

## **New European project to tackle obesity and unemployment**

Kent County Council has joined a partnership of 14 organisations across southern England and northern France to tackle the link between high levels of obesity and high levels of unemployment.

ASPIRE (Adding to Social capital and individual Potential In disadvantaged REgions) is €10 million Interreg VA Channel project which has been awarded more than €7 million by the European Regional Development Fund.

The challenge tackled by ASPIRE is reflected in local statistics: In Kent, 62.8% of adults (18+) are classified as overweight or obese. The figures for unemployment for the county are 2.8%.

A recent Gallup poll shows that the longer a person is unemployed, the higher the rates of obesity, with rates reaching up to 32.7% after a year or more of unemployment.

Meanwhile, the national unemployment rate in France is around 10%, the Hauts-de-France region is the worst affected at nearly 13%. Obesity rates there exceeded 20% in 2016, six percentage points above the French average.

ASPIRE will give obese/overweight and/or unemployed people the tools they need to make healthier lifestyle choices and improve their employability. Current health and employment services may not typically work directly together, however there is evidence to show that health and employment are linked. The project aims to evidence the value of connecting unemployment and obesity services, so that future service provision can better suit the population needs and improve health. It will encourage a “grow your own, eat your own, sell your own” ethos inspiring a new model, co-created using partner expertise in both fields.

The model will holistically combine the necessary support to increase employability with access to local healthy food produce and consequent weight loss. The model will be implemented at seven sites. In France sites will be in Peronne, Abbeville, Wimereux, Loos-en-Gohelle and in the UK, Medway, Boscombe and Dover. Innovative technology will be used to enable participants to improve their relationship with food and provide them with the skills and support they need to gain access to the employment market.

KCC will provide high-level intelligence and support, backed up by up-to-date statistics, to inform design of the new model; input into the ways the model can be delivered; and

significant dissemination amongst policy-makers at the highest level of the project's results.

A high proportion of people are considered as being obese and overweight in these two areas and the highest levels are recorded in areas of high economic deprivation.

A report by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) exploring the relationship between education & obesity states that "obesity tends to be more prevalent in disadvantaged socio-economic groups." Whilst eating healthily can often seem unachievable on a budget, knowledge of how to cheaply grow and prepare fresh fruit and vegetables can make all the difference.

Interreg FCE is an EU programme set up to foster economic development in the south of the UK and north of France by funding innovative projects which have a sustainable cross-border benefit in the programme's eligible regions.

The project runs from September 2019 to February 2023

#### Information for the editor

What is Interreg France (Channel) England? <https://www.channelmanche.com>

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