

## **Stairway to Health**

Tool Kit to raise awareness of the need for and promote physical activity to sedentary office workers

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction – aims and objectives of the Initiative

#### Health Challenge Wales

1. The key themes of Health Challenge Wales have been selected because they are considered to be those issues that constitute a significant proportion of the ill health that could be avoided. Obesity is the key themes. This intervention, aims to increase physical exercise taken by sedentary office workers and thereby encourage reduction in body weight, and in so doing targets obesity. It is also and intervention that can be offered up as evidence of achievement by an employer seeking to meet the Welsh Assembly Government Corporate Health Standard.
2. The detrimental health effects of overweight and obesity are well documented. Obese and overweight people are more likely to suffer from Type 2 Diabetes, Coronary Heart Disease, respiratory diseases such as asthma, arthritis and some types of cancer and individuals who are obese ( i.e. have a BMI of greater than 30) have a 50 to 100% increased risk of premature death from all causes, compared to individuals with a healthy weight. Physical activity is associated with a decreased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension, obesity, non-insulin dependant diabetes mellitus, high cholesterol, osteoporosis, falling in older people, chronic back pain.
3. People spend an estimated two-thirds of their lives at their place of employment. Sedentary office workers have little opportunity to take physical exercise during the course of the working day. In order for such individuals to stay healthy, it is necessary to find ways to incorporate physical activity into our workday. Daily living activities like climbing the stairs can make a significant contribution to the 30 minutes of exercise we all need everyday. Studies show that risk of cardiovascular disease and death is lower among those who are regular stair climbers<sup>i</sup>. Stair climbing can also add life to years. A U.S. study OF 11,000 showed that those who climbed 20 or more flights of stairs in a week had a 20% less chance of suffering stroke or of death from any other cause. The also developed greater lung capacity and greater bone density<sup>ii</sup>. Research by the John Hopkins University Medical Centre, Baltimore found that 95% of individuals, when faced with the choice of using a lift or stairs, will chose to use the lift. In a review of 6 Stairway to Health projects prompts where found to increase stair usage by up to 54%<sup>iii</sup>. Taking the stairs is often faster than waiting for the lift during peak usage times.
4. The costs to the NHS of dealing with the consequences of obesity are considerable. The Department of Health commissioned a cost-of-illness study to enable estimates to be prepared on the costs of obesity in England for the Westminster Parliament in order to provide a platform for further debate. The National Audit Office (NAO) report, *Tackling Obesity in England*, published in 2001<sup>iv</sup>, was the result of this commission. The report looked at the human and financial costs of obesity and made recommendations to Government on the way overweight and obese patients are managed within the NHS and on cross-Government work to prevent obesity. It became the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing and was followed by recommendations from the Committee

to Government, and a published Government response. The NAO report concluded that obesity accounted for 18 million lost working days due to associated illness and 30,000 deaths in 1998 for England. The direct cost of treatment of obesity and associated co-morbidities was conservatively estimated at £480m or 1.5% of the total NHS expenditure in England. Given that the report was unable to evaluate the costs of obesity-related back pain and several other conditions, the true costs may exceed the estimates.

5. This initiative seeks to prompt individuals to use the stairs rather than to use a lift. By using the stairs individuals can increase their aerobic capacity, increase bone density and can reduce their body mass index. This initiative therefore addresses the key theme of obesity promoted in Health Challenge Wales.

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<sup>i</sup> Training effects of short bouts of stair climbing on cardio-respiratory fitness, Boreham et al. *Br J Sports Med.*2005; 39: 590-593

<sup>ii</sup> Lee I-M. Havard School of Public Health

<sup>iii</sup> See Brownell K – Yale University School, of Medicine

<sup>iv</sup> National Audit Office ‘Tackling Obesity in England’. NAO London 2001

## Chapter 2

### Stairway to Health

#### Running an Initiative

##### 1. Initial considerations

Initial considerations for this project have to be addressed, including;

- What is the target group?
- Will the outcome have the desired outcome, i.e. encouraging more people to use the stairs?
- How can the target group be reached?
- Who are the key partners in the initiative?
- How will the initiative be evaluated?
- Will the initiative deliver value for money?

##### 2. Target Group

The target group for this intervention are primarily office based employees at the workplace where the initiative is being run.

