

# fit *as a* fiddle

## Executive Summary

### Sporting Equals Older People Faith and Community Strand



## Introduction

Age UK was awarded £15.1 million under the Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme to deliver the **fit as a fiddle** portfolio across 9 English regions from 2007 to 2012 supporting people aged over 55 to achieve outcomes focused on three main strands:

- Improving and developing levels of physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Mental wellbeing

Sporting Equals was commissioned by Age UK in August 2009 as one of five national partners for the Age UK **fit as a fiddle** cascade training programme to deliver the faith and community strand. Sporting Equals is an independent body developed to promote ethnic diversity in the area of sport and physical activity. Sporting Equals aims to raise awareness of the needs of BME communities and to promote inclusion and diversity across the sport and health sectors. Sporting Equals expertise and its access to a network of over 5,000 groups across 9 regions has helped deliver a successful model with consistent messaging. With links to disadvantaged communities, experience of faith and cultural sensitivities Sporting Equals role has enabled engagement of groups who would otherwise be disconnected from mainstream services.

This report provides an end of project evaluation of the **fit as a fiddle** faith and community strand with particular emphasis on how **fit as a fiddle** has engaged with BME communities and how the project has made a difference to their lives.

## Project overview

The aim of the **fit as a fiddle** faith and community strand project was to devise and develop a tailor-made training package for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and faith communities to enable opportunities for physical activity and wellbeing through supported interventions. The project worked with local partner organisations to deliver a bespoke training programme for volunteers and a package of activities aimed at those aged over 55.

Activities offered by the partner organisations included looking at healthy cooking methods, food hygiene, and specific diets for common illnesses such as diabetes and heart conditions. The variety of physical activities delivered in the programme ranged

from sport and keep fit exercises to less strenuous strength and balance activities, such as Tai Chi and chair-based exercise. The project's delivery method also included a programme of one-off 'road show' events which allowed a high number of beneficiaries to participate in taster sessions, obtain information and in some cases, access statutory health services such as blood pressure checks.

### Key findings – impacts on equality and diversity

Overall the **fit as a fiddle** faith and community strand engaged with 5,532 participants through sessional activities and road show events. The profile of participants shows the **fit as a fiddle** project has been successful in engaging with a large number of older people from a wide range of ethnicities and faith backgrounds, as well as working with individuals with disabilities and limiting long-term illnesses. Data shows the highest proportion of participants self-identified as Hindu or Sikh representing just over a third of participants, followed by just under a third of participants from the Christian faith, with the greatest proportion of participants in the age range 55 – 75. The project has engaged with a diverse range of ethnic groups including, Asian, Black, Chinese and White Other.

Research from the project identified that 92% of South Asian Women do not do the recommended level of activity<sup>1</sup> (3x30 minutes a week). The project managed to make a significant impact with this group with just over 41% of South Asian Women being supported through this intervention.

A key message reported from partner organisations involved in the **fit as a fiddle** project was that without local community partners, mainstream providers would have struggled to engage with disadvantaged communities. Often faith and community partner organisations do not offer health and wellbeing activities and were keen to extend their provision in this area.

### Key findings – impacts of volunteering

Across the 39 partner organisations, 289 volunteers participated in the training programme and went on to deliver a range of activities which supported older beneficiaries. In general, the volunteers found their experience to be a positive one

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<sup>1</sup> Sport England, Active People Survey 2, Oct, 2008, [www.sportengland.org/research/active\\_people\\_survey.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx)

and most responded well to the training. They found the experience of volunteering to be interesting and rewarding, and many noted that they had used the information from their training to make positive changes to their own lifestyles and those of their families.

Volunteers were found to have had a positive impact on their wider communities by sharing their learning outside of their formal volunteer roles and by widening awareness of the partner organisations' activities. Partner organisations had found the experience of participating in the training to be useful as they have acquired a strong volunteer base for the delivery of future activities; in a time of restricted funding, this was felt to be significant. However, the need for good volunteer coordination and support should not be underestimated.

### **Key findings – impacts on older people**

With the support of the trained volunteers, older people from a broad range of black and minority ethnic communities were encouraged to take part in physical activity, to make small changes to their diet and to become involved in other activities to improve mental wellbeing. Partner organisations reported older people had made significant progress in twelve weeks, with participants demonstrating loss of weight, feeling healthier and less stressed. This was further supported by the Ecorys Analysis which demonstrated key changes to behaviour in light of diet, activity, and general wellbeing,

For some, the **fit as a fiddle** project was seen as an opportunity to socialise, learn new ideas and have some fun, as well as leading to positive changes in behaviour. A sample of 33 evaluation forms completed by older people who had taken part in the physical activities and exercise sessions reported increased levels of activity per week, with levels ranging from one to four hours and demonstrating an average of two extra hours of activity per week. The physical activities and healthy eating sessions offered as part of the other two strands were seen as directly linked to achieving outcomes for mental wellbeing. The benefit of interventions to reduce isolation and loneliness was a recurrent response in the evaluation forms completed by staff.

