunches to help encourage a healthier lifestyle. The locations for these Centres were identified and working in partnership with the Churches, two centres were developed - the Oasis Centre, Ipswich International Church (IP1) and St Mary at Stoke Church Hall, Stoke Street (IP2).

**Other activities** – To develop a programme of activities, courses and workshops to be delivered in other locations within the designated area.

**Timescale** – The project started October 2007– March 2012 (extended to May 12)

## **ActivAge Centres**

### **Oasis ActivAge Centre**

Over a year after being closed down, a lunch club was re-established based within a church, and currently with 5 - 6 volunteers regularly involved in running the sessions.

The Centre also provides a range of information about other local organisations and Services and regular visits and talks from other agencies offering support and advice. Attendance has grown steadily over the period of the project and the club regularly caters for 25+.

### **St Mary at Stoke ActivAge Centre**

This centre was established in November 2008. The aim of this 'ActivAge Centre' was to open from 10am through to 2.30pm and provide a wide range of activities to promote healthier lifestyles, as well as, a nutritionally balanced two course lunch.

Following a kitchen refurbishment the lunch club meals are now cooked on site and the new kitchen also provides a much needed facility for Church members, community groups and local residents who use the hall on a regular basis.

Attendance has grown steadily over the period of the project and the club regularly caters for 25+ each week.

## **Project Management & Partnerships**

The project was delivered by a part-time Project Co-ordinator, working 19 hours per week and managed by the full-time Town & Bridge Project Manager.

Throughout the project 'ActivAge' has worked in partnership and linked with many other groups and organisations in the area to deliver activities. ActivAge Centres have also been successful in engaging different Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.

## **Involvement & Impact of older people and volunteers**

### **Outcomes**

As part of the Age UK **fit as a fiddle** Programme, all projects funded by the programme were asked to complete an online monitoring form for each new client.

Basic data was collected to enable the programme co-ordinators to monitor the overall participation levels and the client profile. **476** monitoring forms have been completed and fed into the Age UK database by the Town and Bridge ActivAge Centres Project from January 2009 – March 2012. (This figure does not include people attending events / roadshows).

Over the length of the project targets were set around individuals who benefitted from **Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Mental Wellbeing, Volunteering** and attending **Community / Health Promotion Roadshows**. The figures achieved by the ActivAge Project have exceeded the targets that were set.

### **Participant Gender**

- Almost seven in ten ActivAge Centre participants were female. (26% Male / 74% Female).
- The project reached a broad spectrum of ages, with approximately 24% aged between 50 and 60 years old and nearly 15% aged 80+. (61% aged between 60 – 79 years).

### **Ethnicity**

- Based on the 476 records entered up to March 12, the majority of the project participants would describe themselves as White British (87%). However, the project has also worked with participants from the Bangladeshi and Caribbean communities (11%).

### **General Health Information**

- The majority of participants (88%) reported to have been in good health. But around 12% reported their health had not been good.
- Almost half (41%) had a long-standing disability, illness or infirmity.
- Of these, almost one in ten (8%) say that this limited daily activities 'a lot'.

### **Postcode Data**

Based on the 476 records entered over 59% of people involved in the ActivAge Project lived in the target area IP1 & IP2. The remaining 41% lived in postcode areas ranging from IP3 – IP14.

Over **696** people have benefitted from the project, including **2,471** outcomes with people attending Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Mental Well-being sessions, Volunteering and **945** people attending Community Roadshows.

### **Volunteers**

One important and crucial milestone was to recruit and train enough volunteers to ensure the two Centres would become sustainable by the end of the project.

In the original milestones it was predicted that over the life of the project there would be a total of **22** volunteers needed to help achieve targets. To date there have been a total of **57** volunteers involved in the project. These volunteers are not all currently 'active', but **37** volunteers are still involved on a regular basis.

## **Healthy Eating**

Throughout the project **246** members have attended lunch clubs or taken part in healthy eating activities such as:-

- Waste the Waist (six week weight loss & nutrition course)
- Family Fun with Food (Nutrition and hands on cooking)
- Cooking for Good Health (simple, healthy, practical cooking sessions)
- Cooking demonstrations

## **Physical Activity and Exercise**

Throughout the project **531** members have attended physical activity sessions. These sessions have been delivered at the ActivAge Centre lunch clubs, Sheltered Housing, local Church halls, health awareness events and in partnership with other organisations.

## **Mental Well-being**

Throughout the project **689** people have taken part in activities that help to improve mental wellbeing.

## **Evaluation**

The overwhelming response from evaluation feedback has shown that many individuals now feel a sense of 'community' and many long lasting friendships have developed. Loneliness and isolation are two of the main reasons stated for attendance at the ActivAge Centres and the 'need for company'. New members are soon encouraged to join in other activities and can see and hear first-hand how they have benefited other members. Although many members do not initially join to improve their fitness, they are soon feeling the benefits of being more active.

## **Health Literacy**

An 'ActivAge' healthy recipe booklet is being developed as part of the British Heart Foundation funding and this will be available to those members who attended the 'Cooking for Good Health' course and ActivLives members.

## **Economic Value of the Project**

Over the length of the project over **696** individuals have been involved / registered with the project (not including 'Community Events' figures). That would equate to a cost of **£136.50** per person.

The major benefit of the project has been around 'prevention'. The activities developed have helped to keep people active, mobile, independent and connected with their community. Sustainable community services can help reduce GP appointments, unnecessary hospital admissions, support family carers and reduce NHS and Local Authority care costs, particularly around falls and mental health services. Many members have reported improvements in their health especially improvements with back, knee and hip problems.

Falls among elderly people are costing the NHS in England up to £4.6m a day. Age UK says the elderly should be encouraged to take more exercise, to reduce the risk of falls. For example a hip replacement costs the NHS £4,000 - £7,000. Projects like ActivAge can offer real 'added value' if the activities provided can help to prevent even a small percentage of participants from undergoing these complicated and

costly operations.

### **Volunteer Economic Value**

Currently our team of volunteers contribute an average **55** hours per week between them. Even on the current minimum wage of £6.08 this equates to a weekly salary of **£334.40** and an annual salary of **£17,388.80**. Over the four year period volunteers have contributed over **£70,000** worth of working hours.

### **Conclusion**

The ActivAge Centres have proved that using a 'community development' approach can be successful in improving people's health and well-being. Although, many people may have originally joined for the 'company', the centres' support, information and signposting network has provided opportunities for people to take up and sustain regular exercise, join other activities that they would not have ordinarily taken part in and improve their health.

In 2006 when the Town & Bridge Project was established the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived wards in Ipswich was **12 years**. The Public Health Observatories health profile for Ipswich 2012 reports that this gap has now reduced to **8.6 years** and over the past ten years, rates of deaths from all causes for men and women in Ipswich, and rates of early deaths from heart disease and stroke have improved in line with the England average.

Initiatives like the **fit as a fiddle** ActivAge Project play an integral role, in reaching, motivating and supporting people 50 years and over improve their health and well-being and live full and active lives.

Both ActivAge Centres are now regularly attracting up to the maximum attendance of 25-30 people and have proved to be very successful. Through regular feedback and evaluation individuals are regularly reporting that the Centres give them 'something to look forward to' and 'a sense of worth'.

Our members often say that being part of a social group has improved their quality of life and keeps them independent. They want to feel valued and make a positive contribution to the community and society. Many of our members live on their own and experience poor health and see the Centres as a safe and welcoming environment to get together with other like-minded people, who may be in a similar situation. "**Having someone to talk to**" is the quote that is repeated regularly!

The **fit as a fiddle** Programme has enabled the Town & Bridge Project to keep older people active and engaged over a longer period of time and supported the development of two sustainable centres and a number of outreach exercise sessions in two of the most deprived areas of Ipswich.

**Julie Stokes**  
**CEO ActivLives**

**Lindsay Bennett**  
**Project Co-ordinator**

**May 2012**

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview and Background to fit as a fiddle

The Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme is a £165 million grant programme encouraging healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. BIG's Wellbeing Programme comprises three main outcomes aimed at:

- Improving and developing levels of physical activity;
- Mental wellbeing; and
- Healthy eating habits for people and the wider community

The Wellbeing Programme is a reflection of the increasing emphasis put upon healthier lifestyles, nutrition and preventative health services by government as obesity levels rise, alongside an increased focus on tackling mental health problems, as demonstrated in the Healthy Weight Healthy Lives<sup>(1)</sup> cross governmental initiative and the New Horizons report, which sets out a vision for mental health services for 2020<sup>(2)</sup>. Funding under this Programme is available for voluntary and community sector organisations, as well as statutory and private organisations through a series of national and regional Portfolios of activity.

Age Concern England has been awarded £15.1 million by the Big Lottery Fund to deliver the fit as a fiddle portfolio across the 9 English regions from 2007 until 2012. Age Concern and Help the Aged have come together from January 2010 as Age UK to deliver this Portfolio. The main aims of fit as a fiddle coincide with the outcomes of the Big Lottery Wellbeing Fund championing healthy eating, physical activity and mental wellbeing for older people. The portfolio aims to broaden and increase the opportunities for older people to undertake physical activities and improve their eating habits, contributing to an overall improvement in mental health.

The **fit as a fiddle** portfolio comprises of 2 national projects and 24 regional projects, delivered by over 200 organisations (99 of which are local Age UK's/Age Concerns). Each of the 9 English regions receives £1.2 million to deliver a range of innovative projects in their area. The portfolio builds upon Age Concern's Ageing Well Programme developed in 1993 to specifically to improve older people's social and emotional wellbeing in a wider context. An independent enquiry into mental health and well-being in later life revealed five main factors that impact upon older people's mental health and wellbeing: discrimination, participation in meaningful activity, relationships, physical health and poverty<sup>(3)</sup>. By increasing the focus upon good expectations of good health in old age and encouraging older people to maintain, sustain and improve their health, fit as a fiddle aims to address inequalities and

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<sup>1</sup>Healthy Weight Healthy Lives, Department of Health, see

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_082378](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082378)

<sup>2</sup>New Horizons, Department of Health, January 2010, see

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Mentalhealth/NewHorizons/DH\\_102050](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Mentalhealth/NewHorizons/DH_102050)

<sup>3</sup> Promoting mental health and well-being in later life. (Age Concern and Mental Health Foundation, 2006)

empower older people to live fulfilling lives with the support of peers and their communities.

**fit as a fiddle** projects promote healthy ageing, based around the needs and ideas of local people. At a regional level, projects aim to include black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, older people with specific health risks (e.g. high blood pressure) and those living in deprived urban or rural areas.

At a national level the programme is focusing on training and support to become a volunteer to encourage lifestyle and health improvements via a National Cascade Training Programme. A series of leaflets, resources and materials are also being produced as part of a national Health Literacy project.

