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Lancashire Science Festival

The University of Central Lancashire for the sixth consecutive year, hosted the Lancashire Science Festival for three days on 29th June to 1st July 2017. The festival was all that it promised to be delivering an array of awe-inspiring shows, experiments and hands-on activities. The event offered something for everyone appealing to both adults and children and focusing upon various scientific disciplines. The aim is to break down the barriers to people engaging with science, dispelling stereotypes and demonstrating how much fun science can be.

The staff from the School of Community Health & Wellbeing, which delivers the BSc (Hons) and Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) courses in School Nursing, Health Visiting and Sexual Health Advising were asked if they could contribute to the festival in some way. As a member of the teaching team, I felt that this was an excellent opportunity for the students to engage with the public developing their skills and affording them the opportunity to deliver on some public health priorities (Public Health England (PHE), 2016).

The thirteen students (eight School Nurses and five Health Visitors) were asked if any were interested in participating in the event and their response was overwhelming as they all expressed a desire to. The next stage was to step up meetings to discuss what they wanted to deliver. Unfortunately due to coursework pressures the Health Visitors were not able to be involved in the planning stages but did express a desire to still participate in the event. A series of meetings were then arranged over lunch times when the students were in university to discuss what would be delivered. It is important here to state that the course undertaken by these students is a full time course where their week is divided into being in university for the academic aspect and then in practice for the practical part. These were also all students who had families and outside commitments.

The students led these discussions and quickly decided that they wanted to focus the event around the Five Ways to Mental Wellbeing (Foresight Project 2008). This fitted in well with the students own course objectives that were based around the four domains of public health practice (Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), 2015). They decided to pair up and each tackle an area choosing 'being active, taking notice, learning and giving' with 'connecting' being an overarching theme (Foresight Project 2008). Each pair then decided the topics and they were all tasked with going away and thinking about what activities they wanted to do with the participants. The festival is open to primary and high schools on the first two days and then the public on the third day so activities needed to attract all age ranges. A follow up meeting was then arranged so that ideas could be pooled.

There were several follow up meetings before the event where we met to discuss what resources we needed and where and how to access them. It was decided that we try to contact some local retailers to see if they would consider donating some fruit for the event that we could give out to people attending as some of the planned activities were around healthy eating and dental hygiene. We were fortunate to have some fruit kindly donated by a local supermarket, which I collected on the first day of the festival. The day before the event we all met at lunch time to finalise any resources we needed, check cover over the three days and then go and set up for the festival. This was very enjoyable, as can be seen by the photographs; with everyone working together to set up the area in a marquee that we had been allocated.

On the first two days of the festival the schools pupils came at timed intervals. All of the groups engaged really well with the activities on our stalls, as shown in the photographs. The teachers were also able to take some of the resources with them so that they could do some follow up activities with the pupils when they returned to school. The third day, which was open to the public, was extremely busy as there was a constant flow of people. Again, the children attending our stalls were very engaged

with the activities, as were the parents and carers who were with them. This was quite a surprise to us but very encouraging that they were so interested in the public health messages that we were portraying.

The evaluation from those who attended the festival was extremely positive. The children and adults who attended communicated to us that it was both interesting and useful to learn about facts around the effects of smoking, high sugar and alcohol intake, dental hygiene and eating a balanced diet. The feedback from the School Nurse and Health Visitor students was equally positive as they felt that as SCPHNs, fundamental aspects of their role is to identify health needs, engage with the public, deliver public health messages and encourage people to take control of their own health outcomes (NMC, 2015). I was confident in all of the students' ability to run the event, as they were all experienced nurses who had a wealth of knowledge and skills but I felt astounded and a deep sense of pride by their enthusiasm, commitment and drive to engage with all attendees whether they be children or adults. This resonated with their motivation to be SCPHNs and was an excellent example of the contributions that SCPHNs can make to public health using their skills and knowledge (National Health Service (NHS) England, 2016). One of the unique skills of SCPHNs is their ability to communicate with people of all ages to deliver health messages. The Lancashire Science Festival gave us the opportunity to convey these in fun and innovative ways to influence health outcomes for our future generations.

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