

CASE STUDY

CHESHIRE GYMNASTICS - GROWING GYMNASTICS THROUGH DIVERSIFICATION



Cheshire Gymnastics started up in 2011 operating within a leisure centre. The club is managed by husband and wife team, Mark and Laura Hudson. Between them, the pair has over 50 years of gymnastics experience. Laura was awarded the Sports Volunteer of the Year award 2012/13 for Cheshire and Warrington, at the Cheshire West and Chester Council sports awards. They won the Club of the Year award the following year. The club has grown from 3 members in 2011 to approximately 600 members, with plans to increase further. This case study demonstrates what Cheshire Gymnastics has done to achieve this growth, and highlights the key factors for success.

Achieving Growth

The club business model:

- Listening to the needs of the members
- Facility expansion
- Diversifying activities

The club's vision is to be 'the biggest and the best club in the UK'. To achieve this they have created a business model which is centred on a network of facilities: hub sites, satellites and micro sites.

There is 1 large permanent facility, with one in the process of being acquired.

There are a further 6 satellite and microsite locations within easily accessible areas within the county of Cheshire. The club has worked in partnership with local authorities, schools, colleges, universities and British Gymnastics to identify funding opportunities. They work with local authorities to capitalise on opportunities such as asset transfers to continue their facility growth. All of their sites exhibit the club ethos of being fully transparent and friendly.

Hub – main site, permanent, larger facility

Satellites – sites in which equipment is stored and brought out each session. Usually leisure centres

Micro sites – Partner schools. After school club provision, curriculum provision or co-delivery. Providing seamless path from school to club activity

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"She just loves it [Cheshire Gymnastics] because every child, no matter what ability they are, they all get taught. And she's made quite a lot of friends here. The coaches are lovely and really easy to talk to."

Parent of 9 year-old participant

The unique aspect of the club's model is that participants can transfer between sites. If a session is missed, people can make it up at another site. It's very flexible. Members have 24-hour access to the club's online management system. They can register for classes very easily. The flexibility is a bonus for the club as well as their members because if people visit a different site, they may then decide to continue with it, with the result that they do more sessions than originally planned.

"The key thing about the club is that whichever site you come into, whichever satellite...whether it's a microsite, satellite or a main hub, that the provision in terms of the service, the quality, the accessible equipment, the quality of coaches has got to be homogeneous." (Mark Hudson)

Key to the success of the club has been the use of insight to develop their offer to participants.

The club managers utilised British Gymnastics' Participant Model research, which they describe as a 'significant' reason for their progress. They picked out the salient points of the research and have formed a club based on sustainable engagement. The major finding of the research was the need to offer a variety of opportunities for people to sample the sport, in order to retain them. Furthermore suitable activities should be provided to meet the wants and needs of the participant. Cheshire Gymnastics has created a club which has taken on the key findings of the research. They have broadened the types of gymnastics being offered. The club offers gymnastics for a range of different age groups, at different sites, with different activities to meet a variety of wants and needs. The first step in creating this amazing offer was finding out what the interests of their existing members were and asking them what new activities they could bring to the club. The research has allowed the club's managers to remove any potential barriers to participation. For example they are fairly relaxed about the clothing that participants wear (as long as it's appropriate). They don't insist on wearing leotards. The research reported that participants can feel a pressure to compete and sometimes coaching styles aren't conducive to children having fun and enjoying themselves. The club has a predominance on fun in order to remove any potential pressures. They are starting to introduce a competitive element now that the foundation is there to draw those individuals in, who want to follow that route.

The Participant Model research highlighted the fact there was 50% drop off in participation for people between the ages of 8 and 9 years. Cheshire Gymnastics is now achieving 75-85% retention within that age group. If participants decide to leave they/their parents are surveyed to find out the reasons for leaving. This customer feedback is part of a cycle of continuous improvement. Where changes can be made, they are done so as soon as possible.

In 2011 Cheshire Gymnastics was offering floor work, tumbling and acrobatics. They are now also

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offering 'Gymnastics for All' activities including GymFit, GymChallenge, Adult classes and the Proficiency Awards Scheme; Women's Artistic Gymnastics, Men's Artistic Gymnastics, TeamGym and taking part in the GymFusion festival events.

Cheshire Gymnastics' Key Success Factors:

- Listening to participants and their parents
- Tenacity – a drive to be the biggest and the best
- Partnership working
- Being conscious of their environment e.g. examining where the demand for the sport is and moving into those areas

What does the future hold?

The club is continuing in its quest to be 'the biggest and the best'. They have submitted a new proposal to take on a local authority community asset swap, which they hope will give them their second permanent facility; with the capacity to offer nine types of gymnastics. This site will allow them to expand their range of activities further, to include FreeG, trampolining and Pre-school gymnastics.

Beyond that the plan is to grow further in Cheshire, the surrounding counties and the rest of the UK! This will be done by using their existing business model which includes capitalising on opportunities to acquire facilities. The club wants to be able to replicate their model in different communities. That's their biggest challenge. Having enough coaches is also a constraining factor, which they've managed by developing coaches from within the club. What's important, however, is that they don't grow too quickly. The club is keen to keep doing what they are doing, well.

Mark and Laura say that 'it's not just about numbers'; it's about having the infrastructure e.g. well qualified coaches before they go on to the next stage. The quality aspect is important to keep up their good reputation and allow sustained growth.

For more information about the British Gymnastics Participant Model research please [click here](#).