## 1.2 Aims and Objectives

This report provides a brief overview and background to the **fit as a fiddle** Programme as a whole. The main aim of the report is to give an in depth summary of the 'Town & Bridge ActivAge Centre Project'.

The evaluation objectives are:

- To assess the particular demographics for the project (age, location etc)
- To outline any other funding received & partnership work completed and consider the cost-effectiveness of partnership working & share best practice
- To assess the impact, of health and social outcomes for the service users through various methods of evaluation
- To outline the methods of evaluation and self-evaluation methods
- To evaluate the importance of volunteering on the economic impact and sustainability of activities

## 1.3 Methods

Throughout the project data has been collected in many ways depending on the activity that is on offer. As the activities varied so widely, the 'ActivAge Centre Project' proved particularly difficult to evaluate. Throughout the life of the project there have been in excess of 30 different activities varying from one off sessions to six / eight week courses. Also many of the regular activities are on-going so different methods of evaluation had to be developed for each.

Evaluation methods used included:

<b>Type of evaluation/ feedback</b>	<b>Information Collected</b>	<b>Collected by</b>	<b>Used for Course/ activity</b>
<b>Registration Form</b>	All personal contact information, health screening, photo/video consent, NOK	Instructors, Volunteers & Project Co-ordinator	All new members
<b>SNAP data form</b>	D.O.B, ethnicity, postcode, health status	Instructors, Volunteers & Project Co-ordinator	All new members
<b>Registers</b>	Attendance details	Instructors, Volunteers & Project Co-ordinator	All Activities
<b>Feedback questionnaires issued at the end of an activity</b>	<b>See example in Appendix 1</b>	Instructors, Volunteers, Project Co-ordinator	Lunch Clubs Short Courses
<b>Customer comments cards collected periodically at lunch clubs</b>	Customer feedback	Volunteers, Project Co-ordinator	Lunch Clubs
<b>Knowledge questionnaires used at the beginning and end of course for scores comparison</b>	(i.e. this could be a questionnaire about nutrition for the 'waste the waist' course)	Course Facilitator	Nutrition / Weight loss Cooking for good health
<b>Steering group meetings held every six months</b>	To discuss progress and achievements as well as ideas for the future progression of the project	Project Co-ordinator	Lunch club members & volunteers

<b>Prize draws/ numbered programmes</b>	These methods help to collect information from community events (i.e. monitor attendance etc...)	Event volunteers	One off events
<b>Weekly progress cards</b>	(weight loss and waist measurements)	Course Facilitator	Nutrition/ Weight loss courses
<b>Case studies</b>	How individuals benefit from the project, their background, how they heard about the project  It's their story in their own words	Project Co-ordinator	All activities and also volunteer case studies
<b>Ecorys case studies/ videoed interviews</b>	As above	Volunteer community evaluators	Used to interview a broad range of 'ActivAge' participants
<b>Clinical data to help raise awareness of any potential underlying problems</b>	Blood Pressure Cholesterol Blood sugar levels	Trained personnel	Men's health events

## Data Collection

All 'ActivAge' instructors, partners & volunteers are issued with the registration and SNAP data forms along with registers to monitor attendance. As the project is reliant on these individuals to maintain up to date records this does sometimes prove difficult to monitor. Occasionally individuals may not fill out the relevant forms, due to, forms not being issued, forms being lost or individuals taking forms away to fill in and then not attending the activity again. The same can also be said for evaluation forms issued at the end of a course. This can obviously affect the results of any evaluation. Throughout the period of the project we have worked to develop various methods of evaluation and try to ensure that all relevant customers return these as promptly as possible i.e. building evaluation into the course time.

## 2 Overview

### The Town & Bridge ActivAge Centre Project

#### 2.1 Aims and Intended Outcomes

The Town and Bridge (T&B) Project was one of the first multi-agency projects established by the One Ipswich Local Strategic Partnership. The project aimed to help and improve the health of Suffolk's (and probably East Anglia's) least healthy population: those people aged 45-74 living in the town centre and Stoke (Bridge) area of Ipswich. The Town & Bridge Project was hosted by ICVS, helping the project to grow and providing back office and management support.

A report produced by the Director of Public Health for Ipswich in 2002 showed the rate of premature deaths among the under 75's were 75% higher in the Town ward and 54% higher in Bridge ward, than in Suffolk as a whole and that the difference in life expectancy between the most and least deprived, living in the project area was 12 years.

Further research revealed that the increase in premature deaths between people aged 45 – 74 years was due to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer and lung disease from smoking; poor diet and lack of exercise and any successful attempt to combat this would need to address these behaviours.

The project had five strands exploring the health, social, economic and cultural surroundings of people living in the Town & Bridge area and how they affected people's health and well-being.

Consultation was carried out with residents, groups, organisations and local business and they felt that:

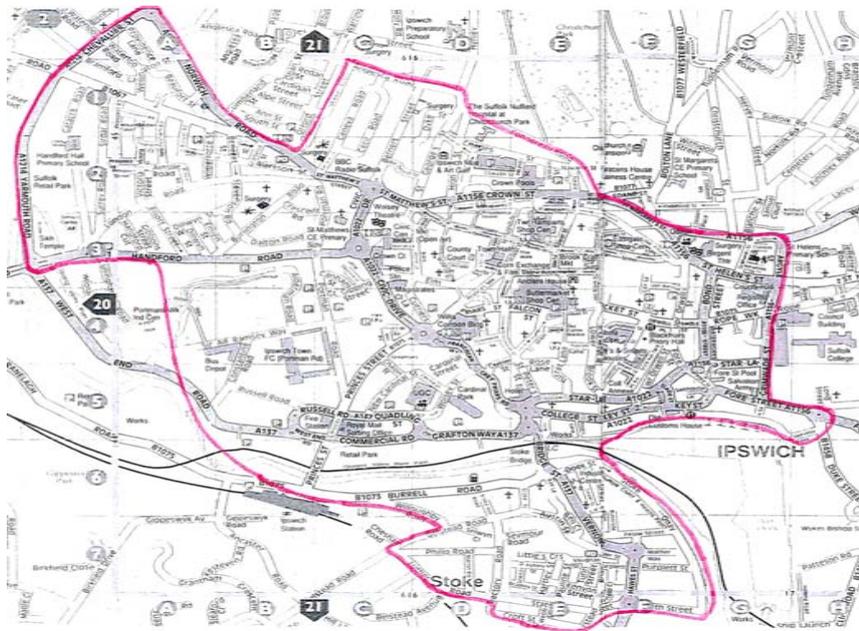
- Many people living in the project area were lonely, isolated, lacked social support and had limited access to local facilities.
- The social environment was thought to lead to low expectations of quality and length of life. Respondents thought life expectancy of 70 years would be regarded as normal in Town and Bridge.
- Low self-esteem and depression in the context of poor social support were thought to have a negative impact on job seekers.
- Low expectations of health and poor experiences of life were thought to influence attitudes towards health related behaviour, with people feeling that there is little to be gained from healthy activity such as quitting smoking or taking up exercise.

The **fit as a fiddle** Programme was introduced alongside two other Town and Bridge initiatives the People's Community Garden (Green Gym) and Keep on Rockin' (Community Singing).

The funding enabled the development of two ActivAge Centres, which provided a place for people to meet and socialise, as well as offering healthy lunches, a variety

of exercise sessions, other activities/outings, advice and information, support and opportunities for volunteering.

## Geographical Area – Town & Bridge Target Area



*Including parts of Alexandra, Bridge and Gipping wards, St Margaret's and Westgate wards.*

### **Aim of the ActivAge Project:**

***To improve the health and emotional well-being of people aged 50 yrs and over, living in areas of deprivation in the Town Centre and Stoke (Bridge) areas of Ipswich over the period of five years from October 2007 until March 2012.***

**Funding Received** – The Town & Bridge Project was awarded £93,000 from **fit as a fiddle** Programme and a further £2,000 from the British Heart Foundation in support for the ActivAge project.

**Target Group** – The ActivAge Project was aimed at people aged 50 years and over, 'hard to reach' groups, socially isolated people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, people on low incomes and people from different cultures and communities with limited access to community based facilities.

**Timescale** – The project started October 2007 – March 2012. (The project was extended to May 2012).

## Outcomes

The project had three main outcomes:

**Outcome 1 – Older people being more physically active and involved in the community through increased skills and participation (PA):** The ActivAge Centres will provide opportunities for older people to get involved in the planning and delivery of activity programmes, to participate in social and physical activities and learn new skills.

**Outcome 2 – Older people and families eating more healthily (HE):** The Healthy Lifestyle and Healthy Eating Programmes will provide advice, information, support and learning opportunities to help people make positive lifestyle changes and improve their health.

**Outcome 3 - Older people having enhanced and improved mental wellbeing (MW):** The ActivAge Centres will enable older people to socialise, become more active, have access to health and welfare information, learn new skills and improve their health both physically and mentally.

## Milestones

Time Period	Milestone	Targets included in this milestone	Achieved
Yr 1 – April 08 to Sept 08	Establish locations for premises of two ActivAge Centres, agree use of premises and exchange contracts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing and agreeing locations for 2 centres.</li> </ul>	<b>Achieved</b> <b>PA – 18</b> <b>MW – 18</b> <b>Total - 36</b>
Yr 2 – Oct 08 to Sept 09	Two ActivAge Centres publicised and open events held. 6 volunteers recruited and trained to support and encourage older people to attend the centres. 161 people attending centres or outreach activities for Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Mental Wellbeing support sessions and general information / signposting. (PA -56; HE- 49; MW - 56) Organise and deliver an ActivAge roadshow to 50 older people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>2 Centres</b> launched</li> <li><b>6 volunteers</b> recruited and trained</li> <li><b>161 individual</b> older people attending centres or outreach activities</li> <li><b>50 older people attend roadshow</b></li> </ul> <b>Total Outcomes: 219</b>	<b>2</b>  <b>23</b>  <b>773</b>  <b>381</b>  <b>Total: 1,179</b>
Yr 3 – Oct 09 to Sept 10	6 additional volunteers recruited and trained to support and encourage older people to attend the centres. 240 older people attending centres or outreach activities for Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, Mental Wellbeing support sessions and general information / signposting. (PA - 100; HE - 40; MW - 100) Organise and deliver an ActivAge roadshow to 50 older people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>6 additional volunteers</b> recruited and trained</li> <li><b>240 older people</b> attending centres or outreach activities</li> <li><b>50 older people attend roadshow</b></li> </ul> <b>Total Outcomes: 296</b>	<b>13</b>  <b>342</b>  <b>214</b>  <b>Total: 569</b>



By 2009 most of the Church volunteers had retired and the 'ActivAge Project' gradually recruited a team of volunteers to take over the running of the centre. There are currently 5-6 volunteers that regularly attend the Oasis Lunch Club each week.

