



# ASPIRE

## The Medway Journey

09. 2019 - 03. 2023

A wooden sign with the text 'MICH PLOT 05' in green, bold, capital letters. The sign is made of two horizontal wooden planks. It is positioned in front of a dense garden with various green plants and some small yellow flowers. The sign is attached to a wooden frame that appears to be part of a raised garden bed or a trellis system. The background is a mix of green foliage and wooden structures, creating a natural and rustic setting.

# ASPIRE Partners





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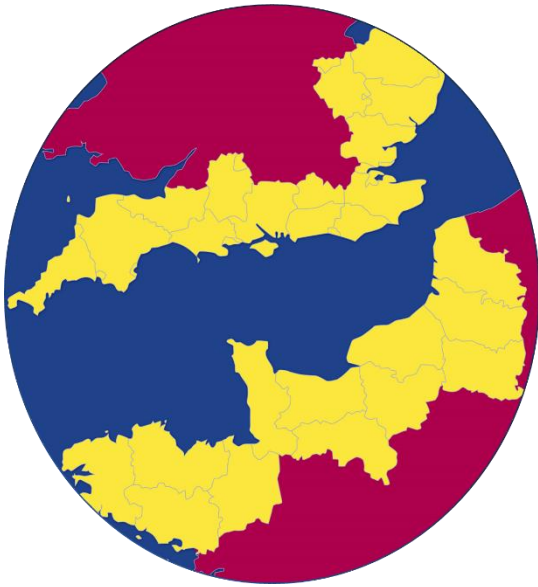
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# Introduction



## **ASPIRE (Adding to Social capital and individual Potential In disadvantaged REgions)**

As a result of concerns over rising obesity and unemployment rates across Europe, and the link between them, partners across Northern France and Southern England came together to collaborate on the design of an innovative programme to tackle these issues and to establish community hubs for this purpose. The aim of ASPIRE was to give people living with obesity/overweight and/or unemployed the tools they needed to make healthier lifestyle choices and improve their wellbeing and/or employability. To have a direct impact on health as a result of the intervention, e.g. weight loss, and an indirect impact as a result of an improvement in wellbeing, e.g. improved self-esteem, and reduction in health inequalities.

The ASPIRE project was co-financed by participating partners and Interreg France (Channel) England Programme: European Regional Development Fund. The project had a total budget of €10 million and ran from September 2019 to March 2023 with 3 months project closure from April to June 2023.

# Foreword



When Medway Community Healthcare CIC (MCH) signed up in September 2019 to commence on the ASPIRE journey with the other, now 15, partners from across Northern France and Southern England no one could have predicted how events would unfold across the world. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic we are more aware than ever of how the wider determinates of health impact on people's health outcomes and it has highlighted the need for an increase in the support made available to people and communities in areas of high deprivation, like Medway. Alongside of this a change of attitude is required by employers to allows those living with increased weight, commonly higher in areas of high deprivation, to gain and stay in employment thereby increasing their opportunity to improve their and their family's economic situation. It is hoped that the ASPIRE Practical Guides – Obesity and weight-based stigma in the workplace, one of the outputs of the ASPIRE project, will go some way to changing this attitude. <http://bit.ly/ASPIREguide>

In this document I have outlined the ASPIRE journey in Medway using the 10 steps of the ASPIRE model, another output of the ASPIRE project, that provides a blue print for organization to develop Initiatives like the ASPIRE programme. <https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/>

Despite the challenges that we have all faced I am proud of the achievements and outputs from the project and the work of the Medway ASPIRE Team who came together with the local community and key stakeholders to co-design, develop and deliver a programme that has significantly impacted on the lives of many of the participants.

It has been an honour to lead the ASPIRE project on behalf of MCH.

**Julie Webster, ASPIRE Programme Lead, MCH.**



# Step 1

## Understanding the local context

<https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-1/>

It was essential to have localised data to make the ASPIRE programme relevant to the needs of the local population and respond to local issues.

Medway is a unitary authority district and conurbation in Kent, South East England. In 2019 it had a population of 278,016.

The main towns in the conurbation are (from west to east): Strood, Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham, and Rainham. These are traditionally known as the Medway Towns. Many other towns and villages such as Allhallows, Frindsbury and Brompton lie within the conurbation.



Medway has a total of 37 neighborhoods ranked in the 20% most deprived areas nationally, 14 of which are in the 10% most deprived areas nationally.

Overweight and obesity levels and unemployment levels are higher than the national average.

[Employment data for Medway](#)

<http://www.wholesystemobesity.uk/medway>

Evidence shows that high levels of obesity often coincide with high rates of unemployment and that the longer a person is unemployed, the higher the rates of obesity, with rates reaching up to 32.7% after a year or more of unemployment.

