

Community Health Champion Poem

Written and performed by Ray Hearne at the Altogether Better Programmes National
“Championing Champions” Event, 30th November 2010, Leeds

Community Health * Champions
Community Health ** Champions

Sixteen flagships in full sail
Around the region – let’s follow that trail
And don’t forget building the evidence base
Helps to construct a water-tight case

There’s all kinds of champions from all kinds of camps
But Community Health Champions are proper champs
Working in their own localities to fight
Health inequalities - all right?
There at the heart of the hub of it all
On their own patches they’ve set up stall
And raised a standard on behalf of their own
Community Health Champions, home-grown!

Preparing the soil, weeding, seeding
Identifying what people are needing
Learning, reaching out, empowering
Cultivate it, then watch it flowering!

Commanding attention, they open up eyes
And ears and minds, putting folk wise
To the countless issues that impact on health
Poverty of course, (that’s lack of wealth!)
Is a major factor, a running sore
That the rich seem eminently able to ignore
So it’s down to citizens themselves on the ground
And the difference a few make can be profound
Even where there’s little or less to be found
Champions with attitude astonish and astound

Getting a buzz on Parson Cross
Not from grass or the Grapes of Loss
But moving beyond distress and despair
To get little kids into sun and fresh air

Motivating the unimpressed
Galvanising the deeply depressed
Making the couldn’t care less, stop and think
Bringing the hell-bent back from the brink

Altogether better, getting better and better
Whether it’s the spirit you mean, or the letter
Better and better, getting altogether better
Even in the language of the target-setter

Champions are givers but they get something back
And most say it's worth it, despite the flak
That day by day, week upon week
Falls on the heads of the no longer meek
But they'll tell you the satisfaction they feel
When they know they've achieved something tangible, - real!
What most of them want's not the least bit strange
Community Health Champions want change!
To leave a lasting legacy behind
Health expectations re-defined
Rich versus poor requires explanation
And the gap between closed in a generation
And they're modelling the means of transformation
With everyday imagination

And that's why we're here, to give big cheers
And thank yous, before everybody disappears
To all those places you've come from today
But we'll have another 'burst' first, as they say

Listen to the range of things they do
Community Health Champions, well just a few

In Leeds they're ever so fresh and fruity
'fruit and veg for health and beauty'
Is as good a slogan as 'five a day'
'like a mobile market, it's brilliant' folk say
If you're less than mobile yourself and can't dash
To the supermarket, or you haven't much cash
'Reaching where other veg stalls don't reach'
As quotations go that's an absolute peach!
They organise 'cook and eat' sessions too
These are things every community could do!

Healthwise Hull from the Goodwin Trust
Will tell you that exercise is a must
'Looking Good and Feeling Good'
'You don't need all that cheese on your spud!'
In Sharrow the Ship Shape Shop is OK!
And Bradford Seniors are showing the way
Knowsley Champions by degrees
Are countering cardiovascular disease
Pregnancy Pals and Birth Buddies
Deliver the bonniest, bounciest goodies!

All that activity in just one year
All that and more in just in one year
And they'll still be here as the snow clouds loom
Community Health Champions through the gloom
Of more job losses and benefit cuts
Hauling us out of abysses and ruts

With gritted teeth and focused vision
Defying the stigmatisers' derision
The swivel-eyed twittering ideologues
The 'you've never had it so good kid' blogs
Through all of that and much more too
The Champions will be there for you
Giving a little bit of a lead
And if ever it was needed, that's what we need

Questions: What do you do with disengaged GPs?
And why is that a full rhyme for diabetes?

If enlightened thinking is currently expiring
The Champion's stories remain inspiring

Stepping up to that neighbourhood mark
To oxygenate more bright little sparks
And nothing is certain, but I think I can say
That health championing is here to stay
And if there's any sense in the coalition
That will be their considered position

So here's a thank you from me, thank you, and thanks
To all of those in the modest ranks
Of the cohort of Champions, paid and unpaid
Who deserve a much better song than I've made

Community Health Champions
Community Health Champions
Country and town, workplace and street
Show friends and neighbours what to eat
And how to stay healthy and fit
Take exercise and not just sit
Community Health Champions
Have more than done their little bit

Community Health Champions
Let's celebrate the Champions
Raising the banner and the flag
Against that ever-tempting fag
Making a stand, sometimes unplanned
And reaching out to hold a hand
Inspiring countless more Champions
To spread the word across the land

They are the Champions!!!!

Ray Hearne
30th November 2010