

Study to test grass roots approach to public health

A GROUNDBREAKING pilot study is to be held in the North East aimed at taking a more proactive approach to public health within local communities.

Sport Works, a social enterprise supporting around 5,000 people nationally each year, is to work closely with ten grass roots organisations to assess the value of embedding health and wellbeing into community life.

The 'Holistic Health' study – focusing primarily on more vulnerable and disadvantaged people – will be launched in January and run for three months, covering from the Tees Valley to Tyne and Wear.

An independent researcher, Dr Christopher Hartworth, has been commissioned to provide robust data throughout the trial. The evaluation will then continue for a further three months to assess whether there has been long-term behavioural change.

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Neil Cameron, founder and director of Sport Works, said: "Our objective is to see whether we can establish a new, much more proactive approach to managing public health by having programmes embedded in local communities, so that fewer people end up having to visit a doctor or take medication."

Mr Cameron, a former nationally ranked junior long jumper, moved to the North East in 2007 to work in the sports sector for a national governing body. He has also been an athletics coach and university lecturer in sports science.

He launched Sport Works in 2009 as a sports coaching business, mainly aimed at schools, and it has evolved into a national

body delivering a wide range of educational and physical activity-based programmes, each designed to improve wellbeing of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. It employs 15 full-time and another 75 part-time staff.

The community organisations chosen to take part in the trial include: Shotley and Benfieldside Tennis Club; Tyneside Women's Health; PCP – Pioneering Care Partnership; Quadrant Leisure/TheQFitGym, in Newcastle; Youth Focus; Age UK South Tyneside; and Newcastle East End FC. The other participating organisations will be confirmed soon.

"We have targeted organisations that are already doing great work by engaging with a diverse range of people who may already have existing health issues or are at risk of developing them. Rather than wait for them to become ill, the aim is to take a



Sport Works staff in action

preventative approach," said Mr Cameron.

"It's about taking health to a

community level and making it part of the levelling up agenda."