

RENOVA 'BEAT THE SCRUM' PARTNERSHIP WITH WIDNES VIKINGS



■ **INITIATIVE:** A SPONSORED MEDIA CAMPAIGN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WIDNES VIKINGS TO SUPPORT THE NHS

DONATION: £13,000 AS OF JULY 2018

RESULTS: WWWIN EXCESS OF 400,000 SOCIAL MEDIA VIEWS
AND A 25% INCREASE IN USE OF THE WIDNES URGENT CARE CENTRE

HARNESSING SPORT FOR HEALTH DELIVERY

Great things are being achieved for local health services, by a pioneering partnership between the NHS, Renova and the Super League rugby club Widnes Vikings. Key messages are being promoted to a captive audience of hundreds of thousands, to ease pressure from hospital Accident & Emergency departments.

A pioneering publicity campaign is using the power of rugby league to educate the public on how to choose the right NHS services and inspire healthier lifestyle choices. In doing so, it provides a powerful platform to reduce the pressures faced by vital services such as Accident and Emergency departments.

Beat The Scrum is a ground-breaking partnership between the Super League rugby league club Widnes Vikings, the NHS Mid-Mersey A&E Delivery Board and Renova. As the local LIFT (Local Improvement Finance Trust) Company, Renova has a direct interest in some of the main aims of the NHS; such as directing people to use community-based health facilities, rather than hospital Accident & Emergency departments. Renova has now sponsored three

Beat The Scrum campaigns. The most recent was delivered in May 2018 and more are scheduled to follow due to the successes achieved so far.

The first campaign was delivered in June 2017. It saw stars of Widnes Vikings take part in 20 videos designed to be thought-provoking and amusing, while creatively explaining the key NHS options locally and the benefits of making the right service choices. These videos were delivered through social media, supported with targeted digital advertising.

The videos highlighted typical waiting times in A&E and the pressures faced by local hospitals, **how people can save themselves time and support their local NHS by choosing alternative care settings** – such as Urgent Care Centres and pharmacies for non-critical matters. The creativity of the campaign was leveraged to secure significant local, regional and national media coverage.

The author of the campaigns was Widnes Vikings' Director of Communications and Digital Engagement, John Hughes.

"We have forged a strong partnership with the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in Halton, so we were well aware of the challenges they face in trying to persuade people to choose alternatives to A&E, for non-life-threatening conditions. We saw that the matter was becoming critical for them and affecting the overall sustainability of our local NHS. It was **an important social issue** that we wanted to play a part in tackling," John says.

"We're a club with a large and active fanbase, a proud track-record in delivering community programmes and fantastic channels for reaching the public – including a significant social media following and media links. We're well placed to engage the public in a way that the NHS cannot.

"We developed the concepts for the first campaign and felt confident that they would resonate with local people. However, as an unbudgeted concept and the first idea of its kind, Halton CCG struggled to find the necessary funding to make the vision a reality. An initial £5,000 investment from Renova via its ESG budget gave us sufficient funding to film and deliver the initial campaign, and started an incredibly exciting partnership."

Renova's involvement was the glue in bringing it all together, says John. "They were the local health sector partner able to provide the necessary leadership and funds to make it happen. We are grateful for their bravery and give them a lot of credit for the exciting journey this has taken us all on," he says.

Renova's interest in promoting alternatives to A&E stems from it being the Investor & Developer of the Widnes Urgent Care Centre (UCC). The UCC opened in October 2015; one of 17 health centres that Renova built and now maintains across a LIFT area covering Halton, Warrington, St Helens and Knowsley on Merseyside.

All 17 facilities were built to the same LIFT model of public-private finance, ownership and operation.





the club create a brand, Beat The Scrum, which is being used to deliver a further four campaigns during the season.

Beat The Scrum now features proudly on the front of the Vikings 2018 playing shirts, reaching an audience of circa eight million people. The Halton Stadium prominently carries key campaign messages and a special digital hub has been developed - www.beatthescrum.com. Moreover, **the partnership is giving the local NHS an unprecedented platform from which to deliver its key messages.**

In the case of the Widnes UCC, the development took shape aimed at forming a single facility for providing multiple healthcare services in the local community, including acute services, which patients can use as an alternative to visiting hospital A&E departments in the area.

showcased nationally too. Delivering positive coverage and informed discussion on the likes of BBC North West Tonight, Sunday Politics, Mirror, Talksport, and BBC Radio Five Live, it was clear that it offered a powerful alternative narrative to the typical 'NHS in crisis' stories.

The Widnes UCC contains GP surgeries, a pharmacy and critical equipment including blood testing and an X-ray facility. Integrating more services and providing acute care in local communities are key aims of the NHS, at least in part for easing the strain on A&E departments. The challenge for Halton CCG and Renova, is in raising awareness within the local community, of the UCC and the reasons for using it.

The test campaign concluded with the Vikings making their Super League clash against Leigh Centurions, which was broadcast on Sky Sports, the first ever celebration of frontline NHS services at a professional sports match - with NHS staff leading the teams out before going on a lap of honour.

Renova has committed to sustaining this relationship, contributing towards the first two campaigns and now pledging sponsorship of a third; taking its total donation to date up to £13,000+VAT. This funding has been invested in video creation and promotion to national health sector leaders.

"Rugby League is a massive part of the local culture in this part of north west England. Partnering with Widnes Vikings has proven to be a great way to reach a big audience and one that is highly localised - ideally so for promoting the Widnes UCC," says Renova General Manager, Ian Willett.

