Exercise Referral in Wealden
Freedom Leisure
Background

• Formed in 2002 from the WDC Leisure Services Department
• Continuous Growth since 2002
• Leading and largest leisure trust in the South East
• Ten local authority partners
• Manage 34 leisure facilities in Sussex/Kent/Surrey
• Turnover 2012/13 will be £36.5m with 2500 staff
• Local, regional and national reputation and accreditation for quality, excellence, innovation and cost effectiveness
How it all began:

The “oasis project” evolved from a concept devised by local Hailsham GP, David Hanratty together with the Hailsham Leisure Centre Manager in 1991
“imagine visiting your doctor for a routine check up and being handed a prescription for fitness training at your local leisure centre” (quote from a 1991 magazine article)
This pioneering programme was the first of its kind in the country offering a subsidised course of exercise with funding from the local PCT.
This simple concept was so successful it was soon copied by others and is now a well established part of the exercise programme offered in many fitness facilities. For the operators the motivation is to get people feeling the benefits of exercise and continuing to exercise once the programme has been completed.
In Wealden the scheme is offered at all four leisure centres working with approximately 100 doctors and health professionals. We estimate that we have taken 9500 people through the programme, the majority of whom would have not have chosen to exercise without a referral.
The scheme has evolved over the last 20 years to offer similar programmes for:

- Pre and Ante Natal Mums
- Stroke Rehabilitation
- Cardiac Rehabilitation
- Chronic Lower Back Pain
- Parkinsons
- Elderly Care
- Weight Management
We continue to focus on developing alternative pathways to encourage our community to not only get active but also to stay active with healthy lifestyle.
Activity Levels for Stroke Referrals at Hailsham Leisure Centre 2010-2012

* 74% of clients referred for stroke rehabilitation are now participating in regular physical activity

[Pie chart showing activity levels]
- Never started: 12.12%
- No longer use the centre: 14.14%
- Participating in other activities: 31.31%
- Regular attend the centre: 43.43%
Exercise Referral Success Rate

- Achieved goals: 88%
- Did not achieve goal: 5%
- Not sure: 7%
Exercise referral clients who intend to continue to exercise after completion

- Strongly agree: 52%
- Agree: 33%
- Neutral: 10%
- Disagree: 2%
- Strongly disagree: 3%
On the referral programme I regained my mobility, strength and determination to succeed. When I first started the programme I was hardly able to turn the pedals on the bike let alone walk, however with a will to keep going I became strong enough to reach my first goal which was to walk across the gym floor without the aid of my sticks. Five months later, I achieved my next goal of walking unaided the Royal Mile to Edinburgh castle. I plan to continue to exercise regularly.

Yvonne Connolly

I started on the referral programme with a referral from my GP to improve my fitness and to lose weight. I was not sure how I was going to do this as I have spent my life in a wheelchair. I felt uncomfortable at first going into the gym but soon found there where exercises I could do and the Instructors helped me to do them. I carried on going to the gym 2-3 times a week after I finished my programme and after two years had lost five and a half stone. My life changed so much and because I could do more for myself my mum got me moved to a new place closer to her in Worthing and two months ago I got married! I still go to my local gym but till come back to Hailsham to see everyone when I can.

Phil Rogers
The Future

• There is no funding for referral schemes except in exceptional places such as Brighton
• Funding is available for specific projects such as for a “physical activity co-ordinator” in Crawley
• Freedom Leisure continues to expand schemes to widen the scope of exercise referral
• Concern over levels of obesity and associated health risks, particularly in children, continue to rise
Freedom Leisure is working with the Health Commissioner at County Hall to ensure we are at the forefront of community based projects in the future.