



## The Healthy Living Park, Peoples Park, Halifax



## Evaluation of the Healthy Living Park Pilot Project



**Summer, 2016**

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## **1. Background**

### **(i) Your Back Yard**

Your Back Yard is not-for profit social enterprise that supports communities in the North of England, particularly in those places where cuts to public and community services have been most keenly felt. We work with local people, community groups, local businesses, third sector organisations, public sector agencies, with anyone who wants to make their area an even better place to live.

Our priority is supporting projects that benefit everyone living in the community; better community buildings, improving parks, play areas and open spaces, promoting healthy living and helping build stronger community organisations.

### **(ii) The concept of a Healthy Living Park**

Your Back Yard developed the concept of the Healthy Living Park (HLP) in 2014. The idea was a response to a call from Nesta, an innovation charity that helps people and organisations bring great ideas to life, for organisations to come up with innovative projects to explore new ways of running and managing parks.

The ideas for a Healthy Living Park came out of the desire to tackle two problems with one potential solution, the poor state of our health, and the looming crisis facing our parks.

#### State of our parks

“Evidence suggests that the renaissance of our public parks that has been underway for the past 15 years is fast coming to an end” (HLF report, The State of Public Parks, 2014). According to the report, 86% of parks departments said their budgets had been cut, with nearly a third experiencing drops of at least a fifth, and two suffering cutbacks of 50%. 81% of councils have cut park management frontline staff.

#### State of our Health

Problems with health, mental health and health inequalities, are on the increase. According to Public Health England, 19% of children in year 6 are obese, as are 24% of adults, which represents a very significant increase from 13% in 1993. Mental health problems too are on the rise, with an estimated 1 in 6 people experiencing a mental health problem in an average week.

#### Evidence of how parks improve our health and well being

Public Health England also cite extensive research showing:

*“There is significant and growing evidence on the health benefits of access to good quality green spaces. The benefits include better self-rated health; lower body mass index, overweight and obesity levels; improved mental health and wellbeing; increased longevity.*

### **(iii) Why Peoples Park, why Calderdale?**

People’s Park lies to the north of the town centre, and whilst it is less than a mile in distance, it is up a very steep hill which creates the perception of it being cut off from the town centre, and the rest of its facilities. Opened in 1857, it is a classic Victorian park designed by Joseph Paxton, and paid for by Sir Francis Crossley, who then donated the park to the city of Halifax. Like many parks of its kind, it suffered from a lack of funding during the 1970’s and 80’s, but since the mid 1990’s significant investment had occurred, most notably a significant grant from the Heritage Lottery. Despite this relatively recent investment, the park has continued to suffer from a poor reputation, and a perception that the facility was for those from the ‘Asian’, rather than ‘white’ community.

The Park was chosen as the location for the pilot for a number of reasons;

- YBY already had a very good relationship with staff from the Councils parks and play areas team, from working on a number of playground improvement projects in the Rastrick ward with them
- The park was a great asset but much of its potential was unfulfilled due to social cohesion issues, which the HLP could help it overcome
- Park ward within which the park is situated is one of the most deprived parts of the borough, with a preponderance of low income families, and many health issues traditionally associated with low income and inequalities

Also, Calderdale as a borough shared our desire to improve health and well-being. 30% of adults in Calderdale are classed as physically inactive, which means that they do less than 30 minutes of moderate activity a week. The Council are committed to tackling inactivity, and improving health and well-being, with the development of a **new physical activity strategy** aimed at making the borough the most active borough in the north of England by 2021, a document closely aligned with Sport England’s ‘Towards An Active Nation Strategy’ 2016-2021. And as the Council were keen to hear from local partners and organisations who could help them realise that vision, they seemed the perfect choice!

