

Report on the Annual Preston Health Mela

Saturday 21st April 2012



**Foreword from Professor Romesh Gupta,
OBE FRCP MBA
Chair: Lancashire Gujarat Health Users Forum**

*It is with great pleasure that I introduce this report.
I feel proud that the LGHUF has been able to take part in the celebrations of this special Guild Year and I am pleased to announce that we will be holding another Health Mela in Leyland in September in partnership with the Rotary Club of Leyland.
My thanks go to all of our partners who have contributed so much to the success of this important event.*

Introduction

The history of the annual Preston Health Mela dates back to 2001 when a group of health care professionals and executive members of the Preston Gujarat Hindu Society led by Professor Romesh Gupta and President Ishwer Tailor respectively, set up a steering group to create awareness of health inequalities amongst local ethnic and social groups. They planned an event to promote healthy living. Designated a Mela – a gathering or festival – this was to be an opportunity to mobilise the community to take an active and enjoyable part in securing its own health and well-being.

The success of the 2001 event provided a sound foundation for what was to become an annual fixture in the Preston calendar. The 2012 Health Mela, eleventh in the series, is reported on below. If it is judged in terms of its scope, attendance, the enthusiastic reactions of those who took part and the other factors noted, it represents a further successful milestone in the development of the 'Health Mela' concept.

The Preston Health Mela provides a valuable reference point of national significance for those committed to community involvement in the promotion of health and well-being. With support from the Forum Steering Group, similar events have been organised in venues across the UK and interest in the ideals of the 'Health Mela' movement continues to grow apace. It is pleasing to report that the Preston event is increasingly used by community leaders as a flagship on which to model their own engagement programmes.

A new venue for 2012

After the tenth anniversary Mela in 2011, the Mayor of Preston, Cllr Bobby Cartwright, opened a new chapter in its development when she agreed to offer the Guild Hall to stage the next event. This was to coincide with and be part of the celebrations of Preston Guild Year.

The new location, provided without charge, added much needed extra floor space. It also placed the Mela in a convenient town centre site with adjacent free car parking. This allowed many new exhibitors and activities to be included in the programme and made it easily accessible to a much wider audience.

Theme

Within the overall theme of community health and well-being, the programme this year was linked with local schools. The objective was to lay a special emphasis on healthy living for children of school-age.

The importance of partner organisations

The idea of partnership is central to the success of the Health Mela and the support received from the partner organisations listed below is gratefully acknowledged. This support has contributed an essential element to the vitality of this and previous events.

The success of the Health Mela shows that the model of partnership working adopted is effective. It allows collaboration between professionals and the community so that shared expertise, insights and skills can be exploited to promote healthy living. It is a model that offers much scope for future development and enhancement.

The major partners associated with the Health Mela in 2012 were:

- The Gujarat Hindu Society
- Lancashire Care NHS Foundation Trust
- NHS Central Lancashire
- Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- Preston City Council
- Roche
- MSD
- Preston Guild 2012
- The University of Manchester Health Olympics Team.
- The University of Bolton
- Lancashire One TV
- The Junior Chefs' Academy

Entertainment was provided by the GHS School of Music, the Celebr8 Team and the jazz group from Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School Blackburn.

Publicity

Effective publicity is a significant factor in determining the success of events such as the Health Mela. A range of media and methods were utilised to promote the event. *These included:*

- **The press:** advertisements consisting of a series of quarter and half page spreads with associated advertorial text placed in the Lancashire Evening Post in the three weeks preceding the event
- **Posters and flyers:** these were extensively distributed via pharmacies, surgeries etc; and circulated to Parish Councils by courtesy of the Lancashire Association of Local Councils
- **Local radio:** interviews with the organisers were broadcast on Radio Lancashire
- **Banners:** these were displayed at strategic positions in the town and on the Guild Hall
- **Informing local Muslim communities:** flyers designed to meet appropriate cultural standards were designed and distributed



- **A working dinner for local GP's sponsored by MSD:** providing essential background information to key stake-holders
- **Television:** a video presentation by the local channel 'Lancashire One' was produced and is available on-line* and on DVD to be used in post-event publicity in preparation for the 2013 Mela

On the basis of the overall attendance figures reported below, the publicity strategy is judged to have been successful.

Exhibitors

Over 110 exhibitors took part in the event. They represented local organisations, local government, health trusts, voluntary bodies, pharmaceutical and medical diagnostic companies, commercial organisations etc. The participants offered information, advice, support and where appropriate, health checks. Some exhibitors provided an opportunity for active participation, for example the Junior Chefs' Academy where groups of enthusiastic children learned to prepare healthy meals.

The organisers gratefully acknowledge the support of all the exhibitors who were involved in the event.

Attendance

An estimated 2500 members of the public attended the Health Mela. This figure is more than double the attendance recorded at the 2011 event. The number reflects well on the attractiveness of the city centre location and the additional resources put into publicity.

