



7 September 2021

**Michael Robson**

**Law and Governance**

**North Tyneside Council**

By EMAIL

Dear Mr Robson

**North Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board**

Thank you for your email of 16 July 2021, inviting People's Health Trust to attend and give a presentation to the North Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Board. In my reply to you on 17<sup>th</sup> August, I explained I was unable to attend but that I would submit something for the Board to consider, which I am now doing.

**About People's Health Trust**

The Trust was set up to address health inequalities in Great Britain and create fairer places in which to grow, live, work and age. Over the past decade we have been working to ensure that where you live does not unfairly reduce the length of your life, or the quality of your health.

Through our funding and support, we encourage resident-driven approaches to impact local systems and target the underlying causes of health inequalities. The Trust funds projects addressing the circumstances that affect our life expectancy and quality of our health (the social determinants of health).

Across its funding programmes, the Trust provides funding, resources and guidance to organisations who wish to act upon ideas from residents living in neighbourhoods experiencing disadvantage to address social and economic determinants of health in the places they live. Residents have control over the design of their project's activities or actions, as well as how they are delivered. The Trust targets the lowest 30% according to Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) as these are the neighbourhoods that require the greatest levels of support.



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Address: 2 Bath Place, Rivington Street, London, EC2A 3DR

Website: [peoplehealthtrust.org.uk](http://peoplehealthtrust.org.uk)

Company number: 6492606 Registered charity: England and Wales. 1125537, Scotland. SCO39848



The Trust supports its funded partners to build residents' social connections alongside their individual and collective confidence and aspirations, in order to provide a platform for wider action on social determinants of health. This is achieved through a clear approach to engagement that encourages open dialogue and the sharing of ideas, interests, and learning through networks. This process builds residents' trust and their sense of belonging, supports increases in their individual and collective knowledge, understanding and skills, and leads to a better quality of life by increasing levels of control over the things that matter to people.

We deliver the Local Conversations programme, a long-term programme which aims to address neighbourhood health inequalities. Longbenton is one such neighbourhood, supported by Justice Prince CIC.

### **The importance of focusing on the social determinants of health**

It is heartening to hear that North Tyneside wishes to tackle health inequalities and specifically the socio-economic causes. Our experience is that it is indeed critical to focus on the underlying causes of poor health in order to effectively target the real causes of poor health outcomes. These come from the everyday circumstances of people's lives: the social determinants of health, for example, their housing, the local environment, the availability of good jobs, the way that the local economy functions and levels of financial and food security, amongst several others. It is only through focusing on these social determinants of health that we will see sustainable improvements on health outcomes as part of any health inequalities strategy. Without greater levels of control over these social determinants of health and improvements in residents' quality of life, it is impossible to create enduring change to the unjust and avoidable differences in people's life expectancy and quality of health throughout their lives.

### **Why focus on local engagement?**

People's Health Trust has learnt that uncovering the wisdom of local people to know what needs to change in their neighbourhood to improve their health and wellbeing, is a critical first step for any planned work with residents. Strong engagement processes are vital as the starting point to begin the process of co-production from.

In order to build a foundation for co-production, the Trust's evaluation programmes have revealed that building social connections locally within neighbourhoods is not a marginal part of this public health function, but is critical. This includes increasing the quantity and quality of social support networks; of friendships; of connections between neighbours; of connections between different groups and within groups (including community sector and statutory partners).



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The Trust's programmes have revealed that strong and deep engagement processes that focus on listening to residents are critical in building social connections. Evidence suggests that this is hugely successful, with 46% of residents in the Trust's long-term 'Local Conversations' programme which Longbenton is part of, reported as talking to their neighbours on most days. This is significantly more compared to the England average (21%) and the average for similarly disadvantaged neighbourhoods (17%), based on comparison to the Community Life survey. Social connections are also health protective. We know from much of Professor Sir Michael Marmot's work that access to social support structures influence the social gradient that defines health inequalities.<sup>1,2</sup> Marmot demonstrates that access to a limited quantity and quality of social support structures leads to a higher likelihood of mortality and a lower quality of life, while access to strong social support structures increases the likelihood of a long and healthy life.

