

Time to celebrate 'Together' making a difference to lifestyles of mums across Europe

On 5th October 2016 five simultaneous events marked the end of 'Together', an EU-funded pilot project for pregnant and breastfeeding women in six European cities. It organised activities from swimming classes, yoga, pilates, healthy shopping and cooking sessions, support groups and lectures to walks in the open.

The closing events highlighted the success of the initiative and its positive impact on the women involved, according to its comparative research. Overall, expecting and new mums who participated in the 'Together' activities feel they have improved their knowledge, attitude and lifestyle during their pregnancy and after giving birth.

The focus was to reach and involve especially women of disadvantaged groups, such as young mothers, immigrants and women with lower income, who sometimes struggle to access fresh foods and other healthy lifestyle options.

'Together' also made women think about their lifestyle and its effect on their (unborn) babies' health. Thanks to this pilot project, pregnant and breastfeeding women in the participating cities are more aware of the importance of drinking plenty of water, eating home-cooked meals, fruit and vegetables, and avoiding energy drinks.

The closing events promoted results and key messages, also ensuring the project's sustainability and transferability to other European cities which might copy its methodology.

They also recognised the active participation and involvement of the different authorities, organisations and health professionals who contributed to the success of this pilot project.



The City of MURCIA announced the continuation of its 'Together' workshops



'Together' celebrated the success of the pilot project in Murcia with a full week of free healthy shopping sessions, exercises, yoga lessons and swimming classes for expecting and new mums. A stand at Santo Domingo Square offered information on healthy habits for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

More than 100 attendees gathered at a conference at the City Hall for a round table discussion with members of the local promoting group and interested representatives of neighbouring cities.

During the event, the Mayor of Murcia, José Ballesta, announced that the successful 'Together' workshops designed to improve maternal and child health will continue to be offered in the city's health and social centres, and will continue putting a special focus on vulnerable groups.

Begoña Merino, Head of Health Promotion at the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Affairs and Equality, announced her Ministry's proposal for a nationwide dissemination of the 'Together' experiences as a good practice in health promotion and disease prevention. She also recognised the relevance of the 'Together' methodology applied in this pilot project within the current national health strategy.

Julio Basulto, writer and author of the popular book 'Mummy eats well', was also present as he appreciated the approach to pregnant and breastfeeding women from the most vulnerable areas of the city. *"It is obvious that in these neighbourhoods women face more difficulties to follow healthy diets and to pass on healthy habits to their children"*, he said.





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'Together' women support each other in Facebook groups - Odense led the way



“Women have become more aware that what is healthy for them is also healthy for their children” was one of the main conclusions highlighted at the closing conference of 'Together' in Odense.

Pregnant women and new mothers who participated in the activities organised in the Danish city throughout the duration of the EU-funded initiative are smoking less and eating better, according to the comparative research carried out. It also shows that the mothers have reduced their consumption of soft drinks and they are now more aware of the importance of having a healthy diet with natural and fresh products.

During the closing event, the local team showcased their successful social media strategy. The 'Together Odense' Facebook profile and group facilitated a lively exchange of experiences and advice between pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The Facebook group allowed its about 90 members to talk about shared interests and support each other in a private online environment. This 'privacy' is especially important for women from vulnerable groups, for whom e.g. reading and writing in the local language may not be as easy. Young or isolated mothers living in suburbs who were not able to participate in the 'Together' activities also benefited from this easy access to information and support by other women.

Other activities offered by 'Together' in Odense included yoga sessions, talks with a physiotherapist, and mental coaching sessions for new parents.

The management team at the Department of Gynaecology and Obstetrics at Odense University, delegates from Odense's municipality and neighbouring cities, representatives from public and private sector health associations, and lecturers and instructors who participated in the project attended the closing event.





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Prague celebrated its success in working 'Together' with vulnerable pregnant women and minorities



At the Thomayer Hospital nutritionist and local coordinator Jitka Tomešová spoke about the lessons learnt from the pilot project.

Around 1,300 pregnant and breastfeeding women in Prague took part in e.g. healthy shopping and healthy cooking sessions; personalised nutrition counselling and hypopressive exercises classes.

In Prague 'Together' focused especially on working with vulnerable women from national minorities and socially disadvantaged environments. Groups of Roma mums participated in healthy cooking lessons led by the nutritionist Věra Boháčová.

Participants in the 'Together' activities confirmed how *“incredibly motivated”* it made them feel, encouraging them to lead a healthier lifestyle by simple changes in habits and routines.

“Women learnt a lot of new things and they were very happy to learn how to follow a healthy diet and how to pass on healthy habits to their children,” explained Jitka Tomešová. *“They especially liked the pre and post-partum exercises. We proved that those mums who start exercising during their pregnancy are willing to continue it after delivery.”*

Several pregnant Czech celebrities, such as Nikola Sudová, freestyle skier, Sandra Nováková, actress and the singer Dasha supported the pilot project.





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More than 300 women participated in the 'Together' activities organised in VARNA



At the closing conference at the City Town Hall in Varna, local facilitator Daniela Koleva explained to the attending health professionals, NGOs and representatives of local authorities the positive results of more than 40 activities organised over 10 months.



More than 300 expecting and new mums participated in activities in Varna, prepared by doctors, midwives, social workers and health mediators who adapted e.g. exercises, healthy shopping sessions, preparing of healthy meals, and discussions to the wishes of the target group.

Participants particularly liked that 'Together' helped them meet other pregnant women to learn together as a group. They also pointed out that they changed some of their eating habits and lifestyles after participating in 'Together', e.g. replacing vitamin supplements by natural and fresh produce.





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MANCHESTER's mums will continue enjoying guided walks and testing slings



Representatives from Manchester universities, institutions and other interest groups attended the presentation of the project's achievements at the University of Manchester.

The activities organised by 'Together' in Manchester were chosen by the city's pregnant women and new mums themselves. Local coordinator Claire Lyon explained that her team asked them which activities best suited their needs and preferences before choosing what to include in the programme.

Free swimming classes, post-natal and antenatal Pilates sessions and guided walks in the local park were among the most popular activities. The monthly walks enabled pregnant and breastfeeding women to test slings to carry their new-borns. These gentle walks proved to be an engaging and enjoyable way for expecting women to meet, keep fit and share experiences and will be continued even after the end of the project.

The Pilates exercises were also very well appreciated by participants, who were particularly pleased by the day care facilities offered for their babies during the sessions.

The materials designed by 'Together', such as the leaflets, cotton bags and magnets, will continue to be used to support pregnant and breastfeeding women by local midwives and children's centres. The local group has also found synergies with other existing projects and organisations (such as Greenwich Leisure Limited), which may replicate the pilot-project's activities and methodology.



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