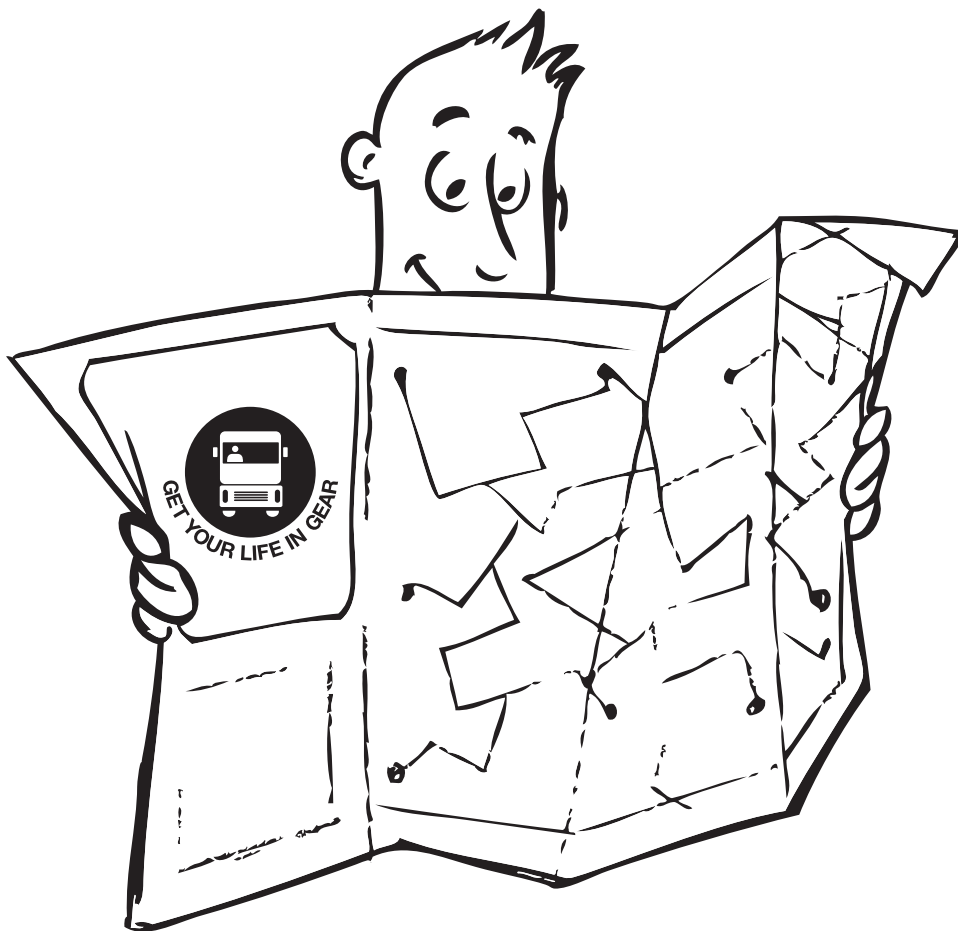


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# DRIVING MEN'S WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAMMES: THE 'HOW TO' GUIDE

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This guide outlines practical tips for implementing male focused interventions. It seeks to assist anyone who is trying to interest men in their health – particularly those who are proving hard to access. It is based on the real life experiences in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating the Get Your Life in Gear initiative. The aim of the programme was to support truck drivers to eat healthily, lead physically active lives, and attain and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

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# ABOUT GET YOUR LIFE IN GEAR

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Get Your Life in Gear was a 12-week intervention developed in 2009 using a social marketing approach. The aim of the programme was to support truck drivers to eat healthily, lead physically active lives, and attain and maintain a healthy lifestyle. It was piloted through a workplace and service station in NI, and a service station with accompanying restaurant in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). There was a total of 79 drivers recruited. The programme consisted of an initial health check followed by participation in a 12-week programme with supporting material provided. Participants received a Get Your Life in Gear starter pack comprising a cool bag which contained a booklet – The Road to Good Health, a pedometer, tape measure, pen and a bottle of water. Drivers also had the option of signing up to receive motivational text messages each week for the duration of the programme and they were also encouraged to take part in a walking challenge with a chance to win vouchers. At the end of the programme period, participants were invited to return for a follow-up health check.

