

people's
health
trust



Local People programme evaluation:

A summary

Introduction and key findings

Local People is a long-term programme funded by People's Health Trust. It aims to increase social connections and the amount of control people have over their lives and in their communities, in order to improve health and wellbeing.

Residents are at the centre of their Local People project's design and development, making the decisions and delivering agreed actions. At the time of the evaluation, the Trust was funding 29 Local People projects. Funding will last for up to eight years, in order to help facilitate transformative change.

Supported by national charity partners, the programme provides a space for residents to engage in a meaningful way with other people in their community, to agree on a local vision from their shared priorities and then to address these together. The programme's intention is to create the space for people to focus on the social determinants of health that are relevant to them.

The New Economics Foundation and Leeds Beckett University evaluated the programme between 2017 and 2019. They explored how it is working and assessed the impact it is having.

The evaluation found that the Local People programme created important improvements in the neighbourhoods and communities that were involved. Many varied actions have taken place. There is good evidence that social connections within and between groups of people has improved. People's enjoyment, sense of belonging and community spirit has also increased. Quality of life has been improved and better places to live have been created.

The residents most closely involved in making decisions and delivering the projects have increased in confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills. They feel able to make changes in their neighbourhoods, and are more in control.

While much has been achieved, there is limited evidence that the Local People programme has improved the amount of influence people have over those in positions of power or improved local social, economic and environmental conditions. While this has happened in some cases, it is not yet widespread.

If the programme is to achieve its aims, efforts need to be made to:

- Support local areas to focus on and tackle the social, environmental and economic factors that affect health, and to influence people and organisations with power.

- Support local areas to increase the number and diversity of people who are involved in decision-making and have control over the project.

What is the Local People Programme?

In 2014, People's Health Trust (the Trust) began a new programme called Local People. This aims to give people living in neighbourhoods experiencing disadvantage control over identifying relevant local priorities. Funding from the Trust and local support helps them to achieve their aims. It intends to increase social connections, increase the control people have over local decisions and their own lives, and to improve health and wellbeing.

The Local People programme is based on four core principles:

- It is a neighbourhood/community of interest approach. People living in a particular place are supported to act together to address common issues.
- The process of joining together to reach a common vision for their community is the key focus. Residents are free to change their minds, and visions naturally evolve.
- Local people are encouraged to use their local wisdom and experience to agree their priorities and the actions that take place in their area.
- The pace of the project is controlled by local people.

At the time of the evaluation, there were 29 projects in the Local People programme, across England, Wales and Scotland, all within the 30% most deprived areas of the country according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Most are neighbourhood based projects but some are communities of interest¹ (e.g. disabled people).

Each project receives a grant of between £40,000 and £85,000 per year. A practitioner is employed to facilitate each project, supported by one of five national charities: Royal Voluntary Service, Scope, Sustrans (until 2019), The Conservation Volunteers and Youth Sport Trust.

As it takes time to build power and control, each project is funded for the long-term, initially for two to three years, with the intention of extending year-on-year, up to eight years. The programme is ongoing.

Project practitioners work with residents to identify what is most important to them and their community. They agree together how they would like to use the money in their area and what actions they will take.

Project practitioners, across Great Britain, contribute to an online and offline network to share learning, explore any issues and discuss solutions.

The programme is built upon the growing body of evidence which demonstrates that if people are socially connected and have more control collectively, as a community, it can improve their health. This includes people working together to take action and to influence the things that matter to them.

