

CASE STUDY



Summary

North West Leicestershire District Council is pioneering a project which encourages greater sports activity by schoolchildren. Uniquely linking education and leisure, the new system - Club Activ8 - uses Gladstone-developed software and HP personal digital assistants (PDAs) integrated with the Gladstone MRM Plus2 Leisure Management System.

The Club Activ8 system now records all school-based physical activity, gives free leisure sports time in proportion to the hours spent, and encourages greater use of leisure centres. The solution is fully scalable and is being extended to more schools in the area. It is also available to other local authorities already using Gladstone Plus2 through a licencing scheme.

"Club Activ8 is encouraging the uptake of physical activity in school"

North West Leicestershire District Council has found an effective solution for meeting the government's schools target of a minimum of two hours of sport and physical activity per child each week. By extending its Gladstone Plus2 Leisure Management System, the council is encouraging more physical activity, tracking children's weekly usage, and is pioneering a scheme (Club Activ8) with nationwide potential.

As a small rural district council, North West Leicestershire looks after 88,000 people in Coalville and Ashby-de-la-Zouch as well as the surrounding countryside. It manages five leisure centres - two main leisure centres plus additional facilities at Measham, Castle Donnington, and Ibstock.

According to John Richardson, Head of Leisure & Culture, Club Activ8 is the result of a local alliance (NWL Local Sports Alliance) between the district council, NWL School Sports Partnership, Leicestershire County Council, leisure centres, and the Leicestershire & Rutland NHS Primary Care Trust. The alliance believed that two hours of activity per week was insufficient to improve the general health of children in the district and to combat the childhood obesity crisis.

"So we came up with the idea: how about rewarding children who achieve two hours of school sport or lunchtime/after school sport activity with free use of our leisure centres?," said Richardson.



Chosen because of Gladstone's reputation, the user-friendly Plus2 system could easily support school 'members' through barcoded key-fob leisure cards - similar to those provided by supermarket loyalty schemes to add to a bunch of keys. The fob is read by a barcode scanner attached to the PDA. Once configured, it would then allow free leisure use: two hours of school activities awarding 20 points or £2, enough for a free swim.

"The more they did, the more points they got, and the more they could 'cash in' at the leisure centres," said Richardson. *"We wanted to make sure that an individual had completed the two hours and was then rewarded."*



Software Development

Seeking Gladstone's help was a "logical decision" based on a long-term working relationship. Plus2 had been used at Coalville and Ashby since 2003, and was later extended to Measham. Modules in use include Connect, Analyser, Datamine, Pocket, Stock, Business Continuity, and Loyalty. Gladstone proposed an innovative solution that allowed PDAs to collect data at schools which would then be uploaded to the Gladstone Plus2 system.

In January 2007, the easy-to-use system was piloted in two schools with two more added in September. The key fobs are scanned in lessons or school clubs, the PDAs docked at a leisure centre, and the data downloaded into Plus2. Collected points are then redeemed for sporting activities and holiday courses while children may easily track their totals.

"They can bring their bar-coded key fob into the leisure centre where it'll be scanned and we'll tell them," said Richardson. "Or they can now go onto a website, type in their PIN, and find out how many points they've got."

Targets achieved

As a unique link between education and leisure, Club Activ8 now goes beyond free swimming, badminton, or squash to include boxercise and cheer-leading. The scheme uses the government's schools target of a minimum of two hours of sport and physical activity per child each week as a entry point to the rewards available.

"Club Activ8 is encouraging the uptake of physical activity in school by individuals because there is a clear reward," said Richardson. "We are also increasing the numbers of weekly visits - there are over 100 per week."

The technical challenges of integrating a new application were well met by Gladstone and this has allowed the scheme to produce good results in terms of encouraging the uptake of sport and physical activity. All the children participating in the scheme soon achieved their targets will all schools significantly increasing previous activity times. That success led to headteachers describing the "ground-breaking initiative" as "an innovative way of ensuring that young people become more active".

Gladstone continues to provide professional services such as implementing remote data uploading. "We have found Gladstone to be a company that's reliable for the long term. They have supported us well in this project and they continue to work with us to develop it further," said Richardson who would now like other areas of the country to adopt the idea as a way of encouraging children to undertake more sport and physical activity.

In September 2008, the government's target rises to five hours per week which, for existing Club Activ8 users, will be easy to track. Keen to showcase the system's true potential, Richardson is also exploring a link with healthy school meals. Club Activ8 is now likely to receive considerable interest from schools nationwide.

The 2008 Municipal Journal Achievement Awards

North West Leicestershire District Council was a 'Promoting Active Communities Achievement of the Year' finalist.



THE MJ
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