

Vale Park Community Initiative

Feedback from Participants and Partners

Community Benefit

The aim of the project to develop community initiatives focussing on Port Vale FC has been achieved. The action plan, based on regular consultation was agreed and steered by the Steering Group. Each initiative has been evaluated by the feedback from participants and partners. Highlights include:

Tackling inequalities in health

The concept of the stadia as a setting for health has been used to pilot and test a range of initiatives. Healthy walk training delivered at the stadium attracted participants because of the venue. An interest in health walks focussed on the stadium will be followed up in the proposed continuation project. The 'Health Month' in March 2007 took considerable co-ordination but the results were significant. Over 100 people, all males, filled in the questionnaires at a Home Game with Tranmere. The majority indicated that they would come to Port Vale as a venue for health initiatives– and they were particularly interested in men only weight management support groups, plus healthy eating, physical activity and stop smoking support.

Walking, cycling and structured physical activity would also be welcomed. All of these activities have either been or are in the process of being developed at the stadium.

Feedback from the key partner, the PCT was that:

'The Port Vale Health project has been of great value in providing the vehicle in which we can creatively explore and deliver a broad range of healthy lifestyle messages and activities. In particular to community groups that may not necessarily go to their GP or mainstream health services for support.'

The role of Jonathan Pace, the Community Development Officer has been critical in ensuring links are established between the Club and the wider stakeholder's including ourselves. We have seen a positive difference it has made, with the dedicated post and resource, hosted within the club and with the work we do, compared to other clubs.'

Siu-Ann Pang Programme Leader Food & Health/Obesity

Dr Giri Rajaratnam, Director of Public Health, Stoke on Trent PCT said:
"I am delighted that the PCT is working in partnership with Port Vale Health Project in raising awareness of the importance of not smoking and healthy living. It is an excellent opportunity to get health messages across to a wider audience that may not go to their GP".

The partnership work with Closing the Gap and the development of the volunteer programme has been very successful. The Port Vale Volunteering project has recruited 12 local people (16+), by using the 'badge' of Port Vale FC as a hook of engagement. They have been provided with free training as sports leaders with a view for them to access community groups to plan and deliver a programme of sport to young people. The continuation VPCI project will develop the capacity of the club to 'take ownership' of this initiative with the long term view of the club managing the volunteers and coordinating delivery of the training, using the facilities of the stadium to do so.

Volunteering opportunities for older people has also been an important initiative.

In partnership with VPCI, Beth Johnson Foundation completed an initial three week Active in Age training course aimed at providing older people with the necessary capabilities and opportunities to run community activities. The course took place at Vale Park and attracted a lot of local participants. 12 of the participants went onto complete the Volunteer Walk Leader training at Port Vale. This was followed up by another Active In Age training course. Graham, 64, a participant on both the Active in Age Training and the Walk Leaders course said, *"These are the first things I have done since retiring and found both of them very useful, I met a lot of new people and intend to use my Walk leader training to help run the healthy walks planned at Port Vale. I've also gone out and worked with various community groups over the last few months and hope to continue to do so."*

MEND, a project tackling child hood obesity will be delivered as part of the proposed continuation project, but the basis for the successful bids for funding was the Vale Park Community Initiative partnership and the credibility it has built up as evidenced above.

Inequalities in education

The project has initiated a number of projects with local schools using the stadium and football to engage and inspire students identified by their schools as in need of innovative stimulation. Stadium City was a project with BBC Radio Stoke, Creative Partnerships, creative artists, Stoke City FC Port Vale FC and pupils from Haywood High School and

St Thomas Moore School used Stoke City and Port Vale Football Clubs as creative settings to engage the imagination of young people and explore issues of cultural and civic identity. 70 young people worked in smaller groups to produce 10 short films based on their perceptions of their local community and the connections with the football clubs. The feedback from all participants was very positive (DVD enclosed with report).