Analysis of post-code data provided by visitors shows attendance from as far afield as Harrow, Newport, Chester, Bradford and India but not surprisingly the vast majority lived in the areas covered by PR1 and PR2, Central and North Preston. These are, by and large, the areas closest to the venue. The figures suggest that the 'Health Mela' style presentation has a real local appeal and that there is likely to be a considerable audience for more 'Health Mela' style events if they are held in appropriate locations close to local centres of population.

Health checks

A major feature of the Health Mela is the opportunity it provides to participate in health checks performed in a friendly, non-threatening environment. More than 280 visitors took advantage of these and their value is demonstrated by the summary of those with previously unidentified problems who were discovered during the event. *These included:*

- **38 individuals with a high lipid profile**
- **1 newly diagnosed case of diabetes mellitus**
- **6 newly diagnosed cases of impaired glucose tolerance**
- **27 cases of impaired hearing requiring further investigation**

In all cases counselling was provided to the individuals concerned and their GPs informed when appropriate.

Health checks on this scale were only possible thanks to the help of the student volunteers; the Health Olympics Team from the University of Manchester and the Blood Drop Team from Lancashire Teaching Hospitals. Essential support in the form of materials and equipment was also provided by Roche and MSD. These contributions are gratefully recognised.



Feedback from visitors and exhibitors

Over 86% of exhibitors provided feedback on the comment form provided. The vast majority were happy with the venue overall, the specific accommodation provided for them and the number of visitors to their stand. 98% indicated their intention to participate in next year's Mela. A number of detailed comments aimed at improving future events were received. The most common are listed below.

- The public address system was too loud at times, limiting opportunities for conversation
- The aisles were not wide enough to allow visitors to linger at stands
- Better signposting (inside and out) and a plan of the venue would be helpful
- The possibility of grouping stands by theme should be considered
- More table space would be appreciated
- One or two areas needed better lighting

Completed comment forms were also received from 647 visitors. Of those responding, the vast majority (98%) agreed that the event was well organised, enjoyable and informative. Over half the respondents had attended previous Health Melas and of these, thirty individuals indicated that they had made life-style changes as a result. This response suggests that attendance at a Health Mela style event could be a positive influence on the health related behaviour of nearly 10% of visitors.

The list below shows the most commonly expressed comments made by visitors suggesting how future Melas might be improved:

- The stage presentations were too noisy drowning conversation
- The aisles were too narrow, particularly for prams and wheel-chairs
- Better signposting needed
- The provision of a sign language interpreter for stage presentations would be helpful
- Could the Mela be held twice a year or in additional local venues?
- Could exhibitors be persuaded not to pack up early?
- More activities for children would be appreciated
- The queues for health checks, Reiki etc. were too long

Members of the Mela Steering Group really appreciate the feedback provided. The issues raised and suggestions provided will be invaluable in planning the Health Mela for 2013.

Comments from guests

"The Health Mela was a fantastic experience and a great celebration of health and healthcare in Preston. I was very impressed by the great community involvement from the very young to the young at heart! I wish you every success next year." **Chief Guest - Professor Adrian Davis, OBE FFPH FSS**
Director NHS Newborn Hearing Screening and Physical Examination Programme

"I just wanted to congratulate you and your team on an excellent event. It was nothing like I had expected! It was a fantastic, vibrant, dynamic, diverse programme that brought together so many themes about health management, ill health prevention and education. You and the team should feel justifiably proud of pulling together such an excellent event and I do hope you'll invite me to be a part of it again next year." **Karen Partington, Chief Executive Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**



Plans for future Health Melas

With the kind support of Cllr Carl Crompton the Mayor and Preston City Council, the 2013 Health Mela will take place on Saturday, 20th. April 2013, once again in Preston Guild Hall.

An additional local Health Mela, arranged in collaboration with the Rotary Club of Leyland, will be held in Leyland Civic Centre on Saturday, 22nd. September, 2012. Exhibitors involved in the 2012 Mela will automatically receive invitations to both events.

Other interested organisations or individuals may obtain details by contacting the Secretary at the address given below:

Extending the Health Mela movement

There is much in this document to support the idea that the 'Health Mela' movement provides a realistic structure capable of involving communities in a meaningful way in the promotion of their own health and well-being.

The Lancashire Gujarat Health Users Forum has already provided advice to organisers of similar events in places as far apart as London, Cardiff, Manchester, Chorley and Bolton, for the forthcoming Mela in Leyland and a planned festival in Bradford in 2013.

LGHUF members are happy to provide help and support to any group thinking of developing their own version of this event. Please contact the Secretary at the address given below for further details.

For further information please contact:

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*This web-site gives access to the Lancashire One video record of the 2012 Health Mela
www.lancashireone.com/channels-detail.php?s=70&id=710&catID=25

