

Gloucestershire Pub Clubs Supporting active independence in older people living in rural areas

Summary

'Lifelong Learning and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council have successfully worked in partnership to provide a central point for older residents in the Toddington area to gather, at a central point that could provide accessibility, adequate space, reasonably priced hot food, parking and an environment conducive to relaxed conversation in a social setting...a pub'

Press release 2008

The original press release above was just the start of 'pub clubs' as we currently know them. Each club is, as the title suggests, a club for older members of the community held in a public house approximately once a month with a nominal amount charged for activities. Each meeting consists of a variety of activities including the opportunity to partake in gentle exercise and informal learning, arts and crafts and a relaxed lunch with others who are also at risk of social isolation.

The clubs are a different and cost effective form of day service and are a variation of existing 'In Touch' social or lunch clubs. These clubs are not dissimilar to the former Countryside Agency's 'Pub is the Hub' initiative which saw the local pub as a hub for the parish offering services including lunch clubs, collection of prescriptions, post office services and other health and social care related activities. Initial funds of £6000 were put into the Gloucestershire pub clubs from a variety of pots to engage the professionals and aid with pump priming. No further funds have been added and yet we now have 3 operational clubs.

Professional engagement at the beginning of the project is essential but it must be light touch as experience has shown that when organisations completely run a project from a beginning it creates an expectation that is not sustainable. For example when funds are reduced, organisational support is removed leaving the attendees feel abandoned and the club could easily cease. This fits exactly with the aims and objectives of GRCC's In Touch project, which aims to empower older people to provide self-help initiatives to enhance social inclusion.

The 3 pub clubs operating within Gloucestershire all look to provide a more modest function that is sustainable in the long term by GRCC's In Touch team first identifying local need in conjunction with parish councils, Village Agents and local knowledge through their existing knowledge base i.e. does the area already have a regular meeting place?

Are residential properties clustered around a central point in a village or does it cover a wide area? Would people actually attend a club should it be set up?

Initial meetings are then planned with the relevant publican and then members of the community so all can put their ideas forward and feel engaged from the outset as different communities will have different needs in terms of the club content. This will also ensure that the club is 'owned' by the community at the very start and will therefore remain sustainable in the long term.

At these early meetings the more vocal participants in the meeting are identified and a relationship fostered that encourages a lead role to be taken in organising and empowering the group to run a club that is right for its needs. This method has worked well and ensured that the clubs and activities on offer are all:

- self funding,
- sustainable
- empowering
- reduce social isolation
- provide an economic boost to village pubs.

Case studies

The Pheasant Club, Toddington (Tewkesbury Borough)

This club is enjoying a monthly attendance of approximately *15 older people. Initiated by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, Lifelong Learning and the PCT Locality General Manager for Tewkesbury District in 2008, this club acts as a beacon club for the scheme and is now 'running solo' as paid organisational support is gradually removed and members take ownership of their club.

(*high numbers of attendees is not the main aim of the clubs. It is the positive outcomes for those who do attend that are imperative to the project, although minimum numbers are reviewed to ensure viability. One must bear in mind rural areas will not attract the same high numbers associated with the urban settlements)

Attendees have enjoyed a range of activities including

- Sports professionals delivering gentle physical activity (light weights, T'ai Chi, movement to music)
- Reminiscence professionals
- Arts and Crafts
- Partaking in DVD recording



The Anchor Club, Saul, Longney & Epney (Stroud district)

This club started in August 2009 and has enjoyed 6 sessions with 22 attendees enjoying the Christmas lunch in December. The high attendance is a testament to its popularity and the welcoming environment the publicans have created. A slightly younger demographic than Toddington with members able to drive or walk to the venue independently.

Activities include :

- Boards Games, including some newer games such as 'Jenga' which have been received very well.
- Arts and Crafts Easter activities
- Gentle Physical Activity
- Singing



The Boat, Ashleworth (Tewkesbury Borough)

This club started in February 2010 for the same reasons as the other clubs. It is however run differently from the others in that older members of the community are still quite active. The village hall is undergoing renovation works and is closed for 6 months and the pub being used is very small. The club was therefore set up as a temporary situation during the refurbishment and acts mainly as a book club which coincided with the reduction in mobile library visits.

The start of the club drew on the networks of village agents, local post office, Library Service community outreach programmes, all of whom contributed to advertising and targeting of members.

The club is nearing its planned close, however members (regular attendance of 6) wish to continue to run the club themselves at the pub with use of the library service book club scheme as their focal point for obtaining new books they can discuss approximately every 3 weeks.

Outcomes of the Programme to date

- Clubs in 3 districts offering support to those at risk of social isolation
- Exercise at clubs contributing to falls prevention agenda
- Village Agents' role crucial to targeting individuals
- Small initial investment has led to 3 sustainable self funding clubs
- Empowerment to attendees –programme is fixed and driven by those attending
- Evidence of increased social engagement through verbal testimony

Possible areas for development

- Staverton
- Forest of Dean
- South Cotswolds

The GRCC team has identified these areas as those suitable for development of pub clubs using the previously mentioned needs analysis. All areas have locations that are isolated, where there is no central meeting point, no village hall and little in the way of local facilities.

Summary prepared by Lifelong Learning (Gloucestershire County Council) and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council - April 2010

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