Tendring is one of three targeted localities within the Essex local delivery pilot. Its location east of Colchester includes coastal places with high levels of deprivation and communities are often isolated with limited transport links. The area was already facing challenging times, only to be exacerbated by the coronavirus (Covid-19) but local resident ‘Bert’ has shown the power of local people in really making things happen.

‘Bert’ – Roberta Meskell to be precise – clearly recognised the specific challenges people in her own community were facing and wanted to do something about it. But why? Well, back in 2015, during a very difficult time in her life, Roberta realised she needed to do something for her mental wellbeing and set up a Facebook page called Happy Motivators – a space where people could help, motivate and support each other. It soon became apparent that getting active helped to relax and de-stress people, however there were no classes available for families or children aged 7-14 and Roberta wanted to change this.

Roberta said: “I’ve always struggled with English, numbers and pronunciation of words, so never thought I could pass my level two gym instructor, but I did! Bert’s Belly Busters was my chance, and I started to run classes in a hall during school time, which was aimed at mums from the local primary school who lacked confidence and couldn’t afford to go to the gym. I was then lucky enough to be taken on as a Rebound instructor for adults and children at the Clacton Leisure Centre and then started to save to invest in my own rebound equipment, with the hope of running my own family classes at a price that was affordable for everyone.”

In September, after successfully applying for a local delivery pilot micro-grant – a simple process to access quick, small amounts of money – Roberta was able to purchase 10 Rebound trampolines to start up her first set of family bounce classes directly within the community ‘on their doorstep’ outside. These sessions have continued but Bert has also now commenced sessions indoors at a local YMCA community hall in Walton-on-the-Naze. Due to great attendance and positive feedback, these affordable sessions are now being held fortnightly and are compliant with the current coronavirus safety measures.

To read more local stories, visit Active Essex

“Investing in people who are trusted and connected in local communities really makes things happen”
The story of Bert’s Belly Busters

“The importance of having families connect through physical activity means they can grow together and continue to be physically active away from the sessions; the children will gain life skills and as the parent is a child’s biggest role model, they will be more likely to continue being physically active into adulthood.”

(Roberta)