Most of the members are on low incomes and this club gives them the opportunity to eat a balanced healthy two course meal at a very reasonable price. If there are any meals left over, these are often distributed to homeless people who visit the Church.

The Centre also provides a range of information about other local organisations and services. There are also regular visits and talks from other agencies offering support and advice.

Attendance has grown steadily over the period of the project and the club regularly caters for 25+.



### **St Mary at Stoke ActivAge Centre**

This centre was established in November 2008. The aim of this 'ActivAge Centre' was to open from 10am through to 2.30pm and provide a wide range of activities to promote healthier lifestyles, as well as, a nutritionally balanced two course lunch.

The kitchen did not meet Food Safety Standards, so unfortunately meals could not be cooked on site. However, after discussions with Stoke High School and Suffolk County Council (SCC) a partnership was formed and meals for the lunch club were cooked in the school kitchen and then transported by Town & Bridge volunteers, in hot boxes to the lunch club.

This partnership arrangement continued until £6,500 funding was secured by the Town & Bridge Project, through Ipswich Borough Council's (IBC) Area Forum budget and SCC Councillor Bryony Rudkin, to install a new kitchen (Seager Kitchens) in the Church hall in July 2010. Lunch club meals can now be cooked on site and the new kitchen also provides a much needed facility for the Church, community groups and local residents who use the hall on a regular basis. .

Attendance has grown steadily over the period of the project and the club regularly caters for 25+ each week.

### **Activities at St Mary at Stoke ActivAge Centre**

Every week there are two activities on offer, one morning session from 10.30am – 11.30am and an afternoon session from 1.30pm – 2.30pm.

The morning session is usually an activity based around falls prevention and consists of a chair based / balance / stability / co-ordination focused class. As with the lunch the numbers have also increased over the duration of the project and these morning sessions are regularly attended by 15 – 20+ people.

The afternoon programme is changed regularly to maintain interest and access to a wide range of activities and also to accommodate the wishes of those attending who are regularly consulted on the activities they would like to try. The focus is always around health improvement through physical activity, healthy eating and social inclusion. 10 – 15 people attend the session.



### Sessions have included:

- Community Health Walks
- Circle dancing
- Salsa / Line dancing
- Yoga/relaxation
- Holistic therapies
- Brain Training
- Cooking for good health & cooking demo's
- Pilates / Tai Chi
- Producing a cabaret show over 7 weeks & 2 performances
- Dance & Prop making
- Card making / flower arranging
- Nutrition talks
- Balance Circuits / Indoor Golf
- Boccia
- Singing



These activities have varied from single taster sessions to six/eight week courses as well as sessions led by ActivAge members i.e. card making.

### Other regular 'ActivAge' activities:-

The 'ActivAge Centres Project has established other regular activities linked to the project and using different venues across the project area:-

- Weekly Bangladeshi men's circuits (Bangladeshi Support Centre)
- Weekly Bangladeshi women's activities (Manor Ballroom, Town Centre)
- Weekly movement to music class (Town Centre)
- Twice monthly health walks in local parks
- Weekly sheltered housing activities and coffee afternoon (Cumberland Towers Sheltered Housing)

- Twice monthly falls prevention activities at a local church coffee morning (All Saints Church)



### One off courses and activities have included:-

- Women's Aqua Confidence courses at Crown pools (six week courses)
- Men's Aqua Circuits at Fore Street Pool (six week course)
- Nordic Walking courses in Christchurch Park (six week courses)
- Various health and wellbeing activities at the local library group (monthly)
- Family Fun with Food at the Quaker Meeting House (5 week course)
- Waste the Waist at Westgate Ward Social Club (six week course)
- International women's dance group at West Gate Ward Social Club (six week course)
- Golf taster sessions at St Mary at Stoke Church Hall



## 2.3 Project Context

The project met a number of local and regional strategies. The East of England Regional Health Strategy – Healthy Futures 2005-2010 highlighted the need to encourage better health for people in the East of England and support them in 'active ageing'. The Town & Bridge Project was also mentioned as a specific case study in the strategy.

Within Local Area Agreements there were several targets that met the aims and objectives of the ActivAge Centre Project e.g.

- Healthier communities and older people

- Increasing the number of volunteers
- Improving the standard of life for the most disadvantaged

The Town & Bridge Project was also part of the Local Strategic Partnership One-Ipswich Community Plan.

In 2009 The Town & Bridge Project was mentioned in the Department of Health 'Health Profile' for Ipswich stating 'The Town and Bridge Project (a multiagency project) exists to tackle poor health in the town's most deprived communities.'

## 2.4 Project Management and Leadership

The 'ActivAge Project was developed by the Town & Bridge Project based and hosted by Ipswich Council for Voluntary Service (ICVS) in Ipswich town centre. The project was delivered by a part-time Project Co-ordinator, working 19 hours per week and managed by the full-time Town & Bridge Project Manager. The Town & Bridge Project Manager initiated the development of the project for nine months before the Project Co-ordinator was recruited, working closely with the **fit as a fiddle** Regional Development Officer.

All 'Town & Bridge' projects were accountable to the Town & Bridge Project Steering Group, which included representatives from the One-Ipswich Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Councillors, Education, Suffolk Police and NHS Suffolk. The Town & Bridge Project Steering Group met bi-monthly until ActivLives was established in April 2012.

The Town & Bridge Project Manager organised regular supervision sessions with the Project Co-ordinator to monitor the development of the project against the **fit as a fiddle** milestones and to agree action plans.

Each ActivAge Centre has its own individual Committee made up of representatives from the Churches involved, volunteers and members.

Quarterly and yearly reports were produced for Age UK **fit as a fiddle** Programme and information about the progress of the project was included in the Town and Bridge Annual Report and ICVSs Annual Accounts.

Throughout the project 'ActivAge' has worked in partnership and linked with many other groups and organisations in the area to deliver activities. ActivAge Centres have also been successful in engaging different black and minority ethnic groups.

Partnerships have Included:-

- ICVS (Ipswich Council for Voluntary Service)
- Age UK Suffolk
- CSV Media
- Bangladeshi Support Centre
- Ipswich Hospital, Physiotherapy Departments
- Suffolk Police – Safer Neighbourhood Teams
- Breathe Easy Ipswich (individuals with chronic lung disease and disorders)



- Karibu (African women's support group)
- Refugee Forum International Women's group
- British Heart Foundation
- Active Well-being Project – Suffolk Sport
- DanceEast
- Top Time groups – Suffolk County Council Libraries
- Healthy Ambitions Suffolk
- Stepping Out in Suffolk – Live Well Suffolk
- Tai Chi Association
- Ipswich Borough Council – Crown Pools, Community Development & Parks & Leisure



The ActivAge Project has also provided support to many public health information roadshows facilitated by other organisations such as, the Bangladeshi Support Centre, Ipswich Borough Council, Falls Prevention Service, ICVS Volunteer Centre, Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Sport & Suffolk Police. Examples of this support are displays, exercise taster sessions, 5-a-day fruit stand, project information etc.

## 2.5 Involvement of Older People and Volunteers

The involvement of older people, members and volunteers was key in the development and success of the ActivAge Project. Also an important and crucial milestone included recruiting and training enough volunteers over the five years, to enable the two ActivAge Centres to become sustainable by the end of the project.

In the original targets it was predicted that over the life of the project there would be a total of **22** volunteers needed to help achieve sustainability. To date there have been a total of **57** volunteers involved with the project. These volunteers are not all currently 'active', but **37** volunteers are still involved on a regular basis.

The ActivAge Project used both formal and informal methods of recruiting new volunteers. Informally, many existing lunch club members have volunteered to help with various tasks involved in the running of the centres. The more formal route is through organisations such as Ipswich Council for Voluntary Service's - Volunteer Centre or through media campaigns and public events.

The Project Co-ordinator arranges an initial visit for the prospective volunteer, so they can experience and clearly understand the role that they will undertake. They then attend a basic induction day and receive training and guidance from existing volunteers. On-going training may then be offered depending on the volunteer's role, such as, Food Safety, Health and Safety and First Aid Training.

The majority of volunteers are retired, female and over the age of 55, some are students hoping to gain further experience of the workplace or to help with a degree course and some are unemployed hoping to gain work experience with a view to enhance their chances of employment. Other volunteers are referred through

organisations such as the Papworth Trust, who provide opportunities, training and support to young people of working age with special needs. Four volunteers referred by the Papworth Trust currently attend the two ActivAge centres.

Volunteer roles include cooking, waiting on tables, setting up & clearing away, taking money/registers, admin, washing up, laundry, providing support to other members and assisting with activities.

Alongside these volunteers, members also help out, as and when required. Tasks might include setting tables, translation, delivering leaflets/posters, making tea / cakes, helping on promotion stands at community, health promotion and fundraising events.



Volunteers are invited to attend quarterly steering group meetings and participate in any decision making regarding the development of the Lunch Clubs and organising outings and activities.

ActivAge Centre members and volunteers are regularly asked for their feedback and invited to attend focus/discussion groups, as well as, completing questionnaires and customer comment sheets. They are able to share their views, ideas and suggestions for future activities and outings or discuss any issues they have regarding services provided at the two centres. In fact the majority of members are so empowered that they confidently inform volunteers and staff of any issues, face to face, by phone, email and in writing.

Two members / volunteers have recently been invited to become Trustees of the new organisation ActivLives.

## 2.6 Outcomes of the ActivAge Project

As part of the Age UK **fit as a fiddle** programme, all projects funded by the programme were asked to complete an online monitoring form for each new client.

Basic data was collected to enable the programme co-ordinators to monitor the overall participation levels and the client profile (**Appendix 2**). **476** monitoring forms have been completed and inputted into the Age UK database by the Town and Bridge ActivAge Centres Project from January 2009 – March 2012. (This figure does not include people attending events / roadshows).

Over **696** people have benefitted from the project, including **2,471** outcomes with people attending **Physical Activity (PA)**, **Healthy Eating (HE)** and **Mental Well-being (MW)** sessions (some people may attend more than one session), Volunteering (**VOL**) and attending Community Roadshows.

There are no figures shown prior to Oct 08 as the Project Co-ordinator only came to post in July 08 and the first few months were spent identifying locations and planning the opening of the ActivAge Centres.

### Individual outcome totals for the period of the Project:

<b>Outcome area</b>	<b>Targets (people involved)</b>	<b>Total of new people benefiting</b>	<b>Figures +/- Targets</b>
<b>PA</b>	300	531	<b>+231</b>
<b>HE</b>	145	246	<b>+101</b>
<b>MW</b>	300	690	<b>+390</b>
<b>VOL</b>	22	57	<b>+35</b>
<b>COMMUNITY ROADSHOWS</b>	250	945	<b>+695</b>

Over the duration of the project these figures show that the targets set have been exceeded. This is not always the case when studying the individual Quarterly Reports because the figures can rise and fall depending on many outside influences. It has proved difficult to predict these influences when setting targets; the most common being, time of year, weather, holidays etc.

