

# Study finds social marketing an effective tool in boosting physical activity

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(Medical Xpress)—Social marketing has been found to be an effective tool in boosting recruitment and retention into regular physical activity sessions in a deprived area, according to new research from the University of Bristol published in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

The British Heart Foundation-funded study, led by researchers from the University's Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Services, aimed to test the effect of using social marketing techniques to increase participation in [physical activity](#) in a low-income area.

The researchers designed a six-month social [marketing campaign](#) central to which was a new physical activity programme entitled 'Fit and Fab'—comprising five different sessions, each delivered once a

week—in a deprived area of Bristol.

The team then used promotional techniques, which included outdoor banners, street leafleting, leaflet distribution via schools, community groups, a poster campaign, local press, two taster sessions, a loyalty scheme, campaign blog and a text campaign, to proactively promote the 'Fit and Fab' programme.

Data on recruitment, participation and drop-out over the six-month period in the intervention, and a similar control area and at pre-existing physical activity sessions in the intervention area were collected weekly to evaluate and compare participation in the physical activity sessions.

The results showed positive findings with recruitment into intervention sessions significantly greater than into pre-existing and control area sessions in months one, five and six. Attendance at intervention sessions was significantly greater in all six months compared to pre-existing and control area sessions. For example, in month one an average of 38.83 people attended each intervention session compared to 7.17 in pre-existing sessions and 4.67 in the control area. In month six the average attendance figures were 28.72 compared to 8.28 and 4.00 respectively.

Janet Withall, the study's lead researcher from the University's Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences in the School for Policy Studies, said: ""Good levels of physical activity are important for the prevention of a range of chronic diseases. These conditions are more prevalent in low-income areas where physical activity levels are consistently lower. The [public health](#) benefits of increasing physical activity in this group are clear.

"Although there have been previous initiatives to target those who took little exercise, our findings indicate a more cost-efficient and effective way of getting people to take part in longer-term physical activity

programmes."

The British Heart Foundation-funded study, entitled 'The effect of a community-based social marketing campaign on recruitment and retention of low-income groups into physical activity programmes – a controlled before-and-after study' by Janet Withall, Russell Jago and Kenneth R Fox from the University of Bristol Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, is published in the journal BMC Public Health.

**More information:** 'The effect of a community-based social marketing campaign on recruitment and retention of low-income groups into physical activity programmes – a controlled before-and-after study' by Janet Withall, Russell Jago and Kenneth R Fox from the University of Bristol Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, is published in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

Provided by University of Bristol

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