

BUSINESSES 'BID' FOR HEALTHIER FUTURE

FUNDED BY: Greets Green Partnership's Health Theme, with in-kind support from Albion BID Co Ltd, Healthy Hearts Institute, M&T Solutions, Sandwell PCT, Harrington Enterprises and individual businesses who released workers for health checks.

PROJECT BACKGROUND: This project was designed to address Greets Green's health and business needs as well as tackle inequalities and regeneration issues. Although workers are a captive audience for promoting health and well-being, they are not often targeted. Improving the health of workers means businesses benefit from better productivity and less time lost through absence.



The Albion Business Improvement District (BID) Co Ltd in Greets Green was set up under a government scheme which enables local firms to pay extra rates to fund additional improvements in their area. The BID joined forces with various partners to make Healthy Hearts check-ups available to local workers.

Projects such as this fit in with government and NHS policies which recognise the key role workplaces can play in improving the health of the nation. This includes tackling inequalities and providing care closer to where people live and work.

The Healthy Hearts Project was delivered by Albion BID Co Ltd with Greets Green Partnership, Sandwell Primary Care Trust (Workwell, Communications and Service Modernisation), The Healthy Hearts Institute based at Sandwell Medical Research Unit, West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, and M&T Solutions.

While traditionally workers in larger organisations had access to health advice on site, 99% of workplaces now employ less than 100 people. This means they have no time or resources to tackle health issues.

In Greets Green there are 490 businesses employing around 15,000 people. There are almost 70 businesses in the Albion BID area, employing around 1,500 workers, primarily in manufacturing and engineering.



The area has higher than average levels of deprivation and health is generally poor compared with England as a whole.

In Greets Green, the main causes of disease and illness are from coronary heart disease, strokes and cancers, with residents having a 32% higher chance than the national average of dying from cancer and a 13% higher chance of dying from heart disease, according to the 1999 baseline study.

Sandwell PCT and Greets Green Partnership have set targets to achieve in tackling this. They are working to reduce the death rates of cancer in the under 75s by 20% by 2010 and to reduce the death rate from heart disease by 40% by 2010.

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Source: 1999 baseline study.

CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT: The Healthy Hearts pilot took place in the Albion BID area over two days in March 2007. It enabled up to 100 workers to have check-ups with medical staff on a first come, first served basis. These were organised through pre-arranged appointments to allow employers to plan for absences.

Eighty people from 22 companies attended the event which was staged in a special trailer placed in two local companies' car parking spaces.

The check-ups included making health information available to raise awareness of health issues and the services available locally. Leaflets, novelties and 'goody bags' were handed out, packed with information.

To let local companies know about the event, a marketing campaign was run based on the comedy 'Carry on Theme' under the banner 'Carry on Working in West Brom'. This light-hearted campaign gained coverage on the internet and in the local press and was designed to be friendly, fun and unthreatening, to generate support for the event.

ACHIEVEMENTS: More than three quarters of the workers who attended the check-ups were found to have health problems which needed to be referred to primary care (e.g. their GP).

The Healthy Hearts project enabled health workers to speak to middle aged men working mainly in manufacturing and engineering. This group of people are traditionally hard to reach and are less likely to access health services than other people.



It showed that individual businesses are prepared to invest in staff health through workplace programmes.

Marie Carroll, of Workwell, said: “Healthy Hearts demonstrated that through successful partnership working there are real benefits to workers’ health, commercial enterprise and social responsibility.

“It would appear from this small case study that there are potentially real benefits to using the workplace to raise awareness, to screen for specific risk factors and to provide information to enable choices to be made around lifestyle changes.”

Following the initiative there was unanimous support from employers for hosting future events. The majority of employees would also welcome further events in the workplace.

Suggested improvements included more testing - especially screening around men’s and women’s health issues. Participants also wanted to see more health information provided and access to further support such as stop smoking services. They would like to see events held regularly and rolled out



to all employees in the area. Since the event, interest has been shown by a variety of technical and medical press journals and other health improvement programmes from outside the Sandwell area, providing an opportunity to share best practice.

A survey of businesses taking part revealed:

- Employers wanted to take part in the Healthy Hearts Project to address concerns over workers' health, to be seen as caring employers, and to support the objectives of the Albion BID Co Ltd. Other reasons included reducing sickness absence levels and improving worker morale.
- More than 85% of employers believed the event was excellent.
- Over 86% stated it had met their needs: the health checks were very convenient and people were seen quickly.
- 100% of employers would support this type of event in the future as they believe it helps to improve the health of the workforce and it gave peace of mind to some workers who had worries about their health.
- 100% per cent believed the project contributed to the positive effect the Albion BID Co. Ltd was having.

Personal positive feedback included the following:

- 'I'm a man in my mid 40s - I wouldn't ask my GP for this type of care.'
- 'One employee of ours has already changed the content of his lunchbox to a low fat and low salt lunch.'
- 'Our Asian ladies were pleased to have interpreters at hand.'

A survey of employees who took part revealed:

100% of workers believed the event had been of benefit to them, with the following being the main reasons given:

- I don't get time to see my GP (42%)
- I'm worried about my health (15%)
- Other (26%):
 - 'Held over two days – covered rota systems'
 - 'Good location of trailer... close proximity to my workplace'
 - 'Long waiting times for doctor appointment (sometimes up to 10 days) – apathy and just don't go'

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Marie Carroll, Workwell





- 'GP appointment system inflexible – especially for full time workers'
- 'Only go to see doctor when I am ill'
- 'Good to get reassurance'

70% said the following aspects of the checks were of particular benefit: blood pressure, cholesterol, consultation with a doctor and health advice.

100% of workers said they would attend a similar event in the future, with the main reasons being: they were allowed time off to attend, it was a very good booking and appointment system, ability to see health professionals and get immediate results.

100% of workers would recommend this type of event to others.

42% of the workers who responded said they would prefer to seek medical advice via their workplace, with 19% preferring their GP or health centre. 39% chose other options, which included community centres, faith establishments and NHS Direct.

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PROJECT IN ACTION: The checks included assessing blood pressure, weight, hyperlipidaemia, impaired glucose and a 10 year cardio vascular risk score. Over 97% of attendees gave consent for their results to be used in an analysis of the event. The key findings were:

- 71% were male, 29% female. The mean age for the male workers was 46 years, and for female workers was 44 years.
- 77% were referred by the Healthy Hearts Physician to their general practitioner. The reasons included a risk of Coronary Vascular Disease, newly detected high blood pressure, obesity and undetected raised total cholesterol.
- Of these 77%, newly detected high blood pressure was found in almost 44% of the male workers, and obesity was found in 58% of the male workers and 44% of the female workers. An undetected raised total cholesterol level was found in one in five.

The event raised some issues for the future, including the response from GPs to referrals and ensuring primary care has the capacity to cope with any extra demand generated. However, the overall results demonstrate the huge benefits gained from the Healthy Hearts Project and the enthusiasm of both businesses and employees for such projects.

For further information please contact Marie Carroll, Workwell, Sandwell Primary Care Trust on 0121 557 4733. Or, Sally Sandel, Greets Green Partnership's Health Theme Leader on 0121 612 1957.

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Greets Green Partnership was awarded £56 million in 2000 to deliver a 10 year regeneration programme under the Government's New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative. It has funded over 340 projects throughout the area, covering community services, crime & community safety, health, housing & urban form and jobs & skills. The Partnership area, which is adjacent to West Bromwich Town Centre, is home to just over 12,400 residents living in 4,900 households.

To find out more, call Brian McKinstrie, Greets Green Partnership's Communications & PR Manager on freephone 0800 953 0215.

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