

Building a Children's Community In Newcastle: Update July 2016

Karen Laing and Liz Todd from Newcastle University have been working with lots of local practitioners to develop a Children's Community in the West End of Newcastle. This update reports on the progress so far.

What is Children's Community?

A Children's Community (otherwise known as a Children's Zone) brings together a range of existing services in a specific geographical area to work in a co-ordinated way to tackle childhood disadvantage, with a specific focus, from cradle to career across all the contexts in which children live and learn.

All organisations could be involved who provide a service for children and/or their families to enhance their wellbeing (e.g. housing, GP practices, Sure Start, schools, voluntary organisations).

A children's community needs several ingredients to make it work:

- a robust assessment of needs
- a willingness to work together
- effective governance systems
- a clear mission or focus
- leverage of funding and resources
- locally driven with community participation
- robust evaluation to find what works locally

Why do we want a Children's Community?

The life chances of the most disadvantaged children in the poorest areas are still worse than those of other children, even after decades of intervention. Evidence suggests that, a multi-strand approach like a Children's Community, can achieve far more in terms of good outcomes for those children, than interventions trying to address single issues in those children's lives.

What has happened so far?

Last year, we spoke to lots of local practitioners in the West End to find out their views, and we produced a report which showed that those we spoke to were interested in the idea of a Children's Community, especially one that builds on existing networks and relationships. The report is available here:

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/publications/documents/childrenscommunitiesreport2015.pdf>

We continued to meet with local practitioners, but it became quite difficult for people to concentrate on a new way of working such as a Children's Community when there was a major review of services under way, accompanied by Local Authority cuts and uncertainty about the future, and so not much happened for a while. More recently, conversations have been happening again, and meetings have been held where we learned about the work going on in Wallsend, where a Children's Community has just been launched, and started to decide on some key shared goals for a West End Children's Community.

*Breaking the cycle – achieving
and sustaining positive change
for children and their community*



What should our Children's Community be trying to achieve?

A group of about 25 people including Headteachers, teachers, family support workers, representatives of local organisations, and Newcastle City Council, met to discuss their ideas. Four key strands were identified:

1. A stronger, tolerant community

A vision of a West End where everyone works together, building a cohesive, supportive environment.

2. Reducing inequality

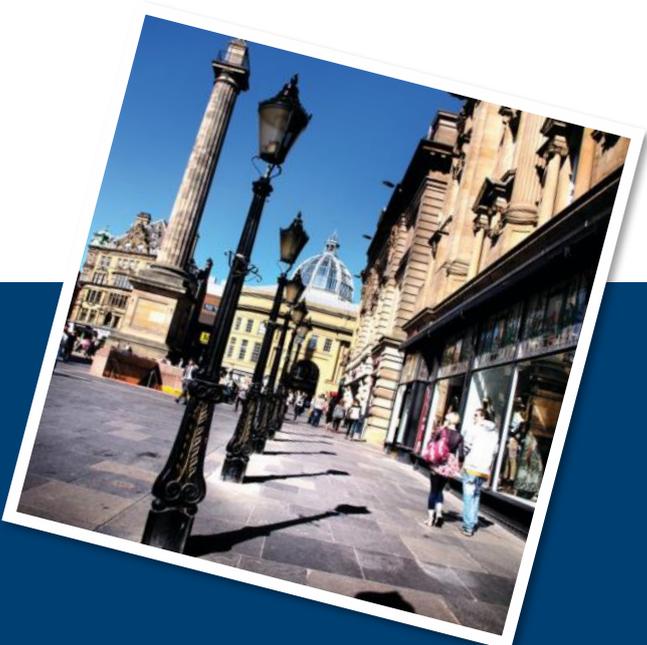
Challenging poverty to ensure everyone can achieve and be healthy, and ensuring people are accepted for who they are.

3. Starting early and supporting transitions

Getting things right from before birth, ensuring healthy child development and supporting children through key transitions in their lives.

4. Realising aspirations

Aiming high for young people and providing more opportunities for success.



What needs to happen next to make these strands a reality?

Discussions have started to take place about how these strands can be realised. Ideas include:

- Mapping existing services in the area, and mapping levels of deprivation and need
- Employing someone who can drive this forward by encouraging collaboration between organisations and facilitating parent engagement
- Starting small with a focus on 0-11, particularly schools and Sure Start, gradually expanding to draw others in across the age range and across service areas
- Establishing a list of key partners, involving other schools, particularly faith and special schools, and the secondary schools
- Gathering the perspectives of young people
- Decide on the geographical area (where children live? Or where they go to school?)
- Explore options for a governance structure
- Establishing a theory of change
- Developing joint bids for some pilot work in the most deprived areas.

How can I find out more, or get involved?

The work is continuing, and discussions happening regularly. We want to ensure that the Children's Community is as open and welcoming as possible, as we all work together to improve the lives of children and young people in our area.

To find out more, to receive hard copies of the report or briefing, or to get involved, please contact Karen Laing by emailing k.j.c.laing@ncl.ac.uk or by telephone on 0191 2088735.