

**TITLE OF REPORT: 'Fit 4 The Future' and Community Linking Project**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this briefing is to highlight the findings from an embedded research project, *Fit 4 The Future*, commissioned by Public Health.

**Background**

2. Place based, collaborative approaches are an effective way to tackle health inequalities in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations.
3. Gateshead Council's Public Health team commissioned an embedded researcher to work alongside local communities in collaboration with Pattinson House, a local voluntary organisation in East Gateshead, to explore collaborative approaches to promote health and wellbeing and prevent childhood obesity. Some areas, including Felling, have higher rates of childhood obesity than the average in England. There is a need to involve communities in those areas in developing solutions together.
4. Using a small amount of public health funding, steering group members identified activities which they thought would make a difference, including street dance for children and young people, a primary school engagement project, promotion of the Daily Mile, provision of a family-based healthy eating course delivered by Food Nation, work with Gateshead Stadium, and promotion of adult physical activities, such as pilates and yoga.

**Methods**

5. As part of an embedded research project undertaken from September 2016-October 2017, Mandy Cheetham, a researcher from Teesside University spent time (approximately 250 hours) in Pattinson House talking to staff (number=12) and community members (number=27) about life on the estate and the approach taken by Pattinson House.
6. Group discussions were held with teachers, teaching assistants (number=12) and children in years 4, 5 and 6 (23 children aged 8-11 years) in three local primary schools and young people aged 12-15 years (number=7) who lived locally.

**Main Findings**

7. The effects of austerity, welfare reform, the introduction of the benefit cap and sanctions have had devastating consequences in areas facing health inequalities. They have increased levels of stress and anxiety, financial exclusion and exacerbated the effects of unemployment and discrimination facing families.
8. High levels of concern were reported about community safety, crime, traffic, environmental hazards, lack of safe spaces for children to play out, and poor access to local leisure facilities.

9. The importance of a safe, welcoming place where people can come together, support one another, socialise, laugh, eat, make things, plan trips and activities in the local community.
10. Non-judgmental, friendly staff and volunteers helped bring people in and make friends. Participants, including children and young people, welcomed opportunities to be involved in decision making about changes they would like to see locally.
11. The holistic approach of Pattinson House, building and maintaining long term, positive, responsive, social relationships with and between local people, enabled public health messages to be embedded in enjoyable everyday activities. Teachers and other workers with positive, supportive attitudes were valued.
12. Food is a great connector; community lunch, afternoon tea, family cooking, baking and Pizza night all provide opportunities for people to get out of the house, come together, increasing confidence, skills, social support, community spirit, creating a sense of belonging, and reducing social isolation.
13. Effective partnerships between public health, schools, voluntary organisations and local communities can improve health and wellbeing, with visionary leadership and sustainable infrastructure funding. They offer a promising way of affecting changes in the social and physical environment, promoting health and wellbeing.
14. Children's activities, including sport, art and craft-based activities, offer a route to engage children and for parents to access trusted advice and support.
15. Children and young people report concerns about bullying and its effects, including on mental health. Social pressures and expectations about body size, weight and appearance have a significant impact on children and young people, their wellbeing and confidence. Gendered expectations can limit possible options for physical activity.
16. Improving mental health and wellbeing and confidence is at the heart of efforts to address childhood obesity, in ways that involve children, young people, adults and parents.
17. The Stadium is underused by local people, but with sustained efforts, engagement levels increased slowly with support from staff and community members to address the financial, social, psychological and attitudinal barriers to access.
18. Schools were seen as important places to promote physical activity, encourage healthy eating and engage parents. Some schools have started to run the Daily Mile. Children had mixed views about running every day. Teachers and parents had lots of creative ideas about getting children active. Some teachers saw promoting health and wellbeing as an integral part of their job.
19. Volunteering has social and relational benefits, but does rely on small numbers of regulars who are willing and able to give their time. Dedicated volunteers, working with committed, non-judgemental staff, with robust support systems in place, can drive efforts to make a difference locally.
20. The Council has an important role in supporting community centred approaches and responding to local concerns, which affect health and wellbeing, for example

traffic near primary schools. The Council has an important and changing role in promoting inclusive, collaborative partnerships with VCS organisations in areas with health inequalities, challenging stigma and discrimination.

21. Collaborative, targeted, place-based approaches require sustainable, long term responses to tackle deep-rooted inequalities in health. They need to take account of the everyday reality of people's lives, building on local assets and widen opportunities.

### **Proposal**

22. It is proposed that the views of the Health & Wellbeing Board are considered alongside a presentation and film about the Community Linking Project, a social prescribing project in Gateshead.

### **Recommendations**

23. The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to consider the implications of the presentation and research findings for Gateshead.

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