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## KEY LEARNINGS

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### GETTING STARTED

- **Reflect** on your own biases/assumptions/prejudices/awareness, etc. regarding men and **become familiar** with ‘the world of men’ and the impact of masculinity on men’s health. This will help you relate more meaningfully (empathetically) with men and the issues that affect them
- **Develop realistic aims and objectives** – they will be the foundation of the project and will also guide your evaluation
- **Make a plan** and realistic timelines. Remember to factor in adequate development time (including pilot work) – don’t underestimate the time it all takes, even the simplest of things!  
*Our development phase took much longer than anticipated – agreeing content for booklets, getting sign-off, arranging dates for checks all take time.*
- **Start small** and build on your success – you will not be able to change everything at once
- **Develop suitable partnerships** – organisations with similar goals can help expand the reach of your campaign and offer value
- **Understand the forces working for and against you** (direct and indirect competition). Undertaking exercises such as force-field and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses can be helpful  
*Although the recession had begun during the planning stages of the project, we underestimated the impact it would have on our activities over such a short space of time – be flexible.*
- **Prepare for failure** as well as success – remember, while you can plan for all contingencies, you do not have total control over the outcomes. Don’t forget, there’s learning in all of it!  
*In the formative research the drivers advised us on a location for the pilot – In reality it didn’t live up to their expectations and might not have been the best choice.*

### CASE HISTORY

Paul was a jovial man in his late fifties who became known to recruiters on the first day of health checks. He returned on day 2 for his health check. When completing the questionnaire he admitted that he drank heavily most nights of the week. Following a long chat with the nurse, he said ‘that’s me now that’s me, I’m going to get sorted out. I have a friend already in the AA and next chance I get I am going to go with him’.



## WHEN DEVELOPING YOUR PROJECT

- **Don't try and reinvent the wheel** - look for local, national and international examples of projects that have similar themes and learn from their strengths and weaknesses. You might even be able to use some of their materials or evaluation instruments  
*We found lots of useful examples on the island including Farmers Have Hearts, Royal Mail/An Post campaigns, Irish Cancer Society's Man Manuals, Irish Heart Foundation's work with construction workers. There were good examples in England also, e.g. Tommy the Trucker.*
- **Pick up the phone!** Talk to people who have done similar work before and learn from their experience
- **Find out the real issue** – Speak to the target audience (we used in-depth interviews and focus groups), they know best - discover the barriers and motivators to change. Remember – your issue might not be their issue!
- **Involve the target audience** in designing the project – develop it for them by them. Pre-test material with them to check if its relevant and appropriate
- **Consider the costs for participants.** It's not just time and motivation but programme components such as text messaging can incur financial expenses for participants. Also time is money for the drivers – if they are not driving they could be losing out
- **Remain flexible/responsive to men's needs** – strategies and plans should not be developed in a vacuum
- **There is no 'one size fits all'.** All men are different. There is no single, easily packaged solution to getting men involved. What works in one scenario may fail miserably in another.

## ENVIRONMENT

- **Go to your target audience** - make it easy for them to take part, be it research or programme delivery  
*We used service stations and a workplace to conduct our health checks.*
- **Assess the location** for delivery suitability – take the time to go visit it and observe what is going on. Don't always go on what others say – sometimes you need to see it for yourself. Ensure there are adequate parking facilities and space for consultations (if applicable)  
*We hired trailers to facilitate health checks on one pilot site as there was no room within the service station to do so. Remember to check that trailers are high enough to accommodate height measure, contain adequate seating, and that heating is adequate depending on the weather. Also ensure there is electricity supply and adequate generator!*
- **Improvise where possible** - use the facilities that are available to you and where possible adapt  
*We also used room dividers with appropriate spacing between booths on pilot site 3 to protect the privacy of men while participating in health checks.*
- **Timing is everything** - plan and choose a time of the year that will have the largest impact, cold and dark weather can be off putting especially if you are talking healthy eating and physical activity. It also has safety implications  
*Discussions with management on one site indicated that 5-10pm would be optimal for this but this meant that it was dark and recruiters could not do much in terms of promotion and also many drivers did not come into the restaurant instead staying in their trucks. Safety issues on-site meant that recruiters could not approach parked trucks.*
- **Environmental change is crucial to facilitating behaviour change.** As all the books say a combination of top down and bottom up approaches is required.  
*We tried to encourage workplaces and service stations to provide healthier options but this proved the least successful aspect of the pilot.*

## CASE HISTORY

Peter, was very annoyed about the weight he gained since he started driving and the employment conditions he endures on a daily basis. While completing the questionnaire he became quite emotional about the loneliness of his life and job and stated that he wished he sometimes wasn't here at all. He felt as though he had no options – 'What else can I do?' he said, head in his hands, 'I have no qualifications, I have nothing else'. He spent over an hour with the nurse.



