



A LEGACY OF HEALTH

The euphoria of winning the Olympic bid has now turned to the excitement of preparing to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. The bid for the Olympics was based on the long-term impact that winning the event would have, not just on the local community, but across the UK and particularly the benefits to young people. The London 2012 website backs this up: 'The Games will provide a lasting legacy for future generations - in health, homes and jobs, and of course sport'. But aside from the obvious physical infrastructures required, can a four week sporting event deliver all this? And if so, what can be done to really maximise the effect? This article looks at the experience of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002 and other opportunities to use high status events, sporting personalities and 'brands' to engage communities and boost physical activity participation.

By Lesley Giddins, physical activity specialist

PIONEERING APPROACH

Over the past six years a pioneering approach to maximising the benefit of major sporting events has been developed in the North West initiated in relation to the Commonwealth Games in 2002. A regional Legacy Board for the Games was set up in 1999 and included a range of chief executives and senior managers from organisations such as Government office for the Northwest (NW), Sport England, the Northwest Arts Council, with representatives from across the NW region, in addition to the chief executive of the Commonwealth Games. This board led the development of a £20m Single Regeneration Budget programme to run across the region as a whole, aiming to capitalise on the hosting of the Games in Manchester. In particular, it was looking to engage people from excluded communities across the region in health, skills, arts and activity programmes running from 1999-2004.

Strategies

A media communications strategy ensured that national and local media promoted the Games, even developing a storyline in the TV soap, *Coronation Street*, to promote the Volunteer Programme and the Games. However, the role of the Legacy Programme was to bring the benefits of the Games to excluded communities. This was done by working across the region with local authorities and other key regeneration agencies and partners. The programme was able to deliver local, on the ground programmes across the region as a whole, matching the 'central pot' of Single Regeneration Budget funds to other local regeneration monies. For example, the Pre-Volunteer Programme (PVP) worked across 23 local authority areas, each one managed according to local requirements and using local

funds as appropriate. This might for example, be the local further education college, or the local authority, and again, involved each locality working with a range of partners and agencies. While covering the region as a whole, working with local partnerships in this way ensured direct contact with excluded communities and in the case of PVP, supported over 2,200 people from regeneration areas to attain a nationally accredited qualification in event volunteering and guaranteeing them an interview to become a Games volunteer.

In this way thousands of people became engaged in activities on a local level, inspired to feel part of the Commonwealth Games. Just one specific example was two years before the games when children took part in a canoeing event in Barrow, which is 100 miles from Manchester, they wore a specially designed Commonwealth Games cap and t-shirt and felt they were part of an exciting and 'cool' event.

A Commonwealth Curriculum Pack was developed that used sports included in the Games to deliver free on-line national curriculum material to schools in the region. This included distance time graphs taught through the excitement of Linford Christie running the 100 metres and culminating in the creation of a DVD that explored a range of issues from citizenship to the history of the Commonwealth, presented by Johnny Vegas, and sent to every school in the region.

Healthy ways

With regard to health in particular, the Healthier Communities Project used the interest created by the media in the Commonwealth Games to develop innovative health projects across the NW region. The project, branded with the Commonwealth Games



logo, funded capacity building to a range of new and existing health projects across the region, established collaborative health based networks, and developed bespoke resources, all using the attraction of the Games as an added incentive to participants, including for example a vulnerable young people's health project plus work in a Chinese Healthy Living Centre.

People were hugely inspired to participate in Games-linked projects. The ultimate link was the issuing of 5,000 'free' tickets to participants in these programmes to attend the Games themselves, a reward provided by United Utilities as part of their sponsorship of the Commonwealth Games and much prized by people from excluded communities who had been part of projects in the run up to 2002.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

This thinking was further developed in 2005 with the hosting of the Women's European Football Championships in the NW region. The key aim of the programme linked to that event was to increase sports participation and physical activity generally and, in particular, to increase participation in women's and girls' football. Again, inspired by a major sporting event a range of projects were developed from the 'Euro Haka' dance project (cool dance that attracted boys as well as girls as it wasn't called 'dance' and took place on a football pitch!) to a range of taster and skills sessions for girls and women to play football. A project that caused some early anxieties was the cheerleading project. Is cheerleading a sport? Is it a good thing, or is it scantily clad women performing for men, and wholly inappropriate? In fact in the NW, led by the UK Cheerleading Association, hundreds of girls and boys regularly take part in physically demanding cheerleading activities, dressed for sport, and many declaring they wouldn't do any other form of physical activity.

Clearly the idea of using a major event such as a multi-sport Games or a tournament to promote participation and physical activity has much wider applicability. For example, the principles can also be used in relation to one-off matches or activities. The holding of a Women's World Cup Football qualifying match on Mother's Day, 26 March 2006, is being used as a 'hook' to bring more girls and women into football - a 'bring your mum to try football' event, and a mini-

tournament for Asian heritage women who have never played football before are both being held on the day of the match, with tickets provided as part of the incentive package to join in.

