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Weight management programme hailed a huge success

A BILLERICAY man has praised a free NHS weight management programme which has helped people across Essex lose 1,300kg (2,866lbs) during the past year as ‘a liberating experience’.

Community healthcare provider, Anglian Community Enterprise (ACE), was awarded a contract in April 2015 by Essex County Council’s Public Health team to help tackle, locally, the country’s burgeoning obesity crisis.

ACE runs a bespoke programme called *My Weight Matters* which is aimed at those who prefer to tackle their weight management issue on a one-to-one basis rather than in a group structure. A University of Essex research study concluded *My Weight Matters* produces better results than one of the country’s leading commercial diet programmes.

Mike Chandler of Billericay is one of 4,092 people who have signed up to *My Weight Matters* during the past year and he is thrilled with the results. He said: “I can’t stress enough how much this has changed my life. I’ve struggled with my weight for a number of years. I was borderline high blood pressure and was prescribed pills but they didn’t agree with me. When I signed up to *My Weight Matters*, my weight had risen to 15 stone. My father died in his early sixties and he was overweight with high blood pressure and high cholesterol so, at 65, I saw the warning signs for myself.

“I had two hernias which, despite being repaired, still caused me problems because of my excess weight and I also suffered with IBS. Since I started *My Weight Matters*, the change in my life has been amazing. I have lost just over two stone and I’ve lost five inches from around my waist.

“I now walk at least 15 miles a week, I feel fitter, I feel better and my IBS has dramatically improved. It really has been a liberating experience.

“*My Weight Matters* is not like other diets – in fact, it’s not really a diet at all. It shows you a way of eating which is enjoyable and produces results which are sustainable because they are based on lifestyle changes, not short-term diets.

“My wife, Carol, has also lost a stone simply because we are eating so much more healthily now – and, because we’re not buying lots of expensive, processed foods, we’re spending about £20 less on our food shopping.”

The programme looks at eating a healthy, balanced diet, managing portion size, physical activity and understanding food labels. With the support of a fully trained facilitator, clients work their way through a series of professional support guides over five weeks. After this time, they can attend on a drop-in basis to be weighed and share their progress towards a healthier lifestyle for as long as they feel necessary.

The University of Essex research study, led by Dr Gavin Sandercock from the School of Biological Sciences, compared how people fared on *My Weight Matters* with how people fared on a leading commercial weight-loss programme. It looked at weight loss, BMI (body mass index) reduction and waist measurement reduction after one week, five weeks, six months and 12 months.

In his conclusions, Dr Sandercock says: “*My Weight Matters* is an effective intervention to promote significant weight loss. While the programme is only five weeks long, the continued weight loss at six months suggests that clients were continuing to use the behaviour changes learned during the programme.

“Clients typically continue to lose weight up to six months following the start of the programme with an average loss of 4.5 kg. Waist circumference loss averaged 6.8 cm. As a measure of the programme’s potential overall effectiveness, 53 per cent of those who completed the 12-month follow-up had lost up to five per cent of initial body mass.

“These results are indicative of a more homogeneous response to the *My Weight Matters* programme than to the comparative commercial programme, suggesting that overall *My Weight Matters* is a more effective programme.”

Liz Wilson, Weight Management Lead at ACE, said: “At a time when weight management is such a high profile issue, we are so pleased to be able to offer a programme we have devised ourselves which is free to participants and proven to produce better results than commercial programmes.”

My Weight Matters is available at 45 locations across Essex, at various times of the day throughout the week including evenings and Saturdays. People can sign up to the programmes by calling 0800 022 4524 or via the ACE website www.acelifestyle.org/weight-management

ACE also runs *Shape Up* which offers group weight management sessions.

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