### **(iv) Project aims**

**The aims of the project were:**

- To provide highly accessible opportunities for people to engage in healthy activities within a park setting
- To provide opportunities for our target groups; young people, those with physical and mental health issues, as well as the general public
- To encourage more people, from all sectors of the community, to use and enjoy the park together

- To run the project as a pilot, learning lessons to inform the development and delivery of successor HKLP projects

### **(v) Funding**

The project was funded via a grant from the Health Opportunities Programme, administered by the Calderdale Foundation, and funded through the Calderdale CCG. YBY submitted a bid for £25,000, and were awarded £9,000, to run a smaller, pilot type project more focussed on specific groups and issues. The suggestion from the funder was we prioritised people from the BME communities, and people with cardio vascular problems

## **2. Developing the Project**

### **Partners**

One of the requirements of the funding was that we got a 'core' partner to work with us on the development and delivery of the project. We recruited Calderdale Healthy Minds, because we had built up a very good relationship with them whilst working up the bid, and also because they worked with a wide range of organisations whose users and clients were from one of our target groups, people with mental and physical health issues.

### **(i) Consultation and Engagement**

In order to meet the aims of the project, and the requirements of funders, it was vital that we

- Undertook an extensive programme of consultation and engagement with a wide range of groups, organisations potential partners, delivery agents, etc.
- Used the feedback from that consultation to inform the development and delivery of a programme of health activities designed to achieve the projects aims

In total we talked to over 50 organisations, from the public, private, community and third sectors, including the council, charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, schools and community members. Most was done face to face, with some telephone conversations. All were enthusiastic about the project, what it was trying to achieve, and were keen to help, or get involved.

As well as building support for the project, this extensive consultation gave us a really good understanding of what was already taking place, and how we could complement, rather than duplicate, that provision. It was also vital in getting 'buy in' from the local community, and in identifying people and organisations who could help promote the project, deliver sessions and put us on to other potential partner organisations.

At the same time we contacted all 4 primary schools within a 15 min walk of the park, and asked if we could meet with their school councils, to tell them about the project and, most importantly, find out what activities they would like to take part in. We had a bit of a mixed

response with only one school taking the opportunity to get fully involved. We visited the school, and ran a session with a very enthusiastic school council who filled in a short survey about what they would like to see us put on in the park. It was also planned for the pupils on the council to get their friends to fill in the survey, but unfortunately the school ran out of time to do this before the end of term.

## **(ii) Developing the Programme of Activities**

The feedback from this consultation gave us a number of ideas for activities that formed the basis for a draft programme of potential activities. Activities were chosen on the basis they were likely to be popular, there was someone to run them, they would be healthy and would fit well into a park setting. We then consulted further on this, and looked to identify partners who could help deliver them and came up with the programme set out below:

- A weekly multi sports session for children – organised with Himmat
- A weekly boot camp – instructor provided by Calderdale Community Coaching Trust
- A weekly singing session, operating from the bandstand, targeted at those with Dementia – with live singer Jo Grace and delivered in partnership with the Archway Project
- A family day with fun, health activities for young children – delivered in partnership with the children’s centre. This included Zumba, Bikeability session and Health Checks.
- 2 cycling sessions for youngsters, ran by Bikeability
- Weekly zumba classes – run by independently contracted Zumba instructors
- A mini Olympics day – delivered in partnership with the children’s centre’s Teddy Bears Picnic
- A launch day with a stall and Zumba classes

## **(iii) Publicity and marketing**

From the outset we were committed to delivering a comprehensive publicity strategy, using a number of ways in which we could get the message across to potential participants.

## Neighbours day



Neighbours day is one of the biggest annual events held in People's Park, and the date, in early July, coincided nicely with the planned start of most of the HLP activities. We therefore decided this was a great opportunity to get the word out there. We therefore put up a HLP stall, where people could find out about the project, pick up a leaflet and talk to YBY staff. We also booked the Zumba instructors to do a taster session, which was probably the most popular attraction of the whole day!

