

# Health Inequalities: Peer Research into the Role of Communities

## Family and Friends

Scotland has some of the worst health and widest health inequalities in Europe. People with the lowest incomes are more likely to live for 26 years less in good health than those with the highest incomes.<sup>1</sup> We also know that more deprived areas tend to experience poorer health. Our **Health Inequalities: Peer Research into the Role of Communities** project aimed to explore how the communities that children grow up in contribute to these inequalities.

The project engaged 15 young peer researchers from Dalmarnock Primary School, Glasgow and Baldrigon Academy, Dundee, to explore how the places where they live affect health and wellbeing and how they contribute to inequalities in health.

The young peer researchers from each school delivered focus groups and conducted an ethnography of their local area. They identified three main areas they wanted to focus their research on:

- + Safety
- + Littering
- + Family and Friends

This briefing will focus on the **Family and Friends** aspect of their research.

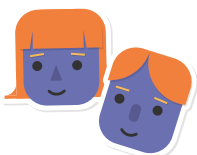
## Research Findings

### Activities

The research highlighted that children and young people enjoyed going to parks and green spaces with friends and family. We know that going to the park provides opportunities to play, exercise and socialise. This can benefit health and wellbeing throughout life. However, for many of the young people we spoke to, the bigger parks were located far away from their homes and required public transport to reach, which made them difficult to access. As we found in other sections of the research, parks were often littered with rubbish, this made children less likely to want to use them.<sup>2</sup>

It was clear from the safety aspect of the research that substance misuse and crime could affect what children wanted to do in the areas they lived in. They felt they were not in control of these situations and it could make them mistrust people. The researchers thought it would be good to have a range of opportunities and activities to support people to build relationships in the area; they suggested things like community events, markets and local festivals.

We also heard about a range of other activities in the community that children and young people enjoyed doing with their friends and family. This included activities such as the cinema, ice-skating and soft play. The participants appreciated these opportunities but felt that they were often expensive. They said some families could be priced out of doing these sorts of activities, while others might feel peer pressure to engage in activities they can't afford. It was very clear that the activities available to children and young people were accessible depending on material circumstances.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities-december-2017/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://childrenscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Hi-Briefing-Littering.pdf>

## Food

Our ethnography confirmed a high density of fast food restaurants within both communities, in line with national statistics.<sup>3</sup>

We know from other research that this is likely to have an impact on the choices made by children and young people in relation to food.

This is particularly important as it was clear during the focus groups that going out for fast food was valued by the children and young people. Fast food restaurants appeared to provide key opportunities for socialising with family and friends within the two communities in which the research took place. We know the importance these relationships have on children's development.<sup>4</sup> Supporting affordable, healthy alternatives where friends and families can meet and eat together is therefore important.

## Policy recommendations

It is clear that in areas of deprivation, such as those in this study, there is a lack of accessible green space and affordable activities for children and young people to access with their friends and families. Combined with a high density of fast food restaurants, this severely limits the opportunities for children and young people to make healthy choices in the areas they grow up in. In response to these findings, our young peer researchers made the following recommendations for decision makers:

- + We would like more access to free or cheap fun activities, like youth clubs, football pitches and play spaces. We should not have to pay money to have places to go.
- + Provide opportunities in the community to build positive relationships so that we can take pride in where we live. This could include community groups, local events, markets or small local festivals.
- + Use planning processes to get support for healthier shops and restaurants to set up in our communities.
- + Provide cheaper or free bus travel for children, young people and families so we can visit parks and leisure facilities in other areas.
- + Involve children and young people in decisions about the places we live. This is our right.

The places where children and young people grow up need to be designed with children and young people in mind. The UNICEF Child Friendly Cities model presents a framework for this. This should be used to identify the types of resources that children and young people want and need, including the options for meeting with family and friends.



<sup>3</sup> Cummins, S.C., McKay, L. and MacIntyre, S., 2005. McDonald's restaurants and neighbourhood deprivation in Scotland and England. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 29(4), pp. 308-310.

<sup>4</sup> Multiple refs, See P18 of final report for references:  
<https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Health-Inequalities-Report-Chris-Ross.pdf>



### Contact

If you would like to discuss the content of this briefing further, please contact **Chris Ross, Policy Officer:**  
[cross@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:cross@childreninscotland.org.uk)