In 2017, when the idea to begin the ASPIRE application for funding was first formed, the rate of people aged 16-64 years claiming job seekers allowance for more than twelve months in Medway was 4.9 per 1,000 population, which was significantly higher compared to England (3.5 per 1,000 population) and the South East (1.9 per 1,000 population).

# Step 2

## Selection of the location and engagement with partners <https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-2/>

In order for the ASPIRE programme to succeed, it was essential to find a suitable location for the Medway hub and work with local stakeholders.

When considering the location of the ASPIRE hub a variety of aspects were considered, for example, facilities and access for disabled participants, welcoming environment that would put people at their ease, and links to public transport. Using a combination of statistics and local knowledge we also considered the needs of the local population and what was already available and being provided locally. The final decision to locate the main ASPIRE hub at the Shaw Memorial Hall and install the ASPIRE kitchen at the same site was supported by information provided by one of our formal ASPIRE project partners, C3 Collaborating for Health, through the use of CHESS® (Community Health Engagement Survey Solutions) with people in the community around the Shaw Memorial Hall. Created by C3's global health associate Dr Denise Stevens, CHESS® includes a mobile tool that equips local communities in identifying and mapping the barriers they face every day when making choices about diet, activity and healthy living. <https://www.c3health.org/ourprogrammes/community/>

However, due to the wide geographical area of Medway a decision was also made to have some satellite locations for delivery of the ASPIRE programme, e.g. the allotments at Fort Amherst, Chatham, and the concept of a hub and spoke model was implemented.



Please join Medway Community Healthcare and C3 for the

**ASPIRE CHESS community walk**  
**Monday 21st June**  
**10.00–13.30**

**Meet:** St Augustine's Church, Rock Avenue, Gillingham, ME7 5PW

Take part in a guided community walk around our neighbourhood using C3's CHESS™ tool. Explore how our local environment can either help or harm our health. Share your ideas for change.

Receive a £25 supermarket voucher as thanks for your time

To find out more or take part, please contact Hayley on [Hayley.almond@nhs.net](mailto:Hayley.almond@nhs.net) or 07795 267 282





# Step 3

## Responding to the needs of the target audience <https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-3/>

It was important to listen and understand the target population's expectations in order to provide a "tailor made" programme responding to the expectations of the local population.

### How did we listen in Medway?



A formal research project called "Building ASPIRE together" was undertaken as early in the project as possible. Due to COVID restrictions all focus groups and one to one interviews with the target population and local stakeholders had to take place on line. This made the recruitment process more time consuming but the understanding that was gained provided a blueprint for the next steps in the ASPIRE model.



ASPIRE MEDWAY  
STUDY SUMMARY - F



# Step 4

## Recruitment of the ASPIRE Participants

<https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-4/>

ASPIRE is aimed at people who do not know “where to start” and who would like to gradually reintegrate into society. It is aimed at people who need to re-establish social links, who have a lack of self-confidence, who feel lonely, people who want to take care of themselves...

This was supported by the information we gathered in the focus groups as part of the “Building the ASPIRE together” project. People told us that they didn’t want their weight to be the first things we talked to them about. They wanted to feel better about themselves, learn new skills and be supported. It was important to help individuals build their self-esteem and value themselves which increases motivation to make changes to improve health and wellbeing.

The language we used in recruitment was also a key thing to get right and some of the people from the focus groups designed the recruitment leaflet.

A wide range of methods were used to recruit participants including social media, word of mouth, sign posting by professionals, the ASPIRE Team attending key Medway events like the Medway Mile and through raised awareness of the ASPIRE programme via the Health MOT Roadshows, conducted by one of the ASPIRE project partners, wellbeing people, like this one at Fort Amherst for National Allotment week.



# Step 5

## Building the ASPIRE activities

<https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-5/>

It was important to meet the expectations of the target group so that they felt involved and to increase their commitment to the project. A “tailor-made” programme responding to the expectations of the cohort and the professionals around the themes of nutrition, physical activity and mental well-being.

We used the learning and information from the “Building ASPIRE together” as the starting point.

Through the discussions the following core themes were identified:

- Weight loss
- Employability
- Individual journeys of change
- Support
- Belonging to a group

Through further exploration of the above core themes a number of sub -themes emerged:

- Motivation
- Defining and measuring success
- Signposting
- Peer support
- Being heard
- Being free to be authentic
- Giving worth
- Overcoming barriers.

Not only did this start the conversation about the content of the ASPIRE programme but also gave us clear information of the expectations of the target participants, the environment we needed to create but also the skills of the ASPIRE Team required to deliver the programme. For example, people wanted to be part of groups to be able to get peer support that helped with their motivation and people wanted to monitor their own weight loss as it was all about their journey. Keys skills of the Team would need to include good facilitations skills to ensure everyone was heard and motivational interview techniques to support people to identify their intrinsic motivations.