The Port Vale Tales project which was developed from an earlier pilot in year 1 has been a similarly positive experience for all participants:

Port Vale Chairman Bill Bratt said: 'A lot of people taking part have really enjoyed this experience. The school pupils have done themselves proud. This project has been all about co-operation across boundaries which has resulted in greater understanding and a sense of value'

Dave Dickinson, head teacher at Haywood High School said 'There are no league tables for this sort of work between the generations, but if there were, this project would be at the top of mine. This is an example of a school working in the community and working for the community. We have worked with Port Vale over the years but this is a new relationship for us to build on and develop'

Inequalities in employment

The project has worked in partnership with other agencies to successfully offer innovative opportunities to tackle issues around worklessness, including youth offending.

Over the summer of 2007, the project worked with the Stoke-on-Trent young offending team who together with Unity, a local community arts agency, delivered a 6 week summer college program to persistent young offenders. The summer college was developed by the arts council and the youth justice board with the aim of using creative media to engage and train young people in a unique way. The session plans also embedded literacy and numeracy into the lessons, resulting in nearly 50% of the group improving in basic skills by going up a level by the end of the 6 weeks.

As part of the summer college's visual arts strand the young people had to work with a graffiti artist to create a mural in a public place. Working in partnership with VPCI and Port Vale FC the group took part in site visits and development afternoons at Vale Park. The piece was created over a number of sessions which included preparation of the wall, drawings, sketching, and the final completion of the mural which was themed over the regeneration and heritage of Stoke-on-Trent together with images relevant to Port Vale and its

surrounding communities. None of the participants had been to the club before and their attendance and engagement with other initiatives had been problematic. Their feedback from this project has been very positive and has changed their perceptions of the club and vice versa.

New relationships have been highlighted as a lasting benefit of the project and with them a desire to build on the pilot initiatives and undertake further partnership work.

Social cohesion

The project has been responsible for developing the outreach work of Valiants Against Racism. The annual Community Shield football tournament has been particularly successful:

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PLAYERS UNITED IN ANTI-RACISM GOAL

When Kurdish refugee Siever Ali came to Hanley in 2002 he had no friends, spoke no English and faced an uphill struggle to build a new life in a strange country. But five years on, the 22-year-old not only speaks the language fluently but is working as an interpreter for the Citizens Advice Bureau in Hanley.

"In the beginning it was hard, but then I started going to college and getting to know different people, and I started playing football," he said.

"I would play every week, and it meant that I had a little bit of communication with other people.

"Now I think of Stoke-on-Trent as my home and I'm hoping to go to university."

Mr Ali put his footballing skills to the test yesterday when he took part in a special tournament aimed at tackling racism on and off the pitch.

The fourth annual Valiants Against Racism Community Shield tournament took place at the Dimensions sports centre, in Burslem, and featured 10 local teams representing different communities.

Mr Ali played for all-Kurdish newcomers Nawroz against teams such as the predominantly African side AC Stoke, Asian teams Grange Park Rangers and Real Macot.

The line-up was completed by mainly white sides such as Portly Vale, Port Vale Football In The Community and two teams from the Bird In Hand pub, in Hanley, as well as ethnically mixed sides Cobridge Community and Unity.

Cobridge Community earned a place in the final by beating Port Vale Football in the Community.

They faced last year's tournament winners Grange Park Rangers, who had beaten Nawroz in the semis.

Grange Park Rangers eventually emerged triumphant following a nail-biting Cobridge derby that ended at 0-0 and had to be decided on penalties, which the reigning champions won 4-3.

Organiser and Valiants Against Racism chairman Dr Steven Bradbury said the success of the tournament showed how football could be used to break down boundaries between the city's different ethnic communities.

And he said the recent publicity surrounding the investigation into attempted car bomb attacks in London and Glasgow had made building bridges between cultural groups more important than ever.

"One of the issues involved with doing anti-racism events locally is that no matter how much good you do you are always going to be subjected to global and national pressures," he said.

"The issues around terrorism have been brought into our city now, and there is also the constant influence of the BNP, who are trying to divide our city.

"These things show that there is a greater need than ever before to be united.

"The fact that we have no trouble getting teams to take part shows clear support in grass roots football from local teams who wish to mix."

Matt Wilcox, of newly-formed team Unity, said: "It's a great chance for people to interact with different cultures and integrate with other communities.

"I think football does a great deal to bring people together."

Stuart Kerby, manager of the Portly Vale squad, said: "The tournaments bring the whole community closer together. We had a lot of fun taking part last year, and it was great to meet the other players afterwards."