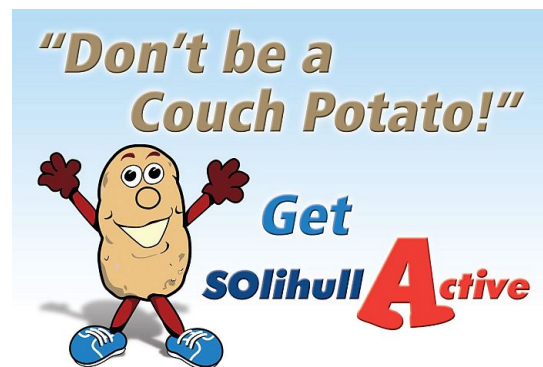




SolihullActive: tackling 'couch potato' culture

Summary

SolihullActive came out of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's Physical Activity Strategy. It is a high-profile publicity campaign and branding exercise to reinforce health messages about physical activity. At the heart of the initiative is an [online database of local leisure activities](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/activities) (<http://www.solihull.gov.uk/activities>).



Background

Solihull Council developed and piloted the database application with help from specialist IT consultants during build stage. The council's leisure services team coordinate the SolihullActive campaign.

Key partners include Solihull NHS Care Trust and the Greater Warwickshire Sport Partnership.

Key issues

National research shows that on average, three quarters of a borough's residents are unaware of all sport and recreation opportunities available to them within their own locality, according to London Borough of Lambeth Sport Strategy 2003-08. Research into participation in positive activities clearly indicates that a lack of information on activities and facilities is a key reason behind non-participation amongst young people.

The council and Solihull NHS Care Trust led the Physical Activity Strategic Group, which published 'A physical activity strategy for Solihull' in 2004. This identified the lack of access to accurate and up-to-date information as one of the biggest barriers to participating in physical activity.

Development began on an interactive leisure activities database. Local sports organisations were encouraged to register their details online at the SolihullActive database, a one-stop shop for leisure information.

The online database features information on activities and events taking place in:

- schools
- community centres
- sports grounds
- health clubs

Residents can find their nearest provider by entering in their postcode.

Solihull wanted to provide an impartial and comprehensive source of information on sport and recreation opportunities. It wanted to do this through a partnership that spanned the public, private and voluntary sectors.

What we did

Phase one mainly aimed to get organisations to register and populate the database. This paved the way for the public launch of the SolihullActive campaign in September 2005. SolihullActive is reinforcing national messages on the importance of physical activity and associated health benefits. It combats couch potato culture and offers a local solution to the inactivity epidemic and obesity time bomb.

Engaging partners and stakeholders

Solihull's communications strategy focused on:

- establishing contact with known providers and encouraging them to register on the new database
- creating awareness of the project across stakeholder groups, such as schools and colleges, voluntary and community sports clubs, golf courses and private health clubs
- using partner and umbrella organisations to disseminate information, including local school sports coordinators partnerships and the borough's Sports Council
- media relations – to reinforce messages to existing partners and reach hitherto unknown groups

We targeted the sports clubs we already knew and those that were listed. We followed this up with briefing sessions and hands-on workshops at Solihull College and Solihull Central Library. This enabled representatives to get to grips with the registration process and information uploads.

Briefings and presentations were also made to:

- primary and secondary school headteachers
- the borough's Sports Clubs' Development Forum
- local strategic partnership (LSP) thematic groups for learning and inclusion, children and young people, health inequalities and crime reduction

Communication

We issued press releases when we launched the database and to highlight roadshow events. We accompanied our press releases with a photograph of a suited man, sitting on the edge of a diving board and accessing the database on a laptop! This image was used in successive reports and effectively became an icon for the first phase of SolihullActive.

A significant landmark was notching up the 100th registered provider, the Centurion Running Club, in June 2005. This 'century' was marked with a Centurion runner posing for press photographs alongside a Roman re-enactor on the athletics track.

We launched the SolihullActive campaign in September 2005. Former Olympic ski jumper, Eddie 'the Eagle' Edwards and Eddie King – Solihull's giant couch potato mascot – attended the official unveiling of the SolihullActive database.

Eddie King, the sporty spud has become the borough's ambassador for physical activity. Solihull-born former tennis ace, Jeremy Bates



starred in a promotional DVD with him.

All 93,000 homes in Solihull received a postcard from Eddie King in January 2006, asking them to 'Get SolihullActive'. The postcard also plugged the physical activity portal.

This followed up with an assignment to promote more than 200,000 hours of free Internet access at Solihull's 13 public libraries – enabling more people to access sites such as Solihull's online database of leisure activities.

Meanwhile, Solihull Council's website published a special feature on the SolihullActive campaign on its homepage. This coincided with the seasonal upsurge of interest in health and fitness.

Paid-for advertising activity in 2006/07 included a local newspaper wrap – 70,000 circulation – and an e-marketing campaign to 11,000 prospects.

Key outcomes and impact

By April 2007 the database contained details of 270 organisations offering a total of 5,700 hours of sport and physical activity each week.

The project is helping the council to meet the Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) aims. It delivers integrated community information, which helps local organisations, community groups to create and maintain their own information online.

The Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM) highlighted SolihullActive as a model of best practice in the May 2006. A double-page feature appeared in 'The leisure manager'. 'Regeneration and renewal' also featured SolihullActive in September 2006.

The SolihullActive publicity campaign has so far generated 75 pieces of media coverage. Local newspaper coverage alone has accounted for an advertising value equivalent of £38,000 and PR value of £95,000.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) Midlands PRide Awards 2005/06 commended SolihullActive in two award categories: Community Campaign and Public Sector Programme.

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Service Awards 2006 commended SolihullActive as Best Information and Communication Technology Initiative.

Coventry City Council has now developed [a resource similar to the SolihullActive database](http://activities.coventry.gov.uk) (<http://activities.coventry.gov.uk>). We have also shared best practice with other councils and county sports partnerships in the eastern region and southwest.

Resources

The database development and build cost about £15,000. The leisure services' base budget pays for ongoing marketing.

How would we do things better

We would organise more roadshow and engagement events for representatives of voluntary and community sports clubs. Mopping-up of unregistered and unlisted groups has been harder than we envisaged – despite a huge communications drive.

The exercise has confirmed that traditional sources of information on local leisure opportunities are invariably disparate, incomplete or out-of-date. Many of the listings and directories we screened at the start of our project were wildly inaccurate and misleading.

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