In disadvantaged communities with disproportionately receding public services<sup>3</sup>, a lack of social status, and higher feelings of stigma and shame, residents are more likely to withdraw from social activity, as interactions reinforce these feelings of relative status.<sup>4</sup> Evidence also demonstrates that a lack of access to transportation - a common by-product of receding public services - puts people at particular risk.<sup>5</sup> As such, targeted work to increase and improve social connections within disadvantaged neighbourhoods is key to effectively addressing health inequalities. **Building control and taking action on social determinants**

By building strong foundations of connection, this also leads to other positive outcomes. At a statistically significant level, residents involved in Local Conversations are more satisfied with life, less anxious, and more likely to feel that the things they do in life are worthwhile, compared to averages for similarly deprived areas in England.

While these are health protective outcomes in themselves, the Trust's evidence also indicates participants involved in these engagement processes are significantly more likely to feel a stronger sense of neighbourhood belonging (81%) than England-wide averages (56%) and averages for those living in similarly-disadvantaged neighbourhoods (62%).

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<sup>1</sup> Marmot, M., et al. (1991). [Health inequalities among British civil servants: the Whitehall II study](#)

<sup>2</sup> Marmot, M. (2010). [Fair Society, Healthy Lives \(The Marmot Review\)](#), (Last accessed 8 June 2020)

<sup>3</sup> [Local government funding and life expectancy in England: a longitudinal ecological study - The Lancet Public Health](#)

<sup>4</sup> Pickett K., Wilkinson, R. (2018). *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-Being*

<sup>5</sup> Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkley, L. (2009). [Perceived Social Isolation and Cognition](#) (Last accessed 9 June 2020)





When residents feel connected, have built trusting relationships and have a sense of control, they will also feel much a greater sense of agency and willingness to get involved in local initiatives. When compared to the Community Life survey:

- Residents involved in Local Conversations are much likelier to agree that when people in the area get involved in their local community, they can really change the way the area is run (82% compared to 51% in similarly deprived areas and 54% in England as a whole).
- Residents involved in Local Conversations residents agree that people in their neighbourhood pull together to improve their neighbourhood (76%) than in similarly deprived areas (47%), and in England as a whole (58%).

All of this provides a critical foundation for wider action on the social determinants. Through a process of local priority-setting alongside building partnerships and relationships with local stakeholders, it then becomes possible to identify and target specific social determinants of health and co-produce positive outcomes that directly impact people's health and wellbeing.

We believe the numerous attempts to address health inequalities fall down because they:

- Fail to address the needs identified by local people, rather than their perceived priorities;
- Marginalise already marginalised communities by not supporting them through a meaningful engagement process to full participate;
- Do not act on the social and economic factors which contribute so significantly to health inequalities, as the Marmot reports (2010 and 2020) so clearly showed.

We have the greatest of respect for any council trying to address the real causes of health inequalities at a time of unprecedented pressures. If we can provide more information, please do feel free to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

**John Hume**

**Chief Executive**



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## Case studies

### Case study: Longbenton, Newcastle - supported by Justice Prince

Start date: April 2014

Grant awarded by People's Health Trust: £706,186

Through a process of deep engagement, residents in Longbenton identified Employability and Training, Reducing Isolation and Increasing community resources and assets as the key social determinants which give rise to poor health in their neighbourhoods. They wished to prioritise these areas.

