

AMAZING STORIES

FACTFILE

NAME

David Walshaw

ALTOGETHER BETTER PROJECT

One Barnsley

WHAT HE DID

Took healthy lifestyles course and accredited motivational interviewing training, gaining the skills needed to be a Community Health Champion. Appointed ambassador and community representative for the Fit Reds programme. Completed LifeCheck training. Now enrolled on a coaching course with the aim of returning to full-time employment.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID HE MAKE?

Encouraged over 80 people to improve their health through the Fit Reds course, helping them lose a total of 205.6kg in weight. Improved his own health and well-being after 15 years of recurring health problems. Provided specific detailed support to 17 people, addressing issues including physical activity, substance misuse, smoking and mental well-being and signposting them to relevant services. Carried out 67 LifeChecks (NHS online health assessment tool) in his community.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

One Barnsley works with partner agencies and local community groups to address health inequalities in two of Barnsley's most deprived communities. The aim of the project is to provide a range of activities to promote physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing that are based on local need and developed with local people, as well as developing new resources to fill gaps in existing services.



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COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION

“ALL MY LIFE, I’VE DONE THINGS FOR OTHER PEOPLE. NOW I CAN SEE A WAY OF HELPING OTHERS AND DOING SOMETHING FOR MYSELF AT THE SAME TIME”

To borrow the famous football cliché, David Walshaw’s life has been something of a game of two halves.

After cruising to a fairly comfortable position in life and work, he was then hit with a devastating triple blow of redundancy, bereavement and a debilitating illness.

Now, with the help of football and his passion for health and fitness, he has begun to turn his own ‘game’ around, while empowering others to do the same.

David is a Community Health Champion with Barnsley’s Fit Reds scheme. Affiliated to Championship club Barnsley FC and supported by Altogether Better’s One Barnsley project, Fit Reds draws on men’s passion for football to tackle major health issues, including drug use, obesity, drinking and smoking.

David got involved, following a particularly difficult period in his life. After being made redundant by the Forestry Commission and the death of his parents, he contracted Neuralgic Amyotrophy, a painful viral muscular condition.

“I’d always been an active guy,” he said.

“Then all of a sudden I had to deal with a body that wouldn’t do what it was supposed to. I wasn’t sleeping very well. When it first started, it felt



like someone was trying to push a knitting needle through my shoulder. Around the same time, my parents died. It was the lowest point of my life. I even considered emigrating to get going again.”

After finally getting a correct diagnosis and treatment for his condition, David decided to take stock of his life, giving greater priority to health and well-being.

He joined the first Fit Reds course in September 2010. Over eight weeks, the group received regular dietary advice and blood pressure checks, with each session culminating in a game of football at Barnsley FC’s Oakwell ground.

“We’d do a bit of gym work, look at what we’d eaten during the week, have some talks about food and what people needed to do to lose weight and reduce their blood pressure and then we’d have a football match,” he said.

David was so impressed that he volunteered as a Community Health Champion on subsequent courses. A course in motivational interviewing techniques aimed at encouraging men to talk about and seek help for their health problems has formed the bedrock of his voluntary work.

“The problem with men is that they put up with things,” he said. “They’re often too proud to go and see their doctor. The idea with Fit Reds is to catch problems at an early stage.

“Although I am not clinically trained, as a Community Health Champion, I have skills that allow people to see me as someone they can talk to. I try to make them feel that they are not alone, especially when talking about sensitive health problems, like prostate cancer and mental health. A lot of lads ignore their problems and I try to get them to address them and overcome them.”

David has also learned to run Lifecheck, an online NHS resource which allows people to ‘benchmark’

their lifestyles and diet and has become a walk leader with the Strolling Tykes.

“It gets people out of a sedentary lifestyle,” he said. “It gets them moving and feeling the benefit of that for body and mind.”

But it is football which continues to inspire him.

“I look forward so much to Mondays and Thursdays,” he said. “We’re living out our fantasy. I’d love to see it spread to other towns so that we can play other clubs.

“It’s really moving to see the effort that everyone puts in. Some people come along with weight problems but can be great footballers once they get on the pitch. There’s a really good rapport.”

And for the first time since contracting his illness, David is beginning to see the possibilities for a future career, as a health trainer.

“I’ve always been a working bloke, but never been in employment that fulfilled me. There weren’t many opportunities until I got involved with Fit Reds and became a Community Health Champion.

“Working with the health team has given me confidence to go out and show people what I can do and how I can support and help them. My ultimate aim is to get back into full-time employment using the skills I have learned as a Champion.

“All my life, I’ve done things for other people. Now I can see a way of helping others and doing something for myself at the same time.”

CONTACT

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Using evidenced based community engagement approaches and our community health champion model, Altogether Better works with others to unlock the full potential of people, patients and communities to improve their health and wellbeing and that of the people they live and work with.

We work with the NHS, Department of Health and national partners to prototype models which support Foundation Trusts, CCGs and General Practice to engage local people. We have models to support people with the self management of long term conditions, birth and parenting; LifeCheck, local needs assessment, relationship support and Roma health.

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