Office based employees do not have the opportunity to take much incidental physical exercise during the course of a working day, unlike manual workers or those employees who are office based but work for large parts of the day in the community. Office based workers therefore are the group who can derive most benefit from this initiative, however benefit will also accrue to other staff and to visitors to the premises who will also observe the poster which are to act as drivers and may chose to take the stairs rather than the lift.

##### 3. Achieving the desired outcome

The purpose of this initiative is to raise awareness of the need to undertake some form of physical exercise every day and to advocate participation in physical activity by encouraging people to use the stairs on a regular basis rather than the lift. The desired outcome is achieved if more people use the stairs than the lift after the initiative than did before it.

##### 4. Reaching the Target Group

In this initiative the target group is easy to reach. It is a closed group, being employees of the organisation; therefore it is a simple matter for the organisation to communicate directly with every one of its employees.

The organisation can reach its employees by sending a corporate email, to all email users, posting information on notice boards, in the corporate newsletter, if one is produced, and on the intranet, by attaching letters to all employees' pay slips and by requesting that the messages to be promoted should be included as an item on the agenda of all management team, departmental and team meetings.

## **5. Who are the key partners in the initiative?**

This initiative is primarily 'internal' and therefore all of the partners to it will be drawn from inside the organisation. Although this initiative was designed and piloted within a local authority it is transferable to other public and private sector organisations, hence the internal key partners will have to be identified from the different structures of each organisation. The personnel department and the corporate workplace health group or occupational health department are the lead partners, although the support of the Management Team will be critical to the success of the initiative. Within local authorities the environmental health and leisure services department will also be key partners.

## **6. How will the initiative be evaluated?**

Evaluation of this initiative is simple, and is by comparison of pre-and post – intervention rates of use of the stairs.

The pre-initiative information is collected by a simple watching survey, to be carried out for an agreed period prior to the initiative. The survey should record use of the number of individuals using the stairs and the number of individuals using the lift. Further information may also be recorded, depending on the depth of information required from the survey data. Recorded information could include number of people using the stairs when the lift was available, and length of time spent waiting for the lift to arrive.

The survey should be repeated after the initiative has been carried out, for the same period of time as the pre-initiative survey and using the same questions. A direct comparison of pre- and post-initiative results can then be made, to demonstrate the success or otherwise of the initiative.

The survey could be repeated at intervals after the initiative to measure whether the increased usage of stairs, if any, is maintained in the medium and long term. Where there is a drop off in use of the stairs consideration can be given to a campaign reinforcing the messages used to reinvigorate the initiative.

## **7. Will the initiative deliver value for money?**

This initiative is not resource intensive to run, with costs mainly being incurred in the design and printing of materials. Some officer time is expended in the carrying out of the survey before and after the initiative, and there are cost implications in promoting the 'Use the Stairs' message to staff, irrespective of the method/s of communication used, but it is suggested that these will be minimal.

Analysis of the project suggests that the potential health benefits to the participants the initiative out weight the financial and time resources required to run it, and that being the case, that it does represent value for money.

## Chapter 3

### Stairway to Health

#### The Campaign

Advice is given and drivers are used to promote physical activity in sedentary office workers, i.e. taking the stairs instead of using the lift.

#### Preliminary steps

1. It is important to the success of this initiative that the Management Team of the premises at which it is to be run is fully supportive of it. Premises which are seeking to achieve the Welsh Assembly Government Corporate Health Standard are likely to be keen to participate, as such an initiative will assist them in achieving the award. The Management Team must support the initiative and must be willing to promote it, by e.g. appointing someone to champion it, and by promoting the initiative through whatever methods are considered most appropriate for the business concerned. These may include:
  - Attaching letters to pay slips,
  - Sending a corporate e-mail to all staff encouraging them to participate,
  - Using the corporate newsletter if one is produced,
  - Using corporate notice board
  - Using the intranet
  - Putting the initiative on the agenda of all Management Team, departmental and team meetings.

This list is neither exclusive nor exhaustive.
2. The Management Team should also be encouraged to set an example by using the stairs themselves. It should be made clear that whilst every encouragement is given to all staff to participate there will be no action taken in respect of any individuals who chose to continue using the lift.
3. In order to measure the success of the intervention it is necessary to collect data at the start of the project, for comparative purposes. This information is collected by a survey. In the pilot project this survey work was carried out by the Work Place Health Group. The survey form used in the pilot project is shown as [Appendix 1](#). As noted in Chapter 2 the survey can be tailored to suit the needs of the organisation and can include issues such as time spent waiting for lifts, lift use –v- stair use by visitors to the premises etc. This will be a matter for local decision.
4. Prior to the commencement of the initiative the material to be used as drivers should be produced. The pilot project used a series of posters, which are shown as [Appendix 2](#). Other material could include leaflets or handbills.

