

# The Heart on Track Challenge - Merseyrail

## Background

Merseyrail are working toward the NHS Charter for Health and Well Being at Work. To support this they have looked for innovative ways of engaging the workforce in health and well-being activities.

Merseyrail initially worked with Hope University in June 2010, following an offer to run a pilot health & wellbeing programme for their staff. A series of meetings took place in order to develop an insight into Merseyrail's workforce and focus groups, involving a cross section of their grade groups, were carried out in order to identify the key themes to be covered. The programme involved workshops at key locations: their headquarters; train crew and maintenance depots; and some of Merseyrail's larger stations. Staff were able to drop in and undertake a general health MOT which involved:

- Height, weight, body mass index and blood pressure checks;
- Dietary and exercise advice; and
- Wellbeing initiatives including sleep hygiene.

Dr Anne Coufopoulos led the programme along with her colleagues from the university and Merseyrail's HR team remained in contact with her once the scheme and report were completed.

## 2012 initiative

The Heart on Track Challenge concept emerged from a conversation Cathy Turner from Merseyrail's HR team had with a colleague. They were discussing a television programme on losing weight and were debating whether the concept of a health improvement/weight loss/get fit challenge would work in Merseyrail. Cathy took the concept to Bart Schmeink, the former Managing Director of Merseyrail in early 2011; he liked the idea and advised her to develop the programme.

Cathy therefore contacted Dr Coufopoulos, now at Edge Hill University and she remained keen to work with Merseyrail.

They discussed content and branding of the scheme, in a series of meetings, and provisionally came up with the 'Heart on Track' challenge concept. The branding was linked to the HR team's eagerness to raise awareness of heart health, improve awareness of health & wellbeing within the business and also fell in line with Merseyrail's business charity of the year for 2011, which was Broad Green Heart & Chest Hospital. The team believed the key to success was promoting this as a **health awareness initiative** and not specifically a weight loss programme.

The HR team promoted the scheme within the business and 'recruited' 50 voluntary candidates to take part by reviewing the applications submitted. The programme for 2011 involved:

- One-to-one consultation for each 'challenger' with Dr Coufopoulos to include the health MOT mentioned above, and to agree personal targets.
- Workshops.
- Personal advice via regular update calls (and meetings where requested) with the doctor.



## Positive results

The scheme proved to be very successful and based on the statistics collated from all employees who participated they found that their sickness levels reached 35 days when compared to the previous year's total of 155 days. This reduction in sickness levels more than justified the running of the scheme, since this amounted to a £11,000 reduction in costs based on an average direct cost of sickness per day of £95 (*figure as of August 2012*).

It also encouraged increased employee engagement and showed Merseyrail's corporate social responsibility from working with their charity of the year.

Following this success, Senior Managers in the company again agreed that the HR team should look to roll out the programme in 2012. This was also supported by feedback received from Merseyrail's staff health & wellbeing survey undertaken in August 2012.

## Health Benefits

Whilst it was recognised that the challenge was not solely a weight loss programme, the participants in 2011 found that by eating healthily they did actually lose weight and finished with a collective loss of 251lb (114.2kg)

## Current challenge

The scheme was re-launched in September 2012. The same format of individual consultations and support is being followed, with the addition of a Merseyrail health & wellbeing web page and forum. Participants can ask questions, share tips and give encouragement to other participants. It is intended this web forum will be rolled out to a wider audience when the success of the pilot has been evaluated.

**'Get your heart on track'**  
*Application form:*

Name

Location (base)

Please tell us in no more than 50 words why you would like to take part in the 'Get Your Heart on track' challenge.

Rail House  
 Birkenhead Central  
 Birkenhead North (depot)  
 Kirkdale  
 Southport

Anne Coufopoulos, the Dietitian for 'Get Your Heart on Track' will be working across different Merseyrail locations between 7th - 24th June and will be setting up one-to-one appointments with those who are successful in being chosen to take the challenge. Please could you tick in the box(es) below your preferred location to meet with Anne.

*Thank you and we will be in touch very soon!*

**Merseyrail**  
*More than just a journey*

Indications from Dr Coufopoulos are that engagement again is high amongst the 'challengers' and weight loss results have increased this year. The HR team are also exploring with their occupational health provider, the possibility of using the Heart on Track participants to trial an on-line health assessment tool which will support the Heart on Track programme on a sustained basis.

Some comments from the current participants of the programme include:-

*"I needed something to focus me to lose some weight before Christmas and this is exactly what Heart on Track did. Anne gave me the confidence to reconsider what and how I eat and to set a realistic goal, which I achieved. Realising just small changes could help the health of my heart was really encouraging."* Jane English, HR Director.