Key learning from the programme was the positive impact of the activities on participants within a relatively short period of time. In addition, partner organisations found the most difficult part of the project was trying to encourage individuals to

change their eating habits. They suggested a gentler approach in future where participants are initially supported to think differently about eating before being asked to consider changing their diet.

### Key findings – impacts on partnerships and sustainability

72% of the projects confirmed that they had established some form of partnership links which have led to additional capacity support and 56% of organisations stated that they would continue to maintain these partnership links longer term. The impact of partnership links stated by organisations included stronger working relationships, referral links, befriending services, staff awareness of user needs and agencies which could help, along with increasing networks with partners and links to funders.

In terms of sustainability, there was general enthusiasm amongst partner organisations for keeping project activities going and to develop them further into other areas of work. Projects found that the programme had raised interest amongst beneficiaries who became keen to continue their involvement. However, funding was generally raised as an issue, but organisations cited a range of approaches to continue activities as far as possible. These included charging a nominal fee for participation in activities, a greater reliance on volunteers for the delivery of the project and other activities, and the diversification of their current offer to fit with existing funding streams.

79% of projects stated that they would be continuing with **fit as a fiddle activities** after the project had ended and have managed to sustain some **fit as a fiddle** volunteers. Three projects have managed to secure additional funding and another project confirmed that 5 of the original volunteers have used the information from Sporting Equals to support new volunteers which demonstrates the added value and sustained impact of this intervention.

### Key findings – health literacy

A number of different health resources from the national cascade programme were used by the faith and community strand to inform the training programme, the development of the training manual and subsequent **fit as a fiddle** activities.

Feedback from end of project evaluations suggests that most volunteers felt that the two day training and volunteer pack was sufficiently comprehensive to give them the information they needed. This may have however been more to do with time as the volunteers were more concerned with ensuring they focused on BME older people and achieved their overall outputs rather than the need to increase their knowledge in this area, bearing in mind Sporting Equals support resource was available.

### **Key findings – economic value of the project**

An assessment of the unit costs of the project found that Sporting Equals' delivery of the **fit as a fiddle** project represented excellent value for money, with the overall cost of the project at £47.09 per beneficiary and cost of roadshows delivered for £5.04 per beneficiary. The unaccounted economic benefit involved the cost of staff time from projects which was given free and the amount of volunteer hours which have helped support both projects and roadshows.

The added value of a sustained volunteer base, ongoing delivery of activities and sustained partnership links have also brought a number of additional economic benefits which need to be considered in light of the project as a whole.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The **fit as a fiddle** faith and community project engaged with 5,532 older people from disadvantaged communities through their activities and trained 289 volunteers giving them new skills and knowledge plus increased soft skills such as increased confidence and self-esteem. Sporting Equals achieved a wide geographical spread and partnered with a wide range of faith and community organisations. The cascade approach meant that the projects engaged as partners have been able to reach some of the most isolated groups who would be unlikely to engage with mainstream provision. The focus on religious and cultural issues in the training package has meant that participants have reported that their preferences in these areas were respected.

Feedback was consistently positive about the training received. The partner projects frequently reported that the training and experience gained by the volunteers has also had a positive impact on their organisations, providing them with a pool of culturally sensitive, skilled volunteers able to take delivery forward in a time of restricted funding

opportunities. The added value from the project has resulted in some volunteers acting more generally as champions for promoting healthy living in their local communities.

The project has been well received by the BME older people engaged and there appears to be a clear appetite for the activities delivered. Projects reported beneficial impacts on older people who had participated in activities, including improved self-esteem, self-confidence, physical health and mental wellbeing. A number of older people (and volunteers) reported changes in diet and a greater understanding of healthy eating, and some reported immediate benefits from their physical activity sessions.

In terms of recommendations, feedback from partner organisations showed that more lead-in time and outreach support would have allowed them to make more of an impact. The partner organisations also raised concerns over the monitoring of the project and felt that beneficiaries would have appreciated shorter forms. However, there are also sensitivities around both age and faith which could be accounted for in future programmes. Finally, there was some cultural sensitivity around the healthy eating aspects of the project's delivery and partner organisations reported that in future they would take a more gentle approach to this kind of work.

Sporting Equals role in light of reaching out across 9 regions helped with consistency of messaging. Its key links and knowledge into the disadvantaged communities along with its experience of faith and cultural sensitivities has all made this project a success and well placed for delivering similar interventions in the future.

**Sporting Equals**  
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