Despite the morning rain we gave out more than 250 flyers. The overall response was extremely positive, the big selling points appearing to be the fact the sessions would be free, and people did not have to book

## Posters, flyers and logos

Within the park, 10ft banners were displayed on the railings at key gateways and local roads on the A58 King Cross Road and the corner of Park Road/Hopwood Lane. There were also poster displays in the park notice boards and the window of the visitor centre.



Posters and flyers were also distributed and displayed locally to promote the programme in key venues including Queens Road Neighbourhood Centre, the council offices on Park Road, Arden Road Community Centre, St Augustines Centre, the sports centre at Calderdale College and the local children's centres.

## Facebook Page

The Facebook page [www.facebook.com/healthylivingpark/](http://www.facebook.com/healthylivingpark/) was probably the most effective form of publicity. In addition to letting people know about what was going on, it also allowed people to interact with the project, providing comments, asking questions, clarifying start times of activities etc. Sending the link to the page is also a really easy way of letting people know how things are going.

## Press releases

Press releases were sent to the press at the time of the launch, and this generated some really good publicity in the local press.

## Local networks

The programme was also promoted through local and partner networks, including Calderdale CVS monthly newsletter, council e-bulletins, emails sent out from Queen's Road Neighbourhood Centre and through leaders of local community groups.

#### **(iv) The Launch**

It had been hoped to get the programme fully up and running by the beginning of June. However, the month of Ramadan started took place between 6<sup>th</sup> June and 5<sup>th</sup> July and given the local demographics, it made sense to hold back on the main programme unit after Eid, which was on July 5th

However some activities did take place before this, including a planting session with a group of primary school community wardens on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> June, for which a press release was prepared and the event promoted to local media. This resulted in some coverage in the Halifax Courier. We also commenced the singing and dancing sessions for people with dementia and their carers during June.

### **3. Delivering the project**

#### **(i) How the activities went**

##### **Zumba**



The weekly Zumba classes were very well attended, particularly at the start of the summer, with an average of 15 people attending the class. Zumba really captured the imagination of lots of people, those doing it, and those just spectating. Whilst most of the dancers came along specifically for the session, there were a small number each week that joined in in an impromptu fashion as they walked through the park! Instructor led activities like Zumba and Boot Camp clearly work very well within a park setting and there is a lot of potential to expand delivery and encourage greater participation, particularly from families.

##### **Family Day**



This was huge success, thanks to no small part to a gloriously sunny day. More than 200 people attended, from all sectors of the community, making it a truly multi-cultural event, in a park which traditionally struggled to appeal to all sectors of the community. Activities that involved things that both children and parents can do together work well. Providing activities in conjunction with other deliverers resulted in the highest levels of participation and impact – Neighbours Day, and the two events co-organised with the Children’s Centre.

Perhaps best summed up by a park warden, why was watching the throngs enjoy playing games in the sunshine and remarked

***“This is great, are you doing this again next year?”***

### **Multi sports sessions**



Apart from a first week washout, attendance at the weekly sports club was good, with between 15 and 25 children attending. However, there was an issue with 2 of the coaches, from rugby and tennis, failing to show up on some weeks, highlighting the need to use instructors and coaches you can rely on, and on tightly managing the delivery end of the programme.

Half way through there was another push on the publicity front, with over 300 flyers being distributed, covering all households within a 5 minute walk of the park. It was therefore great to see more than 25 children at the next session, many of whom had found out via the flyers.

### **Cycling/Bikeability**



The first cycling event was a huge success, again benefitting from some glorious sunshine. More than 80 children came along to ride either their own bike, or one provided by the organisers, along the course set up by the bikeability team.

Many parents and families came too, sitting down in the sunshine whilst the children raced around the course. The second session, held in mid August, was well attended in the morning, with 25 children coming along, but rain in the afternoon resulted in an early finish.

### **Boot camp**

There was good attendance at most of the sessions, all of which were held on a Saturday morning. Instructor led activities like Zumba and Boot Camp work well within a park setting and there is a lot of potential to expand delivery and encourage greater participation.

