



Laura Kerrigan

Formerly Senior Business Manager

📍 Energize Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (Active Partnership)

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Laura attended the Leadership Essentials programme in 2019. At that time, she had already designed a pilot project linked to the Integrated Falls Prevention strategy, which had tested out a model for a 20 week community exercise programme. 'Elevate' aims to help older people keep active and maintain their independence. Prior to the creation of the scheme, only one person in Shropshire was trained to provide an exercise-based falls prevention service in a county with a significant older population.

Now there is a team of carefully trained specialist instructors and a highly qualified project officer, funded first through Public Health and with support from Shropshire's Clinical Commissioning Group. Community exercise is now an explicit strand in the county's Integrated Falls Prevention Strategy.

Laura explained that they take a holistic approach, saying “We work with ‘wobblers’ rather than fallers as the emphasis is on prevention. When the project was first launched on local radio, the team received 300 referrals in just a few days and over 1,000 people have now used the service. They have a cup of tea and a biscuit at the end of a session and share local service information; how to get a fire check or help with avoiding scams”.

The approach taken is about more than physical activity; people gain confidence, make friends and are more connected in the community. There have been some excellent health outcomes in strength and balance, for example one person reported, “I've had a bath for the first time in three years ...and it feels amazing”.

Laura reflected that the programme helped her to increase her insight and understanding of system thinking and system change.

Her role in the Active Partnership has focussed on developing relationships outside of the sport and physical activity sector, with health commissioners and voluntary sector organisations where sport and physical activity may not be their immediate priority.

Laura and the Project Officer have spent time developing a relationship of trust and collaboration with key people in public health and the wider health system, engaging with large groups of GPs, physiotherapists, clinical leads in hospital settings, and community and care coordinators.



Since attending the programme she has built on the early success of the Elevate project to engage more broadly across the wider county building a coalition of the willing.

Laura found the networking and connections created by Leadership Essentials highly valuable.

The journey has had some bumps in the road; there has been resistance from some professionals less open to input from outside the traditional health sector, challenges in finding instructors with not just the right technical skills but also personal attributes and empathy to work with vulnerable older people in the community, and building sufficient funding and capacity to start to make the service sustainable in the long term.

She says she has learned that to lead system change you have to be willing to take time, to be open and listening. One of the messages from the Leadership Essentials sessions on system leadership is that systems move at the speed of trust, and this really resonated for Laura "You have to take time to listen to people and understand what they are trying to achieve. You are together on a journey, just listening and getting to know people, building up the trust along the way".

Since attending the programme she has built on the early success of the Elevate project to engage more broadly across the wider county building a coalition of the willing. In addition to the close relationships with public health and the CCG, Energize Active Partnership is now also commissioned by Shropshire Council on a consultancy basis to help remodel the countywide service so that in future there is a more united system for community falls exercise.

Laura has now been engaging with providers in Telford and Wrekin who have developed an innovative new digital tool for their falls prevention programme.

Strategic conversations have recently started with the newly established Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS) and Energize, Active Partnership.

The Elevate team took on an even closer community support role during lockdown setting up a telephone helpline for vulnerable older people.

Five of the instructors are working through a new Community Interest Company and undertook specialist training in pulmonary, cancer and cardiac rehabilitation, diabetes, dementia and mental health, to enhance the service offered, supported by the Sport England Tackling Inequalities Fund.

In response to the pandemic, Elevate has started a new shorter programme 'Up and Out', aimed at helping older people develop the confidence, strength and balance to get back out of the house after lockdown.

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She reflected that "I hadn't come from a traditional sports background, and I hadn't always found it easy to find others to connect with... in Leadership Essentials I felt like I went into a space where there were different voices talking about leadership and I could focus on the issues I was facing and learn from others, share a problem and hear other people's ideas. Some of the people who attended were more senior and I got such a lot from talking to other people, seeing the challenges they faced and learning how they see and think".

Laura has continued her learning journey, joined the Active Partnerships System Change Network, and taken part in a Leadership Essentials Deep Dive on system mapping and the alumni session on Leading Through Transitions.

