

CASE STUDY —

Cowley Hill, January – March 2024

CHOICES at St Micheals – Cowley Hill Opportunities Involving Communities at Every Stage

Previous learnings have identified integrating physical activity into established community groups or sessions as a successful approach to increasing participation in physical activity. Building upon previous approaches we aim to increase the physical activity provision at one site in Cowley Hill, Saint Michael's and All Angels Church.

The funding application for CHOICES (Cowley Hill Opportunities Involving Communities at Every Stage) at St Michael's is a comprehensive plan to address the needs of the Cowley Hill community. Cowley Hill is a diverse community with residents of different age groups and backgrounds. There are long established concerns about social isolation, lack of community engagement, poor mental health and limited access to resources. This programme recognises these challenges and aims to address them through various programmes and activities. To fund these initiatives, CHOICES decided to apply for external funding via the National Lottery, Awards for All grant.

The mission of CHOICES is to create opportunities for residents of all ages to become more connected, feel less isolated and improve their mental and physical health. This case study outlines our strategies for achieving these goals through resident consultations, collaboration with local organisations and a person-centred approach.

The first step in our funding application process involved thorough resident consultations. We believe that the best way to understand the needs of the community is to engage directly with its members. Through surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews, we have collected valuable insights about the challenges and aspirations of the Cowley Hill residents. This information will guide our future programming and ensure that our efforts are aligned with the needs of the community.

In addition to resident consultations, CHOICES have liaised with local partners and organisations such as community groups and faith groups. These partnerships will allow us to leverage existing resources and expertise to create a more comprehensive and sustainable programme. We work in a whole-systems change approach to develop community assets based within Cowley Hill. By working together, we can maximise our impact and reach a wider audience.

At the heart of CHOICES is our commitment to putting the needs of "the person" at the centre. This person-centred approach means that we will take into account factors such as age, barriers, cultural background and personal interests when designing our activities. For instance, we will offer different exercise classes suitable for different age groups, circumstances or diversity of the community. We will achieve this by introducing Forever Cycling into the Welcome Cafe group, build upon an existing offer of seated exercise and provide taster sessions of other activities in the area such as Golden Zumba. During the Tea and Tots session we will implement a dance and rhyme time session that will encourage the parents and young children to be active in a non-onerous manner whilst challenging their concepts of physical activity. At Chatter Tables we will introduce provisions from well-established and respected organisations such as Herts Sport Disability Foundation to run Seated boxing and other inclusive sports such as Boccia.

Other physical activity provisions are being developed across the ward. This is one example of how using an asset-based community development model will enable us to reduce inequalities within one of our spotlight areas.

