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FIRE FIT

UTILISING ROLE MODELS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL EQUALITY THROUGH PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITY.

Fire Fit expands the role of the local fire service beyond its traditional boundaries in order to make the local community safer, stronger and healthier through the promotion of sport and physical exercise.



Liverpool (United Kingdom)



Organisation	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS).
Start-end date	2010 – ongoing.
Target group	All ages.
Reach	In 2014, Fire Fit Schools reaches over 400 children (aged 10), through engagement at the Fire Fit HUB in Toxteth. In addition, there are over 1,000 memberships and links to other recreational groups.
Partners	Liverpool City Council, the Department of Education, the Health and Wellbeing Board.
Key facts	MFRS was the first Fire and Rescue Service to reach the “Inspire” participation mark set out by the Local Organising Committee for London 2012. Fire Fit went on to encourage 17 other UK Fire and Rescue services to achieve the same recognition.
For inspiration	www.firefithub.org.uk

Summary

The Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) identified the strong link between the threat of fire and the levels of social inequality in the fields of education, housing and income. The incidence of anti-social behaviour, crime and other risk factors directly related to fire are far more prevalent in areas that suffer under these aspects of social inequality (English Indices of Multiple Deprivation ranks Liverpool 1st & Knowsley 5th in terms of levels of deprivation).

The Fire Fit initiative was born out of the need to tackle this inequality within these communities through sport, exercise and physical education, leveraging the expertise and social status of the local fire and rescue service. Fire Fit encompasses sport, healthy eating, volunteering, and cultural and community cohesion activities. It uses the fire service, firefighters and other staff as role models to increase participation in physical and cultural activities.

The entire Fire Fit brand can be divided across five main activity areas – Schools, Communities, Activities, Events and HUB. The Schools facet focuses on engaging the youth of the city before they leave primary school, preparing them for a physically and mentally healthy lifestyle. It acknowledges data provided by health officials through the National Weight Management Programme (correct engagement and targeting).



Communities and Activities focus on the promotion of events and initiatives across different communities and the city at large. Fire Fit Events are themed activities run in conjunction with the Schools component over the course of the year, one in each district where the programme is active. Finally, HUB revolves around the running of a world-class youth zone centre in the city.

Operating costs for Fire Fit Schools and Communities are approx. USD 40,000 per annum. Costs for the HUB exceed USD 100,000 per annum while the facility has a bespoke income generation business model.

Keys to success

MAJOR EVENT PLATFORM

The need for a social programme of this type was first conceived during the hosting of the World Firefighter Games in Liverpool, as part of the larger celebration of Liverpool as the European Capital of Culture in 2008. The legacy of this event to the city was a primary concern and the momentum it generated helped in getting the project off the ground and running with the backing of key stakeholders. This effect was bolstered by the approach of the Olympic Games in London in 2012, as the programme was launched in between the two events, giving it a huge level of exposure and coverage.

PHYSICAL LOCATION

As part of the “HUB” component of the Fire Fit programme, a GBP 5 million state-of-the-art, world-class facility for young people was built in Liverpool with the assistance of the Liverpool City Council and the Department of Education. The centre caters for sports, music, culture and other diverse activities, all of which are specifically designed for young people. The HUB also generates revenue by hiring out its facilities to other users. Having a physical centre or “HUB” from which to deliver many of the great initiatives underneath the Fire Fit brand, as well as having a dedicated focal point where the community can gather, assists a great deal when trying to connect with people from the local community and bring them together.



“We are delighted that our school is part of the Fire Fit programme. It is highly engaging and the children look forward to the sessions with enthusiasm. The Fire Service adds real value to the school.”

Kath Honey – Head Teacher – Blueberry Park Primary School

SUSTAINABILITY

Fire Fit is focused on delivering sustainable programmes in the local community. This involves hiring out facilities at the HUB when they are not in use to generate revenue. It has also seen the introduction of a new innovation in the form of the social impact bond scheme. Under this scheme, workers or volunteers within the Fire Fit programme receive bonds for time they have spent in service. These bonds have a financial value in that they can be exchanged for certain goods such as new football kits or the use of a mini-bus for a community programme, for example. The scheme has also seen staff commissioned on a voluntary basis with the provision of a bursary to support travelling expenses and subsistence, thereby delivering the service on a lower cost model than in previous years. This innovative approach is a first for a Fire and Rescue Service. As a result of these initiatives; each team member who provides support for a community-based activity does so in the knowledge that they are personally putting something back into the community.

OUR PEOPLE

Fire Fit's own people are the engine room of the programme. They are its future. The programme looks to support them by encouraging participation in sports events such as the "Race for life" or "Santa dash". Fire Fit also provides opportunities for coaching qualifications as part of its own Continued Professional Development; this investment brings benefits to both the individual and community.



Sport for All objectives

PROMOTE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

The programme's core vision is to better the community through the vehicle of sport and physical exercise. This has involved initiatives focusing on active participation as well as the construction of facilities to provide a venue for the practice of exercise and physical activity.

INCREASE HEALTH

Besides the physical benefits that Fire Fit aims to impart to the community, additional health benefits such as improved confidence and self-esteem are integral to the design and delivery of the programme. All activities are centred on instilling a sense of achievement among participants.

INVOLVE SCHOOLS

A key objective of the Fire Fit programme is to increase attendance and behaviour at school. An individual member of staff is embedded into individual participant schools to deliver the programme and act as an enabler for the MFRS to deliver the prevention message.

SUPPORT THE DISADVANTAGED

The Fire Fit model improves social capital and develops community cohesion in the locality. The ultimate aim of the programme is to reduce the level of inequality in disadvantaged communities in order to make them safer, stronger, healthier places.



How is the programme communicated?

On the ground, the programme is communicated through community outreach programmes, particularly in local participating schools, relying heavily on the social status of the MFRS as community leaders. The programme also runs its own website, Twitter and Facebook accounts.

How is the programme evaluated?

The MFRS has a dedicated officer that oversees the overall governance of the programme. Outcomes are reported internally within the MFRS with a full annual report being produced. The strength of the Fire Fit brand can be measured by its reputation and visibility.



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