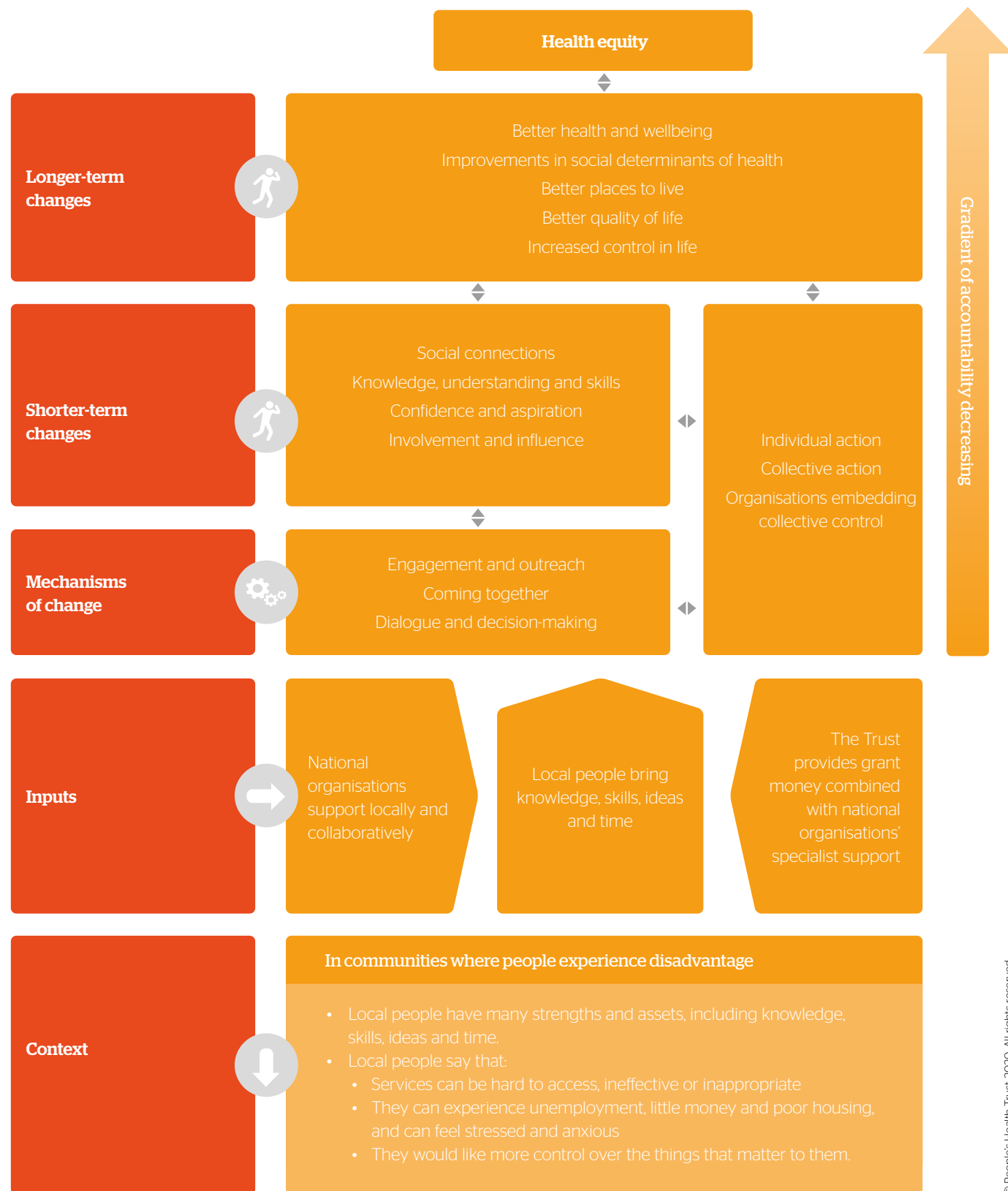
We know from existing research that social connections play a vital role in health and wellbeing. This is because social relationships have stress buffering effects, can have positive impacts on health behaviours and contribute to a sense of meaning and purpose in life. The effect of social relationships on mortality risks are comparable with smoking and alcohol consumption and are likely to exceed other risk factors such as physical inactivity and obesity.² There is a body of evidence building about the impact of control on health. Whitehead et al.'s review of control and health inequalities noted that potential relationships between collective control and health are both direct and indirect³. When communities make or influence change collectively, they may prevent risks to their current health and form the ability to do so in the future. They also build social networks and combat isolation, develop neighbourhood trust and reduce alienation and distress – all important factors which impact health. Conversely, lacking power or control can increase stress, which adversely affects health.

How was the programme evaluated?

The New Economics Foundation and Leeds Beckett University conducted the evaluation between 2017 and 2019 and collected information using:

- A survey of participants, repeated every six months. 1,089 people took part in the survey. This enabled outcomes to be tracked over time, and compared to averages collected in the UK government's Community Life Survey (CLS) for England.
- Case studies of five projects, including interviews, group discussions and observations by the evaluation team (with over 140 conversations) plus community research by project participants.
- Anonymous, written feedback from project staff.
- Interviews with the five national charities plus report /website analysis.
- Self-evaluations by the local areas with training and support from the evaluation team.
- At the beginning of the programme, a Theory of Change was developed with funded partners (figure 1, page 4). This describes the changes it was hoped would take place and how that could happen. The information collected in the evaluation was used to test this Theory of Change.

Figure 1:
A theory of change for Local People



What did the evaluation find?

How the projects work locally

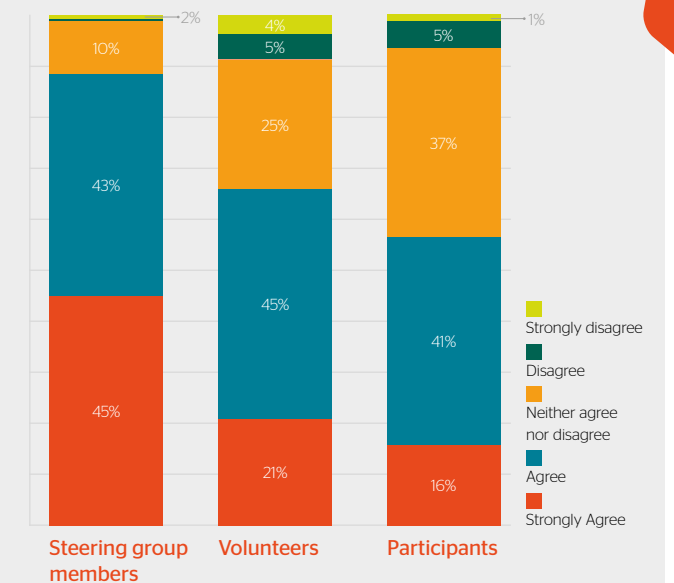
Since its inception in 2014, a vital part of the programme has been to engage with local residents and agree their priorities. Project practitioners used a range of methods to reach out and engage with community members, including: handing out leaflets, meeting with existing groups, going door-to-door, having stalls in public spaces and consultation events in community buildings. This in-depth engagement process identified the issues most important to the community - their local priorities.

