



## Equal North Research and Practice Network

**'Improving the Experience of Children & Young People'**

**Friday 9 March 2018, 10:00 – 16:00**

**St James Park, Newcastle United Football Stadium, Newcastle upon Tyne**

This event brought together academics, practitioners, policymakers and clinicians to discuss issues impacting on the health and social care of children and young people. Over 150 people attended the event from Equal North and the GNCH network, and enjoyed a full programme of speakers, activities and workshops. Some highlights of the event include:

### **Edward Kunonga, Director of Public Health and Public Protection, Middlesbrough**

*Strategies for tackling childhood social and health inequalities in Middlesbrough*

This presentation presented the scale of the challenge to tackle childhood and social / health inequalities in Middlesbrough. It focused on key areas to consider now and future challenges ahead. It was highlighted that 25.9% of the population in Middlesbrough are aged under 20 years old, with the health and wellbeing of these children being worse than the England average. Further, over a third (34.6%) of children aged 16 or under are living in poverty in Middlesbrough. Levels of obesity amongst children are rated as higher than the national average. Whilst there are significant challenges in this region, particularly as Middlesbrough has some of the most deprived localities in England, this talk highlighted a vision to transform provisions of support for children and young people, particularly around mental health services, nutrition and literacy. However, the challenges for the area included deeper and prolonged austerity measures, but this was framed with an advocacy for 'shrinking together not shrinking apart'. Added to this was an increasing demand for social care, new emerging communities with different cultural needs, and consideration of adverse childhood experiences. The DPH advocated greater investment in preventative measures to tackle growing social and health inequalities in the area.

### **Michelle Addison & Eileen Kaner/Vicki McGowan**

Equal North Research and Practice Network/Fuse: *'What should be priority research areas to help reduce inequalities relating to children and young people'*

Four workshops were delivered to 20 participants ranging from Consultant Paediatricians, midwives, senior academics, BME practitioner, and researchers. A short presentation discussing and highlighting health inequalities between the north / south, and within the north, was provided. This led on to four key questions.

1. What do **you** think are the key health inequalities amongst CYP?
2. What **can we do** to help reduce **child** health inequities within the north and between north and south?
3. What does the **government need to do** to reduce these inequalities?
4. How can **research** help with reducing health inequalities amongst CYP?

The key issues impacting on young people could be grouped according to 4 overarching themes related to (1) *social and economic determinants*: there was considerable concern raised about the relative poverty and socio-economic environment that many young children were currently situated in. Discussion also developed around concerns of inadequate access to resources for those who have a disability or impairment. Other issues around malnutrition and food banks were discussed as an important health issue. Overcrowding and poor housing were also considered a priority, alongside issues to do with urban and rural location and access to appropriate health services. Participants discussed the link between looked after children and social / health inequalities and felt that this deserved further attention that could be bolstered through research. There was a general sense that austerity measures enforced locally and nationally have been too stark and prolonged, having a greater impact on the most vulnerable children; (2) *individual risk behaviours*: this was particularly in relation to obesity, diet and alcohol; (3) *transparent and available information*: participants were concerned about the level of health literacy amongst children and young people, how easy this information was to understand, and the formats in which this information was presented and shared; and finally (4) *Mental Health*: there was concern raised around the perceived increase in cases of mental health and the link to self-harm.

Participants discussed briefly a number of possible solutions to these issues operational at a local and national level. These included improving the ways multi-disciplinary organisations work together and communicate, and to utilise a whole systems approach to understanding protective factors for the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Further, participants felt that improvements could be made to universal basic income to create a better and more responsible welfare safety net. This was supported by favouring a fairer taxation system. It was felt that the government should also be held to account through minimum standards.

Participants also advocated ring-fencing public health funding, sharing good practice, and undertaking evidence based research – for example, to understand why parents are taking children to A&E rather than their GP. It was felt that GPs would benefit from further training in speciality health care of children and the issues facing young people, this included a focus on early interventions. Opportunity to interact with role models was cited as a way to improve the health of children and young people, as well as having the opportunity to co-produce solutions regarding issues impacting on their health and wellbeing. Solutions were also focused on socio-economic factors such as the funding of free, shared public spaces like libraries and Sure Start centres.



**Hayley Alderson, Debbie Smart and Eileen Kaner**

Fuse: How to include young people in research –focusing on vulnerable groups

This session delivered to approximately 12 attendees. It summarised and highlighted the benefits and challenges to *'Understanding the journey of Looked After Children and care leavers in developing a Patient and Public Involvement group to participate in national research.'*

The journey of this participatory project with 9 young people from a local Children in Care Council (CiCC) was presented to share experiences, approaches and learning from involving 'Looked After Children' in research.

A short film *'Project Research'* was screened; the culmination of the sessions involving young people which emphasised the importance of involving them in participatory research.

Participants and researchers discussed ways to enhance engagement of vulnerable young people and the need to be flexible in approach, recognising that facilitators need to adapt and re-prioritise session outcomes depending upon the needs and engagement of the group.