For example, most people who took part were adults under 30, and from consultation done in other areas, there would appear to be a lot of demand for boot camps for families, hence this is something we will build into this session for the next HLP.

### **4. Did we meet our project aims?**

The project had 4 overall aims, and the extent to which these were met are set out in the table below.

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Achieved?</b>	<b>Potential for improvement</b>
To provide highly accessible opportunities for people to engage in healthy activities within a park setting	Yes, people participated from all age groups and sectors of the community	Need to focus on how benefits could be sustained
To provide opportunities for our target groups, young people, those with physical and mental health issues, as well as the general public	-Partly, young people did participate in large numbers, the other target groups proved harder to reach -Due to the majority of the local population being from Muslim communities, it was harder to engage with older girls and women many of whom are not comfortable or willing to take part in physical activities in open spaces.	Needs to put more resources into proactively targeting those with physical and mental health issues, and to overcome any cultural barriers

To encourage more people, from all sectors of the community, to use and enjoy the park together	Yes, The family day was extremely successful in this regard	Again, how could this boost to social cohesion be built on, and sustained?
To run the project as a pilot, learning lessons to inform the development and delivery of successor HLP projects	Yes, the project has provided a wealth of information, highlighting a number of areas/activities that worked well, and other areas where things could relatively easily improved	-If funding would allow, an independent evaluation could be carried out by specialist researchers/evaluators -More funding would allow for more evaluation methods to be used, such as interviews with participants, pre and post project

## 5. Lessons learnt for future projects

This was a pilot project and one of the key aims was to experiment, be innovative and learn things that could inform future projects. This section looks at the lessons that were learnt, and how they could be used to improve future HLP's.

### (i) Working with partners

- Extensive work needs to be done to get as many local schools on board as possible, they are absolutely key to getting young people involved in big numbers
- The more time spent meeting with potential local partners, stakeholders community groups and organisations the more 'buy in' from the local community, in terms of support for the project, helping publicise and driving up participation levels
- The close working relationship with a very supportive council, in particular the parks team, and the lack of bureaucracy, was a major contributory factor in the success of the project

### (ii) Managing the budget, additional benefits from more resources

- More resources would allow for more development work, more activities to be delivered and more time put into marketing to drive up numbers

- A significant level of resource needs to be assigned to evaluation and impact assessment-this is crucial if we are to capture the evidence, in terms of positive impacts on people's health, which could be the key to securing future funding
- More resources would also allow more time to be spent developing a healthy living dimension to the programme, e.g. around raising awareness around healthy living and lifestyles
- More resource could help developing a volunteer programme to support the project, people who could assist those delivering activities, act as project ambassadors to market and promote the programme and could learn skills to develop future projects

### **(iii) The activities/participation**

- The pilot project has given us some 'core' activities (Zumba, cycling, family days) that we now know work well and can form the starting point for future HLP projects
- Coaches/instructors need to be supported, with someone from YBY present, particularly at early sessions, to help with signing in and getting baseline surveys done
- Providing activities in conjunction with other deliverers resulted in the highest levels of participation and impact, e.g. Neighbours Day, and the two events co-organised with the Children's Centre
- Negative local perceptions of People's Park due to previous issues with crime and ASB meant that some potential users of the programme were put off from taking part in activities
- A future HLP needs to have more of a healthy living dimension to the programme, i.e. around raising awareness of healthy living and lifestyles-Public Health teams and Well-being teams in the Councils need to play a key role in this

### **(iv) Reaching target groups**

- Getting people along with physical/mental health issues is challenging-people from this group are unlikely to attend events without a significant level of support
- The focus should therefore be on putting on activities in response to the expressed needs of organisations already working with these target groups, and who can support them to attend
- Due to the majority of the local population and catchment for the project being from Muslim communities, it was harder to engage with older girls and women many of whom are not comfortable or willing to take part in physical activities in open spaces. Had indoor or screened off spaces been available within the park, this could have enabled more of the local community to take part in activities.