## THE KEY TO COMMUNICATION

- **You can't beat face-to-face!** Posters are good - people are better! Especially if the intervention is new and unusual - recruiters male or female are able to talk the drivers through the process and build their confidence  
*We found that an enthusiastic recruiter or workplace champion really enhanced recruitment. Having someone to speak with and answer queries can move men from (pre)contemplation to action!*
- **Identify a 'gate keeper'** - this person could be someone who is trusted and well liked by the potential participants who is willing to act as an ambassador for the project and bring people on board  
*Good support from management – e.g. in one site they sent a group mail in advance of the first health checks to notify all staff of the programme. We also had the support of a very dedicated staff member – he greatly enhanced recruitment rates when he was on-site to assist us! His knowledge of the drivers' schedules and personalities was crucial.*
- **Talk to men on their level** – be direct, honest and make it relevant. You don't have to be a man to start the conversation but it does depend on the topic
- **Women (partners, family members, wives and girlfriends) can help** get messages to men so don't discount them but equally don't put all the responsibility on them  
*We issued letters at 6 and 12 weeks to participants using their home addresses – this increased confidentiality for those recruited through the workplace as many did not wish their employers to be aware of their circumstances but also on the off-chance that their families would become aware of their participation in the programme.*
- **If at first you don't succeed, try again.** It can take time to develop relationships/interest for some men
- **Be visible.** Whether its recruiters or posters make sure people recognise who you are and what you are about – this will avoid suspicion and get people talking  
*We placed recruitment posters in areas where truck drivers would congregate – smoking area, driver hatch and canteen areas.*
- **Get people in the area excited and bring them on board as recruiters.** Use local media, other meeting points in the area and key people
- **Make sure men see what is on offer as being 'normal'.** Few people will come to a programme if they are classed as being 'problematic'; 'at risk'; 'weak'; 'needy' or 'lacking'  
*Recruiters and nurses were briefed to normalise the issue and not stigmatise potential participants. Many drivers commented that services such as ours should be made mandatory for truck drivers to make them more accessible.*
- **Create safe spaces/practices** – and let men know this is the case.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU INCLUDE?

- **Men like health checks** – they provide them with a cue to action which can be linked with nutrition and physical activity - men like having tangible results from a qualified person  
*Briefing in health check providers was a very worthwhile process. There were differences between NI and ROI in services offered (and guidelines for blood pressure!) so make sure you know what you are getting in advance so you can incorporate any necessary changes.*
- **Don't force the issue** – some men won't think that your programme or the topic is for them. It's important to know when to let go. Gauge where they are at and pitch your communication/actions at this level.
- **Competition is a hook** – men often come to health checks with friends and therefore compare results  
*We used a walking challenge (kindly adapted from the Irish Heart Foundation) with a prize draw for those who completed it and returned their details. Other competitions such as group activities in the workplace were not feasible for us due to the transient nature of this workforce and long hours – many said they would rather go home and spend time with their families rather than participating in a soccer tournament.*

## CASE HISTORY

Bob, around 40, stands outside the service station having a smoke with a few other men who don't seem to have any interest in the programme. They spend a long time talking to recruiters, making fun of them and telling them that they were wasting their time, that they were fine and have no interest in health or a health check. The recruiters provided information on the programme and leaflets which the men take out of politeness. The men then leave to go back to work. That afternoon John comes back to have a health check, he looks a little embarrassed but is determined to go through with it. An hour later one of his friends follows suit.



## GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS

- **Banter is important** – it loosens them up (and you!) and gives you a route in to give your messages
- **Use positive images of men**
- **Use humour** to grab attention – it works!
- **Interesting tips and facts** get men's attention
- **Don't flood them with too much information** – give key messages and keep it practical, action-focused, realistic and achievable
- **Men do talk** – contrary to popular opinion. It's important to give them the space to do so, actively **listen** and show **empathy**. Always be supportive, encouraging and never judgemental
- **Know your boundaries** – If someone has underlying issues that come to the surface during their visit, know when (and how) to make a referral and to whom. When a crisis arises it's too late to start looking around for sources of help.