# Step 6

## Implementing the ASPIRE activities

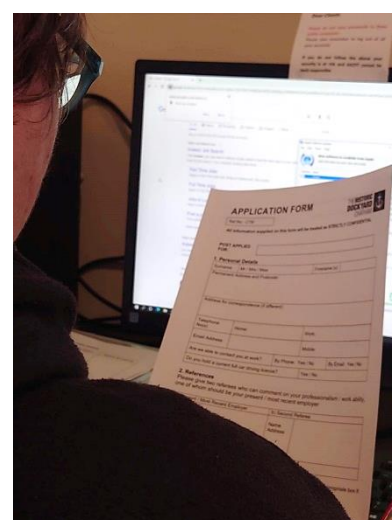
<https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-6/>

The implemented programme was designed to meet the needs of the participants so needed to be a mix of information giving, skills enhancement and increasing confidence, motivation, peer support, improved wellbeing and overcoming barriers and enjoyable.

It was essential to have a highly skilled team that helped people to improve their self-esteem thus enabling them to make better choices. Any specific skills that were not available within in the team were purchased from external providers, e.g. carpentry and joinery workshops.

**ASPIRE Medway Timetable**

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
<b>MON</b>	<b>Lewis Big Fun Small Change @Shaw Memorial Hall</b> 10am-12pm (weight loss group) <b>Sarah Boccia @ Medway Archives</b> 10-11.45am	<b>Lewis/Rachel Choir @Shaw Memorial</b> 1-2pm <b>Sarah Gardening @Shaw Memorial Hall</b> 2.30-3.30pm	<b>Lisa Community Yoga @Chatham Grammar School C3</b> 6.15-7.15pm
<b>TUES</b>	<b>Woodwork @The Octopus Foundation</b>  <b>Lisa Community Walk C3</b> 10am-11am <b>Lewis Art @Shaw Memorial Hall</b> 11am-1pm  <b>Pam Art @The French Hospital</b> 11am-1pm <b>Sarah Art @Allhallows</b> 11am-1pm	<b>Woodwork @The Octopus Foundation</b>  <b>Brian Employability/IT Workshop @Magpie Centre</b> 1-3.30pm  <b>Briony Qigong @Allhallows</b> 1-3pm	
<b>WED</b>	<b>Lewis/Tina Low Impact Exercise to Music @Shaw Memorial Hall</b> 10-11am	<b>Sarah Gardening @Allotments, Fort Amherst</b> 12-2.30pm  <b>Lisa Cooking @ASPIRE Kitchen St Augustine's</b> 1-3pm	
<b>THURS</b>		<b>Briony Discovery Wellbeing Group @Centre Anahata</b> 12.30-2.30pm  <b>Sarah Gardening Group St.Augustine's Church</b> 1-3pm	
<b>FRI</b>	<b>Lisa Cooking @ASPIRE Kitchen St Augustine's</b> 10am-12pm  <b>Brian Employability/IT Workshop @Shaw Memorial Hall</b> 10am-12.30pm	<b>Briony Qi-gong @Rochester Library</b> 2-4pm	





# Step 7

## Evaluating actions

<https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-7/>

It was important to encourage participants to complete the evaluation tools to enable us to measure the impact of ASPIRE programme on behavior change and observe the effectiveness of the activities we implemented.

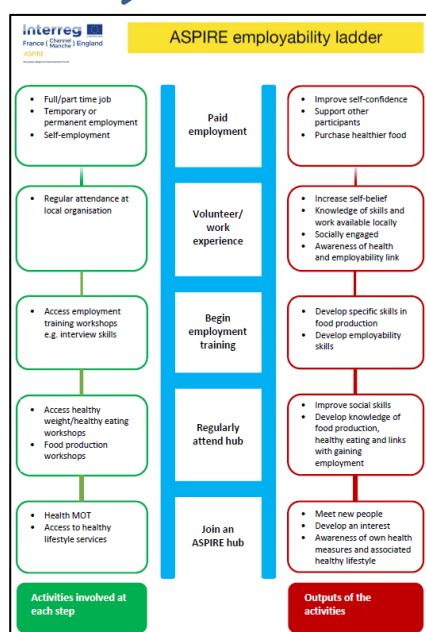
Alongside the ASPIRE evaluation tools the employability ladder was used to capture people's progress and individuals measured their own journey via the wellbeing people health kiosks, taking part

in the photo voice element of the ASPIRE evaluation, keeping personal records, agreeing to be case studies and a few took part in the Medway ASPIRE video.

... "cooked with ingredients I've never tried before"...

... "gained confidence. Something I've never had before"...

... "I have got a job because of ASPIRE"...



