Active in the outback

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The Active Broken Hill Management Committee was formed and incorporated approximately three years ago, to combat declining participation in sport and active recreation and the associated public health issues.

The first Management Committee consisted of five community members and arranged face-to-face surveys with every known local sporting, physical activity and active recreation provider, in order to ascertain what local groups felt were endangering their growth and sustainability. Potential solutions were highlighted. 168 community members were also surveyed. The results were collated and the first Active Broken Hill Business Plan was developed.

Aim of the Business Plan: To retain and grow the range of sport, physical activity and active recreation opportunities available in the city and to increase participation in health promoting activities by raising awareness across the community.

The website www.activebrokenhill.org.au was established early on. This incorporated the first ever free electronic database of all sport, physical activity and active recreation opportunities locally. It immediately increased access and provided dramatically improved communication and notification of events. Additional groups and associations are periodically added to the database.

A locally written fortnightly newspaper column, ‘Play your part’, commenced and is now two years old. It is widely read because of its local content and multiple-authorship. It covers a wide range of 'preventative health' topics and is written in an easy-to-read style.

New members are beginning to join some local clubs and associations as a direct result of this increased exposure. Local physical activity providers are experiencing their best-ever membership numbers. This is an area that would benefit from more formalised research. The Active Broken Hill link to Broken Hill City Council website is also receiving in excess of 250 direct visits per month.

Active Broken Hill is now working towards strategies that will ensure sustainability, such as scaled subscriptions from local sporting and physical activity groups, and corporate sponsorships.

The future: Improved community awareness via a high profile shopfront and part-time employee would greatly enhance uptake across the community. Active Broken Hill is addressing a vacuum that existed locally—the need for greater access to local sporting and physical activity providers and the need for a greater level of knowledge at a community level about the role of the individual in their own health and wellbeing. Given its increasing success, the Active Broken Hill model has the capacity to be replicated across larger rural centres in Australia.