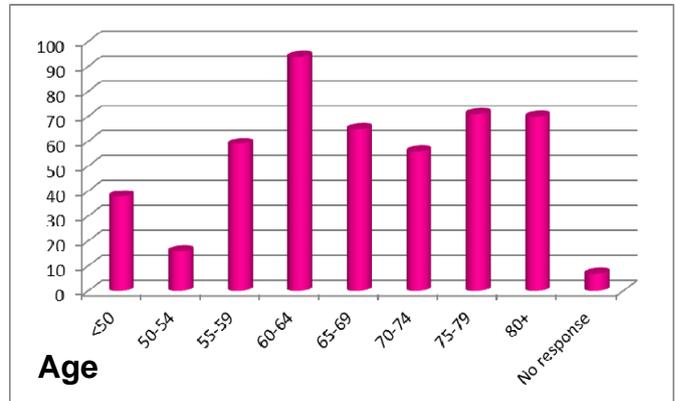
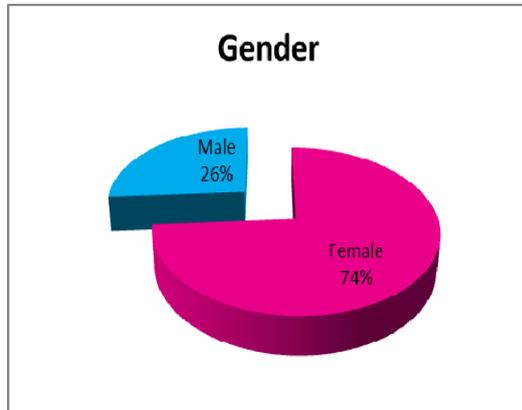
It is also inevitable that with the on-going nature of the 'ActivAge' Centres the registration of new members will be higher at the beginning of the project and figures will gradually lessen over time. The attendance figures reflect the success of both

ActivAge Centres as they are both now running to capacity and this can only strengthen the case for more ActivAge Centres being made available to older people in other areas of Ipswich/Suffolk.

## Outcomes Achieved

The following charts summarise the overall profile information for the ActivAge Centre Project.

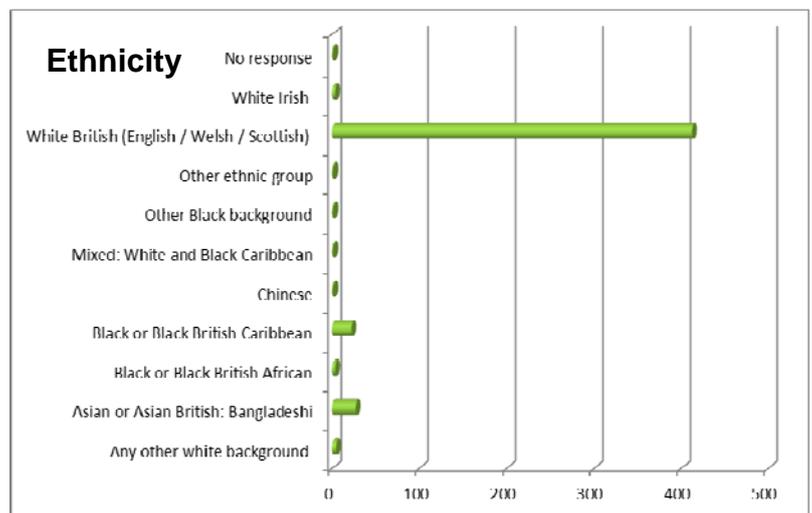
### Participant Gender



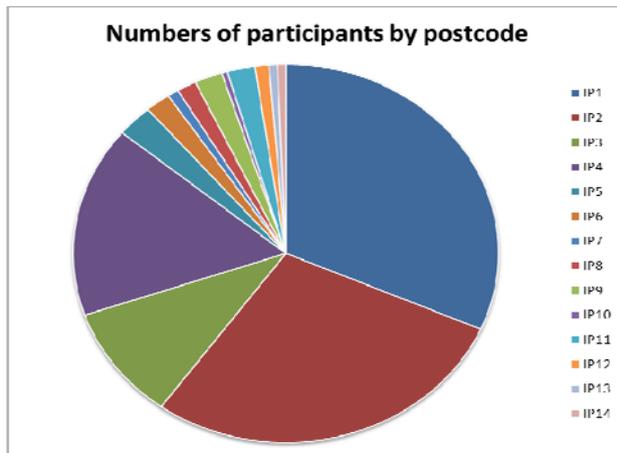
- Almost seven in ten ActivAge Centre participants are female.
- The project reaches a broad spectrum of ages, with approximately 24% aged between 50 and 60 years and nearly 15% aged 80+. (61% aged between 60 – 79 years.)

Based on the 476 registration forms entered up to March 12, the majority of the project participants would describe themselves as White British (87%)

However, the project has also worked with participants from the Bangladeshi and Caribbean communities (11%)



## Postcode Data

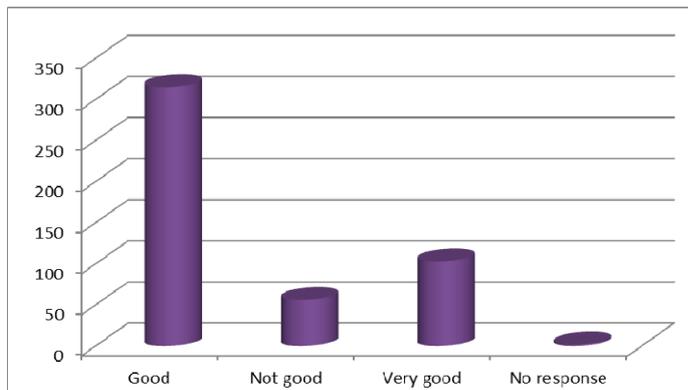


Based on the 476 registration forms entered, over 59% of people involved in the ActivAge Project live in the target area IP1 & IP2.

The remaining 41% lived in postcode areas ranging from IP3 – IP14.

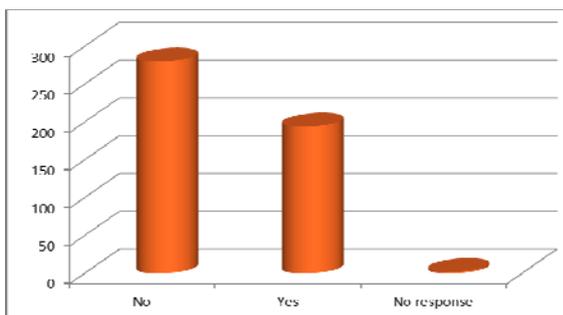
## General Health Information

### Current health of participants

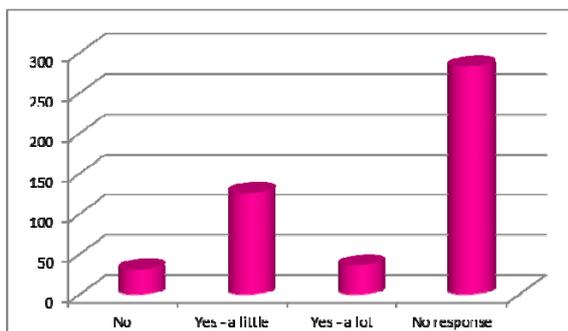


The majority of participants (88%) reported to have been in good health. But around 12% reported their health had not been good.

### Participants with a long term health condition or disability



Almost half (41%) have a long-standing disability, illness or infirmity.



Of these, almost one in ten (8%) say that this limits their daily activities 'a lot'.

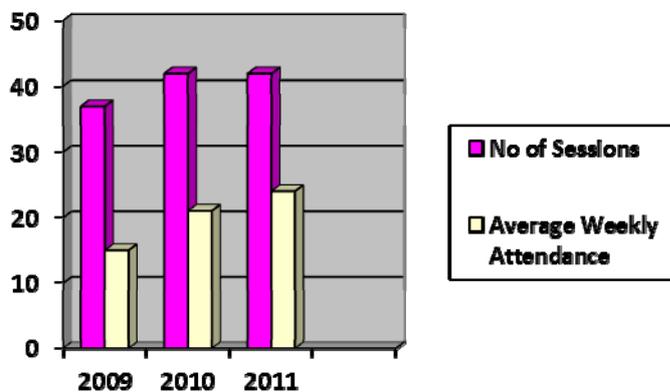
**Impact of long term health condition or disability upon everyday life**

## Attendance at ActivAge Centres

The regular attendance for both ActivAge Centres has grown over the duration of the project:-

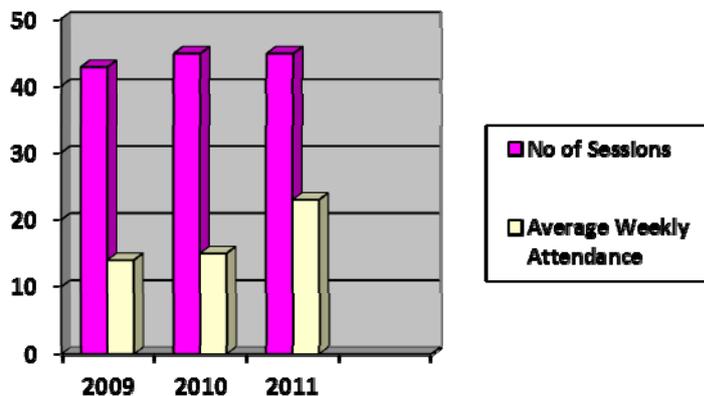
### St Mary at Stoke ActivAge Centre Outcomes

Year	No of Sessions	No of Attendances	Average weekly attendance
2009	37	542	15
2010	42	902	21
2011- March 2012	57	1355	24



### Oasis ActivAge Centre

Year	No of Sessions	No of Attendances	Average weekly attendance
2009	43	601	14
2010	45	676	15
2011- March 2012	61	1402	23



## 2.7 Successes and Lessons Learned

### Successes

The ActivAge project has successfully met the **fit as a fiddle** targets and developed two ActivAge centres that are both well attended, as well as, a wide range of outreach activities and courses that have helped support people to improve their health and well-being.

