



Project Summary

Step to WIT 2016 was a student step challenge which ran in WIT during the week of the 19th of September 2016. The step challenge was organised and implemented by myself (Aisling McGrath) and supported by Sharon Daly from Smarter Travel Campus. The challenge was promoted throughout the campus via social media, posters, banners and stands. Students were encouraged to join teams and clock up as many steps as they could per day on their smartwatch, pedometer or smarter travel app and log them on the active travel logger. Teams with the most steps at the end of the challenge won prizes. Competitions were also run daily throughout the challenge to encourage participation and get students active throughout the day.

Project aims and objectives

I am a third year Health Promotion student with an interest in promoting physical activity to encourage positive physical and mental health in the community. In September I was due to begin a three-month work placement in WIT as a research assistant in the department of Health, Sport and Exercise Science, so I thought it would be a good opportunity to run a project to promote physical activity.

The challenge was aimed at students in WIT. Students are a noted group for showing declined rates in physical activity due to increased sedentary time at lectures and studying, and the associated stress and lifestyle changes at third level. The goal of the challenge was to therefore encourage the students to increase their physical activity levels in a fun and inclusive way and improve their health overall. The other aim was to get the students to consider their commuting habits. Promoting the students to walk on the commute to WIT aimed to increase physical activity while also helping with parking congestion and decreasing emissions. I specifically targeted first years in an effort to help them get to know each other and familiarise them with the WIT community. I did this by linking in with the Peer to Peer mentoring group in WIT who work specifically with team building among new students.

Detailed description of project

The planning for the challenge began in the Summer of 2016. I liaised with Sharon Daly on how best to run a step challenge in WIT. I also met with other partners to help promote the challenge such as Student Life and Learning centre and the Student's Union. I then came up with the branding for the project "Step to WIT" and Smarter Travel Campus provided promotional material. Students were encouraged to form teams of three and aim to clock up as many steps as they could throughout each day of the challenge. Niamh Murphy assisted in recruiting first and second

year Health Promotion students, whom she lectures, to volunteer and promote the challenge. These students engaged in the project to gain some practical experience in running health promoting initiatives in a college setting. Sharon Daly visited WIT in the run up to the challenge to brief these students and also provided me with the promotional goodies to use during the challenge.

The week of September the 12th was spent using social media to promote the upcoming challenge. I designed cards with instructions on how to sign up to the challenge and visited classes where I gave them to students. Lecturers were also contacted via email and were requested to promote the challenge among their students. Monday the 19th was the first day of Step to WIT and I set up stands around campus and signed students up to the challenge with the help of volunteer Health Promotion students. We recruited the majority of participants on this day. Photos were taken using the promotional material also and used on social media and the Smarter Travel website to promote the event. The remainder of the week was spent promoting the challenge and encouraging students to increase their steps. Daily emails were sent to all participants reminding them to log their steps and take part in daily competitions that were running as a part of the challenge. The challenge ended on Thursday the 22nd and participants were reminded on the Friday to log their final steps. That evening the winning teams were announced. The final stage of the project was to award the prizes to the teams and celebrate Step to WIT. Afterwards the participants were asked to evaluate the challenge. Sharon and I discussed how the challenge went and what changes we could make for future practice to improve the quality of the event. Sharon then visited with the students involved in recruiting participants and presented them with certificates for completing an Active Travel project.





Results

In total 86 students joined the Step to WIT challenge and clocked up just fewer than 350,000 steps. Prizes were awarded to first, second, third and fourth place. There were lots of photos taken and the event had a large presence on social media. Posts were liked and shared by Healthy Ireland, Smarter Travel Campus, Get Ireland Walking, The Department of Health Sport and Exercise Science, lecturers and students at WIT and the WITSU.

The challenge was a very useful learning experience to gain insight into what works well in a campus environment such as Waterford IT. Students who volunteered with recruiting participants for the challenge gained experience in running a health promotion campaign in the college setting and saw first-hand the challenges that accompany it. During the promotion of Step to WIT there was great atmosphere around the campus with plenty of goodies on offer. This was noted by the students as being valued as it improved the atmosphere and generated some excitement on campus. As part of the challenge students were also asked to evaluate the experience. The evaluation overall suggested that the challenge had a positive impact on students in WIT.

