

Healthy lifestyles: active community collaboration between council, health providers and consumers

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Background

The **Healthy Communities - active community collaboration** had its beginnings in 2006. The Health Promotion Coordinator from the Rural Primary Health Services Program partnered with Women's Health, *North Coast Area Health Service* now the Mid North Coast Local Health District, when they held extensive local community forums. The aim of the forums was to determine the health needs the community felt should be prioritised and that these needs should be 'driven' by the community. This was in the context that health services should be "accessible, appropriate, timely, affordable, client centred, preventative focused, well integrated and coordinated" therefore giving individual communities control to improve the health of its own community.

Hundreds of members of the rural and remote general community were consulted. The high priority issues identified included lack of access to General Practice's services, lack of specific women's and men's health services and poor health information.

From this consultation the **Rural Out Reach Program 2007-2010** began. A collaborative partnership was formed with the Community Development Officer at the Port Macquarie Hastings Council, the Health Promotion Coordinator from Rural Primary Health Services Program *North Coast Area Health Service* now the Mid North Coast Local Health District Women's Health and local key partnerships. During 2007- 2010, 683 events were held in 10 communities with 6,485 participants which delivered health and social programs in a broad range of applications.

In 2010 this professional collaboration developed "Losing it – in the Bush" a locally developed program empowering rural people living in the Port Macquarie Hastings area to promote healthy lifestyle changes and reduce the risk of complications from chronic disease. A partnership between nine rural communities, Port Macquarie Community Health, Port Macquarie Hastings Council and At My Pace Specialist Rehabilitation the program operated out of seven non-Council-owned rural halls. Each of the halls received exercise equipment and the Rural Primary Health Service developed a twelve-week program to be run in each of the halls. The program includes an exercise component and a presentation on healthy lifestyle by Port Macquarie Community Health professionals. The program promotes existing national health programs including the Measure Up' Campaign, Get Healthy Telephone Line and Swap it Don't Stop It. A total of 150 community members participated in eight programs across nine communities. Funding for this program was through the Healthy NSW Communities Grant Program.

It is from this beginning and from the great success of "Losing it – in the Bush" that the **Healthy Communities - active community collaboration** came about and we became a major player in the 2012-2014 funded Commonwealth's Healthy Community Initiative across two local government areas on the Mid North Coast, Kempsey Shire Council and Port Macquarie Hastings Council.

Introduction

The **Healthy Communities - active community collaboration** is a locally delivered program empowering rural people to promote healthy lifestyle changes and reduce the risk of complications from chronic disease.

Over a two year period, health professionals from the Mid North Coast Local Health District and the private practice At My Pace Exercise Physiologists delivered both the Healthy Eating Activity and Lifestyle (HEAL™), and the **Losing It-in the Bush** Programs to six hundred people, a total of twenty six programs, including three Aboriginal programs. There were fourteen programs in Kempsey and twelve programs in the Hastings. This included two Aboriginal programs (MY HEAL) in Hastings and one in Kempsey over the two year timeframe.

The Healthy Communities program held weekly for two hours, includes an exercise component and presentations on healthy lifestyle by health professionals. The success of the program was due to it being delivered locally so participants didn't leave their community.

Aim

To empower rural populations to make informed choices to improve their health, to reduce their risk of lifestyle disease and complications from existing chronic disease and encourage healthy lifestyle changes.

Why we did this program

According to the 2007–08 National Health Survey (cited National Women's Health Policy; Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government 2010 (p47)), people who live in rural areas were less likely to undertake sufficient exercise compared with urban areas. Similarly, people who lived in the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas were also less likely to undertake sufficient physical activity compared to those who lived in least disadvantaged areas.

The program resulted from a federally funded initiative to local councils where grants were provided (2012-2014) to increase the number of adults engaged in physical activity and healthy eating programs and lifestyles, this funding was called the Healthy Communities Initiative, our Health Communities project was one of several funded by the Initiative across both councils.

