

Case study/project title:

Targeted Swimming Project

Leisure Trust: GLL Manchester

Department: Community, Sport and Health

Case study/project dates: November 2022 – March 2023

Introduction

The project aimed to engage African and Caribbean women in swimming lessons for a 10 week period. The participants would be provided with Soul Cap swimming caps and taught how to swim with the intention of improved confidence and water safety while becoming more physically active and having a positive impact on overall health and wellbeing.

Detail the challenge and/or opportunity

The project was set up between GLL and then Buzz Community Officer, now Manchester City Council Officer, Patsy. Patsy has personal experience of hearing myths such as Black people have heavy bones and don't float along with finding swimming a chore while trying to manage Afro hair. Patsy had seen the media attention given to Soul Cap surrounding the Tokyo 2020 Olympics when the swimming cap that is made to manage Afro hair was banned by FINA as it does not follow 'the natural form of the head'. It has since been approved for use in competitions in September 2022. This attention along with Black History Month began discussion in Denmark Road, a shared working space that accommodates health and community organisations. Conversation in the office linked GLL, Community Sport and Health Manager around supporting women from African and Caribbean background being given the chance to learn to swim and also use the process to encourage continued activity past learning to swim for health and wellbeing purposes. GLL and Buzz agreed to joint fund the project which would engage two cohorts of a total of 20 people in swimming lessons. Information regarding the project was made available to local community groups that supported the BAME communities and encouraged those interested to register their interest. There were five leisure centres across the city that were being made available; Arcadia Library and Leisure Centre, East Manchester, Hough End, Moss Side Leisure Centre and North City Family and Fitness Centre. Women from the African and Caribbean community were the initial target participants however one male and a few South Asian women were given the opportunity to participate. Participants were also provided with a swimming cap gifted to the project by Soul Cap. The project hoped to achieve improved water confidence along with the confidence to go swimming independently following the project which would in turn provide positive movement towards improved health and wellbeing.

The Results/next steps

A celebration event was held with some of the participants, stakeholders and local Councillor to showcase the impact and give the participants recognition for their achievement in taking part.

Feedback from participants included:

Motivation

- Wanted to be able to take children/ grandchildren swimming
- Wanted to learn to swim
- To build confidence
- To let go of fears
- It would be beneficial to health
- It was free

Lessons

- The Swim Teachers were supportive
- It was good to learn with others
- Looked forward to weekly session

Health Benefits

- Strength and conditioning
- Weight loss
- Improved mobility
- Pain reduction

Outcome

- Learnt to swim
- Improved confidence in the water
- Social benefits
- Health benefits

The celebration was well received and provide an opportunity to seek further funding to support similar opportunities. The local Councillor will be supporting a Neighbourhood Investment Fund application to support wider opportunity for the African and Caribbean community.

Testimonials/client quotes

“The social side was beneficial as I met other learners and formed a common bond with them. We would later stop and have a chat when we saw each other out in the community”.

“We got to know the different instructors who were all very approachable. Each week we built on what we learnt the previous weeks, and sometimes we revisited the basics to ensure that we had the techniques grounded in”.

“Swimming helped me to lose inches off my waistline and strengthen my core muscles”.

“My experience and benefit was my stomach muscle was strong”.

“Physical benefits were I have frozen shoulder and painful joints and arthritis and the exercise helped with the pain. It made me more flexible. Mentally it uplifted me and I felt better for going. Good chatting with other people, it was an evening out and I looked forward to it”

“Physical slept really well afterward, I felt the full body work out, and my wife noticed it and a feel better. My wife said I should do more stuff like it on a regular basis”.