Face-to-face approaches tended to be more successful than indirect approaches, such as leafleting. Actively reaching out to people by knocking on doors was an important way to include people who weren't as involved in the community.

Each project then set up decision-making bodies (often called steering groups). These usually involve between five and 15 local community members. They come together regularly and take control of decisions about which actions to take and which groups or activities to fund.

Numerous actions across a wide range of issues were carried out. These included: regular classes, large-scale community events, area improvement initiatives, creative activities and support for existing groups. There were also some examples of influencing actions, such as campaigning for improved disability access (see page 17) or bus services. Table 1 (page 6) gives examples of the action taken or supported by Local People projects.

Figure 2. I am able to have a say in how the Local People project activities are designed, developed and run



How people are taking part

Most projects are engaging with a wide variety of people and this is increasing over time. For example, the proportion of survey respondents with no recognised formal education has increased over time and 50% of survey respondents said that, before joining the Local People project, they had never participated in a group that took action or made decisions locally.

However, there are still some biases in who does and does not participate. It is an ongoing challenge to ensure that those taking part are representative of the community.

Regular community events or activities; funding for existing community groups; and using the networks of those initially involved all helped to involve a wider range of people.

Most people's way of participating in the programme however is by attending events or activities and they are not yet involved in decision-making. This means they are less likely to feel they have a say in how the project is run (see figure 2). In some areas, power was concentrated amongst quite small groups. A key challenge therefore is getting more people involved in controlling the direction of the projects.

Local People projects have faced many barriers. The programme operates in areas that experience extreme difficulties, from retreating public services and stigma to a high prevalence of poverty and mental health issues

Table 1: Sample of action taken or supported by case study areas

Local People project in Biddulph	Local People project in Brighton	Local People project in Inverness
Men's group	Disability and carer's swimming	Christmas and summer events
Meet and Eat	Disability Pride – an annual public event to celebrate inclusion and raise awareness of disability discrimination	Youth forum trip to Holyrood
Sports coaching training	Art, swimming, cooking classes	Mural to cover graffiti.
Fit for Friday	Theatrical production discussing sex and disability	Residents association trips
Ukulele lessons	Beach access campaign	Craft group
Coach trips		Brownie group
Art class		Basketball
Bowling		
Campaigning for improved bus services		

amongst residents. Often, residents are busy working long hours trying to make ends meet. In some cases, people did not want or were not able to take on more responsibility in their lives. Some were distrustful of funding initiatives, having had negative experiences before.

The knowledge, enthusiasm and hard work of the project practitioners has been critical to the success of the projects. The grant money, the programme's long time-frame, and residents being able to focus on what was important to them also helped. The knowledge and wisdom of community members is central.

The role of the national charities

The evaluation found that the national charities provided important support to projects through line managing and supporting the local leads, as well as providing training, guidance and resources. However, they also created an extra layer of administration, which led to additional reporting requirements and, at times, misconstrued communication. How the focus of the national charity – such as sports or volunteering – should be included in the programme, given its ethos of empowering residents to decide on their own priorities was unclear in some cases.

The role of People's Health Trust

People's Health Trust provides funding and acts as a critical friend to support the projects make progress through the theory of change. It facilitates regular face-to-face network meetings for practitioners to help them work through challenges and share best practice. An online network space has also been setup for practitioners to facilitate peer and Trust support. The evaluation found that project practitioners and national coordinators appreciated the Trust's flexible, long-term approach, and their commitment to community-led change. However, some projects reported difficulties with communication, and some local staff and participants didn't always fully understand the programme's concept, or the Trust's expectations.

The impact of Local People projects

Local People projects have achieved a number of important changes in the neighbourhoods they operate in. Here, we describe these changes, referencing findings from our case study and survey research. Survey findings have been compared to averages taken from the Community Life Survey (CLS, see page 3)

Social connections

There is good evidence that social connections have improved as people have got together through events and activities. One participant explained:

"I know more people when I go out; I talk to people more and have a bigger circle of friends."

Significantly more Local People participants report talking to their neighbours on most days than England-wide averages, as well as averages for those living in similarly-disadvantaged areas (see Figure 3). Local People participants also report significantly stronger feelings of neighbourhood belonging (see Figure 4).

Connections between groups of people previously separated by age or area have improved.

"When we have the events on the avenue, that's like the sort of neutral meeting ground, so to speak, for everybody. So, that's the time when the two communities really do come together and mix and get to know each other."

"I came up here on the Wednesday for the choir, and there was a gang of kids outside. I was like, 'Oh god, I gotta go past these kids now'. Now these are the kids that we are actually dealing with in the youth group, that I'm volunteering with. These were the kids I was panicking over. Most of the time, they are just being there, it's about getting used to it. It's broken that barrier down. If that youth session wasn't being run, [I'd] still be scared of them."

Figure 3. How often do you chat to any of your neighbours, more than just to say hello?