**This is what our members had to say:**

**“Don’t know what I would have done without it, we need more of these places”**

**“Most of us still do the exercise outside of the class”**



**“Just because we are getting older we shouldn’t stop”**

**“I feel part of a little society”**



**“I used to use a walking stick, but I no longer need one apart from occasionally sometimes in the morning”**

**“Definitely feel fitter, I am more motivated and my breathing is better”**



**“Being more active affects your life, because you can achieve more”**



**“I used to swim 20 lengths, now I can do 30!”**

Through regular consultation with participants, members have regularly reported that their quality of life has improved both physically and mentally, but with the main emphasis on the reduction of social isolation. New friendships have been formed and social support networks built.

Over the five years members have grown in confidence and through the project have joined other Town & Bridge initiatives, or have been signposted to other community groups, projects and support organisations.

Strong partnerships have developed with other organisations over the project period, which has helped to reach more older people, particularly from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and 'hard to reach' communities.

The **fit as a fiddle** five year funding has helped the Town & Bridge Project to build a good reputation in Ipswich for the delivery of high standard services and activities for older people. The Centres and outreach activities have encouraged and supported people aged 50 years and over to keep active and involved in their community over a longer period of time, which has had much more impact than a short-term funded projects or one off six week exercise sessions.

The project has successfully recruited 57 volunteers of all ages and supported them to get involved in their community, gain valuable workplace experience, access to training and support in gaining local employment.

The project has developed strong links with the local media e.g. radio and local newspapers to help promote activities, training programmes, courses and community events. The Town & Bridge project was invited by the Ipswich Star to have a monthly column promoting activities and raising awareness about the issues that face older people. This ran for 9 months and helped with the transition of a LSP project becoming an independent organisation called ActivLives. **(See Appendix 3)**

## Lessons Learned

### Evaluation

Evaluation has proved particularly hard to implement as all the activities have been so varied. As outlined previously there were many methods of evaluation developed by the Project Co-ordinator to cater for different activities. Age UK also commissioned an independent research company (Ecorys) to collect and validate evaluation information. Unfortunately, this evaluation for the **fit as a fiddle** project was only introduced in the final year of the project and then only new members, from that date, could be included. This was very disappointing for the ActivAge Project, as none of the previous attendance /membership figures could be used by Ecorys.

As outlined above new memberships had started to decline by the end of the project, even though attendances figures were up, so unfortunately the project was unable to benefit from these statistics.

However, this has highlighted the need to thoroughly research preferred methods of evaluation, prior to the start of a project through consultation with funders and key stakeholders. This will ensure that information gathered is relevant and provides useful up-to-date and valuable data that can support the development of local services and strengthen future funding applications, tenders etc.

## Men's Activities

Over the period of the **fit as a fiddle** project attendance by men, compared to women, has increased from 22% in 2008 to 26% in 2012. However, this is an area that will continue to be researched and developed in an effort to engage more men to improve access to healthy lifestyle and community activities.

Focus groups were held in April 2011 to discuss this issue involving men attending the ActivAgeing Centres. The groups were run by independent facilitators to enable the men to speak more freely about their views of existing services and ideas for new activities. Although, Age UK initiatives such as 'Swimming without Women' and the 'Men in Sheds' projects have attracted more men to join 'men only' activities, the feedback from men attending the Oasis lunch club and similar at St Mary at Stoke Lunch Club was:

**Men Only Sessions:** The men present did not like the idea of men only or single gender sessions. Being able to meet women in a social environment and doing activities alongside them was an important reason for attending the lunch clubs.

When asked what activities they would like to take part in the men stated:

**Activities:** In terms of more physical activities, the men referred to activities such as carpet or short mat bowls, darts and dancing, although when the activity of dancing was explored further this was an activity enjoyed with previous partners, for example wives, and the men were less certain that they would want to dance or enjoy dancing in the same way with others.

Greater enthusiasm however was shown when the men discussed activities which would enable them to learn a new skill which they could then try at home. Examples were given of craft related activities such as glass painting or tile painting.

Activities such as 'bingo' were specifically mentioned as a type of activity the men would not want to do.

The feedback from the men's focus groups can be found in **Appendix 4**

The outcomes of the focus groups were:

- To hold further focus groups with existing participants to develop activities at the two centres
- To communicate the benefits of participation to wider networks.
- The marketing messages should highlight the existing benefits of low cost, easily accessible, social activities and venues, and should seek to appeal to the male values of maintaining a sense of purpose, daily structure and having a role in society.
- Additional research and focus groups are conducted with non-participants to further understand barriers and potential drivers to participation for men.

## 3. Key Findings: Impacts on Older People

### Quote from Mr B's Case Study

Mr & Mrs B are in their 80's and regular attendees at the Oasis lunch club. Mr B described what they like about the Lunch Club and why they keep coming by saying, *"We enjoy the atmosphere, good food and good value, everything about it. Everything is plus, plus, plus!! The company, the people are so pleasant towards us, we feel right comfortable we really do."*

### 3.1 Healthy Eating

Throughout the project **246** new members have attended lunch clubs or taken part in healthy eating activities these include:-

- 'Waste the Waist' a six week nutrition course
- Family Fun with Food and Film
- Cooking for Good Health
- Cooking Demonstrations

### 3.2 'Waste the Waist' summary and evaluation results:-

The aim of this course was to help raise awareness of the significance and dangers associated with excess body fat carried around the mid torso. Awareness was raised through advice on healthy eating and the benefits of physical activity.

Food diaries were kept by the attendee's and each week they were given the option of being weighed and their waist measurements taken also on a weekly basis. Out of the eight people taking part, all but one individual decided to have these measurements recorded. Each week everyone was encouraged to complete eating plans where they could pre plan their meals for the coming week.

The session on 'reading food labels' proved particularly popular and the practical sessions of analysing real food labels was very enjoyable and all members expressed that this session in particular had been very useful to them when shopping for healthier options. Alongside meal plans they were also given recipes to take away with a focus on healthy versions of popular classics.



*Members of 'Waste the Waist'*

Eight ActivAge members attended this course; this was made up of three men and five women. Of the eight clients, six were overweight according to their Body Mass Index (BMI). One lady, a diabetic with a normal BMI, was in a high risk Cardio-Vascular Disease (CVD) group because of her ethnic origin. One gentleman with normal BMI already had CVD. So even though weight loss was not an issue both were advised to eat a healthier diet.

The improvements in the measurements from the first session to the last were as follows:

- All seven members lost weight
- The biggest weight loss was 5.5lb
- The women achieved greater weight loss than the men, ranging from 3lb to 5.5lb
- The two men achieved a weight loss of 1lb and 1.5lb
- 6 members reduced their waist circumference and one member stayed the same
- The largest waist circumference reduction was achieved by 2 women at 2.75 inches
- The four other members reduced their measurement by at least ½ an inch

As an additional method of evaluation, each client was given a questionnaire based on healthy eating and physical activity guidelines. The questionnaire was completed at the beginning and end of the course with the following results:

#### **Results from healthy eating and physical activity questionnaire:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Score</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Score</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>% of improvement</b>
<b>Client 1</b>	11	11	0	0
<b>Client 2</b>	13	17	4	31%
<b>Client 3</b>	11	16	5	45%
<b>Client 4</b>	15	Absent		
<b>Client 5</b>	12	14	2	17%
<b>Client 6</b>	8.5	Absent		
<b>Client 7</b>	8	16	8	100%

The main aim of the questionnaire was to see if scores increased at the end of the course, to show if members were more knowledgeable about the healthy eating and physical activity guidelines and how they can maintain good health and their independence.

As a consequence of attending the course, one member sought advice from her GP because her waist circumference seemed particularly high compared to her general size. This resulted in the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome, which is now being managed with appropriate medication and her waist circumference has now reduced.

### 3.3 Case Study - Family Fun with Food & Film –Working in Partnership with CSV Media and funding from the British Heart Foundation

This six week nutritional programme was designed to bring families together so they could compare diets and lifestyles and learn about nutrition and how it can affect their individual health. The programme involved interesting, colourful PowerPoint presentations combined with plenty of practical hands on experience of food preparation, simple and healthy cooking techniques, food tasting, as well as, recipes and various hand-outs to take away.

#### **Mrs K, Postcode IP1.**

Mrs K heard about this course through CSV Media and had wanted to lose weight for a long time, but really didn't know where to start. Also having a 15 year old daughter who was slightly overweight she thought it may help them to attend the course together. She felt she really needed some guidance and help with goal setting. Mrs K said, "The weight has just slowly crept up over the years and I didn't feel comfortable in my clothes anymore, I thought the course might help me to lose weight."

Mrs K has always been fairly active and does a lot of walking, but admitted that it was her diet 'that was the real problem'. She added, "Initially I just wanted to look better in my clothes but now I realise that it's good to do this for the benefit of my health as I get older."

After attending the first session Mrs K felt confident enough to join her local slimming group along with her 15 year old daughter. By the end of the course Mrs K had lost nearly two stone and her daughter had lost 8lbs.

Mrs K enjoyed the practical nature of the course and felt that the handy hints and tips along with healthy recipes to take away have helped her stick to her healthy eating regime, without too much effort. She particularly enjoyed the healthy dips and snacks. She concluded, "My greengrocer knows me now! I only live over the road, but he didn't know me before."

When congratulated on her success she added, "The information I received and goals set by the slimming group and the nutrition course have been really helpful and my ultimate goal is to be a size 12. I don't know what size I am now, but all my clothes are way too big. I used to be a size 18/20. I will continue to go to the slimming group until I reach my goal."



### 3.4 Physical Activity and Exercise

Throughout the project **531** new members have attended physical activity sessions. These sessions have varied greatly as previously mentioned in the report. They have been delivered at both lunch clubs, sheltered housing, local church halls, health awareness events and in partnership with other organisations.

#### Case Study Overview – From Ecorys ActivAge case study

A participant aged 65 attends ActivAge Centres chair-based exercise classes, health walks and swimming classes. She has arthritis and had thought she would need an operation on her knee. After taking part in ActivAge Centres classes, her doctor told her she no longer needed the operation due to the amount of exercise she was doing. She felt that the swimming and chair-based exercises had particularly helped to ease her arthritis.

#### Mental Wellbeing

Throughout the project 690 older people have taken part in activities to improve mental wellbeing. The overwhelming response from feedback has often shown that many individuals now feel a sense of ‘community’ and many long lasting friendships have developed. Social inclusion is one of the main reasons stated for attendance of the ‘ActivAge Centres’. Although it has been found that initially most members usually attend the lunch as they feel “they need the company”, they are soon encouraged to join in with the other activities available as they see and hear first-hand how other members have benefited. Even though they did not initially join to improve their fitness they are soon feeling the benefits of being more active.

The members also support each other regularly, with hospital visits when someone is ill and dinner invites to those with no family. Shopping trips and lifts are organised for those members who are less mobile, as well as, summer day trips out and a few members have even been on holiday together.

#### Case Study - Mrs M, Aged 83, Postcode IP2

Mrs M has been attending the Stoke ActivAge centre since it opened in November 2008.

