

Shaping Up lifestyles for better health

A lifestyle-changing local health improvement programme is saying 'on your bike' to poor health.

A large group of older men from Oldham's black and minority ethnic (BME) community combined improving their health with having fun when they test-ran some three-wheeler bikes this week.

The activity forms part of an eight-week NHS Shape Up programme, which aims to improve the overall long-term health, well-being and quality of life of those taking part.

Following a half-hour session on the bikes, the men took part in some seated exercises and enjoyed a healthy lunch. Healthy eating and nutritional advice forms an important part of the Shape Up programme and is delivered by Waqar Mahmood, who is a food worker from Oldham Community Health Services (OCHS, (OCHS, part of NHS Oldham, the local primary trust responsible for health services in the borough). The men have been keeping food diaries, which they bring in with them to discuss each week. This initiative has resulted in a number of positive changes in the men's diet, including only having one chapatti, instead of two and swapping high-calorie puddings for fruit salad.

Another activity that the men have taken part in is Nordic walking. Some of the men enjoyed this so much that it prompted them to join the weekly Nordic walking group who meet at Alexandra Park, Glodwick every Thursday morning.

Margo Jackson, from OCHS' health improvement team, who co-ordinates the Shape Up programme, said: "It's fantastic to see so many men interested in the programme and taking on board our messages about the importance of getting plenty of exercise and eating healthily. It's really worthwhile to come here and see that they are enjoying what they are doing and to build some strong relationships for the future."

Ashraf Khan, one of the men taking part in the programme, is really feeling the benefits. He said: "I've had surgery on my knee and the sessions are really helping me. I've also learned lots of things, although I did eat too much during Eid last week - as we all do during festive occasions!"

Shape Up is run in partnership between the health improvement service from OCHS, Oldham Community Leisure, who co-ordinate the seated exercises and Activate, who provided the bikes and Nordic walking poles and oversee the activity sessions. The Activate project is a local cycling and walking-based initiative aimed at those who need to do more exercise. It is part of the North West based Target Wellbeing programme, which is managed by Groundwork and funded by an £8.9m lottery grant.

The Shape Up programmes are run on a regular basis throughout the year and can be tailored to suit the needs of each particular group. Last July saw a group of local men team up for some lifestyle-changing activity sessions with Oldham Athletic Football Club an Oldham Roughyeds, the local rugby club. While more recently, a group of women from the Oldham's BME community completed a Shape Up programme.

For more information about future Shape Up programmes contact Margo Jackson on 0161 621 7150.

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