

Brio Leisure



Brio's Managing Director Elly McFahn, pictured on the far right, at the launch of a partnership with Vivo Care Choices in one of Brio's leisure centres, pictured alongside Vivo staff and customers

Brio Leisure is the highly successful result of an innovative experiment in 2011 to set up a Community Interest Company (CIC) to deliver affordable leisure opportunities for the people of west Cheshire. Brio has grown year-on-year, delivering inclusive services in a safe and supportive environment. In 2011 its turnover was £7 million – and the local authority subsidy represented 13 per cent of income: its current turnover is £12.6 million with the subsidy providing only two per cent – the remainder coming from fees, charges and third-party contracts. Visitor numbers have increased by 45%.

The initial ground-breaking idea has been mirrored in Brio's continuous quest for innovation, expanding its activities far beyond the boundaries of traditional public sector leisure operations. Working with partners to deliver specific health benefits is an increasingly important part of its agenda. Managing Director Elly McFahn explains why Brio has proven to be such a success.

The Power of the CIC Model

Operating as a CIC brings together the efficiency of the private sector with the ethos of the public sector. Although wholly owned by Cheshire West & Chester Council (CW&CC) Brio operates largely independently of it. A board of execs and non-execos oversees the business; the culture is dynamic and forward-looking. The vibrant award-winning Brio brand, typical of a private sector approach, is well-established locally and has allowed diversification with a range of sub-brands. At the same time the company's relationship with the council is strong – CW&CC's

FACTS ABOUT BRIO LEISURE

- » Owned by Cheshire West and Chester Council
- » Established in 2011
- » Based in Chester with facilities and outreach across the borough of Cheshire West
- » Supporting local health and wellbeing through the provision of services based from ten leisure centres offering gyms, fitness classes, swimming pools and playing surfaces, as well as three entertainment venues
- » Employees: 230 FTE but c.700 people in full, part time, temporary and casual roles. Nine apprentices; 55 volunteers
- » 79,000 leisure cardholders/ members – 23% of the borough population. 3.1 million visits per annum including 163,000 entertainment visits
- » www.brioleisure.org
www.cheshirechangehub.org



Brio fitness instructor, Lydia Morgan putting the class through their paces

“It was fantastic. Inside three months of being referred by the GP I was feeling completely different”

Over-75 customer, Anne making use of the free leisure pass to keep active and increase wellbeing



confidence in Brio was reflected in the grant of a 15-year contract to operate its leisure facilities from 2015. The Brio-Council partnership ensures we can contribute to meeting its goals around activity, public health and culture. In return, CW&CC constructed two well-received new facilities at Northwich and Ellesmere Port, each costing £15m. The Council can provide loan funding and other capital to support carefully-justified further development and gives Brio opportunities to bid for relevant contracts.

Financially, Brio must stand largely on its own two feet, with a council subsidy of just 8p per visitor – extremely low by industry standards. This requires a constant focus on business efficiency and careful balancing of commercial and social objectives.

Embracing public health challenges

The team at Brio is motivated by the opportunities we have to make a real difference to local people’s health and wellbeing – a message supported by careful training and internal communications. We know we have a key role in helping with issues such as childhood obesity, sedentary lifestyles and social isolation. We can help reduce the strain in the NHS so two experienced health professionals sit on Brio’s board.

Examples of how delivering positive health outcomes are integrated into our activities include:

- » Delivery of part of the Council’s Integrated Wellness contract providing services for smoking cessation, weight management and exercise on referral. Brio delivered over 8,000 health interventions in 2017, as well as providing free memberships to all over-75’s. A dedicated “Cheshire Change Hub” brand was established to support the contract;
- » A Falls Prevention service, delivering strength and conditioning activities to older people in their homes and local communities;
- » ‘Buggy Burn and Firm’ – a fitness programme offered to new mums at risk of post-natal depression;
- » ‘Starting Well’, working with Cheshire & Wirral Partnership, delivering activities in children’s centres and schools to increase participation and tackle obesity.

Belief in Partnership

By working with partners, Brio can leverage its resources to deliver much greater benefits to the community. Examples of successful partnerships include:

- » Macmillan Cancer Support, which allows Brio to deliver volunteer services to those affected by cancer.

» CASE STUDY: CHESHIRE CHANGE HUB

Brio's Cheshire Change Hub helped transform Rachel Williams' life. Born with a rare spinal condition, she struggled to walk from an early age, and by her late teens was reliant on walking aids and a wheelchair.

As she got older, she suffered from severe depression and anxiety, rarely leaving the house. In 2016 she attempted to take her own life. After being released from hospital in 2017, she grabbed at a lifeline offered by the Cheshire Change Hub and underwent the Exercise on Referral programme.



She was overwhelmed by how welcoming and accommodating the staff at Ellesmere Port Sports Village were. "They are so experienced in assisting wheelchair users and have an attitude which encourages you to focus on what you can do, rather than what you can't", says Rachel.

Rachel now visits a Brio centre up to six times a week and enjoys a variety of activities, including the gym and aqua fit classes.

These include leading health walks, organising volunteers for assisting people with daily tasks and running other community and social events;

- » Vivo Care Choices, which operates care homes across Cheshire West. They have moved some services into Brio centres, relinquishing ageing properties and saving the council around £200k annually. Users feel more integrated into the community and benefit from dedicated services such as swimming lessons and fitness classes.

Other valued partners include the Poverty Truth Commission, various local housing associations and Sport England who recognise Brio's positive approach and have provided valuable grants and other forms of support.

An exciting future

Through innovation, partnership and a prevailing culture of "Making a

Difference", Brio goes from strength to strength. New developments include:

- » Plans to transform our flagship leisure centre in Chester, Northgate arena, into a dynamic new health and fitness centre;
- » An innovative partnership with the University of Chester, with master's students evaluating the benefits of health and exercise in various ways to help quantify the social value our services can bring;
- » Exploring with the NHS exciting new ways to deliver therapies outside of a clinical setting;
- » Seeking innovative ways to help more people become happy, healthy and active.

In addition, our belief in Brio – its ethos, skills, ways of working and brand – are strong and we believe there is scope to extend our model beyond the CW&CC footprint. We remain ambitious.

“When I'm in the gym I can tell that other users are genuinely happy to see me. It's made me feel like an equal for the first time in my life”