Mrs M is a widow who lives on her own and first came to the lunch club as a volunteer to get out and meet new people. She now attends as a well valued member and regularly joins in with the activity sessions, as well as, staying for lunch.

When asked about her reason for joining the ActivAge Centre Mrs M replied, *“When I joined I was on my own in the area, so I got three or four others to join as well and they introduced other people to join, you know, their friends. So it was rather nice. So there’s usually about three of us that come together in the morning.”*

She has always been very happy with the meals served at the lunch club and thinks they are good value for money. When asked about the meals provided she continued, *“It’s lovely to sit down and have a good meal that you haven’t had to*

worry about and prepare and all the rest of it. It's been very, very good. For £3.60 where else can you buy a two course lunch that size? Very, very, good value”.

Mrs M has been involved with many different activities since joining and has been pleased with the variety of activities that have been on offer.

*“We’ve had tai chi, we do yoga now, we’ve had salsa, and we’ve had Greek dancing. That was fun! Lovely music! Very good mixture in the afternoons, so I love it! You’re not forced into doing something which you will regret the next day. It works from your feet right up to your head.”*

Mrs M says she can feel the benefits from the exercise and other people have noticed an improvement in her posture.

*“I feel a lot better actually. Yes, someone said to me you are standing more upright, you do look a lot better since you first started the club. It's done a lot of good that way”.*

Mrs M, who has degeneration of both hips and lower back, was regularly using a stick to walk with when she started attending the club. Mrs M finally added,

*“Very rarely do I have to use a walking stick now. The muscles have been toned so they take the strain of the hips. I can walk quite a way at my own pace. I can go out and enjoy myself. I can even do my gardening.”*

## **St Mary at Stoke ActivAge Centre Evaluation Summary**

Over a six month period, members who attended the weekly lunch club at St Mary at Stoke Church Hall were asked to complete a ‘Customer Comment Card’, giving some feedback on the meals, activities, social benefits and organisation of the club. Of the 21 members who responded only one person rated the meal choice as poor, with everyone else grading the meals between excellent and average. The complete breakdown of the grading for the meals is as follows;

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Very Poor</b>
<b>Choice</b>	10%	50%	35%	5%	0
<b>Quality</b>	5%	62%	33%	0	0
<b>Price</b>	33%	62%	5%	0	0
<b>Service</b>	62%	38%	0	0	0

Some individual feedback comments from members are shown below:

*“Since coming I have met lots of nice people, which has helped me to overcome the loss of my wife – I haven’t laughed so much for ten years!”*

*“The lunch club helped me to recover from my physical illness, and the Tai Chi taster sessions helped me to get over my depression.”*

*“I love coming as the people are so friendly and the exercises are really helping me an awful lot, and the meals are delicious.”*

*“I have benefitted from all the exercises and enjoy the friendly company – I look forward to coming every week.”*

This six week course was designed as an introduction to Nordic Walking.

The course was repeated five times over the course of several months, and 65 people in total took part. Just over half of the attendees (34) completed the feedback questionnaire.

In response to questions on how the course had helped them, and if/how it had improved their general and emotional health, the members responded as follows;

- 97% said it had been fun to attend
- 85% said it had given them a new interest
- 68% said it had improved stamina and general fitness
- 62% said it had improved their posture, strength and stability
- 59% said it had enabled them to meet and make new friends
- 44% said it had enabled them to achieve something positive
- 38% said it had given them something to look forward to
- No one who attended thought that the course had been a waste of time

Some individual feedback comments from participants are shown below:

“I feel vulnerable walking in the countryside on my own, so to be with a group has given me confidence.”

“I have gained strength from the course, for years I suffered with a bad back, I had bad circulation, both have improved after Nordic walking. I feel more positive and mentally alert. I continue to walk with someone I met on the course.”

“Helps me forget my mental health problems, being able to spend time with other people.”

#### **A letter received from one Nordic Walking participant:**

***Dear Mrs Bennett,***

***I today finished a course at Christchurch Park learning all about Nordic Walking. I am ‘over the moon’ about the experience. I am 81 and thought I would be too old! I suffer from arthritis – mostly knees and cervical spondylitis which affects my neck, shoulder and arms.***

***The poles put me in the right position when I use them. When I see others – mostly elderly people- walking with sticks and pushing walkers I feel the need to advise them their bodies are in the wrong position.....***

***Good luck to you the organisers and your lovely tutor.***

Confidence sessions were aimed at people 45+ who couldn't swim or had lost their confidence in the water and to encourage people to use local facilities. The courses included a combination of swimming lessons and aqua aerobics. Members were also offered free entry to the pools and Profiles Gym for two months if they completed the six sessions. These sessions proved very popular with two full sessions running in 2009 & a further three in 2010.



Two members have continued to use the Ipswich Borough swimming facilities, joining a weekly Aqua Exercise class at Fore Pools. One member is in her 80s.

**Customer Quote:**

“At the start of the Aqua Confidence Course I could not swim at all. Now I am able to swim a width. Although I am not a strong swimmer, thanks to the course I have now gained confidence & have attended the pools on my own in an effort to practice my swimming. I considered myself to be quite fit before the course, but going to the classes has improved my fitness levels further.”

**Cynthia, Age: 74 IP2**

Aqua Confidence was a project at Crown Pools in Ipswich which offered adults swimming lessons, and helped improve confidence and technique in the water. This was an extremely popular project and the places filled up very quickly.

One of the participants was Cynthia. Prior to a bad fall in December 2009. Cynthia used to be physically fit and attended various exercise classes. As a result of the fall, Cynthia seriously hurt her back, and since then has been trying to gradually build activity back into her life. When asked what her motivation for taking part in the course was, Cynthia replied; “I have always been frightened of water, and as a child I never learnt how to swim. I am always taking my grandchildren out and from a safety point of view I thought it was about time I tried to overcome my fear of water and learn how to swim”.

When asked how she was getting on, Cynthia continued, “I am still frightened of water but four weeks into the course my confidence is improving. The group are very supportive towards each other and the tutors are marvellous, they have inspired me with confidence and I trust them to progress me in the water – I think both of these are key in my success in the water. From being afraid to get in the water, I am now swimming with the use of a woggle. One of my worst fears was getting my face wet but now I blow the water so that it splashes on my face. The best thing of all is that after trying numerous treatments for my back, all of which have been unsuccessful in relieving the pain/ tension, I find that I am most relaxed after the swim session and my mobility is improved. I also suffer from arthritis and I am aware the swimming is ideal for this as it doesn't put any strain on my joints”.

Cynthia finally added, “As I am retired, cost is particularly important and this course was affordable for me”. Cynthia is now speaking with the tutors to decide what she can do after the course to continue to improve.

Working with the Town & Bridge People’s Community Garden Project and funded by Suffolk County Council Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) fund a course was run to show people how to keep fit and healthy through outdoor exercise, including gardening, healthy eating and horticulture.



11 people attended a 6 week course. Each week there was advice on nutrition and a physical activity session, which included:

Week No	Activity
Week 1	Nutrition – Understanding food labels
	Physical Activity – Garden Circuits
Week 2	Nutrition – Understanding the Eatwell Plate
	Physical Activity – Home gym workout
Week 3	Nutrition – Portion sizes
	Physical Activity – Power walk in the park
Week 4	Nutrition – Meal planning
	Physical Activity – Pilates, good posture when gardening
Week 5	Nutrition – Good & bad fats
	Physical Activity – Weight Bearing workout
Week 6	Nutrition – Eating on a budget
	Physical Activity – Stretching, meditation & relaxation

The activities were all based on eating/exercising on a budget. As well as providing nutrition advice there was simple, nutritious, seasonal recipes to take away. All exercise sessions were focused on using the outdoor and home environment utilising day-day objects as ‘gym equipment’ i.e. watering cans filled with water to do arm curls. Exercise workout sheets were provided and a goals sheet was filled in weekly by participants with the outcomes being discussed the following week.

The main feedback participants reported was that they were making more of an effort to include activity in their day to day lives and that cooking from scratch with healthy ingredients was easier than they first thought.

Richard Howitt MEP also visited the project and took part in a Garden HOE session at the People’s Community Garden, with members from the ActivAgeing Project.



## 4. Key Findings: Impacts on Partnerships and Sustainability

### 4.1 Partnerships

The ActivAge Project has worked closely with strategic partners, such as Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, Ipswich NHS Hospital and NHS Suffolk and has developed good working relationships with local voluntary and community organisations. This has enabled the project to develop exciting 'joint' initiatives that have reached more older people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups and 'hard to reach' communities living in the target area. It also helped to avoid duplication of services and provide cost effective activities.

Community Development Officers (CDOs) from Age UK Suffolk were extremely supportive at the beginning of the project and offered lots of great advice in helping to establish the St Mary at Stoke Lunch Club and recruit volunteers. The CDOs knowledge of Food Safety was invaluable, especially setting up the partnership with Stoke High School and the use of hot boxes to transport the meals.

Strong relationships have also developed over the five years with Ipswich international Church and St Mary at Stoke Church and link volunteers who have helped develop the Lunch Club, support members and do the washing up.



Other partners include DanceEast, a local charity delivering a project funded by Suffolk County Council, which focuses on providing free dance sessions to people aged 50 years and over. This enabled ActivAge to offer various dance inspired workshops to ActivAge members and DanceEast access this particular age group.

The following quote is from Ecorys 'ActivAge' case study:

#### **DanceEast**

'DanceEast has developed a strong partnership with ActivAge Centre's. DanceEast believes the partnership works well as ActivAge Centre's help DanceEast to target the right people for their project and in return DanceEast delivers sessions for ActivAge members.'

## Stepping out in Suffolk – Live Well Suffolk.

The ActivAge Project, in partnership with Stepping Out in Suffolk, has established a number of health walks in three local parks in Ipswich - Christchurch, Chantry and Bourne Park. Two members of staff and a number of volunteers have been trained by Stepping Out in Suffolk as Walk Leaders, which included a day's training and attending a half day basic First Aid course. On average 15 – 20 people (and puppy Max) attend the walks on a regular basis. The ActivAge Project also runs specialist walks for Bangladeshi men and women during the summer months. Attendance on the main ActivWalks has increased over the five years from 6 to 25 regular participants.

### A quote from Ecorys 'ActivAge' case study:

#### Stepping out in Suffolk Live Well Suffolk

'To get people who are less able and the older age group is a big plus as we would like to see people extending their walk years. We are also seeing people from the (ActivAge Centres) lunch clubs out on other walks.'



#### Customer Quote:

"The Christchurch Park walk was fine for me, as being overweight a really long walk proves too much of an unwanted challenge. These walks are ideal for building confidence and self esteem. Keep up the good work!"



