



Active for Life - 60+ Free Leisure Offer in Barking & Dagenham

Project Overview

The number of older people (aged 65 and above) in Barking and Dagenham will increase from 19,500 in 2010 to 21,800 in 2030. Increased life expectancy is impacting particularly on the numbers of very elderly, with an increase from 1,100 people over the age of 90 in 2010 to 1,900 by 2030, an increase of 72%.

Barking and Dagenham is ranked 22nd of 326 local authorities in the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation, and 7th amongst London boroughs. The index compares indicators covering income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and the living environment.

Inequalities in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are closely associated with deprivation. People who live in areas of high deprivation, or who have worse socio-economic status, experience poorer health than those in more affluent areas. They experience greater levels of morbidity and premature mortality than the better off in society. The reasons for this health inequality are multi-factorial.

As well as resulting from poorer access to health care and poorer quality health services in more deprived areas, lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol intake and occupation are more important. The wider determinants of health, as discussed in Fair Society, Healthy Lives, underpin the disadvantage that people experience.

In 2010/11 residents aged 60 and over were given the opportunity to access the Borough's leisure centres for free during a year-long Active for Life pilot project. A budget of £130,000 was provided by Adult Social Care to pay for the programme. When the project was originally launched, every eligible Barking and Dagenham resident was sent a letter, to inform them of the offer. This was an effective way to reach the target group.

The offer was made available to residents of Barking and Dagenham, Monday to Friday (9.00am-5.00pm) and all weekend. Free access includes swimming, the fitness suite, studio classes and racket activities.

Due to the success of the offer, funding was committed to continue the programme in 2011/12 and 2012/13. From 2013/14 the scheme will be funded by the Public Health grant.

Project Outcome

In 2012/13, there were 60,217 visits to the leisure centres by Active for Life members. An increase of 25% compared to the previous year. The exercise



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classes and fitness suite were the most attended activities, each totalling 35% of the total usage.

On average 57% of individuals who attended the leisure centres participated at least 5 times per month, 27% participated at least 10 times and 7% participated at least 20 times per month.

There are currently 3,245 active members (participated within the last three months). This means that 17% of residents aged 60 to 74 are members of the scheme and 12% of the over 60s population as a whole are members.

To help evidence that the offer is improving the health and well-being of the target group, a satisfaction survey of members was undertaken during 2012/13. In total 645 people returned a completed survey. Customers were asked whether they had increased their physical activity since starting the programme

- 57% stated they were participating more, with 21% of people participating more than 3 x 30 minutes per week.
- 82% of respondents regularly attended the leisure centres and took part in the free activities.
- The main reason that people participate is to keep fit and healthy (21%).

As well as improvements to physical health it is apparent that the scheme is making an equally important impact on the well-being of members. The members were asked whether they agreed that by attending the free activities that their quality of life has improved:

- 88% have adopted a more active and productive lifestyle.
- 91% have an improved sense of mental health and wellbeing.
- 85% have an increased sense of personal achievement, confidence and self-esteem.
- 75% have an improved knowledge of health and healthy lifestyle issues.
- 79% have increased their social interaction.
- 70% feel less isolated.
- 61% have increased their social and communication skills.
- 59% have increased their skills and confidence to deal with life change

Below are some testimonials in support of the offer;

“When the new Becontree Heath Leisure Centre opened I was spoilt for choice. I do four classes a week, it keeps me fit, it gets me out of the house, you meet lots of different people, learn different things and it’s very beneficial to my well-being. I don’t see how you could improve it, it’s my lifeline and I thank you for it.” Pam Phillips

“When I started I was well and truly overweight. I have lost at least 3 and a half stone, I feel fitter and don’t get so tired. The staff are so helpful they answer any queries and are very friendly.” Mrs. Mary Thornhill



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"I have improved my physical and mental well-being since attending the gym. I have not been to the doctors since going to the gym." Brian Mackenzie

"I am 80 years old and the opportunity to access this range of facilities locally and at no costs has been very beneficial and is much appreciated. Apart from the obvious health benefits it has provided a good opportunity to make social contacts."

Ronald Wylde

Due to the success and uptake of the programme, funding has been secured until 2015 from the Public Health budget.

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