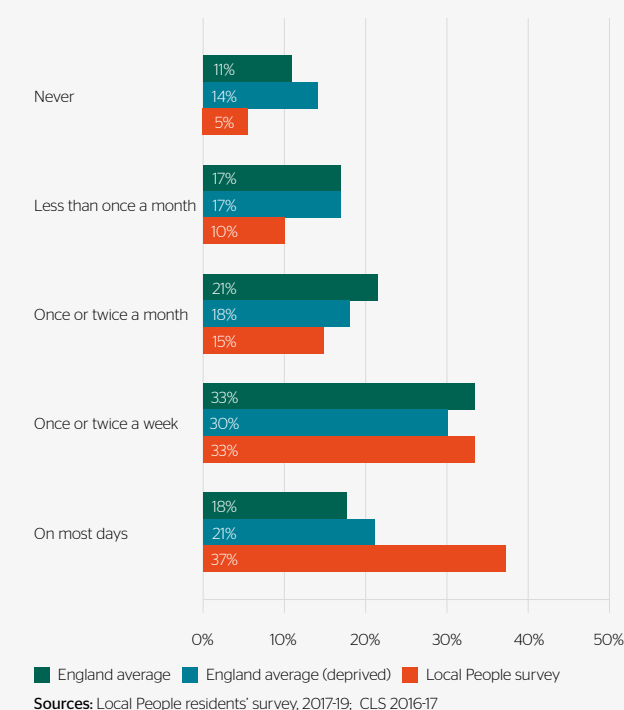


Figure 4. In your immediate neighbourhood, how strongly do you feel you belong?

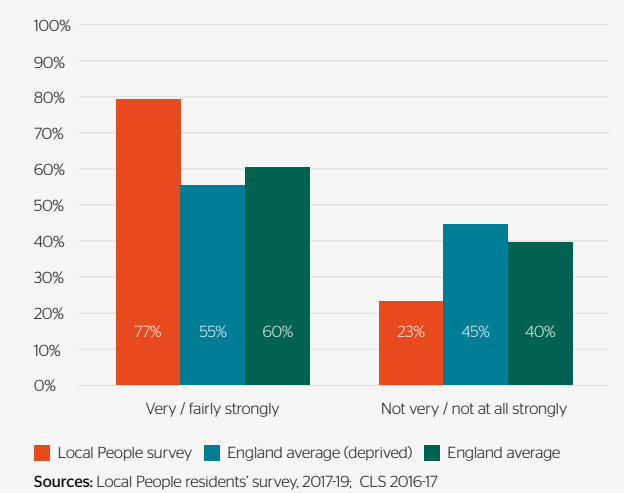
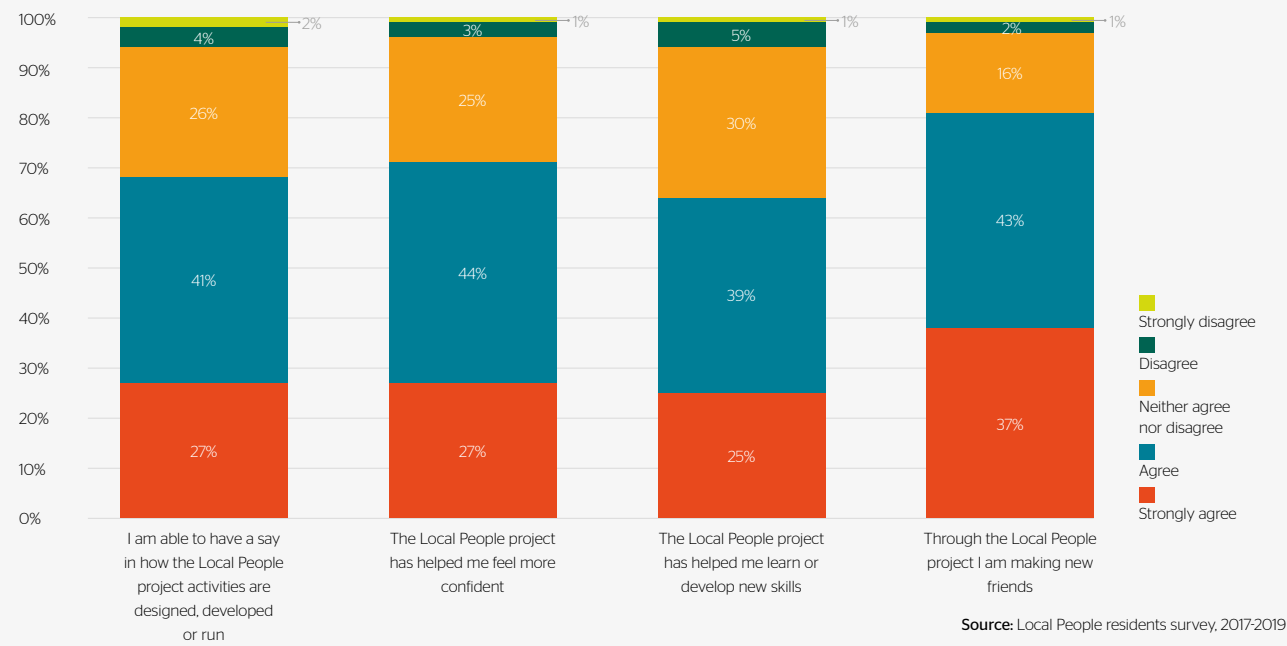


Figure 5. The difference that Local People has made for you



Confidence, knowledge and skills.

