Perth and Kinross Healthy Communities Collaborative

Case study - Eating well and healthy diet in older people workshop in Birnam and Dunkeld

Perth and Kinross Healthy Communities Collaborative is a community-led health promotion initiative. It works with older people from specific communities, and empowers them to improve health and quality of life for themselves and their peers. Taking an asset based approach their work in Birnam and Dunkeld developed around a focus on eating well and a healthy diet, and continues to evolve.

**How it developed**

Over three widely publicised consultation sessions, in Birnam Arts and Conference Centre, Healthy Communities staff engaged with local older people to identify interests and plan the work. It became clear, older people did not want to be taught how to cook, they wanted to improve their health, diet and overall wellbeing. This meant focusing on the distinctive food needs of older people, especially those with particular health and nutritional needs, availability of food locally and the use of IT to access shopping delivery opportunities.

In November 2013 a series of six two hour workshops were organised over four months. A local cook, an older person herself, agreed to give simple food health related cooking and tasting demonstrations, helping Healthy Communities staff facilitate activities and discussions around food and health. For example, they had a Healthy Eating Quiz, did a game with the Eat Well Plate, mapped where to get food from, they discussed fat and sugar in food, exercise, reminisced about food when they were younger and were introduced to internet shopping, by placing an order for a few items to be delivered at the following session. Food demonstrations involved making simple bread dough to use as a pizza base, oat pancakes and soda bread, while sample tastings included different simple pate’s, roasted vegetables such as squash, sweet potatoes and celeriac, different cheeses and seeds. All the ingredients and food used was sourced in the local shops and delicatessen.

Older people aged 50 – 102 were involved in the workshops and numbers participating ranged from 10 – 15, with a core group of around 8 who attended every session. Following the initial six sessions, the group wanted to learn more about using computers for grocery shopping and internet security. A taster session led to 4 – 6 people doing a back to basics computer course over four sessions.

The group accepted an invitation to a local supermarket with a Community Kitchen, where they could ask more questions about internet delivery services and try food that otherwise might be too expensive to try and which they might not like. They invited Live Active Leisure to hold a “Stride for Life” health walk taster, which 4 people attended, they continue to meet for a weekly walk, though when the weather is poor they have a catch up and cup of tea.

**Funding**

Perth and Kinross Healthy Communities Collaborative is funded by Perth and Kinross Council, Perth and Kinross Community Health Partnership and NHS Tayside. Community Food and Health Scotland provided a small amount of funding to initiate and further development the work.

**Partnerships**

A number of partners played key roles in supporting the work, Healthy Communities Collaborative staff supported the planning and facilitation of group activities, a Public Health Dietician provided advice on the quiz and food activities, the local cooking tutor organised and presented food demonstrations, Highland Perthshire Adult Learning Worker delivered the IT workshops, local food suppliers were interested to learn more about the needs of older people and healthy produce.

**Policy links**

Early in the planning of the work the Healthy Communities Collaborative developed a logic model to think though the short, medium and long term outcomes that could be expected and how these linked to policy. This illustrated that it contributes to “Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland” by older people having improved mental health and wellbeing, to “NHS Tayside Health Equity Strategy” by trying to reduce the gap in health inequalities in the area and to Scottish Government National Outcomes.

**Challenges**

The group had hoped to engage more with and influence local retailers and suppliers, and while they were interested in the needs of older people were unable to attend any workshops due to other commitments

In such a rural area, it is difficult to reach very isolated older people, and though a wide range of mechanisms were used to publicise and promote the work, the group recognises there are others still to reach.

**Achievements**

There is a committed group of older people, engaged in and committed to taking forward activities with and for their peers on health issues.

The older people involved in the Eating Well and Healthy Diet workshops either sustained or increased their knowledge of healthy eating. They were surprised that most low fat items are high in sugar, which means that now many report that they read the labels on food more.

Older people have improved their IT skills and confidence to shop online for groceries, one individual bought IT equipment.

The older people involved have made new or deepened friendships, exemplified in the weekly walking group which itself may have increased levels of physical activity.

There is a foundation to build from and early evidence of success in achieving short and medium term outcomes.

**Future plans**

Members of group are thinking about other ways to get the community involved and are considering putting together a healthy eating leaflet or flyer, with local supplier details, focusing on mental health and wellbeing. This could be linked to a bigger one day event on Eating Well and Healthy Diet for older people. Another possibility is to set up a tea and chat group or lunch group.

**Quotes**

Told to eat low fat foods, am amazed at the sugar content in low fat foods. I will pay more attention to a balanced diet.

I enjoyed using seeds and different flavourings that are of benefit and being able to taste them.

Surprised how easy it was to make bread…. it looks really therapeutic to do…. Don’t know if I can do it with my arthritis hand, but will try the other ways demonstrated (using fists instead of fingers to kneed)

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