Many Australians eat too few vegetables or fruit, and eat foods high in fat, sugar and salt. Excessive energy intakes, combined with low levels of physical activity, have contributed to the continuing rise in overweight and obesity (Swinburn et al. 2009, cited National Women's Health Policy; Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government 2010). The National Preventative Health Taskforce (NHPT) acknowledged that this is one of the greatest public health challenges facing Australia (cited AHIW 2013, NPHT 2008).

Planning and implementing

The Mid North Coast Local Health Districts' commitment and contribution to the Healthy Communities Initiative was via the Losing it in the Bush and HEAL™ (Healthy Eating Activity & Lifestyle) programs. Health Professionals involved in the program had been trained as HEAL facilitators. These two programs utilised the resources of the recognised programs; Swap it Don't Stop it, Heart Foundation Walking Groups and the NSW Get Healthy Info line, as they have been evaluated and considered better practice in addressing healthy lifestyle changes. These were chosen because the resources were available and participants could access further information during and after completion of the program.

Participants registered to attend this program via their local councils in response to advertisement and promotion in the local papers. To be eligible participants had to be a recipient of government welfare payments and have risk factors or diagnosed chronic illness including obesity. Participants had to have clearance from their GP to undertake the programs.

A Memorandum of Understanding was undertaken between Mid North Coast Local Health District and Port Macquarie Hastings and Kempsey Shire Councils to show commitment for the 2 years. The Health Promotion Coordinator of the Rural Primary Health Program provided the leadership and communication conduit between partners. Councils managed the administration, risk assessments, all expenses, found suitable venues and equipment provision. Enrolment forms, pre surveys and measurements were undertaken by the clinical service providers. The council also managed the tenders for the Exercise Physiologist to provide the exercise components of the programs.

The program consists of one hour each of exercise provided by an Exercise Physiologist and education delivered by health professionals, weekly, over ten or twelve weeks. The success of the program was due to the program being delivered in local facilities so participants didn't have to leave their community and utilised resources that were available within their communities. Pre and post program surveys were completed by participants relating to diet (Nutrition), lifestyle activities and medical history. In addition measurements were taken to determine weight loss, strength, flexibility

and cardiovascular improvement. All participants received a manual that they could keep which had activities and health information relating to each topic.

The team consisted of Healthy Communities Coordinators, Occupational Therapist, Exercise Physiologists, Community Dietitian, Women’s Health Nurse Consultant, health promotion workers and council support staff.