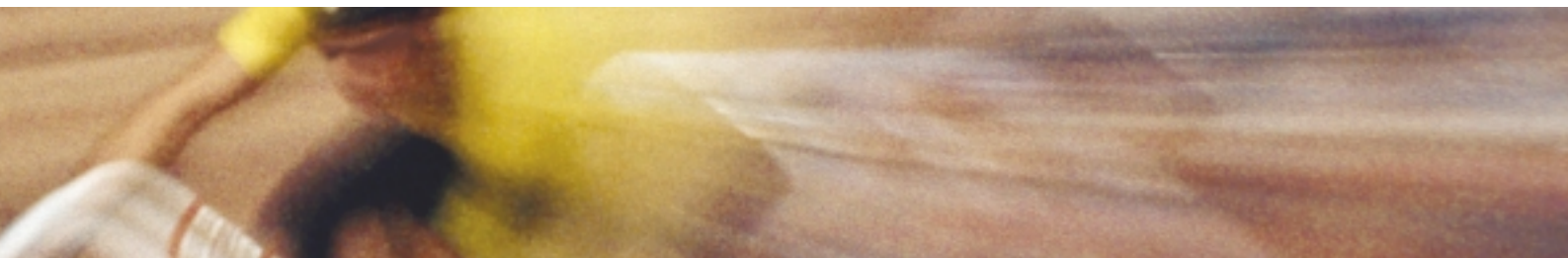
ATTRACTION

All the evidence from these activities points to the fact that people are attracted to major sporting events and will take part in activities that make them feel part of that excitement. Invite a disenchanted unemployed young person to take part in a training programme that might result in a job and they've probably heard it all before. Invite them to do the same training programme linked to being a volunteer at a major sporting event where they might end up, say, holding Darren Campbell's clothes while he runs the 200m and it's suddenly so much more exciting.

In the north west region this thinking has been taken a stage further and isn't limited to the hosting of major or even one-off events. Football and rugby stadia can attract and engage communities who are not generally attracted to health, training or other programmes. A recent study has looked at how professional sport clubs in the north west region (including 36 football, rugby league, rugby union and cricket clubs) engage with community regeneration in their area and found many interesting examples of engagement with health, from the front line service 'health suite' at Warrington, Wolves football club's new Halliwell Jones Stadium to the hosting of Primary Care Trust's offices at Bloomfield Road, home of Blackpool FC. In the NW a programme to really drive forward the link between professional sports clubs and health is the Healthy Stadia project aiming to make stadia places where 'people can go to have a healthy experience playing or watching sport'. This includes for example, having healthy food options available to purchase, providing a smoke free environment, and promoting and providing opportunities for physical activity. A far cry from the traditional experience of sitting down and having a pie and a pint in a smoky atmosphere. Four clubs in the region are currently acting as pilots for this programme.

SHARED PROBLEMS

Discussions between sport and health partners can reveal shared problems, and innovative solutions to mutual benefit. Warrington Wolves Rugby League Club has significantly increased their season





ticket holders since large numbers of people started to walk through their doors to attend health facilities and appointments, and the PCT have benefited from rationalising a number of their services into new purpose built accommodation in an attractive and exciting setting. It is also no co-incidence that the Women's European Football Championships was incredibly well-attended with up to 24,000 people attending matches. The work done during the spring of 2005 with thousands of people on a whole range of projects was hugely instrumental in raising awareness of the tournament. Long lasting community and health benefits are also in evidence. Over 2,000 people regularly volunteer for events across the region following their experience at the Commonwealth Games, many of them older retired people, keeping them active and engaged. School dance projects recorded an increase in participants (particularly boys) following involvement in the 'Euro Haka' project, and girls and women's teams in the region recorded an unprecedented rise in new participants in the build up to the hosting of the tournament.

MAXIMISING THE HEALTH BENEFITS

While this represents an interesting set of examples, does it represent real maximisation in health terms of a major event or of a major sports club? I don't believe so. From our work in this area we believe that many health professionals have not yet grasped the ways in which events and clubs can really support their work, and attract client groups that they find hard to reach. On the other side many events and professional sport clubs have not recognised the role they can play in taking forward the health agenda. Further, on the health side, budgets and work programmes are often set well in advance, and capacity to be involved can be extremely limited without longer term planning. On the event or club side, the challenge of getting the event to run smoothly, or turning a decent team out on a Saturday afternoon, is often challenge enough, with few extra staff to consider how they might relate to health agendas, and frequently no spare cash.

Developing good relationships and long-term planning are key. With less than six years to go to the hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in London in 2012, now is a great time to think about the potential health benefits that could be delivered through that event. Can this present a real opportunity to affect the 'health of the nation'? Can there be anyone in the country that doesn't know we won the right to host the Games? If the publicity surrounding the event has reached so many people, the health messages can too and quality programmes to engage and excite people from a wide range of communities can surely be developed.

Further details of these programmes can be found on www.gameslegacy.com (includes evaluation reports) and www.thefa.com/euro2005 or by contacting Lesley Giddins on lg@dtp88.com or Kate Egford at ke@dtp88.com

THE AUTHOR

Lesley Giddins was previously the director of the Commonwealth Games social and economic legacy programme, co-directed the Legacy of the Women's European Football Championships 2005, wrote the volunteer strategy for the London 2012 bid, and developed Newham's Volunteers to support the Olympic bid. Building upon that experience, Lesley has provided advice and support to organisers of a range of major international sports events, particularly in relation to the development of sustainable volunteer programmes. Lesley has also worked on a range of local sport and regeneration linked projects.

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