- There is a clear focus on environmental action as part of increasing community resources and assets. Environmental Action Teams oversee specific sections of the neighbourhood, have planted trees, held regular litter picks, delivered horticultural training, and have worked in partnership with the council on improving one of the play areas to restore it and make it accessible for disabled children. Residents have also led work with the council to replace tarmac on local footpaths, and developed their own environmentally-focused network.
- Evidence shows that this work has brought a sense of pride, greater levels of trust and a deeper sense of belonging to the neighbourhood<sup>6</sup>, outcomes that steer towards a greater sense of control and, in time, better health outcomes.
- Justice Prince have also negotiated a land asset transfer for their community garden and have recently built a modular building, where they intend to run a social hub and food enterprise. This will increase community access to fruit and vegetables and support residents to grow their own. All profits go straight back into the community.
- The project's delivery model includes a range of decision-making mechanisms, ensuring residents can influence decisions and get involved in the ways most meaningful to them. This non-prescriptive approach supports the spread of control across the neighbourhood and underlies their success, with 85% of residents reporting having the power to make important decisions that can change the course of their lives.
- 98% of residents in Longbenton are now satisfied with the local area as a place to live, in contrast with an average of 76% in England, and an average 64% in similarly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup>
- Residents are leading a range of activities, have mapped local sources of power and charted how they can bring about change for themselves, their families and the wider community. Those first engaged in the project in 2014 remain closely involved and deeply passionate. 100% of residents involved report a growth in confidence through the project and 95% have learnt or developed new skills. Many have qualified as Community Organisers, and see clearly how their actions impact against the social determinants of health and how they can start to address health inequalities.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Local Conversations residents' survey 2018, New Economics Foundation; Community Life Survey 2016-17, Cabinet Office.

Case study: Lozells, Birmingham - supported by Aspire & Succeed  
Start date: April 2014  
Grant awarded by People's Health Trust: £730,300

Aspire & Succeed covers approximately 791 households and 5,000 residents. The Local Conversation in Lozells has built strong engagement processes that deliberately transfer control gradually to residents across the neighbourhood, supported by the fact that staff members are seen as “inside” rather than “outside” in the community. Shale Ahmed, Project Manager for Aspire & Succeed in Lozells, Birmingham explains more about his experience of Local Conversations:

“Over the years there has been a lot of investment in the area but many of the people living here felt they couldn't see any impact. The Local Conversation programme designed and funded by People's Health Trust, in Lozells is different. When we started talking to people they wanted to get involved with the project because they recognised us - that gave them confidence to get involved and hope that things would change.

Although Lozells is in the top two per cent of deprived neighbourhoods in England, residents see it as a progressive place to live. There has been a lot happening since the start of the Local Conversation. Residents are working together to develop a shared vision for our community. The project has given us an opportunity to address local issues that matter to us.

It's all about listening to people. This approach has really helped us engage with local residents - they feel like they're involved from the start. We (at Aspire & Succeed) act as facilitators and support residents to come up with ideas. We know that no one activity is going to engage the whole neighbourhood so we need different activities and ideas to reach the most marginalised - something that takes time. Following our first major engagement process, local residents' decided on the three issues that were most important to them - children and young people; jobs and money; and place, environment and safety.

Environment has always been a big issue in our neighbourhood - children couldn't play in the park because people were taking drugs in there and razor blades and needles were dumped there. We all had our concerns but we actually had to also try to find solutions to them. We are here long term, trying to make a difference working from grass roots all the way to the top, tackling the issues together as community. We now have a relationship with the local street cleaners who know every road inside out and they know every 'grot spot' in Lozells.

We know their whole team - we work with their line manager, who is on a neighbourhood tasking group, so we hold him accountable and if he can't do something, we then go to their head office. We have connections with the whole department now, rather than just working with certain sections of waste management. We've set up an action group with the local residents of each road. There are always people who care about their community and want to improve things, it's just a case of identifying the people that have that passion and just give them some sort of direction, and then Lozells will blossom.

This approach has really helped us to engage with people, they feel like they're involved from the very start and that's really exciting. People can see the area is a progressive place to live where they feel happier about being in control of their own lives through taking action together with their neighbours and improving their health.”