Outcomes and evaluation

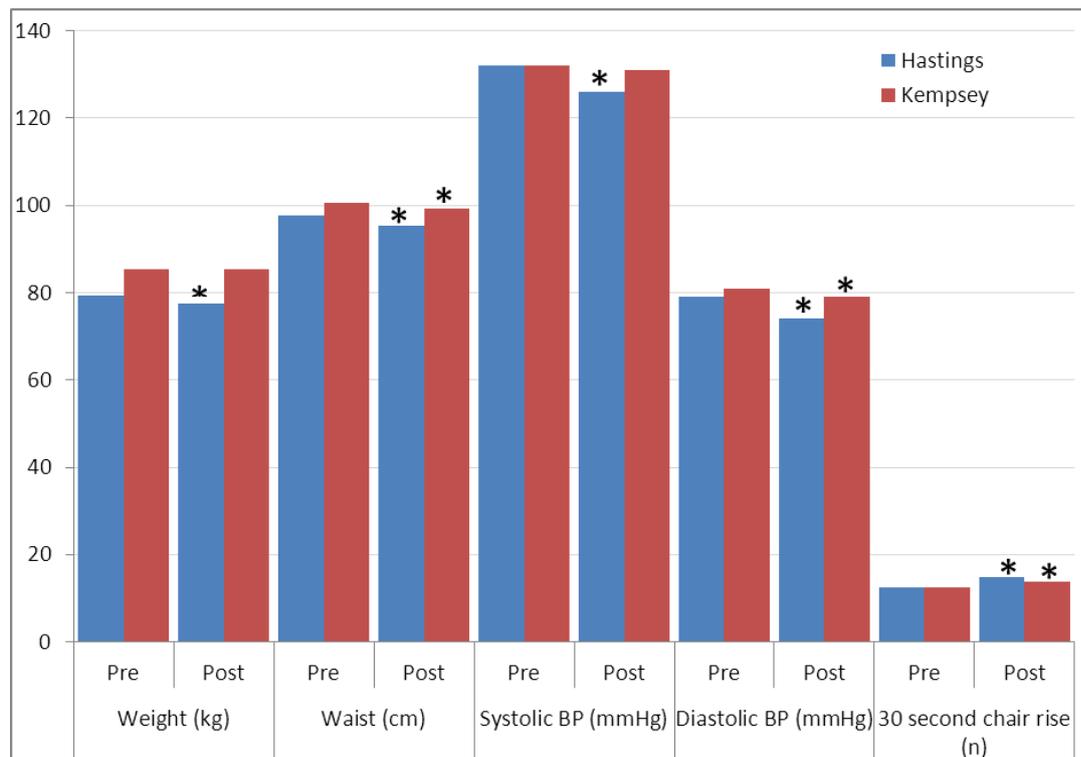
A total of fourteen programs were held in Kempsey and twelve in the Hastings, This including three Aboriginal programs (MY HEAL) over the 2 year timeframe. A total of twenty six programs delivered to six hundred people under the Healthy Communities banner.

Data was analysed comparing outcomes from Kempsey and Hastings council areas in comparison to other local government areas across NSW who were delivering the HEAL program (Hetherington and Borodzicz, 2014). The average age and gender ratio were similar at both locations. Analysis of Hastings data followed trends observed in the national data set (across all councils in NSW) in that there were statistically significant improvements in almost all health measures. Analysis of the Kempsey data showed significant improvements in waist circumference, diastolic blood pressure, six minute walk test distance and number of chair stands completed in thirty seconds (see graph below fig. 1).

Analysis of information from post program questionnaire shows self-reported changes as follows; 95% of participants said they felt more confident to be physically active. In addition, 79% of participants reported feeling more motivated to participate in physical activity and 46% said they had an improvement in their health conditions which they felt had improved as a result of participating the program and implementing changes.

Data from the Aboriginal programs showed that 96% of participants were more confident to do physically activity and 95% said they actually did more activity. In regards to health improvements 47% felt their condition had improved. (Woodrow, J. 2014)

* Indicates improvements that were significant compared to State outcomes.



Graph shows improvements for all programs across both Council areas

Participant stories

One participant said “My life has changed now. I try and go for a walk each day. I eat more fruit; I eat less fatty food and sugar.... I like all the people I met, I like talking to them, I feel happier now”.

As one couple said “We like the way we could do exercises at home based on the ones we learnt, we try to do as much walking as we can now, 1.5 to 2 kms per day. We learnt so much about food we have changed our eating habits”.

Hastings participants demonstrated significant improvements in almost all health measures whereas Kempsey demonstrated significant improvements in waist circumference, diastolic blood pressure and number of chair stands. (Hetherington and Borodzicz, 2014).

Post program lifestyle questionnaire from Kempsey Shire Council shows self-reported changes attributed to the program (Woodrow, J. 2014):

The outcomes

- Non Aboriginal
 - 95% increased their confidence to become physically active;
 - 79% felt more motivated to participate in physical activity;
 - 46% said they had an improvement in their existing health conditions.
- Aboriginal
 - 96% increased their confidence to become physically active;
 - 95% felt more motivated to participate in physical activity;
 - 45% said they had improvement in their existing health conditions.

Sustaining change

By providing manuals and ongoing access to National and State resources, participants are empowered to make lifestyle changes during and after completion of the program. With access to further information personal results can be maintained or improved on leaving the program. Another fantastic outcome has been the development of social groups; these have been reported by participants as being a highlight of the programs, because many of the small communities are geographically and socially isolated.

