

## Row your boat to tackle obesity

An innovative pilot scheme between the Tony Blair Sports Foundation and the North East Strategic Health Authority was launched today (30<sup>th</sup> April) to tackle childhood obesity and other health conditions through rowing.

North East Strategic Health Authority has joined forces with the Tony Blair Sports Foundation (TBSF), contributing £41,000 to purchase 40 rowing machines which are being installed in 15 schools across Gateshead as part of the *Get going, get rowing* initiative.

The Concept2 rowing machines will enable pupils in the Gateshead and Whickham Schools Sport Partnership to compete against each other online, providing an incentive to get involved in sport and improving health and fitness.

The programme will also be used to help train students in the new society health diploma, giving them real life experience within a health training environment and promote the NHS in the north east as an employer of choice.

The former prime minister said: "Encouraging young people to participate in sport is vital to improving their health. North East Strategic Health Authority has taken an innovative step toward improving young people's health. I am delighted that the sports foundation can work in partnership with the NHS to widen participation in health promoting activity.

"Having a partnership approach is fundamental to the sports foundation's work. We really want to engage with young people and sow the seeds for lifelong health and fitness. This partnership is massively important for a region which is close to my heart."

*Get going, get rowing* was launched at The Thomas Hepburn Community School in Felling, Gateshead, to coincide with NHS Innovation Week, which celebrates and highlights new ideas and initiatives.

Almost 100 12 and 13-year-olds from Thomas Hepburn, Joseph Swan, Heworth, Kingsmeadow and Cardinal Hume battled it out in a rowing competition involving individual sprints and relay races. The indoor rowing machines were linked to a computer screen displaying boats and real time race positions.

Ian Dalton, chief executive of the North East Strategic Health Authority, said: "This initiative aims to encourage young people to see physical activity as fun and interactive.

"Obesity levels in the North East tend to be higher than the rest of England. If children have a poor diet and don't exercise enough, they are at higher risk of developing all sorts of diseases in later life, including heart problems, various cancers and diabetes. Over the last few years, NHS North East has consistently delivered the best healthcare in England. However, our population still has some of the worst health in the country.

"Promoting healthy choices is crucial if we are to achieve our vision to become the healthiest place to live and work in England.

"The partnership with TBSF is aimed at attracting children and young people into sport, supporting the national Change4life programme, which aims to prevent people from becoming overweight by encouraging them to eat better and move more.

*"Get going, get rowing* complements a number of innovative services and projects around the region which are already tackling obesity in children and adults. All local primary care trusts have in place strategies for managing obesity."

Research carried out by the Institute of Youth Sport highlighted that as little as 72 minutes' intense exercise over a six week period resulted in lower blood pressure. It also identified rowing as an effective method of combating childhood obesity and inactivity.

Lee Rankin, PE Technician at The Thomas Hepburn Community School, said: "We welcome the training opportunities and resources made available through *Get going, get rowing*. We will use indoor rowing as a catalyst across the curriculum to develop better team working, interaction between age groups and the promotion of a positive body image. It will help increase confidence, engage those not currently active and improve fitness."

Alex Perkins, Competition Manager at Gateshead and Whickham School Sports Partnership, said: "The extra resources provided will support us in the delivery of the five hour offer - our ambition is for each child to have access to five hours of sport and physical activity a week by 2012. This will be made possible through an increased capacity to deliver both school and community based indoor rowing sessions across Gateshead. It will help to support our ever-expanding competition structure, facilitating a range of intra and inter school competitions."

The launch event was filmed by the Department of Health and footage will be shown at an event in London in June as a beacon of innovation in the NHS across the UK.

- ENDS -

### Notes to editors

North East Strategic Health Authority is one of ten strategic health authorities in England and is responsible for the development of health services in the region, on behalf of the Department of Health. Its role is to make sure that services are fit for purpose, that quality and improvement targets are met and that NHS organisations in the region, such as primary care trusts, hospitals and the ambulance trust, are providing well-planned, good quality services to meet the needs of local communities. For further information log onto [www.northeast.nhs.uk](http://www.northeast.nhs.uk)

The Tony Blair Sports Foundation is dedicated to investing in local people, through an initial batch of 4 sports: indoor rowing, tennis, football and athletics and from January 2009 basketball and cycling. It seeks to sustain and strengthen a volunteer culture by developing a new generation of coaches and engage, educate, and empower children and young people.

Concept2, the company which has developed indoor rowing as a modern, inclusive sport, provides expertise and equipment. Their Master Instructors go into schools, coaching teachers and delivering complementary healthy eating programmes.

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