Doncaster's Compassionate Approach to Weight

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Our Vision: Everybody in Doncaster is fully able to pursue their own health goals and are fully supported to do so by society, without judgement or assumptions. They feel valued as an individual just the way they are. Compassion is at the heart of how we move together towards a healthier society for future generations.

Overview

Weight is a complex issue governed by the interactions between multiple genetic and environmental factors. In the decades of public health intervention, nothing so far has made any long term impact in reversing increasing rates of overweight and obesity. We want to try a new approach to issues of weight and health that is driven primarily by compassion, takes blames away from individuals and fully acknowledges the mental and financial burden poverty and inequality places on people.

Inequalities

- Obesity disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities and is strongly associated with inequality
- Most interventions focus on individual responsibility to change behaviour, without addressing the underlying determinants that impact on health, wellbeing and people's ability to take care of themselves.
- Feelings of shame around weight are not motivators for change and does not elicit long term behaviour change and can make things worse for individuals, when many socioeconomic factors influence the quality of diet and physical activity.

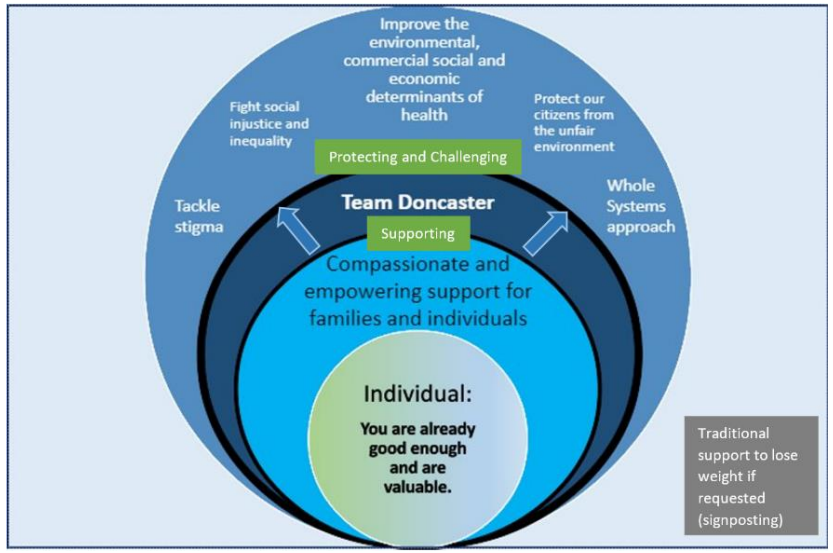
So Far, We Have:

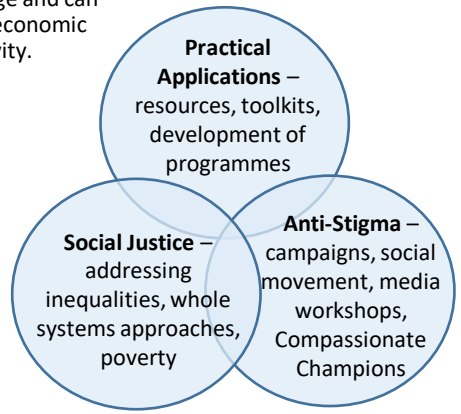
- Created a scoping review into alternatives to a Weight-Centred Health Paradigm
- Recruited a full-time dedicated post to support the development of the approach
- Launched a Doncaster Talks consultation on food, health, and weight

And We Continue To:

- Build relationships locally and regionally through our Operational Group and our Regional Group
- Apply and test the approach in new and existing programmes

Mapping the Approach Locally





Our Work Themes

What We Want to Reject:

- Interventions that create or increase inequalities
- Interventions that place the onus on individuals succeeding or that might shame individuals, bring feeling of failure/less self-worth (e.g. forced participation in Physical Activity; policing of food)
- The premise that being a certain weight equates to being healthy and that weight loss as the only route to health and wellbeing
- Use of government guidelines as basis for health promotion initiatives or as measures of success (e.g. minutes physical activity; portions fruit and veg eaten a day; BMI etc.)

Our Principles

- Rooted in principles of social justice, aiming to lift up the systematically disadvantaged and challenge the environmental and social structures that create inequalities
- A compassionate approach that is sympathetic and realistic regarding circumstances and human behaviour.
- Capitalise on opportunities and build on existing levers for change whilst acknowledging this is a long-term approach.
- Take away individual blame and challenge assumptions.
- An approach that builds up individuals strengthens self-efficacy and self-worth and provides a clear message that everyone is valued and are "good enough".
- Intervene upstream at a population/community level wherever possible. Unsustainable individual interventions are least preferable

What We Want to Adopt:

- An approach that advocates for social justice and reducing inequalities
- Protect our citizens, where possible, from the unfair environmental, social and economic factors that constrict their lives
- Accept and respect the inherent diversity of body shapes and sizes, and that we can promote health and wellbeing without focusing on being a certain body size
- A 'gentler' approach to food and nutrition that supports a positive relationship with food and eating; does not place moral value on one food over another; does not shame or police.
- Support physical activities that allow people of all sizes, abilities, and interests to engage in enjoyable movement, to the degree that they choose

What You Can Do Today:

- Assess your own unconscious bias and weight stigma!
- Join our Regional Group!
- Talk to us! Email publichealthenquiries@doncaster.gov.uk

Images sourced from 'The Weight of Expectation' by Dr Oli Williams and Jade Sarson