Four Exercise Philologists and six Mid North Coast Local Health District staff are now trained in the Losing It - In -the Bush and (HEAL™) programs due to continuing demand, so there is no delay in future resourcing.

Port Macquarie Hastings Council have provided two grants for 2014-15

- \$5,000 to fund LIITB programs in Aged Care Services Social Seniors & Friends; 4 programs have been delivered to date, preliminary results show improvement in balance.
- Up to \$5,000 to deliver the LIITB program to Aboriginal mothers groups and small communities. Our first small communities group starts end of April 2015 with 27 participants.

This program is also suitable to meet program outcomes for chronic disease such as diabetes, improving Aboriginal health, cardiac rehabilitation, falls prevention and mental health services.

The program is readily adaptable to young mum groups, aged care programs, schools and non-government organisations.

This model encourages community engagement as the health workers consult with individual communities and then together are able to determine the communities' need for preventative health. It

provides education on specific illness or risks via relevant health professionals and adapts exercise programs to fit the communities' resources and environment via the Exercise Physiologist.

Whilst this program is concerned with primary and secondary health prevention, it is also easily adaptable to tertiary prevention, intervention and treatments.

Recommendations

The most important recommendation that we feel should be put forward is for the Department of Health to consider adding accredited exercise physiology professionals to Allied Health Services. As of 2015, this profession has a major role in regional and rural health program development for promotion and prevention and would be a valuable team member in local health districts. There are currently no accredited exercise physiologists employed in the Mid North Coast Local Health District

Acknowledgments

We wish to give special thanks to the following for their great support of the program:

- Maya Spannari - Community Development Officer Port Macquarie–Hastings Council
- Julie Woodrow - Community Development Officer Kempsey Shire Council
- Leesa Roach - Diabetic Educator, Mid North Coast Local Health District
- Rhonda Coppin - Exercise Physiologist, At My Pace
- Shannon Jobson - Exercise Physiologist, ACESO
- Michelle Delaney Occupational Therapist, Mid North Coast Local Health District
- Kate Greener – Exercise physiologist
- Taryn Avery- Exercise physiologist

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Presenters

Dianne Penberthy is a registered nurse, with qualifications across three disciplines in nursing. She holds an Advanced Diploma in Business Management. Dianne is currently employed by the Mid North Coast Local Health District working in Aged Care Services. She has worked in a variety of positions working across services, disciplines and health departments for over 40 years. Dianne has worked in various clinical and management roles in Mental Health, Disability Services, Women's Health, Community Health, Health Promotion Clinical Governance and Aged Care. Dianne's passion has been to develop new innovative ways to do business within our health system which focuses on empowerment and creative visionary way of working. Dianne held the position Health Promotion Coordinator working for the Rural Primary Health Service Macksville Community Health 2005-2013. In

this position she worked in partnership with other services agencies and health professionals developing many new initiatives and programs including the Losing It—In the Bush Program that have been sustained and is still being run today. Dianne has lived in Port Macquarie NSW a rural coastal town for over twenty years with her husband and three children and one granddaughter. Her passion is rural country living by the beach.

Jane Newman is a Clinical Nurse Consultant Women's Health, currently employed with Mid North Coast Local Health District. She has worked in a variety of health and community settings for over 30 years. Jane has worked in Women's Health in various clinical and management roles for the past 15 years and her women's health vision focuses on health promotion, intervention, early detection and empowering women in communities to take control of their health outcomes. This is achieved by education and support programs on a range of women's health topics, across the lifespan from puberty to managing chronic illness and aging well. Jane particularly enjoys developing programs to suit the needs of clients and the community. Jane lives in a beautiful rural coastal community and participates in many community events in the region. She has a passion for fine food and wine, long lunches with friends and is always planning her next holiday.