## Suffolk Police – Safer Neighbourhood Teams

Support from the local Suffolk Police - Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) has also proved invaluable to the project. The local SNTs Community Support Officers have helped the project connect with 'hard to reach' communities, particularly residents from the local estates. They have also attended a number of ActivAge community roadshows and events and have given talks about personal safety, crime prevention, bogus callers and promoted the Safer Senior Network to help older people feel safe out in the community.



## Partnership Events

A major event organised in 2009, was the **'Have a Go'** Event, held in conjunction with the Ipswich Borough Council and Eden Project 'Big Lunch' initiative in July 09. The event was held at University Campus Suffolk on the Waterfront, in partnership with Ipswich Borough Council and involved a wide range of organisations, who provided information / health promotion stands, displays, taster sessions, music and various demonstrations e.g. Tai Chi, Self-Defence, Movement to Music, Chair-based exercises and Hoola Hooping. The event was also a 'thank you' celebration in the form a 'BIG' buffet lunch for members and volunteers of the Town & Bridge Project. Over 300 people attended the event and we received excellent feedback from everyone who took part.



The Town & Bridge / ActivAge Project also attended other events to promote the work of the project, such as the Ageing Well Conference, Suffolk County Council

Feeling Well Event, Suffolk Show, ICVS AGM and Volunteer centre Volunteering days, various Fundays across the area, Healthy Ambition Suffolk's Award Event, Town & Bridge - People's Community Garden Annual Garden Party and have offered exercise taster sessions to local community groups, Housing Associations and Suffolk County Council library Top Time groups to promote healthy lifestyles.

On Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2010 a '**Love Your Heart**' community lunch was held, in conjunction with the national 'Big Lunch' initiative and working in partnership with NHS Suffolk, Suffolk County Council Suffolk Police, Ipswich Borough Council, Stepping Out in Suffolk, DanceEast, the Town & Bridge projects and the ActivAgeing Centre at Stoke. The event was open to all age groups. 76 people attended throughout the day, with many participants aged 50 years and over.



The event included a free healthy lunch and dessert, various information stands, a raffle, entertainment, workshops and free alternative therapies sessions. 36 participants completed a survey about their views on health, access to information and advice, physical activity and general well-being. *(See Appendix 5)*



For Men's Health Day, two **Men's MOT Health Check sessions** were held at Westgate Ward Social Club and at the Pavilion, Halifax Rd and included:

- Cholesterol / Sugar testing
- Smokers Health checks – Carbon Dioxide test
- Lung Health Check
- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Weight , Nutrition & Diet
- Exercise & Physical Activity
- Sexual Health for 50+
- Cancers / Skin / Moles etc
- Advice and Information

20 men attended and gave some positive feedback about the sessions:

**“The MOT was most informative and I've already booked an appt. with my GP with a couple of items that are of concern.”**

**“It was nice to make your acquaintance and many thanks for the information and advice session that both I and my young son attended yesterday at the Westgate Ward Social Club - I learned a lot about myself and my health and realised that I am not as fit and healthy as I originally thought!”**

**“Well, I haven't seen my GP for 18 years. I was thinking about going for a health check-up but haven't got around to it. So when I was told about this event (Men's Week MOT), I thought I'd better pop in”**



The last roadshow was held at the **Mecca Bingo Hall**, in Ipswich, where over 200 people, the majority aged 50 years and over, attend bingo sessions each day. This was a fantastic opportunity to promote the **fit as a fiddle** project and ActivAge activities.

A workshop, '**Healthy Ageing Matters**' was held in 19<sup>th</sup> July 2012 in partnership with Age UK Suffolk, **fit as a fiddle**, Press Red and ActivLives to bring together members of local government, the NHS and local communities to discuss how everyone can jointly influence healthy living in later life. It provided an opportunity to share learning and ideas, develop connections, promote sustainability and help steer future healthy ageing initiatives in Suffolk.

The event was well attended including delegates from health, local authorities, voluntary organisations, Suffolk Sport and members of Age UK Suffolk and ActivLives.

## 4.2 Sustainability

In March 2012 the Town & Bridge Project ended and a new charity called ActivLives was established to continue developing the ActivAge model in the Town & Bridge area, as well as sharing best practice in other deprived areas of Ipswich and Suffolk. The decision to become a charity was made by the Town & Bridge Steering Group in 2010 to ensure that initiatives, such as **fit as a fiddle** would continue and become sustainable over time. In 2011 a new board of trustees were recruited to take this forward and ActivLives is now linking with key stakeholders such as the new GP Clinical Commissioning teams, Suffolk County Council and Public Health, Ipswich Borough Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that services being delivered meet local need and health priorities in community and health strategies.

During this transition period and the end of the **fit as a fiddle** ActivAge Project, the Project Co-ordinator has been working with instructors and members to keep sessions running and become sustainable. ActivLives, however, will continue to support the two ActivAge Centres and other activities to ensure more people aged 50 plus can access the groups and maintain good health.



## 4.3 Current Initiatives

### Oasis & St Mary at Stoke Lunch Clubs

The cost of meals and exercise sessions is currently covering the cost of the food, rent, training, materials, equipment and support from ActivLives. The sustainability and development of the clubs was discussed with members at the end of project of Steering Group meeting and all volunteers were happy to continue volunteering will some added support from the two Churches. It was also highlighted that there would still be support available from 'ActivLives' (formerly the Town & Bridge Project). This support would include back office services, Project Co-ordinator management time and help with sourcing volunteers and promoting the centre.

### AM & PM Sessions St Mary at Stoke ActivAge Centre

**The morning session** is attracting enough members to continue at the end of the project funding period. It was agreed at the last Steering Group meeting to increase the activity fee to £2.00, as this still represents good value for money. This will provide enough income to cover the instructor's fees and rent.

**The afternoon session** has now become a group led activity, occasionally being subsidised with a small donation from individuals attending of £1.00 - £2.00 (this

was agreed by the members). The group have already taken part in activities that do not incur any instructor costs (or very minimal expense), such as singing sessions, card making, local walks, flower arranging, Boccia etc. A volunteer has been recruited to help plan the afternoon schedule and organise and supervise the session. The Church has also kindly agreed to freeze hall hire fees for at least six months when the situation will again be reviewed.

### **Cumberland Towers Sheltered Housing Chair-based Group**

This group meets weekly for exercise and a coffee afternoon. Twice a month a paid instructor teaches this session, to ensure sustainability the fee has been agreed at £2 per person. All other sessions are led by a volunteer who has received 'chair based instructor training' through the project and these sessions are free.

### **Movement to Music Stability Group**

This activity will continue with support from further funding. Funding has been secured from Healthy Ambitions Suffolk / Suffolk Foundation to cover the hall hire fees and participants have agreed to pay a fee of £3 to cover the instructor's fee.

### **Health Walks**

The health walks will continue to be offered free of charge and these will be led by 'ActivLives' staff and volunteers.

### **Falls Prevention at All Saints Church**

This group meets weekly for a programme of varied activities. Twice a month the 'ActivAge' project has funded an instructor to lead various falls prevention activities. To secure sustainability it has been agreed that the fee will be increased to £2 per person.

### **Bangladeshi Groups**

The attendance figures vary greatly between the men & women's groups. The women's group attracts up to 20 attendees each week, so this group has been able to continue beyond the funding period subsidised by the Bangladeshi Support Centre. The men's group attracts up to 5 attendees per week; so unfortunately, there are no funds to pay for a qualified instructor. To try and keep those attending motivated, it has been agreed that this group will still meet weekly and participate in group led activities until further funding can be secured to employ an instructor.

## **4.4 Future Funding**

The ActivAge Project Co-ordinator and ActivLives Chief Officer have successfully secured funding from Suffolk County Council to develop a project called 'Best Foot Forward', which will provide activities that centre around 'falls prevention' and a Family Carers Project, which will support carers 18 years and over to maintain good health and develop more ActivHubs across Ipswich.

## 5. Key Findings: Impacts of Volunteering

### 5.1 Impacts on Volunteering

People volunteer with the project for many different reasons:

- To improve self confidence
- Gain new skills and/or work experience
- Social interaction
- Improve their health and mental well-being
- Meet and make new friends

Volunteers provide an invaluable service to the project and the community. It would be impossible for the project to run the two Centres and various other activities without the commitment, passion and support of the volunteers. Many of the activities that are now sustainable would be unable to continue without their input.

Volunteering also helps to build people's confidence and self-esteem and empowers them to be more involved in their community enables individuals to have a greater say in their own activities and gain valuable skills and qualifications whilst doing so.

Another key benefit is that volunteers can provide additional support for participants.

"A volunteer is somebody that the participants trust and can talk to, if they have a problem." (Project Co-ordinator).

#### **Case Study – Mrs A ActivAge Church Liaison Volunteer for ActivAge Centres**

Mrs A is 65 years old and lives in the IP2 area of Ipswich. She was first approached by the vicar of her church about the role of church liaison volunteer. As the project wanted to use the church hall it was agreed that a liaison volunteer from the church would be a good idea. Mrs A was also a very active member of the church and the local community, volunteering as a vergger in the church and working in local schools and hospitals.

Mrs A was already a very active person and had no physical health issues but did suffer from bouts of depression.

Mrs A initially assisted with opening up the lunch club but this role soon grew as she realised that the Centre was very much in the early development stages and all/any assistance was much welcomed. Mrs A explains, "The role grew more by accident and I became more and more involved each week and did pretty much whatever was needed. This includes providing lifts to those less mobile, opening up, serving the meals and washing the linen. Also we had such a successful Christmas and summer outing that I have also now taken on the role of organising these each year." In fact

Mrs A also gives two ladies a lift to the club each week, if it were not for her support they would be housebound and unable to attend.

Mrs A explained that she had no particular goals as such when she agreed to help out but is very pleased to have developed many wonderful and long lasting friendships. She also said that having the commitment to the lunch club has also helped her to deal with the bouts of depression she has suffered. In her own words, "When I felt low I knew I had to come out to the club as I had made a commitment that I had to honour. I also found it helpful to talk to other members about my problems and was relieved to hear I wasn't the only one with these issues, it really helped to lift my spirits."

Mrs A has always enthusiastically supported the project and has attended steering group meetings, various courses and also helped out at many community events. She did stress that even though the lunch club is now financially sustainable and can be run independently she found it comforting to know that they still had the support of the Project Co-ordinator and manager to help out with any challenging situations.

The final words from Mrs A, "I intend to stay on as a volunteer as long as I am needed and able. I was never a very confident person but I have learnt during the project that I do actually have many skills and now feel a great sense of self-worth as I realise that the members really appreciate what I do."

