

Health Promotion Starts With You Iceland



The healthy town initiative 'Health Promotion Starts With You' was launched with the aim of encouraging entire communities to improve their health and well-being by taking health promotion into their own hands. It was also hoped that other towns would be inspired to follow suit. Húsavík was chosen to take part in the healthy town initiative. It has a population of around 2.500. This was the first time for it to be involved in this kind of project.

Working Together for Better Health

The 'Health Promotion Starts With You' – project is a joint initiative between the state (the Ministry of Health and the Directorate of Health) and the community, with funding coming from both sources. It focuses on improving individual lifestyles and creating a better health profile by adopting a preventive approach and encouraging individuals to be proactive regarding their own health.

How the project was set in motion

When the "Health Promotion Starts With You", project was launched in Iceland, each town was allocated a special project manager and a management committee to organise the day-to-day running and develop a strategy for taking the initiative forward. The Ministry of Health and the town itself provided financial backing, but members of the management committee were not paid a salary.

The project aimed to motivate the community as a whole. It worked towards improving the health of

the population by encouraging people to recognise and ultimately avoid health threatening lifestyle elements and to embrace those that promote good health.

As the aim was to motivate the entire community, the project manager decided it would be best to kick things off with something that had a broad appeal and carry on in a similar vein, launching events that would enthuse large sections of the community.

The management committee met regularly to work through a wide range of suggestions and put together a broad and varied range of events. Between the years 1994-97, 33 projects were launched. These included lectures on sporting activities, diet and drugs, as well as family-days, car-free days, workplace health promotion and much more. The response was good to start off with and during the 1994-97 period the community was actively and enthusiastically involved. However beyond that interest began to dwindle. Enthusiasm for the project could not be rekindled despite it being heavily promoted via advertisements and



Húsavík

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considerable press coverage in the local newspapers.

When Husavik became a health promoting town a private company was contracted to carry out health promotion activities at the workplace. Great hopes were placed on the expertise that this company could bring in terms of WHP. Workplace health initiatives included lectures on a variety of subjects, measuring of employees' heart rate and consultation with physiotherapists.

Sadly, in Husavik, the project has not produced the results hoped for. The goals it set out to achieve were too broad and too ambitious and the private company responsible for health promotion at the workplace did not live up to expectations.

A less than successful outcome

The project failed to produce the desired outcome for a number of reasons. Sustaining public interest in the long-term proved to be difficult. The project's goals were certainly too ambitious and its remit was far too broad. Furthermore the private company contracted to run the occupational health promotion programme proved to be a major disappointment. Many employees reported that they were unhappy with the company's approach. They felt that the manner in which the information was delivered was pompous and that the lectures

were far too wordy and long-winded. They also felt alienated by the fact that the company placed heavy demands upon them in terms of their input and personal commitment. However, the work carried out by the physiotherapists generated a more positive response and was universally well received.

The community has therefore decided to terminate its contract with the private company. Not only did it fail to fulfill its obligations, its services were also thought to be too expensive.

Despite these shortcomings, the town is still a part of the healthy town initiative and the management committee has recommended that the project continues, even though there has been no activity at all for quite some time now. Ways of creating a better working arrangement will need to be looked at. For example, the project might be more successful if different elements of it were carried out by different companies, rather than the project manager and the management committee trying to implement a large-scale operation with such diverse and all-encompassing goals. There also needs to be more direct contact with members of the community to boost morale and motivation as well as increased contact with workplaces.