

Improving affordability of fruit and vegetables in low income areas - working with small retailers.

Joanne O'Suilleabhain, Have a Heart Paisley

Joanne outlined the background aims and current work of Have a Heart Paisley (HaHP) and more specifically the prevention project she is involved with.

Have a Heart Paisley (HaHP) was funded as a national demonstration project through the Scottish Government originally receiving £6million in 2000 to target heart disease in Paisley (population ~80,000).

The first phase of the projects was between 2000 and 2003 and worked across all settings with all ages groups. The transition year of 2004 was used to evaluate the project and draw together lessons learnt. Following this, the Scottish Government agreed to refund the project, but with a more targeted approach. The work up to 2003 was widely praised and had been very successful in raising awareness, but was yet to demonstrate a shift in the incidence of Coronary Heart Disease (CHD).

The second phase of the project therefore focused on middle age and was granted a further £4million leading to the development of a 20 person team and cardiac rehab centre which has another 12 staff.

The project works in three key dimensions 1. testing new ways of providing tertiary care for those with a step change in their heart disease such as using a leisure centre as opposed to hospital for rehabilitation programmes, 2. working with those with diagnosed heart disease to support an increase in exercise behaviour and 3. a primary prevention project.

The primary prevention project works with those aged 45-60 and aims to improve over all heart health. The first step in working with this group was to mail the 11,000 45-60 year olds living in Paisley and offer them the opportunity to be screened for their risk of coronary heart with follow on support to improve their lifestyle behaviours.

Those who agreed to come in were tested using the Framingham risk score to determine their risk of developing CHD and then were offered health coaching. HaHP has 8 trained health coaches who work with individual clients for a year. The process is client led and includes smoking cessation, physical activity and diet all of which also include mental health and well being. Clients are retested after one year to see if their Framingham risk score has decreased as a result of the health coaching programme. This process of pre-empting illness is fairly common in Scotland and known as 'anticipatory care'.

In 2005, HaHP carried out a needs assessment with its clients to find out what they needed to support improvements in their lifestyle behaviours of physical inactivity, tobacco use and unhealthy eating. Overwhelmingly clients stated that they needed support through cooking classes and weight management with 32% reporting that they couldn't afford fruit and vegetables. Whilst aware that there was a need to keep the primary prevention projects work within their remit to work with the particular HaHP client group, the healthy eating staff felt that there was scope to dovetail any work more widely with retailers based in the community.

This project intended to work with small, local, independent retailers, signpost HaHP clients to buy their fruit and vegetables within these stores and hopefully have a greater impact on supply and demand of produce.

As a result, all clients working with the health coaches and requesting dietary advice and support were provided with £2 off vouchers for fruit and vegetables to use with retailers on a weekly basis (to create a habit of purchasing fruit and vegetables as a part of weekly shopping). Clients have an ID card which they have to present with the voucher and vouchers are completed by the health coaches including the dates for use during the 8 weeks of the voucher programme. The scheme was piloted in 7 shops in the Paisley area and there are now more than 30 shops in which the vouchers are accepted, many of whom are one off independents. Retailers were recruited through cold calling and invoice HaHP for the cost of the vouchers used in their shop.

The project formed closer links with retailers by helping them to develop scheme they ran already. E.g. one retailer ran a poorly publicised home delivery scheme so HaHP asked the retailer to produce a smaller vegetable box for £2.75 which is delivered to the client free of charge and advertised through the primary prevention project. The retailer then charges HaHP £1 for delivery of each box.

HaHP have also coupled their retailer work with the Scottish Government's Healthy Living Neighbourhood Shop Scheme to improve displays and layout inside the shops and promote fruit and vegetables. This scheme offers free display stands and shelf signage to stores plus training. This has in turn helped the Neighbourhood Shop Scheme gain access to small retailers.

Evaluation

The fruit and vegetable project of HaHP is evaluated on a regular basis through a project diary, interviews with retailers, focus groups with health coaches and data analysis which looks at the uptake of vouchers.

Findings

- Clients found the vouchers easy to use
- Most clients have increased their fruit and vegetable consumption by at least 2 portions per day
- Over 1600 vouchers were used in shops
- The project had a 65% overall redemption rate of vouchers
- Clients initially favoured fruit shops, but have widened their use to general shops
- The voucher scheme is easy to put into operation
- Shop keepers found the stands they received as a part of the Healthy Living Neighbourhood Shop Scheme led to an increase in sales and a reduction in wastage.
- Getting hard data on sale from shop keepers is a challenge
- Although reception to the vouchers was positive, there was some resistance to changing suppliers or developing the use of stands (some need almost constant policing)

Questions

1. How many people are currently on the scheme?

There are 900 people on the primary prevention scheme of whom 80-90 are regular users of vouchers at the moment. The scheme is purely responsive to the overall HaHP agenda and therefore vouchers are only for those tackling diet as a part of their heart health and if they tell the health coach that they want to focus on diet as opposed to physical activity or smoking cessation.

Of the 11,000 letters sent out, there were 3,000 responses who were interested in being screened (of these, many were worried well). Of this 3,000, 900 were identified as being at risk and agreed to join the primary prevention scheme for 1 year