## 5.2 High Sheriff Awards

Two volunteers received High Sheriff 'Volunteer of the Year' Awards 2011 after being nominated by the ActivAge Project, for their commitment and involvement in the development of St Mary at Stoke and Oasis Lunch Clubs.



## 6. Key Findings: Impacts on Equality and Diversity

### Quote from Ecorys ActivAge Case Study:

ActivAge Centres has been successful in engaging different black and ethnic minority groups. For example exercise sessions have been delivered with Ipswich's Bangladeshi Women's Group, the Bangladeshi Men's Group and the Karibu Club, which caters for African and Caribbean women in Ipswich. Project staff reported that these groups work well as the instructors make an effort to understand the groups' culture and their language. For example the instructor for the Bangladeshi Women's Group learned Bengali words, such as numbers, to help her communicate with the participants.

Building strong partnerships is really important when working with people from different cultures, faiths, ethnic and community groups. Regular meetings with group leaders and Bangladeshi elders enabled the two projects to work closely together. Experienced instructors with good communication skills proved invaluable for building confidence amongst participants and support from the community or the organisations staff helped with translation and communication. The project also seeks out information published in a variety of languages and formats to help get health messages across.

The project has had lower attendances from men than women as is quite common for these types of activities. One reason could be due to pre-conceived ideas that these activities are more suited to women. Also when a man loses a partner they may have less confidence to search out new social activities. See [Appendix 4 - Men's Focus Groups held at St Mary at Stoke Church and Oasis Lunch Clubs](#).

The project has tried to encourage more male participation by including activities that may appeal to men such as:

- Swimming / Exercise Circuits
- Golf Taster Sessions
- Boccia (indoor bowls)
- Walks
- Brain Training / Quizzes

The number of men attending sessions has gradually increased over the five years.



Numbers have increased mainly through 'word of mouth', rather than men contacting the project from seeing a poster or article in the local newspaper. This is definitely an area that the project would like to focus on in the future.

ActivLives and the Bangladeshi Support Centre are currently working on a proposal to continue the good work that has been achieved through the **fit as a fiddle** project and develop activities to encourage more people from the Bangladeshi community to keep active and maintain good health.

There is also an interesting Age UK project currently being developed called 'Men in Sheds'. Three organisations are working in partnership to deliver the project Age UK Nottingham & Nottinghamshire, Age Concern Greenwich and Age UK South Lakeland. There is also an independent Men in Sheds project being delivered by Age UK Cheshire and Age UK Suffolk are supporting the start-up of similar projects across the county.

The Men in Sheds project aims to reduce isolation among men in later life, and improve their health and wellbeing. A concept originally developed in Australia, Men in Sheds involves providing a workshop (shed), tools and equipment aimed at men in later life. They can use existing skills, learn new ones and get involved in productive activity, while enjoying the benefits of working in a social group.

The project also provides an opportunity for men in later life to access information, advice and other services which they might not otherwise seek out. For more information about this project contact Age UK 020 3033 1072 / [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

## 7. Key Findings: Health Literature

### 7.1 Health Information

Throughout the project there have been various resources used and developed. An information stand at both Centres provides up to date information from the ActivAge project as well as **fit as a fiddle**, Age UK and other organisations providing services and information for older people. Leaflets are also distributed in public places, such as, GP surgeries, libraries and cafes.

There have been home exercise sheets distributed at chair based sessions and menu's, recipes and healthy eating information developed by the project co-ordinator handed out on nutrition courses.

An 'ActivAge' healthy recipe booklet is being developed as part of the British Heart Foundation funding and this will be distributed to all those members who attended the 'Cooking for good health' course and ActivLives members.

The project also has a website and quarterly newsletter, which provides regular healthy eating advice, recipes and exercises for improving health. Facebook and twitter are also available to circulate information and keep people up to date.

## 8. Key Findings: Economic Value of the Project

### 8.1 Economic Value

#### Instructors Fees

The project has recruited a number of different Instructors over the duration of the project and their costs have varied greatly, anything from £20 per hour - £40 per hour. This cost often depends on the instructor's experience, level of qualification and distance travelled. Instructor's expenses have played a big part in whether on-going activities could become sustainable at the end of the funding period, particularly with the £1.50 cap on exercise fees. The project has been lucky enough to have had two newly trained 'chair based' instructors referred through Suffolk Coastal District Council's Later Life Training. These instructors are very experienced and have been teaching exercise sessions for many years. They have enabled two of the groups to become sustainable, because of their very reasonable rates of £20 per hour.

To overcome this situation in the future and to grow our team of freelance instructors we are currently developing training programmes in Nordic and Chair-based exercise. This would enable the project to source affordable instructors and also provide training and work experience opportunities to young / older people, students and people long-term unemployed.

### 8.2 Individual Value

Over the length of the project over **696** individuals have been involved / registered with the project (not including 'Community Events' attendees). That would equate to a cost of **£135.00** per person.

The major benefit of the project has been around 'prevention'. The activities developed have helped to keep people active, mobile, independent and connected with their community. Sustainable community services can help reduce GP appointments, unnecessary hospital admissions, support family carers and reduce NHS and Local Authority care costs, particularly around falls and mental health services. Many members have reported improvements in their health especially improvements with back, knee and hip problems.

Falls among elderly people are costing the NHS in England up to £4.6m a day. Age UK says the elderly should be encouraged to take more exercise, to reduce the risk of falls. For example a hip replacement costs the NHS £4,000 - £7,000.

Projects like ActivAge can offer real 'added value' if the activities provided can help to prevent even a small percentage of participants from undergoing these complicated and costly operations.

### **8.3. Volunteer Value**

Currently our team of volunteers contribute an average **55 hours** per week between them. Even on the current minimum wage of £6.08 this equates to a weekly salary of £334.40 and an annual salary of £17,388.80. Over the four year period volunteers have contributed over **£70,000** worth of working hours.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusion

The **fit as a fiddle** programme provided the funding and support needed to enable the Town & Bridge Project to pilot a new approach in community development, in two of the most deprived areas in Ipswich. The 'ActivMob' model developed in Maidstone, by Kent County Council inspired the Town & Bridge Project Manager to develop a similar model in Ipswich. This model has been very successful in engaging people 50 years and over and acting as a catalyst to motivate and support people to socialise, be active, build social and support networks, learn and share skills, volunteer and feel a valued member of the community.

The ActivAge Centres have proved that using a 'community development' approach can be successful in improving people's health and well-being. Although, many people may have originally joined for the 'company', the centres' support, information and signposting network has provided opportunities for people to take up and sustain regular exercise, join other activities that they would not have ordinarily taken part in and improve their health.

In 2006 when the Town & Bridge Project was established the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived wards in Ipswich was **12 years**. The Public Health Observatories health profile for Ipswich 2012 reports that this gap has now reduced to **8.6 years** and over the past ten years, rates of deaths from all causes for men and women in Ipswich, and rates of early deaths from heart disease and stroke have improved in line with the England average.

Initiatives like the **fit as a fiddle** ActivAge Project play an integral role, in reaching, motivating and supporting people 50 years and over to improve their health and well-being and live full and active lives.

Both ActivAge Centres are now regularly attracting up to the maximum attendance of 25-30 people and have proved to be very successful. Through regular feedback and evaluation individuals are regularly reporting that the Centres give them 'something to look forward to' and 'a sense of worth'.

The members often say that being part of a social group has improved their quality of life and keeps them independent. They want to feel valued and make a positive contribution to the community and society. Many of our members live on their own and experience poor health and see the Centres as a safe and welcoming environment to get together with other like-minded people, who may be in a similar situation. "**Having someone to talk to**" is the quote that is repeated regularly!

The **fit as a fiddle** Programme has enabled the Town & Bridge Project to keep older people active and engaged over a longer period of time and supported the development of two sustainable centres and a number of outreach exercise sessions in two of the most deprived areas of Ipswich.

## Recommendations

- **Funding**

To seek further funding and investment to develop and expand services to keep older people active, connected with their communities and maintaining good health. To develop services that help to reduce loneliness and social isolation and provide opportunities for building social networks, volunteering, learning new skills and gaining qualifications.

- **Evaluation**

Evaluation has proved particularly difficult to implement and very time consuming to collect and collate the relevant data. With funding sources disappearing, there is a far greater need now to provide relevant data, to ensure the correct services are being delivered and to a high standard, to meet local need.

One of the main lessons learned is the importance to build in monitoring processes and evaluation from the planning stages of the project, taking into account time and resource needed for the collation of information and producing regular reports. It is also important to work closely with funders and medical professionals to determine what 'outcomes' they need and also to research various recognised evaluation methods.

- **Male Participation**

To develop ways to encourage more men to participate in male 'friendly' activities by running focus groups with existing male members and men who don't use the services to find out what the barriers are and what men would like to attend. Investigate ways to appeal to the older male population using social marketing information, different approaches to marketing and promotion and developing a campaign to recruit older male volunteers, to help spread the word.

- **Qualified Instructors – fees and resource**

To develop a training programme aimed at younger / older people, students, newly qualified/inexperienced instructors and the long-term unemployed. Committed and interested individuals will be trained in Chair-based exercise / Nordic Walking or as Health Walk Leaders to initially assist qualified instructors and then lead their own sessions in the future. The individual would receive accredited training in return for teaching hours at a reduced rate.

- **Nutrition Courses**

The hands on practical cooking courses proved particularly popular. As all the relevant equipment for delivering these courses has already been purchased it would make sense to utilise this equipment with more of the same style courses.

- **Developing New Projects**

**Partnership Working** – It is really important to work closely with other organisations to avoid duplication and in the current economic climate, share precious resources. Finding an individual or group of people who live in and understand a particular neighbourhood, area or community can help encourage friends, family and neighbours to get involved and steer the development of the project.

**Transport** – Ensure that people can get to the activity. Find out about Community Transport and how people can register, do local buses run close by, can members who drive car-share, can volunteer drivers be recruited to help? Although the ActivAgeing Centres are situated in the centre of Ipswich, finding accessible transport for members who are less mobile has been difficult and has restricted some people accessing the service.

**Choice** – It is important to find out when people can attend an exercise session, health walk or other activity. Be mindful of people using public transport and when they can and cannot use their bus pass, family carers, less mobile older people and people who work shifts etc. Providing activities at different times of the day and at weekends will enable more people to participate, but don't be disheartened or put off if no one attends. It does happen occasionally.

**Promoting Events and Activities** - Make sure posters, flyers are prepared in plenty of time and press releases are ready two weeks in advance. Make sure everyone knows about the activity. *If people don't know, they won't attend!*

**Don't Give Up** – Developing community projects can take time, they don't happen overnight and Action Plans can change from week to week. Just make sure people are involved and informed; 'word of mouth' is the best way to advertise and promote any project or activity, so make sure members are also informing their social networks, friends, family and neighbours.



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