### **(v) Sustainability**

Achieving positive outcomes is one thing, finding ways to sustain those benefits is a significant challenge, way of achieving greater sustainability could include

- Making more use of volunteers
- Measuring impact to generate future funding support
- Get activity providers to do stuff (e.g. a launch day) for free, in return for meeting potential customers
- tracking people to help ensure positive outcomes are sustained
- creating a HLP toolkit, comprising an evaluation and impact assessment framework, and templates for documents such as surveys, questionnaires etc, will make future HLP projects much easier to develop, deliver, and evaluate

## **6. Conclusion and Next Steps**

Overall, the HLP pilot project was extremely successful and achieved, to a certain extent, all of its aims. People were universally positive and enthusiastic about the concept, about what it was trying to achieve and were very keen to get involved. Activities were generally well attended, attracting people from all sectors of the community.

### **Outputs**

In terms of outputs,

- 32 sessions were delivered between June and September
- More than 700 people attended 1 or more sessions (including repeat participants)
- 20 different organisations were involved in development and delivery of activities
- More than 500 people were consulted

People attended in decent numbers, from all sectors of the community, to all the activities, particularly when the weather was good. For a relatively small amount of funding the project had a very significant impact, on people's opportunities to enjoy the park in a healthy and fun way.

We believe HLP projects will get easier to deliver as lessons are learnt, best practice developed and the evidence base becomes more compelling, hence funding easier to come by. Also, we will build up a HLP toolkit, which will include an evaluation framework which will allow us to capture data on the impact the project is having on people's health. The toolkit will also include templates for documents such as participant surveys, consultation questionnaires, volunteer recruitment forms etc. This will make developing, and evaluating new HLP projects, a much easier proposition than starting from scratch, as we did with this pilot.

Peoples Park will therefore hopefully prove to be the first of many Healthy Living Park projects, and YBY already has 2 or 3 other projects in the pipeline. People need more accessible opportunities to get healthy, parks need more people to use them, and the evidence from this pilot is that people love exercising in parks, and attending fun, organised activities where they can meet others.

On that note, Your Back Yard will be learning the lessons from this project, and applying them to the next HLP project, to take place in Haw Hill Park, Normanton in summer 2017. The project is being delivered in partnership with the 'Friends of Haw Hill Park', and is being funded with a grant from the national lottery.

Hopefully the second of many, let's hope the sun shines!

*Tony Mullin, Director,*

*You're Back Yard CIC*

*Web: [www.yourbackyard.org.uk](http://www.yourbackyard.org.uk)*

*Twitter: [@yourbackyardcic](https://twitter.com/yourbackyardcic)*

*Facebook: [facebook.com/yourbackyardcic](https://facebook.com/yourbackyardcic)*

## **Appendix, List of organisations consulted**

Women's Centre Calderdale  
Himmat (young people's football)  
Halifax Harriers Athletics Club/Athletics Network  
Calderdale Community Coaching Trust  
Calderdale Council: Business & Sport Development Manager,  
Neighbourhood Manager, Health Improvement Manager,  
Neighbourhood Schemes Manager,  
Park Manager  
Play Service  
Youth Services  
Calderdale College  
Jubilee Children's Centre  
Archway Project (mental health project)  
Healthy Minds  
GP Park Community Practice  
Holy Trinity Primary school  
St Mary's Primary school  
Parkinson LANE Primary school  
All Saints Primary school  
North Bank Forum (volunteers organisation)  
Calderdale Council Bikeability project  
St Augustine's Centre (community centre)  
Halifax Opportunities Trust – Staying well (older people)  
Children's Centres Family Support team  
Women's Activity Centre  
British Muslim Association  
Neighbour's Day Steering Group  
AWAAS - women's group  
Over 50s women's group  
Tai Chi Tigers  
West Riding FA