The years have passed since the Primary Care Team in An Stáisiún Stáinte Primary Care Centre, led by Raymond Smith, Senior Physiotherapist in Primary Care, sat down together to devise ways of helping the people in Dundalk manage their health. Many years of hard work, research, pilot programmes and dedication from the staff have resulted in implementation of the weight and lifestyle management programme.

The programme is a collaboration between Physiotherapy, Dietetics, Public Health Nursing, Psychology and Occupational Therapy and has been running successfully for the last two years. Research has shown that multi-disciplinary education and exercise based programs have more success in achieving weight loss compared to uni-disciplinary programmes.

"The aim of the programme is to give people the tools to allow them to take control of their health and wellbeing," explained Raymond.

"The programme has three components: periodic assessments carried out by members of the team: a six week education programme lasting two hours covering topics such as; making healthy food choices, benefits of exercise including promotion of the national guidelines on exercise, adverse health effects of being overweight and the management of emotional eating and an exercise programme developed and supervised by physiotherapists once per week for one year that the clients are encouraged to attend."

Participants must make initial contact as we only take self referral after which a client information leaflet outlining the design of the programme is sent to them. A few weeks before the programme starts a letter inviting them to contact the health centre and make an appointment for a pre-assessment is sent out.

At the pre-assessment, they meet the physiotherapist who measures fitness, the dietician who measures BMI and sets target weight loss goals and the public health nurse who measures blood sugar levels, motivation levels and blood pressure. Thus before the participants attend the information sessions, they are well aware of what is involved and the commitment needed from them before they can start making that change.

The programme is run four times yearly to coincide with the school term and is advertised in local mass bulletins, local GP practices and by word of mouth. The first programme started in September 2013 where 15 clients attended. Since then, a further eight programmes with over 170 clients attending have been commenced with the most recent starting in early September. Results to date have been positive with many achieving their goals of between 5pc and 10pc weight loss and an improvement in their physical fitness as measured by the YMCA Step test.

Raymond put the success of the programme down to effective communication. "The team are great at their job of communicating their key health message to the client, motivating them to continue down the right path and lead a healthier lifestyle into the future," he said.

Looking into the future the Primary Care Team hope to continue to provide the service to the people of North Louth and help them to make lasting changes for life.

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ONE of the participants in the Dundalk lifestyle programme has a consultation with one of the doctors.