

Pilot study to investigate the benefit of a partnership between Slimming World and Run England to support engagement in activity

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Background

National guidelines recommend an increase in physical activity to improve health and support weight management¹. However, overweight people can face numerous barriers in engaging in activity such as lack of confidence, embarrassment and physical discomfort. Run England developed a project, Changing the Physical Activity Landscape (CPAL), in County Durham particularly aimed at increasing physical activity in those at risk of CVD. As part of the CPAL project, this pilot examined the benefit of a partnership between Slimming World (SW) and Run England (RE) in supporting overweight people to become more active and potentially reducing CVD risk.

Slimming World is the UK's largest commercial weight management organisation*, with 10,000 weekly support sessions in the UK and Ireland, supporting up to 500,000 people each week. As part of the Slimming World programme members are encouraged and supported to include more physical activity into their everyday lives.

Run England is the official England Athletics recreational running project which aims to get the whole nation running. They operate a growing network of over 2,000 beginner friendly running groups, focusing on 'Walk-to-Jog'.

Methods

RE leaders visited 13 SW groups to raise awareness of local running groups and invite members to their 'Walk-to-Jog' sessions. SW member engagement in RE groups was monitored and activity log books were provided to those at risk of CVD to monitor level and frequency of physical activity. Incentives, eg reflective bands and prize draw entry, were promoted to encourage participants to continue engaging with the running programme. This survey reports on data collected over a 6 month period.

Results

RE's CPAL project in County Durham recruited 260 participants over a 12 month period, 130 SW members were recruited to RE groups as part of this engagement. SW members attended 10 existing RE groups plus three new SW-only RE groups were set up. 56% of all CPAL participants were highlighted as being at risk of CVD. 70 (54%) of the SW members were identified as being at risk of CVD and physical activity data was collected for these people. There was a 100% return rate for the activity log books at baseline and at pilot end.

Mean (SD) running sessions attended and activity change for SW members at risk of CVD.

n	RE sessions attended (SD)	Average weekly active time at baseline (SD) (hrs.)	Average weekly active time at pilot end (SD) (hrs.)	Overall change in activity (SD) (hrs.)
70 SW members	22.66 (2.25)	8.05 (4.63)	10.94 (5.28)	+2.89 (6.30)

48% of SW members were still attending RE groups after 6 months. Overall 52% of SW members at risk of CVD increased their physical activity levels. Looking just at those who increased their activity levels, hours spent being active per week increased by a mean (SD) of 7.63 (4.72) hrs.

Conclusion

Run England leaders visiting Slimming World groups resulted in good engagement of Slimming World members, and supported an increase in physical activity. Wider partnership would be beneficial to both Slimming World and Run England.

Reference:

1. Department of Health. 2011. 'Start Active, Stay Active. A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries' Chief Medical Officers.

* Based on the number of members in community groups.