The Local People programme has helped people feel more confident and developed their knowledge, understanding and skills (see Figure 5 above).

These positive outcomes are strongest in the people who have been more closely involved with the project, such as members of decision-making bodies, or those delivering local activities. Steering group members told us:

“I sit at the table now, rather than under it.”

“It’s taught me to stick up for myself a bit more.”

In addition, the survey found that the longer people are involved, the stronger the impact is. They are more likely to feel they have a say in the projects and to have improved confidence and skills.

Quality of life and wellbeing

The evaluation found that enjoyment, a sense of belonging and community spirit all increased, improving people’s quality of life. This was often as a result of the events and activities, as well as the social connections that were gained from the project.

There are signs that for some people the project has led to improved mental health and wellbeing as a result:

“I feel valued, immensely valued. I had a hard time - I had a hard time with my mental health. I had depression for two and a half years, so getting out and meeting people and getting to do these events, it made such a huge difference to me. A huge difference.”

Control and wellbeing

Many of those who have improved their knowledge, understanding and skills have increased feelings of control and empowerment. An interviewee explained:

“It’s about being given the opportunity to do something about the issues. The projects that we are working on, it is all coming together to try and make that difference. Together we are addressing those issues. Just being part of the Local People project - for me, we have come on so far over the months, because together we can do so much.”

This increased sense of control has occurred, in the main, for those who are more involved in the programme, most often in formal decision-making roles. These positive changes are less evident in those who are less heavily involved and primarily only attending events or participating in activities.

Survey findings show that those involved for longer feel that they have more power to change their lives. This supports the programme’s theory of change, that the Local People programme increases empowerment over time.

Survey results show that better wellbeing (including increased happiness, life satisfaction, worthiness and power) is associated with a higher level of involvement.

“It’s about being given the opportunity to do something about the issues. The projects that we are working on, it is all coming together to try and make that difference.”

Influence

There is only limited evidence that projects have increased local residents’ influence over those in positions of power. Most of the stated local priorities and the subsequent actions focussed on putting on activities and events in order to improve connections and the local area, and did not aim to directly increase influence.

However, some signs of developing greater influence did emerge in some areas. In Brighton, for example, community members raised improving disability access to the beach as a priority. They then undertook peer research and used their findings to influence the council. Members of the disabled community involved in the project reported that they felt less on their own and more motivated to make structural changes by sharing power with the council;

“a) [improvements to beach access] needs to happen and b) we want to be part of [decisions and actions] and do it with [the council]. We don’t want [the council] to do it for us.”

Social determinants of health

At this stage, there is limited evidence that the programme is addressing the social determinants of health, beyond the foundations of social connections and increased control described above. Other important determinants of health are jobs and income, our surroundings, local economies, housing and education and skills. There are some exceptions, such as changes to the quality of local environments, but these are generally small in scale.

National charities embedding control

There was evidence from staff interviews and a strategy document review that some of the national charities partnering with the Trust to deliver the Local People programme have either adopted ways of working that support collective control or intend to do so, and this was said to be partly due to their involvement in the programme.

“Working on Local People has led us to a questioning of how well we really do community engagement.”

However, collective control was often supported, or thought about, within the charities’ topical focus - i.e. sport or volunteering. Some of the charities remain focussed on a service-delivery model, individual-level action and/or behaviour change.

Key issues

Reach

The projects need to encourage more residents to get involved in decision-making roles, as positive changes are stronger for this group of people. This could include expanding decision-making beyond formal steering groups. Projects supported by Scope, for example, set up informal 'get togethers' which help build trust and allowed a wider range of people to have control.

Key recommendations:

- Build in more ongoing, active ways for people to feed into setting priority areas;
- Include resident-led decision-making processes in all action taken as part of Local People projects, for example at events and activities, in order to spread power beyond formal steering groups.

Focus of action

Most of the actions taken so far have been community events and activities. Projects have not set some of the more ambitious aims of the programme, such as increasing influence over people in power or improving economic and social conditions, as their priorities. Some of the improvements cited earlier, in social connections and confidence, for example, may have created a base upon which to build, but projects will need to take more specific action in order to create transformative change.

Key recommendations:

- Support projects to explore the social and economic structures that influence health in the local area, and what can be done to improve them;
- Support projects to draw from existing ideas about how to do this - including community organising, co-production and asset-based community development, with a particular focus on developing influencing and advocacy skills.

Biddulph

The Local People project in Biddulph is supported by Royal Voluntary Service and started in April 2015.

The area

Biddulph is a town in Staffordshire surrounded by countryside. The Local People project is concentrated in Biddulph East, an area which was home to the mining community before the pits were closed. Unemployment has been a big problem in the area since the decline of local industries and some local people feel Biddulph East has a bad reputation as a place to live. The Local People project provided an opportunity to change perceptions of the area and to build a sense of community. Some residents feel the community is close knit and supportive, but those without established social networks can feel quite isolated.

How does Local People work in Biddulph?

The Local People project in Biddulph is led by one paid member of staff. The project has a fund known as the 'People's Pot', which community groups can apply to. The project practitioner works with a steering group of local residents, and a wider group of 'observers' to decide how best to allocate the money to work towards improving life for the people of Biddulph East.