## **Running the initiative**

5. The first step in this initiative is the carrying out of the initial survey into use of the stairs. This should be carried out for an agreed period of time, which will accurately reflect the stair usage, e.g. one working week. Thereafter the information to staff in the selected format should be disseminated. The information used in the pilot project is shown as [Appendix 3](#). The posters, and /or the other forms of material chosen to be used as drivers should then be exhibited and distributed at prominent locations near to the stairs.
  
6. After a pre-determined period the survey carried out at the commencement of the initiative should be repeated, for exactly the same period of time as the pre-initiative survey. The success or otherwise of the initiative can then be calculated by comparison of the pre- and post initiative stair usage figures. Where information such as waiting time for lifts has been collected other information can be generated, e.g. number of hours saved through using the stairs, however care must be taken to ensure that staff understand that the incentive for the initiative is to improve health and wellbeing, rather than to increase productivity. The information gathered should be shared with staff to keep them informed of any increase in stair use, of the benefits to health that may already have accrued and to maintain interest in the project in the longer term.

## **Monitoring the initiative.**

7. It is important to ensure that good physical activity habits continue after the initiative, therefore it is suggested that monitoring of stair use continues at fixed and agreed intervals to ensure that the physical activity choice continues to be made. Where a drop of in use of the stairs is detected further information can be issued to staff to re-invigorate the campaign. It may also be possible to extend the campaign in other ways, e.g. promoting lunch time walks, or after work classes of sporting activity, which may be good for morale and team building as well as for raising physical activity levels.

## Appendix 1

### Survey Form – Stairway to Health

Time	Count				Totals			
	Staff		Visitors		Staff		Visitors	
	Stairs	Lift	Stairs	Lift	Stairs	Lift	Stairs	Lift
8.30 - 8.45								
8.45 - 9.00								
9.00 - 9.15								
9.15 - 9.30								
9.30 - 9.45								
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4.15 - 4.30								
4.30 - 4.45								
4.45 - 5.00								
5.00 - 5.15								
5.15 - 5.30								

- Record
1. Able bodied
  2. Wheelchair users
  3. Users with pushchairs/ trolleys



## Appendix 2

### Stairway to Health Poster

See file – [“04 b Stairway to Health \(Bi Ling\) Appendix 2.pdf”](#)



## **Appendix 3**

### **Stairway to Health**

#### **What is stairway to health?**

This is a project that involves encouraging council staff to take the stairs instead of lifts if possible. Taking the stairs requires little or no additional time and has no additional financial cost. People spend an estimated two-thirds of their lives at their place of employment. In order to stay healthy, we need to find ways to incorporate physical activity into our workday.

Daily living activities like climbing the stairs can make a significant contribution to the 30 minutes of exercise we all need...everyday. The 30 minutes of physical activity, needed for health benefits, can be accumulated throughout the day or one stairway at a time, spread at intervals throughout the day.

In a review of 6 stairway to health projects prompts were found to increase stair usage by up to 54%.

#### **What are the benefits of the stairway to health project?**

- Physical activities like stair climbing are a great way to cope with job-related stress.
- Climbing just two flights of stairs everyday could result a loss of 2.7kg or 6lbs per year. Six flights a day could help you trim nearly 18 lbs.
- Adding stairs to your day can add years to your life. Studies show that risk of cardiovascular disease and death is lower among those who are regular Stair climbers.
- Stair climbing can also add life to your years. Those who climb stairs on a daily basis have greater leg strength and aerobic capacity, allowing them to participate more fully in a wide range of daily activities.
- Taking the stairs is often faster than waiting for an elevator during peak usage times. Take the test and time your trip.
- Using the stairs requires no special skill, equipment or clothing and it burns twice as many calories as walking.
- Stair climbing is a 'green' activity; the only energy source used is what is stored in our bodies.... Good for you and the environment!
- Workplaces that implement stairway physical activity programs report improved employee relations, camaraderie and teamwork.

#### **What needs to be done?**

The project will involve posters being displayed near lifts to encourage members of staff to take the stairs, these will be organised through the workplace health group. Line managers will be asked to promote the project through "Link up", and information can be displayed on the council Intranet.

#### **How will the scheme be evaluated?**

An evaluation scheme will be established through the intranet.