

*'Projects that make a difference to physical activity opportunities might be quite small'*  
*Community Recreation Advisor, Wellington City Council*

Newtown health worker and mum of basketball-mad teenage boys decided the local basketball court was not safe. There was no fence and the kids were constantly chasing their balls down the bank and onto the road below. The court was near a council housing complex and many of the local kids were not involved in formal sport activities. The kids liked going to the court, it was close to where they lived and they could make as much noise as they liked without bothering any neighbours.

The first approach, on the mayor's advice, was to the Parks, Sport and Recreation manager at Wellington City Council (WCC). However, upgrading the court was not deemed to be a priority and there was no budget to fund any work on it.

The community recreation advisor for WCC then became involved. Her first action was to find out whether there were other accessible basketball courts in Newtown that would be suitable for the kids. The only courts were at a local primary school and weren't a satisfactory solution for a whole range of valid reasons.

An approach to the Newtown Residents Association proved to be an important step. It not only provided community support and made it possible to seek funding through a community grant but members of the Association gave very practical support. One member, an architect, provided plans for the work. After the first grant application was unsuccessful, WCC reconsidered the upgrade of the court as a community development project. Changing the focus to one of social development meant funding could come from a community fund and building the new fence was approved.

The court was built in time for the Newtown Festival and with support from several local businesses the court was opened with good publicity. Another local initiative, a Street Ball programme at the nearby city housing complex, was able to get the support from the ASB Sports Centre which provided balls to be given away to the kids at the opening.

The fence made all the difference. The local kids took to the court with enthusiasm; it is now well used and provides both social and physical benefits for a group of kids who have limited choices.

One potential problem in the ongoing success of the court was the potential for conflict between the basketball players and skateboarders who also used the court. The Residents Association talked with the skateboarders and there are now plans to meet their request for a low fence to stop their boards disappearing down the hill. This will allow them to share the space and avoid conflict with the basketballers.



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## The success factors for this project include:

- when the first approaches to council were unsuccessful, they didn't give up
- community involvement, through the Newtown Residents Association, provided the community support and involvement criteria needed for success in applying for funding
- working with the Residents Association gave the project extra weight, a 'lone ranger' approach may not have been so successful
- working with the Residents Association provided access to expertise and resources
- taking a social development approach meant the fence could be regarded as a community development project and opened up alternative funding options
- linking in with the Street Ball programme, a City Housing project, extended the benefit of the programme
- the timing of the project meant it could be opened during the festival and provided publicity so the community knows it exists and it is now well used
- at relatively little cost there is a new community asset providing social and physical benefits for local kids.



*Newtown basketball court after the high fence was installed.*

## Key learnings

- Projects that make a difference to physical activity opportunities might be quite small.
- Don't try and go it alone – join forces with other like-minded groups.
- Get community support and look for ways to use community expertise.
- Don't give up at your first rebuttal.
- If one part of the council isn't able to help, try another.
- Be creative, look for another focus, another way into funding options.



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