

Working with communities to reduce inequalities

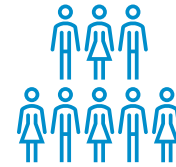
Background

The COVID pandemic shone a light on inequality, with research showing that those living in less affluent areas are more vulnerable to the impact of health conditions.

In Surrey, the Canalside area of Woking has the county's highest proportion of people from lower socio economic groups, and a high percentage who are non-white.

It's acknowledged that physical activity (PA) helps community development and it is vital to wellbeing.

COVID helped to raise awareness and concern about mental and physical health related issues that exist in Canalside.



10.5k people live in Canalside



53% people identify as non-white
(34% of all residents are Pakistani)



63% identify as non-British

Health inequalities in Canalside

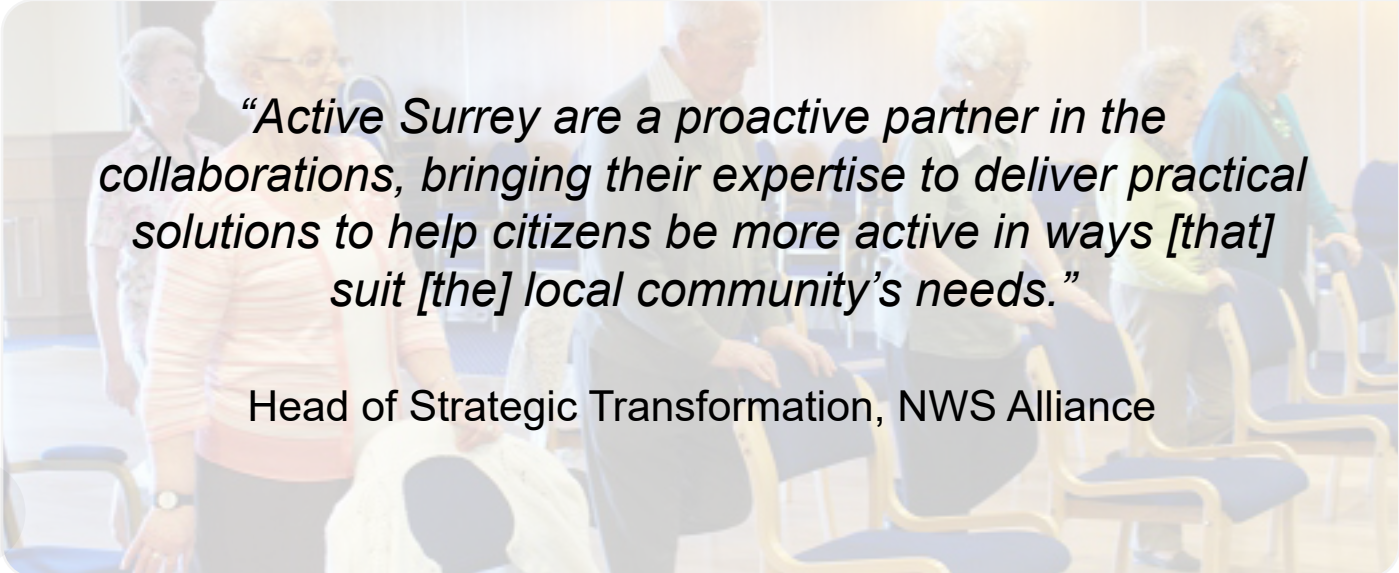
- 41% Children in Year 6 are **overweight** - significantly more than the rest of Woking (30%) or Surrey (26%).
- Adults are **much less likely to physically active** (30%) compared to Woking (25%) and Surrey (22%).
- High ratio of **coronary heart disease, stroke, heart attack and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease** compared to Woking, Surrey and England.
- Highest percentage of people in the county with **diabetes**, (6.8%)
- The number of people claiming incapacity benefit due to mental health conditions is relatively high for Woking



How we responded

Canalside was an obvious target to try wide ranging, place based working. Not only was there a role for greater PA, but it had been identified as a key neighbourhood for regeneration by the county council and we had a good relationship with the local authority. Whenever work is rooted in the community, residents' views are key in helping shape activity so our first step was to engage with bodies already working with the people we wanted to reach. We now have regular contact with local authorities and NHS providers / third sector health bodies as well as faith and community leaders.

Community representatives and professionals were invited to a virtual workshop in Nov 2021 to discuss where PA gaps might exist, and promote the importance of collaborative working. The area's social prescriber highlighted inadequate activities for men; lack of confidence and motivation to access activities; and poor resident awareness of available opportunities.



“Active Surrey are a proactive partner in the collaborations, bringing their expertise to deliver practical solutions to help citizens be more active in ways [that] suit [the] local community’s needs.”

Head of Strategic Transformation, NWS Alliance

What we've achieved so far

We continue to do a lot of listening, but we've brought greater focus to the area in our existing programmes:

- We've ensured a high profile for our Club4 (Holiday Activity & Food) work in the area, running an activity camp in a local primary school and giving secondary aged young people access to day trips through a trusted provider – a model that's unique to this area.
- Our work in schools has seen our Wellbeing Warriors programme repromoted. This lets Year 4 pupils explore wellbeing issues (including mental health) through the lens of PA.
- We supported an Asian women's yoga group thanks to a Sport England grant which progressed to a walking group and culminated in a cycling project, incorporating bike loans and cycle training for those less confident.
- The area's leisure centre was the hub for a large number of activities being offered as part of the 2022 Specsavers Surrey Youth Games which is aimed at disadvantaged youth. Free inclusive dance, street basketball and girls' football was offered to beginners for 6-8 weeks, ahead of them joining other young people from Surrey in a final celebratory event.

New initiatives have also been added to the mix:

- This Mum Moves training helps midwives and health visitors in the area have conversations about being an active mum.
- Money from the local ICP has been used to explore issues around Type 2 diabetes with ethnically diverse residents. Work is taking place with these communities– and their primary care networks – to try and identify suitable PA opportunities.
- Social prescribers and charities have been consulted to plug PA gaps and work on an activity buddy system to improve mental health. We've also worked with Public Health colleagues to offer healthy eating advice and access to cervical screening.
- Four local women have joined the Project 500 programme which was conceived to boost the number of females championing PA and we hope to find more of these 'people like me' role models. This work, alongside contact with other groups such as the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum is helping to deliver initiatives such as ladies-only gym sessions for Asian residents and female only swimming.



What we learned

It wasn't a surprise, but with so many partners working in the area it was sometimes difficult to encourage them to engage with PA-specific issues. This has demonstrated the importance of investing time to build relationships with key individuals before the onset of a programme like this – both in the community and in official bodies working with them.

Some groups operating in the same space didn't always seem to appreciate the benefits (for residents) that could arise from being more coordinated. We continue to play a role as partner and co-facilitator to help join up the network.

There's a need for a base level of resident engagement and analysis of the type of work that we're advocating. Our Project 500 team are delivering some of that resident voice but a more formal survey will be useful and we're working with partners to co-create one.

What next?

We are part of a working group focussing on a DfT walking and cycling social prescription bid for the area.

We hope to use funding from Sport England's 'Together Fund' to develop activities for men that will be identified through the residents' survey.

We are also working on trialling loans of wearable fitness devices through the town's library to see if there is appetite amongst residents to monitor their daily activity levels. This will be promoted in Canalside.

A trial of the Tribe app – a hyperlocal social network that can be used to promote physical activity opportunities from local providers – is being funded by the local health alliance (formerly CCG).