*"I undertook the Heart on Track challenge because after years of yo-yo dieting and having a love/hate relationship with food I saw this as an opportunity to gain awareness of not just my diet but also my health and how my size could affect my health. Ann helped me along the challenge and help me achieve some goals develop portion control and opt for a more healthier lifestyle by taking up exercise (again!)" Karen Green, HR Support Centre Advisor*

*"I began Heart on Track as I seemed to have been dieting continually for over three years. Though I was only a little overweight, I wanted to lose about a stone so that I would feel more comfortable and to date I have pretty much achieved my goal. Anne helped me to focus on my eating, and I realised that there wasn't too much that I really needed to change, just do all those 'treats' I have in moderation. I never had to cut anything out altogether, just have less of it. Not too difficult really, but you need somebody to say it to you to make it sink in and I'm feeling really good right now!" Lee Berry, Senior Business Analyst*

*"I originally took up the challenge to lose weight and increase my confidence. Since starting the challenge I have felt much better about myself and have encouraged my husband to also eat much more healthily. We have increased our exercise regime and I have even managed to get my husband to attend a legs, bums and tum's class with me on a weekly basis. I have found the guidance, advice and feedback given to be extremely helpful and invaluable in helping me to address portion control issues and I now monitor and control the portion size of food that I consume. The only concern I have had is that the challenge takes place over the winter months and I feel that it would be much more effective if it took place over the summer months when you are more inclined to eat healthily and exercise more." Debbie Hunter, Customer Relations Assistant*

*I originally took the challenge to make lifestyle changes and informed healthier food choices. The challenge also enabled me to control my portion sizes and change my relationship with food (snacking, comfort eating). The conscious changes I made during the original challenge are now second nature and occur without deliberate planning. Graham Jones Production Controller Sandhills MEC*

*I decided to enrol on the heart on track scheme after deciding alter my life style after yoyo weight problems and would receive help and back up and the kick in the backside I needed. The main incentive was I wanted to do something as I have five lively grandchildren and want to keep up with them and see them grow up and hopefully see as many of them as possible starting their own families and, like my mother, see great grandchildren. The initial meeting with Anne gave good advice and the fact she is available to contact for advice and support are a valuable tool. Dave Garvey Station Retailer West Kirby*

As the 2012 challenge concludes, it is anticipated that results will match, if not better those of 2011. Merseyrail will use the remainder of 2013 to review the outputs and gather feedback from all participants, with the intention of launching the scheme for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time in January 2014 on a bigger and better scale.

## **Dr Coufopoulos's view of the Heart on Track challenge**

Dame Carol Black, Expert Advisor on health and work to the Department of Health and author of the report *'Working for a healthier tomorrow'* (Department of Health 2008) identifies the key role which the workplace has in promoting health and well-being. Furthermore the report also revealed that there is strong support for health and well-being initiatives in the workplace reinforced by visible management commitment. At the same time The Office for Rail Regulation (2011) in their report *'Work related ill health in the GB rail industry in 2010'* identified a clear need for the rail industry to adopt a more pro-active approach to the prevention of work related ill health.

The Heart on Track challenge at Merseyrail is clearly responding to these reports in a positive and pro-active way. From the outset there has been strong management commitment for this challenge, which I believe has been supportive in the process and contributed to its success (with senior management themselves taking part in the initiative). Response and uptake from employees has also been really positive and encouraging and a cross section of staff from across the organisation has taken part. The Heart on Track challenge is essentially a 'bespoke' workplace health intervention which to some extent responds to the expressed needs of the workforce. For example a recent staff survey identified the need for support around healthier eating, which was a key feature of the Heart on Track initiative.

Being flexible with appointment times has been really important as I have been able to visit rail depots and stations for one-to-one appointments with staff at different times of the day / early evening, as many staff work shifts. Also peer support of colleagues taking part in the challenge has been important for motivation and encouragement for staff, alongside the opportunity to get support through an on-line Heart on Track forum and workshops. Overall I would say there have been key ingredients to the success of the Heart on Track challenge:

- A bespoke 'branded' intervention to the rail workplace
- Flexibility of appointment times / location
- Senior management commitment
- A good working relationship between Anne Coufopoulos and Merseyrail

## **Future strategy and programmes**

This initiative forms just one part of the health & wellbeing strategy that Merseyrail is developing, which is in line with both HR and the business strategy and continues to build a planned programme of health & wellbeing events for 2013 onwards which supports both health & wellbeing and employee engagement.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time	Amount	Food & Drink	Where



# Get your Heart on Track

Food and Drink

*Diary*

To be kept for  days

Name:

Address:

Return to: Please complete this diary for 3 days and bring with you to your first appointment with Anne

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