



Photo credit: <https://bit.ly/2L4Ti7N>

Theme(s): Partnership, Inclusivity, Stakeholder involvement

Type of initiative:
Active Parks

Year: 2017 - till present day

Location:
Berkshire
United Kingdom

Owner: Slough Borough Council

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DESCRIPTION

In March 2017, the project idea was created following a consultation, and it was clear that there was a desire from members of the local community to get more physically active in Slough's parks and green spaces. A free running programme which caters for beginners and intermediates was conceived as an effective way of doing this. It was agreed that running was something that can be done at relatively low costs i.e. equipment requirements is cheaper than other sessions and can be delivered in an inclusive manner for all abilities, ages and experiences. In April 2017, volunteer Run Leaders were recruited through the partnership with Upton Court Park Run and trained in completing the leadership in running fitness course. In May 2017 the running groups began and to date there has been over 90 unique participants.

SUCCESSES

1. Social Media: The establishment of a Facebook page has been a brilliant way to generate (and maintain) interest in the project. To date, there has been over 320 page likes and positive engagement from users occurs on a frequent basis. The Active Slough team constantly upload photos after every session, to ensure that groups don't get disappointed if they don't get a group selfie!

2. Rewards and Recognition: A runner of the week award was developed as a way to recognise individuals (all they receive is a simple Active Slough water bottle), and this goes down brilliantly every week.

3. High female participation: More than 80% of the participants to date are female and 50% were previously inactive (i.e. did less than x3 30 minutes of moderate physical activity a week).

4. Volunteer-led: All five of the volunteer run leaders recruited have been trained and now lead sessions on a weekly basis. These individuals have been key in establishing a good rapport between themselves (we have a Run leader WhatsApp group to share ideas, pictures etc...) as well as the participants.

5. Strong retention and sustained activity: The sense of camaraderie the groups have now generated with wider outcomes being achieved such as participants starting to build friendships with their fellow runners.

CHALLENGES

1. Park maintenance/reputation: One of the parks used has a bad reputation locally, due to various crime related incidents such as stabbings and drug use taking place. Understandably this led to a number of participants mentioning that they felt uncomfortable running in the park or would not do on their own. This continues to be overcome by the concept of running as part of a group being promoted to all participants continuously.

2. Parking/Access: The parking is also very limited, which is another deterrent, makes people late, and provides another "excuse/reason not to attend". This has and continues to be difficult for Active Slough to overcome.

3. Stigma: Still a number of people ask if the beginner groups are for 'genuine beginners' and at every sessions someone says "I just can't run". However, this is something that has been overcome by making the sessions fun, engaging and supportive.

Ultimately, we are concerned of the sustainability of the project through winter due to a lack of light in the parks (and the negative reputation of the parks in the dark). We are currently seeking alternative venues such as leisure centres and a floodlit athletics track to overcome this problem.