Once available the final evaluation report will be found at [www.medwaycommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/ASPIRE](http://www.medwaycommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/ASPIRE)

# Step 8

## Continuous improvement of the programme

<https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-8/>

As part of the co-design aspect of ASPIRE, and to ensure participants gained the most from their participation in ASPIRE, it was important to take a step back, review the activities that were having least success and adapt and add in different activities to meet the real needs of the participants.

At key points, for example at the end of a cohort of a particular element of the ASPIRE programme, it was important to review the activities to ensure they were meeting the needs of the target population. As a result, some activities were adapted, some discontinued and some new activities were added into the menu of activities. Below is a list of some examples:

Employability went from groups to one to one coaching

Content of some of the sessions around nutrition was adapted

Industry Ready Catering with Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate was added

Art was added and streamed to 2 additional locations

Paracise was re-branded as low impact fun movement to music



# Step 9

## Budgeting the project <https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-9/>

Ensuring there were sufficient funding to deliver the ASPIRE programme in the manner that met the needs of the target population was essential for its success.

When we started to consider the size of the budget needed for this aspirational project we knew we would need a team that comprised of different attributes to deliver the different elements. We also knew we wanted to be able to offer the participants on the ASPIRE programme an opportunity to feel very supported so a high staff to participant ratio was needed to allow for enough one to one time for motivational interviews and job coaching if applicable. We wanted to be able to offer ASPIRE to small groups so that everyone taking part had an opportunity to have a voice.



Some of these decisions were based on expertise with previous health and wellbeing projects but these early thoughts were supported from the information that emerged from the focus groups with the target population in the “Building ASPIRE together” project.

Focus group participants told us they wanted to be guided through the project and have the opportunity to build their menu of activities from those available to help them achieve their goals and aspirations.

Other costs that had to be considered related to the implementation of the activities for example, purchasing of tools and equipment, room and venue hire and commissioning of external expertise for specific elements.

The return on investment is difficult to calculate as participants on the ASPIRE programme may also be receiving some support from other agencies however, health and wellbeing programmes like ASPIRE certainly have their part to play in the bid to reduce the economic burden of living with weight problems and unemployment.



# Step 10

## Project sustainable <https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/step-10/>

This project is replicable and adaptable to all regions of the UK where the rates of overweight, obesity and unemployment are quite high by following the 10-step model as set out in this document and available at <https://aspire-wellbeing.eu/>

The ASPIRE programme was always designed to be a rung on the ladder of people's journey and sign posting was always as aspect from the beginning as identifies in the focus groups of the "Building the ASPIRE together" project.

In Medway certain elements of the ASPIRE programme will be continuing and the social capital that has been added in Medway, e.g. ASPIRE Kitchen, ASPIRE Greenhouse and mature ASPIRE Allotments will continue to be used by community groups to improve health and wellbeing as will the ASPIRE hub at Shaw memorial Hall.

Additional funding has already been applied for to continue specific elements.

MCH is committed to ensuring there is a legacy to the ASPIRE programme outside of those mentioned above and will be working closely with Medway stakeholders especially those already who have been involved ASPIRE and Medway Council Public Health to identify future opportunities for ASPIRE.

The learning and resources from the "Building the ASPIRE together" project and the ASPIRE project will support future initiatives to improve the health, wellbeing and opportunities of the people of Medway.

# And finally, thank you...



To Interreg France (Channel) England Programme: European Regional Development Fund for co-funding this project, all the ASPIRE project partners but especially our colleagues Alice, Anna, Sophie and Janet at the Health and Europe Centre, Christine, Liz and Antonio at C3 Collaborating for Health and Ben, Phil and Julie at wellbeing people, all of whom we worked with closely.

Dr W. Hickson and Dr J Teke for their excellent work on the “Building the ASPIRE together” project and the participants and local stakeholders who took part in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

Our ASPIRE volunteers John and Steve who were on the ASPIRE journey from start to finish and gave up many hours of their time helping to set up and maintain the allotments at Fort Amherst and refurbish the Shaw Memorial Hall to establish the Medway ASPIRE Hub.

Executive Team and Board at MCH especially Martin and Louise, our Exec Sponsor Helen and my line manager Chris for all their support, Angela for her financial expertise and patience and all of the MCH comms team.

To Pam, Deborah and all of the ASPIRE Team for all their hard work to make ASPIRE in Medway a success.

All our external partners in Medway, of whom there are too many to mention personally but especially Amanda and the team at St Augustine’s Church, Jon, Liz, Maddie and the team at the Octopus Foundation, Matt and the team at the Paramount Foundation and Neil, Tracy and Tracey at Gillingham Street Angels. Scott and Dan and their teams at Medway Council.

Last but very definitely not least all of the ASPIRE participants who took part in ASPIRE and helped us evaluate the programme.

The last word goes to some of the Medway ASPIRE Team, some of our partners and some of our participants. Link to the ASPIRE film

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=bANQEDJnEOs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bANQEDJnEOs)







Thank  
you for  
reading