Community members value the experience and knowledge that the project practitioner brings to the project and have grown in confidence with his guidance, taking more ownership and control over the course of the project.

The project began in Biddulph just as a local venue was being relaunched as a youth and community centre following a community asset transfer. They formed a mutually beneficial partnership which provides the community with a range of health and wellbeing activities. They have formed another key partnership with a local care home, which has supported residents to be active on the steering group and to participate in activities, giving voice to people who are frequently overlooked.



Main activities

The aims of the project are to improve people's health and wellbeing, to connect people into community life, to give people a voice, to reduce loneliness and isolation, and to increase confidence. The project was initially focused on the over 50s age group but, as it developed, community members added intergenerational work as another priority. The aims were agreed through consultation with local community members.

Activity

- Fit For Friday
- Meet and Eat
- Men's Group
- SMILE (Social Music Interest Learning Education/ Enjoyment) group
- Bowling
- Ukulele classes in a care home
- Coach trips
- Intergenerational cooking project
- Sports coach training

The Local People project in Biddulph continued...

Community engagement

The project has a dedicated core group who have actively taken part throughout the project. The number of people taking part in activities has grown over the years. Steering group members find it difficult to get more people engaged - they find that word of mouth works better than other attempts to promote the project (such as leaflets or posters), particularly for the target age group.

Community members like to have different ways to be involved, so that they are able to commit to differing degrees to suit their personality and lifestyle. Many people worry about letting others down if they can't honour responsibilities due to ill health or other commitments and for some this brings too much pressure.

"I would like to be involved in a little more, but not too much commitment [...] because if I'm not well, then I've got to let somebody down."

Other barriers to getting involved include a lack of confidence, having other commitments and a lack of interest.

The group feel in control of the project and how the money is spent but aren't yet ready to lose the support of the project practitioner. The project practitioner uses a bus analogy to describe who is in control.

"Initially, I was driving the bus, I then ended up in the passenger seat at the side, I'm now, I think, behind the driver... I see myself slowly handing the power and the control over to them."

"[Two years later] I think I'm on the footplate just about to step off the bus, to be quite honest."

The steering group think he's still next to the driver with them, appropriately, at the wheel.

"I should imagine he's probably... still sitting at the front with the driver a bit, I think. Still sitting next to the driver."

What difference has the project made?

Increased social connections

Increased social connections and friendships are the most commonly reported outcomes.

The men's group has given residents a much-needed space to enjoy the companionship of other men of a similar age and background, which had been a large part of their life during their careers in male dominated industries.

The intergenerational activities have built connections between older and younger people, and helped to reduce the older people's anxieties about passing the groups of young people on the street.

Increased confidence and skills

Those most involved have grown in confidence, developed a voice, and learnt new skills.

"I'll tell you what it's taught me, to stick up for myself a bit more, I wouldn't say boo to a goose. [...] To get on my soapbox a bit more. I have no trouble getting on my soapbox for these lot, but for myself I do, but it's actually bringing that bit out."

Improved health and wellbeing

Residents' physical activity has increased through groups such as the weekly Fit for Friday, which has a carefully designed programme tailored to the participants' needs:

"A lady who comes in a wheelchair, she couldn't move her arms before she came and now she can hit a tennis ball with a tennis racket."

Increased activity, social interaction and involvement has had a strong impact on mental health and the better the people taking part feel, the more they do.

"I think if they're in more control they are participating, it's making their minds work, etc. etc., and feel good about themselves. [Participating] raises self-esteem, confidence and all of that, which helps mental health issues and prevents people sitting at home. It reduces social isolation. People are out all the time."

The higher profile of the community centre and the activities there have attracted other groups that promote health and wellbeing to the over 50s. They have offered blood pressure tests, health advice, and crime prevention information to those attending.

One community member credits the Local People project with making her feel better than she has done for years, both physically and mentally. She has also witnessed changes in people as they grow in confidence and socialise more, as well as weight loss in others attending the exercise groups.

"I feel I'm better than I was maybe 10, 20 years ago [...] I'm able to move that little bit better, I enjoy going out more, and mixing, meeting people, having a joke and a laugh and a cuppa, you sit down, put the world to rights, you know, things like that."

The main benefits of the Local People project have been felt by those involved in the decision-making process and participating in activities, but it has not, in the main, reached the wider community. The steering group are working on strategies to increase their reach.

Future plans

The steering group have become more independent, but still need some guidance. The community centre is working with Royal Voluntary Service's national lead for the Local People programme regarding becoming more sustainable.

Residents want to continue the activities they have built up, and they now make a small contribution towards the running costs. They also plan to partner with a local GP surgery to potentially develop a social prescribing programme.

The project practitioner is encouraging the steering group to think more strategically, for example to look for match-funding for a befriending post, as opposed to focusing on organising groups. He is still hopeful there will be opportunities to work with the local authority.

How was the research done?

The evaluation team visited Biddulph in October 2017 and interviewed 19 people (the project practitioner, steering group members, observers, and partners). They returned in October 2018 and completed 19 more interviews (13 new interviewees, including 12 participants of groups, and six follow-up interviews with those involved at phase 1).

