
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Sport and Community Engagement in Ageing Health: Tackling isolation and scoring better outcomes. NHS Halton CCG and Widnes Vikings

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Dave Sweeney¹, James Rule²

1: NHS Halton CCG, United Kingdom;

2: Widnes Vikings Rugby League Club, United Kingdom

Introduction: The NHS CCG for Halton, one of Britain's most deprived boroughs, has developed an unparalleled platform to support older people and people living with dementia through partnership working with the Super League rugby club, Widnes Vikings.

Description: This is a key part of Britain's most innovative and ambitious partnership between a health and sporting organisation.

Stakeholders include: The integrated team of Halton CCG, Halton Borough Council and Widnes Vikings.

Public Health

Voluntary sector

Social care providers

Carers groups

Thousands of fans.

Targeted Population: Halton is a borough in England with a 126,000 population. NHS data identifies that it has a 'hidden 40%' that does not engage with traditional GP-based care. Therefore, the NHS is using innovative community engagement approaches for key aims like improving dementia diagnosis and supporting people with age-related conditions.

Aim and Theory of Change: NHS Halton CCG developed a pioneering commissioning strategy. This not only includes traditional health services, but also community-based approaches that promote wellbeing and social connection. At the core of this is a partnership with Widnes Vikings, the hometown club that is the beating heart of the Halton community.

The team plays in the Super League, elite competition. More than 1/10 of the local people support the club – it is an aspirational brand and the players are heroes. Through using the club's specialist skills and brand, the CCG deploys the Vikings to meet its biggest challenges.

Timeline: Launched early 2015 - delivered daily. It has continually grown in scope.

Highlights – Innovation, Impact and Outcomes: Widnes Vikings deliver an incredible 36 community projects in Halton (these include mental health outreach, accessible sports sessions, health checks, and support for new parents). Some of its most impactful work though is in reaching out to older people.

Widnes Vikings were one of the most successful rugby league clubs of the last century. As such, they are a unifier of its older people and amongst the most vibrant memories of people living with dementia. The partnership leverages this to create:

Weekly events for older fans that blends nostalgic, social experiences and exercise. This has created peer support networks and promoted early interventions.

A programme of reminiscence, activity and chair based exercise in all care homes, involving community coaches and legendary players. These help to reduce falls, inspire person-centered support and provide stimulation.

A free monthly dementia café that brings together all local care homes and people living independently. It gives vital dementia advice and assists with signposting to other services. 100% of attendees say it helps them live well.

Providing free health checks to the club's 55+ fan base, effectively promoting early diagnosis of conditions.

Widnes Vikings became the first ever sports organisation ever recognised at the National Dementia Care Awards and 3rd Sector Care Awards, acknowledging the impact of this work.

Sustainability: This programme is inherently sustainable, as it supports immediate and long-term cost-savings. By reducing falls in care homes or improving diagnosis rates, it is able to prevent the escalation of injury and illness.

The CCG has renewed the programme for three years.

Transferability: Widnes Vikings and Halton CCG have created the Rugby League Vanguard with the Super League and Public Health England, seeing all clubs commit to adopting similar approaches.

Conclusions: This partnership stands as an international example of excellence in the integration of statutory, cultural and community bodies.

Discussions: This presentation will discuss how health authorities can use cultural icons to challenge health inequalities and create closer communities.

Lessons Learned: Sporting clubs – and their current players and legends – are effective in delivering health messages and interventions to older people

Using community engagement and cultural assets is effective in tackling health inequalities

Care homes can benefit by adopting the specialist approaches of sports teams – such as resistance exercises - to promote mobility, stability and health.

Keywords: sport; dementia; integration; nhs; community engagement