In little more than a month, the initial campaign had delivered 96,000 views, with more than 1000 likes, retweets and shares on social media. With a total view time of more than

The first campaign of the new season focussed on Winter Health and was delivered across seven weeks, from November 2017 to January 2018. This smashed the results of the first campaign, securing a phenomenal 280,000 views and a total 52 days of viewing. With more than 10,000

There are two Urgent Care Centres in Halton: one is located at Halton Hospital in Runcorn, in addition to the purpose-built Widnes UCC. The videos featuring Vikings players promote both. In one video, for example, the Vikings players scrum down in Whiston Hospital, telling viewers to "beat the scrum at A&E".



In another, the Vikings pass the ball from Whiston to the Runcorn and Widnes UCCs, saying: "Accident and emergency is only for serious and life-threatening situations. For everything else pass A&E and try Urgent Care". A third has Vikings scrum-half Tom Gilmore pointing out that average waiting times at A&E last for the duration of three league games. At the UCC, patients are seen two minutes after half time.

16 days, it had clearly not only gone viral but gained genuine interest and engagement too.

social engagements - likes, shares, comments and retweets - it clearly grabbed public attention.

"This is a **tremendous amount of exposure.**" Ian Willett says.

The second 2018 campaign saw rugby league supporters sharing their support for Beat The Scrum with stories of making the right NHS choices. Legends of other rival Super League teams, including Warrington Wolves and St Helens were also featured. Supported by targeted online advertising, the reach of Beat The Scrum has gone beyond the boundaries of Halton to inform the whole Mid-Mersey footprint.

The campaign generated widespread media interest, featuring in all key local outlets and being

From this initial trial campaign, possibly the most innovative sponsorship deal in world sport was developed.

For the 2018 Super League season, Widnes Vikings signed a ground-breaking 'primary partner' arrangement with the Mid-Mersey A&E Delivery Board. This has seen

“These campaigns all have a core aim of getting people out of A&E, by raising health awareness and promoting local community facilities,” John Hughes says. **“As a rugby league club, we have a captive and loyal audience and local media that wants our news.** When we twin these ingredients with creative and compelling content, we are able to reach a huge audience. Almost 400,000 video views and a large volume of press coverage show we have an excellent platform for supporting the NHS.”



The Chief Executive of the Halton NHS Clinical Commissioning Group at the time of Widnes Vikings’ first local health campaign was Dave Sweeney. He’s now leading implementation of transformational change programmes for the NHS Cheshire & Merseyside Health & Care Partnership and remains a firm advocate of promoting health messages via sports.

“It’s a fantastic relationship that exists between the NHS, Widnes Vikings and Renova. The next step is to do the same across rugby league and other sports nationally. Imagine what we could do if we can get Liverpool, Everton and Tranmere Rovers football clubs involved,” Dave says.

While the full impact of the campaigns is still being assessed, the impressive nature of the engagement rates is without question. **The NHS partners believe the messages are cutting through**

– Halton CCG found that the initial campaign correlated with a 7.2% reduction in A&E visits. During delivery of the 2017/18 winter health campaign, Halton’s Urgent Care Centres experienced a 25% increase in use compared to the same period in 2016/17. The first campaign measurably generated 14 times the level of engagement of a comparable marketing output delivered by NHS Halton CCG.

This has been recognised with a Commendation in the Innovation Category at the 2018 NHS Sustainability Awards, as well as the club being recognised with the Rosa Parks Award from the NHS Academy of FAB Stuff. With the initial campaign being named the ‘Best Integrated Campaign’ and ‘Best Digital Campaign’ by the Chartered Institute of Marketing North and being shortlisted by the Chartered Institute of PR Pride Awards, it represents best practice in advertising and communications.

“There is massive potential for using sport for communicating health messages,” Dave Sweeney says. “Football and rugby clubs’ stadia are fantastic assets for forging links with local communities and the same goes for women’s hockey and football and sport at a grass-roots level. For comparison, the NHS Choices website used to average about 1000 hits a month. The Widnes Vikings campaigns are now heading towards 500,000, so the message is getting through.

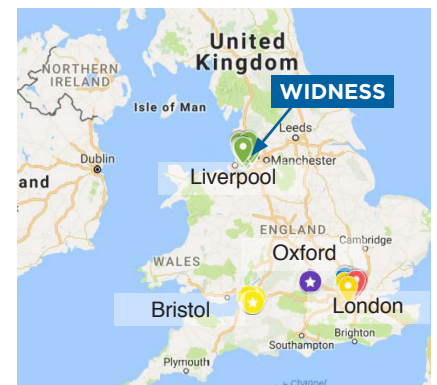
“At present, we have a situation where too many people are bypassing local health services and GP practices and going straight to A&E. That is not sustainable, but through campaigns like Beat the Scrum we’ve got a fighting chance of doing something incredible.” ■

INVESTING IN HEALTH ESTATES

LIFT – Local Improvement Finance Trust – was launched by the UK Government in the year 2000, as a vehicle for procuring public private partnerships, predominantly aimed at regenerating and improving facilities of primary and community healthcare in England.

The LIFT model works by leveraging private sector investment in new health facilities, which are financed, developed and maintained by public-private partnerships. Over fixed terms, usually of 25 years, LIFT buildings are leased back to NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups for the facilities to be used by local health service providers.

For each area or region, LIFT Companies are formed as partnerships between the Department of Health’s Community Health Partnerships (CHP) and private sector developers. Each regional partnership is different in detail, but in general CHP retains a 40% stake in each LIFT Company, with a private sector partner holding a 60% equity share



To date 49 LIFT Cos have been formed, generating over £2.5bn of investment and providing health facilities that serve 60% of the population of England. In four of them, the private sector delivery partner is the Meridiam owned Fulcrum Infrastructure Group, which also owns equity shares in a further two LIFT Cos. Fulcrum’s portfolio includes 41 community healthcare facilities, representing over £460m of investment, across areas of West, South West and South London, as well as Oxford, Bristol and Merseyside. ■

