

1Life: Back to winning ways

1Life harnessed skill and innovation to achieve its recent contract win in Milton Keynes (MK). We look at how the brand's transformation helped it to overcome adversity and win back business in the challenging MK market

For MK Council's Paul Sanders, choosing 1Life to manage one of the Borough's leisure contracts wasn't an easy decision. Having had challenges with the company that used to be Leisure Connection, he was going to need a lot of persuading that the transformation into 1Life was a fresh start for the company.



Paul Sanders – assistant director, community facilities, MK Council: During a difficult period in its history, Leisure Connection operated facilities for us back in 2009. It was clear that the company had lost its focus on the customer, so the leisure management contract came to an end.

Unperturbed by the past, and emboldened by the company's extensive transformation under MD Neil King, the 1Life team set about putting together an innovative tender in pursuit of their first new contract since the rebrand.



Andy Haworth – 1Life director of development: When we looked at the opportunity, it quickly became apparent that if we were going to give ourselves the best chance of winning the management contract, we would have to think differently about it. While a lot of operators' default position is to look at increasing gym

capacity, it was clear that although the existing facilities were fairly poor, just doing a traditional gym extension and other add-ons wasn't going to achieve the council's objective, which was to maximise savings, and enable us to compete in a sustainable way in the marketplace.

With one of the highest densities of private gyms in the country, in addition to soaring rates of inactivity and obesity, Milton Keynes is a highly challenging marketplace for local authority operators at the best of times. But with austerity cuts beginning to bite hard on council funding, the contract needed a highly innovative solution to meet these unique requirements while still balancing the books.

PS: We had a package of five facilities which we'd always wanted to outsource. Effectively, we were subsidising them too much, so we wanted some fresh ideas, programming and investment. The situation

needed innovation and 1Life provided that in terms of a different fitness offer across the facilities. They clearly stood out, presented themselves very well and the package they put forward not only gives us financial neutrality, but it also provides an income as well, which is what authorities expect these days. Income, protection and investment were the main outcomes and it's been a great result for us.

AH: Milton Keynes is absolutely saturated with traditional and budget gyms – which have a reasonable appeal to the market – but the offer is restrictive in terms of the range of demographics the town can reach through traditional physical activity initiatives. So we've looked at a number of different options, based on what we think are competitive issues in the marketplace and also opportunities to do something different and more creative.

Across the five-site portfolio, 1Life has introduced a range of inventive solutions to engage different demographics in physical activity. These include a specialised health and wellbeing centre for the MK deconditioned market; for MK families a £1m+ project to transform an ageing leisure centre, along with the conversion of an underutilised space into a unique Centre of Excellence for Group Fitness; and the conversion of a former tractor shed into a cross training functional fitness hub for MK residents and sports teams. 1Life has worked to combine its exercise adherence knowledge with the guiding

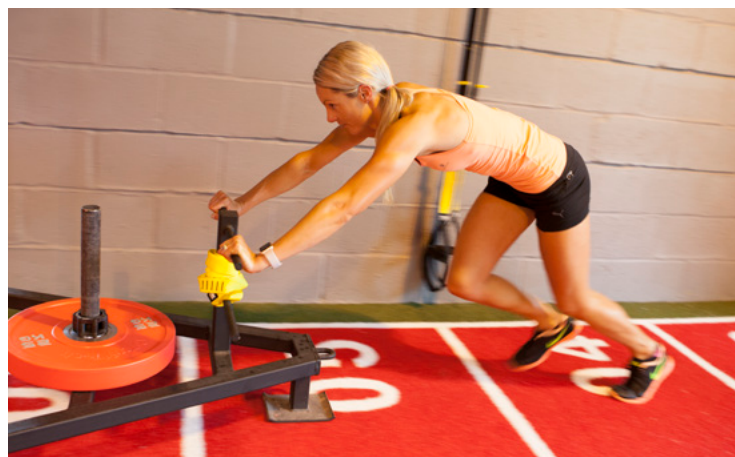
THE 1LIFE JOURNEY

In 2013 the company underwent a root and branch transformation which saw it change from Leisure Connection to become 1Life: an aspirational brand that puts people – staff, clients, customers and community – at its heart.



Above: MK Council's Paul Sanders (left) and 1Life MD Neil King sign the MK leisure contract. Below: 1Life has introduced a raft of innovative leisure concepts across the five-site portfolio.





1Life has invested over £1.5m to engage MK's families, sports teams and deconditioned market in physical activity

► principles in the government's recent Sporting Future strategy.

AH: We've ensured our initiatives for engaging populations in activity are in step with prevalent methods and of course the Sporting Future strategy. And we were particularly conscious of the council's objectives, so we proposed in the bid a range of very specific health promotion and participation plans designed to maximise the potential of the five sites.

PS: Milton Keynes is one of the most obese areas of the UK and activity participation has gone down as well, so we're looking forward to seeing how 1Life's innovations can produce positive outcomes. They took a different approach and analysed what we already had in MK in terms of the saturated gym market. We're confident and 1Life are confident that this different approach will lead to a better offer and the sites they're operating are located in areas where physical activity provisions are somewhat lacking right now.

The remarkable turnaround has meant there is now a strong collaborative partnership and a mutual trust built on the foundations of mutually-beneficial objectives.

AH: I've been in business development for 17 years and the sense of partnership working and genuine co-operation between 1Life and MK Council has been absolutely phenomenal so far and we're very appreciative of the support we've had from the council in terms of moving the plans forward.

PS: For me to say that we want to work with them again after our past issues says a lot. The rebranding is good, but the absolute key is they've now got a really good team of people there in the form of Andy Haworth, Neil King and the rest of the senior management. These are sound professionals who know what they're doing and they're good at it. So I have faith. I can see they are a wholly different partner now and I trust them. They're now 1Life – I can look these people in the eye and have faith in them to deliver.

SERIES ROADMAP

This series of promotional features outlines the raft of innovative leisure projects that 1Life has introduced as part of its new contract in Milton Keynes

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health sport activity



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