In addition to this, four residents completed some peer research. They took part in a two-day workshop and then the four residents interviewed people who had been involved in the project and those who had not. They wanted to find out people's views of the neighbourhood and how to support people to get involved in the project. People told the community researchers that through the Local People project, they had made new friends, tried new things and improved their health. They suggested holding events at a range of times and venues to reach other residents.

Inverness

The Local People project in Inverness is supported by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV). The project started in 2015 and covers two neighbourhoods - the whole of Smithton and part of Culloden.



The area

Smithton and Culloden are on the outskirts of Inverness. They are surrounded by green space and overlook the Moray Firth. The two areas have been quite separate in the past, with some degree of rivalry between them. 'The Avenue', an attractive woodland space, runs between the two areas.

Wage stagnation and austerity have affected the area, with many people 'just getting by'. Crime levels are low, although there is some vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Some residents feel there is a strong sense of community in the area, especially when there is a crisis, but others believe connections between people need to be improved. Tensions between older and younger generations exist.

There are good local amenities (shops and a library), although there is no community centre in either Smithton or Culloden. A variety of activities take place, but not everyone knows about them and they can be too costly for some. There is a lack of activities for teenagers. A large new housing estate is being built and flood alleviation works carried out, both of which are changing the area.

How does Local People work in Inverness?

One paid member of staff leads the Local People project in Inverness. A steering group made up of residents oversees the project, including deciding on its priorities. Some members also run other community groups;

they have a wide range of skills and are a variety of ages. The steering group meets four or five times per year, whenever something needs discussing.

The project provides a fund for local community groups. The project practitioner promotes the fund, encouraging groups to apply and helping them fulfil the criteria. The steering group decide whether they receive the funding, they also make suggestions and help the groups connect to other organisations.

The project has many different local partners, including churches, youth groups and resident associations. TCV line-manage local staff and encourage learning between the different Local People projects they support.

Main activities

The project aims to get people involved in their community so there is improved community spirit and it becomes a 'place where they're happier, more connected, and where they feel they have a say.' The priorities for the project are: improving the green space; sharing news and information about existing activities more widely; having a community venue; bringing the community together in a neutral space, and offering activities to benefit everyone. These were identified through a residents' survey and consultations.

A number of activities have been developed and supported through the project. Some have been organised as part of the programme, while others have been supported through the funding of local community groups.

Projects, activities and events

Local People

Have bought communal resources e.g. gazebos and funded training to capacity build. They have communicated activities via:

- A newsletter - The Juggernaut (3000 copies)
- Noticeboards
- Facebook
- Leaflet

Youth Forum and Youth Hub

Received funding from Local People to:

- Visit Holyrood Parliament
- Paint a mural to cover graffiti
- Buy cooking and social equipment for the hub
- Organise a ski trip
- Set up Health & Wellbeing sessions

PARCS (Preserve and Revamp Culloden & Smithton), funded by Local People and now an independent charity. They have:

- Organised Christmas and Summer social events on the Avenue, with up to 700 people coming
- Performed a wild flower rescue mission
- Sourced a container to store equipment and be a community hub
- Plans to improve seating in parks

Smithton Residents' Association

Received funded from Local People to:

- Go on family trips
- Set up a sponsored tree planting project
- Buy uniforms to raise profile

The Seniors group received a package of funding for sustainability.

Other activities funded include:

- A craft group for primary school children
- Brownies - outings and activities to teach girls' skills
- A basketball hoop for the local park - pitched for by primary school pupils and made together.

Community engagement

The project started by delivering a survey to all residents living in the neighbourhoods (of which 80 were returned), and having conversations with people on doorsteps and outside public buildings. This engagement raised awareness of the project and led to the recruitment of the steering group members. The project increased their reach by holding a number of community activities and through more informal local networking and partnership work. They are particularly focusing on The Avenue, by circulating their own newsletter and inviting residents and other groups to attend steering group meetings and apply for small grant funding.

The number of people attending activities has grown greatly overtime, with some residents going on to support delivery and increasing the depth of their involvement. There is a committed core group of steering group members, funded projects and partners. Relatedly, a key challenge for the project is encouraging those involved to take on increasing responsibility and commit to deliver particular roles or tasks. People are thought to lack confidence and self-esteem, be naturally reserved, or put off by too much formality.

The project tries to draw people gradually into the project, from coming to events, to helping out occasionally to more regular commitment. They try to keep things informal where possible.

"It is difficult to get people to engage, because I think the word 'volunteer' puts people off, because they expect then to have to give hours and hours and hours... It's breaking that down, so we're kind of going with 'supporters', so someone's a 'supporter of a group', so they don't feel like they have to give hours' worth of their time. Whatever they can is fantastic."

Steering group members feel in control of the project, sometimes running the meetings independently, although they still greatly value the project practitioner's input.

What difference has it made?

The Local People project in Inverness has led to a number of positive outcomes.

Stronger social connections

Connections between people have improved as a result of the project. This has come about by working together in groups to make decisions and deliver activities and by going to community activities. Strong relationships have formed within groups, as they work together towards a shared vision. Connections between different groups, including between neighbourhoods and generations, have also been made.

"I think it's helped to break down the barriers, people are finding it slightly easier to make friends because we've got the events and stuff they can come along to. ... So, when we have the events on The Avenue that's kind of neutral meeting ground ... That's when the two communities really do come together and mix and get to know each other."

