



Active Launceston Tasmania, Australia

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Introduction:

In a short period of time, the multi award winning Active Launceston project has developed a strong community profile, an excellent reputation and a highly-recognisable community identity.

Across numerous settings, Active Launceston has managed to achieve many of the aims, objectives, and strategies that were outlined in the original Project Management Plan.

The project's events, programs, website and organisational structure, including the partnership, have gained accolades across the country.

The project has now attracted over \$910 000 worth of funding.

Project Summary:

Active Launceston is a community driven project aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Launceston through increased participation in physical activity.

University of Tasmania (UTAS) is leading the project in partnership with the State Government Department of Sport and Recreation, Launceston City Council and the Tasmanian Community Fund.

The project was initiated as an 18 month pilot in June 2008. Due to its initial success the project will now be ongoing for a period of three years (until Dec 2012).

The Active Launceston project has three objectives;

1. Identify and engage with relevant groups to coordinate, cooperate and commit to the goal of Active Launceston
2. Enhance and increase the opportunities for the community's participation in physical activity.
3. Identify and develop resources that support and monitor increased participation in physical activity.

Active Launceston provides free physical activity opportunities along with resources for the community to increase participation and targets it's programs and events towards groups within the community with an identified need.

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One of the long term aims of Active Launceston is to reduce lifestyle risk factors for chronic disease by facilitating engagement of all members of the community in physical activity, healthy lifestyle behaviours and providing access to resources to improve and monitor wellbeing. The Active Launceston model also looks at maximising the effectiveness, reach and capacity of current strategies in the community in physical activity to improve individual well-being.

The Active Launceston project was scoped around the identified lack of coordination in the community for physical activities. It was evident that there were many other services for health and wellbeing i.e. Eat Well Tas, Quit Tasmania and Heart Foundation etc however there was not an organised authority to promote the benefits of physical activity locally or more importantly deliver a selection of inclusive physical activity opportunities to the Launceston community. Rather than duplicating or reinventing the wheel, Active Launceston initiatives are designed to add value to existing successful local programs, fill any identified gaps in provision and develop capacity within the community to ensure sustainability.

Initiatives are in line with the vision of the Tasmania's Plan for Physical Activity 2011 – 2021 developed by the Premiers Physical Activity Council , which is "All Tasmanians experience and enjoy the many benefits of regular physical activity."

Initiatives are designed to overcome barriers community members have to participation in physical activity and particularly, a lack of opportunities, high costs associated with participation, social disconnection and/or a lack of knowledge of the opportunities available in our community. Older adults, those with a disability, those from a lower socio economic background, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those who suffer from chronic conditions have particular barriers to participation.

Outcomes and Benefits:

Active Launceston programs and initiatives have a diverse range of individual and community benefits. These benefits include but are not limited to;

- Removing social isolation and building social connections
- Improving the physical activity levels and overall health and wellbeing of the greater Launceston community and in turn, the people of Tasmania
- Having the ability to change the lives of community members who are less fortunate
- Providing access to physical activity opportunities to those who otherwise would not participate
- Providing an economic stimulus to the community (particularly in the fitness sector)
- Providing leadership and education opportunities for students

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Active Launceston initiatives increase physical activity levels through:

- Increasing the number of opportunities available for physical activity
- Increasing the knowledge of existing opportunities available in the community
- Increasing the awareness of the importance of physical activity to individual and community health and wellbeing.

Research suggests there is no quick fix or single approach to improving community and individual health and wellbeing. Rather it recommends that a long term commitment is required from across the sector with multiple initiatives and interventions taking place at all levels. This type of approach will enable a level of cultural change to transpire in the community and is exactly what The Active Launceston project has started to achieve.

Evaluation:

The Active Launceston pilot project was fully evaluated by independent research company Community Focus. The following is an excerpt from this report where Janine Combes the report's author suggests that;

“The Active Launceston Pilot Project has created a model of how to engage a community in physical activity and well-being activities. Active Launceston has demonstrated how effective it is for Local Government, business, Universities, the media and the community sector to work together in a partnership to coordinate and promote physical activity programs within a locality base”

The pilot project evaluation report demonstrates that participation in Active Launceston is helping to increase the level of physical activity in the City:

- Rates of participation in moderate to vigorous activity have increased by almost 13% in the Launceston area since the project was introduced 18 months ago.
- 89.9% of respondents to an online survey indicated that Active Launceston had taught them more about the opportunities to be physically active
- 46.6% of those interviewed at the Expo in City Park in 2009 and 50% of those completing an online survey said that the program *had* assisted them to increase their level of physical activity.

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In summary, Active Launceston has been successful as it has:

- clear management structures
- a key driver (Project Manager) who can work collaboratively and is a good networker
- sought to build on what exists instead of replacing or duplicating other initiatives
- a focus which is ongoing and strategic
- high profile partners
- strong media presence and effort put into the brand
- a wide range of activities and events, including ‘tasters’
- a range of sites/locations
- specific, targeted programs as well as general ones.

Active Launceston provides a practical case study and an evidenced based framework to inform physical activity provision for other communities across the state, the nation and the globe.

**For more information about the Active Launceston project contact
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Reference:

Combes, J. 2010, **Active Launceston Pilot Project Evaluation Report**, Community Focus, Tasmania.

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