



COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION

FACTFILE

NAME
PATRICK NOLAN

ALTOGETHER BETTER PROJECT
HEALTHWISE HULL

WHAT HE DID
Participated in Healthwise Hull level 1 and 2 training which empowered him to pass on positive messages about healthy eating and physical activity in the community by both formal and informal means.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID HE MAKE?
Improved his own health as well as that of his family and friends. Helped a number of people to stop or cut down smoking and to lose weight. Found a new purpose through voluntary work, which has led to Patrick embarking on a fulfilling new career as a health trainer.

ABOUT THE PROJECT
Yorkshire and Humber Regional Mental Health First Aid is England's first regional provider of Mental Health First Aid. Through MHFA training, the project aims to empower people by giving them the knowledge, skills and confidence to help those experiencing problems at work, at home and in the general community and address stigma about mental ill health.

‘IT’S CHANGED OUR FAMILY. WE WERE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME. THOSE TWO COURSES HAVE CHANGED OUR LIVES’

Patrick Nolan joined Healthwise Hull after deciding to adopt a healthier lifestyle. A year later, he has become a committed community health champion and is about to make a fulfilling career change.

As an ex-paratrooper, health and fitness had always been important to Patrick but in his current line of work, as a taxi driver, he'd started to get into bad habits.

“My weight had ballooned to 13 stone. Being a cab driver didn't help – being sat on your backside all day, eating junk food.

Together with wife Jayne, he decided a lifestyle change was needed.

The couple's involvement with Altogether Better began when they took the Healthwise Hull champion training, two one-week OCN-accredited courses looking at healthy eating, how to stop smoking, exercise and emotional well-being.

‘I TELL THEM ABOUT IT IN GENERAL TERMS. I DON’T PREACH’

▶ As well as making them want to cook and eat more healthily – the Nolans now usually make family meals for themselves and their three young children from basic healthy ingredients rather than using convenience foods – the courses also encouraged them to go out into the community to introduce the skills they had learned to family and friends.

“I speak to people in my own way,” said Patrick. “My way is to pass on what I’ve learned personally. I tell them how it can be, if they change. I tell them about it in general terms. I don’t preach. People have become more aware in the last year or so because of all the smoking and obesity campaigns. So they do listen.

“There are lots of ways to tell people. You can use booklets and leaflets, although I prefer to write them a programme.

“I start by looking at what they’re doing now in terms of food and fitness. I get them to keep a diary. Then I sit down with them and say: could you change this or that? I get them to set goals basically. I then keep in contact with them to provide support when it’s needed.”

Using this approach, Patrick has helped one overweight friend to lose three stone in four months.

With other demands on his time – he is studying part-time at college and volunteers as an instructor at a judo club as well as having his family and work commitments – Patrick does not always have the time to volunteer formally. But, he says, he does try whenever possible to pass on what he has learned as a community health champion on a casual basis.

“A guy came to the judo club who was overweight and a smoker,” he said. “I told him what I’d learned and he’s now lost a considerable amount of weight and has cut down smoking. Some of the time you’re passing on what you know and you don’t know you are.”

Healthwise Hull provides volunteers with at least six months’ support after completing level 1 training. However, in Patrick’s case, the support and guidance he has received has taken him even further.

“Through Healthwise, I heard about some jobs for Health Trainers and I was lucky enough to get one,” he said. “I’ll be working with people who are at risk of cardiovascular disease. Before Healthwise, I never would have gone for a job with the NHS. It’s changed my career.

“Healthwise Hull is a fantastic project if people take the time to do it. Even if they just help themselves, their friends and family, it will make a difference.

“It’s changed our family. We were in the right place at the right time. Those two courses have changed our lives.”

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Altogether Better was founded on the firm belief that community health champions have the potential to make a significant impact on health inequalities. In 2008, we were awarded £6.8m from the BIG Lottery Well-being Fund to run our innovative, five-year programme in Yorkshire and the Humber. We have 16 locally-delivered flagship projects across the region, testing out different community health champion approaches in a range of settings.