A variety of students across a range of different courses took part in the step challenge. Reasons for taking part involved; to increase fitness, for enjoyment, to win prizes, to support friends and for health reasons. Sixty- five per cent of student's reported swapping a trip by car for walking as a result of the challenge. Some of the other benefits reported by participants included; feeling good, increased activity, enjoyed being part of a team, increased fitness, making new friends, reduced stress and sense of community (see graph attached)

Running the step challenge such as this allowed for students to take part in positive initiative which promoted feelings of achievement in a fun and competitive way. The safety of the team allows less confident participants to take part and be included while also enjoying the added social support. Encouraging the students to reflect on their commuting habits also promotes a sense of social responsibility towards reducing emissions and an awareness of climate change issues. The step challenge also encourages increased physical activity that is not demanding and easy to incorporate into the college day which in turn helps in a small way to combat the increasing levels of physical inactivity which often become cemented in habit at third level. The challenge overall was positive for those who took part and was run on a low budget making it easily replicable for the future.

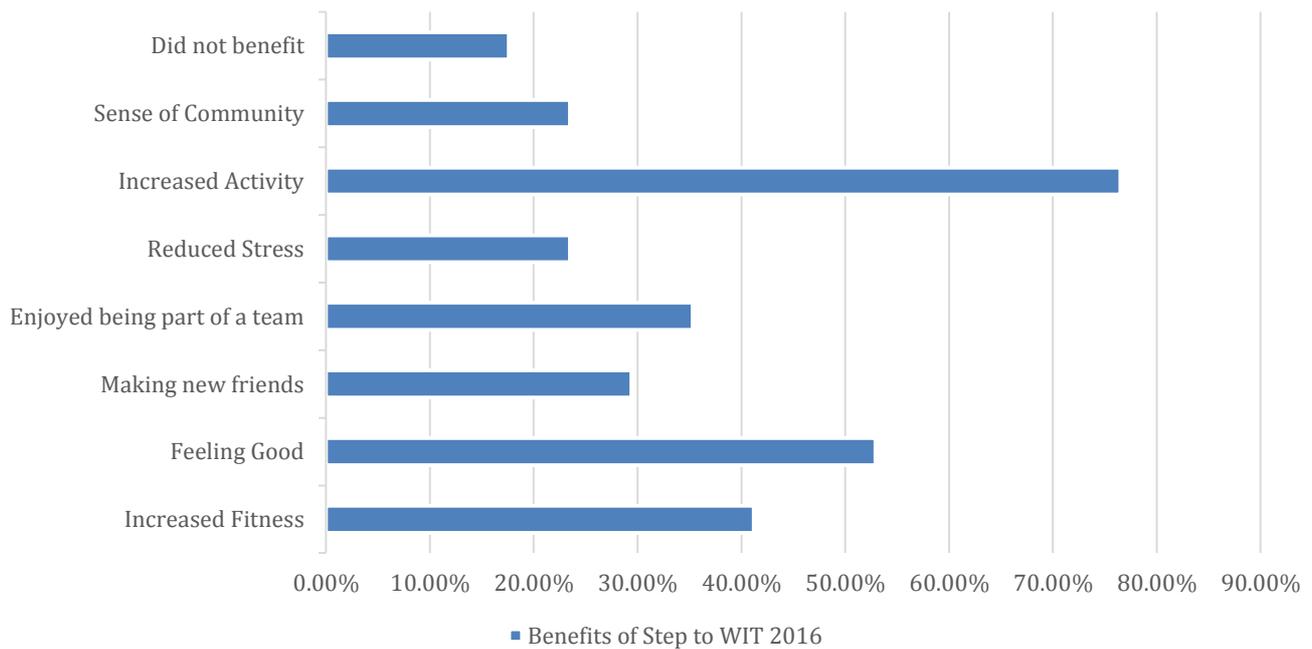
Opportunities and challenges of the project

I enjoyed running the project overall as it was a fantastic learning experience. It especially offered an insight into the dynamics of what works well in the WIT environment in relation to promoting and running a health promotion initiative. The main challenges faced involved the promoting of the event. There were some communication issues as most WIT staff was on leave during the summer months and the promotion was slightly rushed in the run up the challenge as a result. Students at WIT also did not engage with the promotion of the challenge on social media as well as I had envisaged. Instead I realised that for a project such as this students at WIT respond better when the promotion is interactive and more experiential. For instance when stands were run with promotional resources and photo opportunities student engagement was much higher. Only one day had been dedicated to this mode of recruitment. In future instances I would dedicate more time to running stands around the campus and engaging with the students face to face as I believe the participant rate would be higher. This is the first time a project like this has been run at WIT so there is also potential for it to become an annual event and to grow year on year.



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Benefits of Step to WIT 2016



Health Promotion Students recruiting participants for the Challenge.



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Students' Union members come along to support Step To WIT



Student's getting in the stepping spirit



New Recruits ready to get stepping



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