*It would be useful to have details of health services in the area on hand for such situations.*

- **Use the most effective channels to get your messages across**

*We originally thought we would have a different poster for each week of the programme to reinforce the various messages in the booklet. We thought it more realistic to have two posters – one with a healthy eating message and one with a physical activity message – that would be displayed, each for 6 weeks.*

*We used motivational text messages as reminders to participants and also a 'call to action' as part of the programme. We gave participants in NI the option of signing up for them but had low uptake so automatically signed up ROI participants while giving them an 'opt-out' option. The messages were found very useful by those who received them and a good 'call to action'.*

- **Don't underestimate the power of word of mouth**

## PARTNERSHIPS

- **Develop a steering/advisory group** of key 'experts' in the area who will be able to guide you throughout the project. Meetings can be formal or informal and should include people who have influence over your target audience
- **Develop partnerships with the organisations/environment** you are delivering the programme in  
*We held a number of meetings with the pilot organisations during the development of the campaign and had regular email/telephone contact to keep them updated on developments.*
- **Choose the right partners** – make sure that the partners you choose add value not devalue the project  
*Within the formative research the drivers indicated that they would feel suspicious if the industry regulators were part of the project.*
- **Be clear** about roles and responsibilities, goals and expectations  
*It can be daunting for some partners when you lay out all of your expectations in front of them and likewise when they do so. Partnership working involves honesty, trust and mutual respect.*
- **Encourage investment in the project** – monetary and non-monetary, this should increase commitment and buy-in

## CASE HISTORY

John is a 45 year old man who approached us to take part in the programme. His marriage broke down a few years ago and he is now a lone parent who struggles to pay the mortgage and support his daughter through her final year of school. To pay the bills he works long hours and drives 6 days a week but when he returns at night there is no hope of there being a dinner prepared. He ends up either frying a steak for himself or eating a takeaway, then smokes a few cigarettes and goes to bed. John returned at the follow up health check and had a long chat with a recruiter before going into the nurse. When asked for any other thoughts on the programme "Just for once" he said, "it's so nice to think that someone out there cares about us"



## EVALUATION

- **Observe** – you will be surprised how much you will learn from interacting with people; take notes as you go and build this into your campaign  
*We were fortunate to have two days in the first site and three days in the second. This gave us the opportunity to observe patterns in activities.*
- **Follow-up can be difficult.** Don't be disheartened. Build steps into the process to allow feedback  
*We wrote to participants at 6 weeks and 12 weeks to remind them about their follow-up health checks. This was reinforced with text messages to those who signed up to this aspect of the programme. We also rang drivers to remind them – this was a good opportunity to get feedback on the programme and gauge if they were able to participate in follow-up checks. Many stated that while they would like to attend they were unable to do so due to the transient and ad-hoc nature of their business.*
- **Don't try to measure everything!** Pick key measurements or indicators that you want to track. Sometimes programmes can have unintended effects but you can't measure it all – it is a burden on participants if nothing else! Use a variety of methods (surveys, observation, focus groups, and so on) to try and capture what you need  
*We spent days agonising over what questions to include in the questionnaire. We used/adapted questions from existing surveys, e.g. Survey of Lifestyles, Attitudes and Nutrition (SLAN) in ROI. On reflection our questionnaire was too long and it took almost 20-25 minutes to introduce potential participants to the programme and complete the questionnaire with them. We found it less of a burden on participants to complete the questionnaire for them while asking them the questions. Remember to have all recruiters trained in administering survey instruments to avoid any potential discrepancies.*
- **Be prepared for results/needs you don't expect.** In our case, the focus was on weight however mental health emerged as an issue for participants.

## A FINAL WORD (OR TWO!)

- **Just do it.** Many practitioners put off doing what they are able to do because they worry too much about all the things that they aren't able to do!
- **Have fun in the process** – you can learn so much from the experience.

## WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

There are a number of organisations working in the area of men's health on the island.

For further information contact

**safe food:** [www.safe food.eu](http://www.safe food.eu) or

the Men's Health Forum in Ireland: [www.mhfi.org](http://www.mhfi.org)

### CASE HISTORY

Jim is a man around forty who is enthusiastic from the beginning. He took part because he knew how much weight he had put on since he started driving. He returns for his second health check with a big smile on his face. He tells recruiters that he knows he has put on weight. He says it all started off great, he was making sure to eat a better diet, fewer snacks and to walk much more, but then slipped up over Christmas. He was frustrated because it was so icy where he lives that he didn't get out for a walk, and because of the season he has been eating a lot more. He has kept positive anyway and has come back to the second health check because he knows he needs another push in the right direction. The nurse confirms that he has put on weight, but that there are great improvements to his lipid profile. The recruiters give him plenty of encouragement before he heads off to his truck again.