Improved knowledge, understanding and skills

Steering group members have learnt how to assess bids, how to run meetings and gained finance and administration skills. Those applying for funds and delivering activities have learnt how to cost activities, how to present their case, how to run events and engage with others. Young people have gained social and life skills.

"Yeah, and taking them out of their comfort zone as well, and actually making them do something real. So, when they start to engage with... the Avenue event, that's something real, they're having to do that, that's not just something that's pretend at school. (...) I think once you start to do that, then they start to build up all those kind of social skills and soft skills, which will hopefully make them engaged in their community in the long run."

Increased confidence and aspirations

People who have taken on responsibilities or helped deliver projects have also gained confidence in their abilities.

"I've gained in confidence, because before, if [the project practitioner] had handed me that form, I would have been... 'What do I do with this?' But now, over the few years that we've been getting funding, you know what you're doing, and each time you try to make your application even better and more professional."

Some activities have helped increase young people's aspirations and broadened their horizons.

A better place to live

Residents have undertaken many activities to improve the area physically, particularly the green spaces. There is less litter, lots of bulbs and wild flowers have been planted, and community facilities have also improved. People feel more secure, as they now know their neighbours.

"I think it has helped - because I know my neighbours, my neighbours know me, and it makes me feel more secure, particularly for my [child's] benefit. [...] Everyone is ready looking out because they can see if the kids play together, and they're all good friends, and everybody's very aware of that. I mean, there's elderly folk on our street as well so everybody's kind of taking an extra step to make sure they're OK."

Increasing confidence in possibility of change

Taking part in the Local People project has led to residents being more aware of local issues. For some, it has led to a change in mindset from expecting statutory bodies to resolve these issues, to thinking about how they as a community could take action.

"I go around the local area a bit but don't really think about negative and positive sides of it before we did the [peer research] course, and then as we were researching I realised it's quite a lot of negative stuff as well as positives as well, but ... it's like opened my eyes a little bit."

More broadly, residents now have more belief that their area "actually counts", building optimism for the future, with people feeling able to make a difference.

"If you can keep that interest with everybody, we can maybe grow and go on, go forward, because I think there's so much more that could happen in the area if people would just unite and work together."

Future plans

Residents have made plans for future activities including a community sports event organised by young people, using the new container as a 'hub' for activities and further Avenue events. The project hopes to gradually draw people into the project from just attending events to helping deliver them, to eventually helping make decisions. They plan to use informal approaches and language (e.g. 'Supporter', not 'Volunteer'). PARCS is now an independent charity. The project has made great strides but still relies on the project practitioner for support, encouragement and guidance.

How was the research done?

The evaluation team visited Inverness in November 2017 and interviewed 16 people (the project practitioner, steering group members, partners and funded projects). They returned in November 2018 and completed 14 more interviews (some were new interviewees, others repeats).

In addition to this, six young people completed some peer research. After training, they used photography, accompanied by text, to represent their views of the local area. These photographs went on to be displayed at a public exhibition.

Brighton

The Local People project in Brighton is supported by Scope. The project started in September 2015 and is focused on disabled people and unpaid carers as a community of interest across Brighton.

The area

Brighton, part of the seaside city of Brighton and Hove, is often seen as an attractive place to live. However, many of the city's assets - from the beach, to the shops, to the nightlife - are frequently inaccessible for disabled people. There are many instances of intolerant behaviour towards disabled people and a need to raise awareness of less visible disabilities.

Connections between disabled people are often strong as there are a high number of community groups, but not everyone is involved and groups are often impairment specific, with few opportunities for people with different disabilities to interact.

Due to changes to the benefits system, disabled people in Brighton spend a lot of time applying for access to financial support or appealing unfavorable decisions. Welfare rights advice services are underfunded, overstretched and are sometimes inaccessible for people with physical and other unfavourable impairments. A lack of access to disability benefits, combined with the higher costs of living associated with living with an impairment, mean that many have an insufficient income.

How does Local People work in Brighton?

The Local People project in Brighton is led by one paid member of staff and overseen by a Project Board. Members of the Board span disabled people with a range of impairments and access needs, some of whom are also unpaid carers and/or family members of disabled people. The Project Board meets every month, and is responsible for the project's outreach approach, setting priorities and running meetings. They also oversee the grant decision-making process and monitor grants once they have been awarded.

After the monthly Project Board meeting, there is a 'Get Together' meeting open to everyone participating in the Local People project with a core group of between eight and 12 people that regularly attend. Get Togethers are an informal way for community members to connect with other disabled people, and contribute their ideas and opinions into







the decision-making of the Project Board. Those interested in funding complete an application form and are invited to pitch their ideas to the Get Together group, who then collectively discuss, and vote on each idea. Decisions are based on the priority areas chosen for the project (see below).

The project is supported by Scope who line manage local staff and support learning between Local People projects.

Main activities

The project has a series of priorities:

-  Raising awareness of disability and needs of carers, and tackling associated health and social inequalities.
-  Increasing physical and environmental access, including making public transport fully accessible.
-  Reducing loneliness and isolation, by minimising obstacles to or increasing opportunities for social connection.
-  Addressing issues of finances and income (including awareness, resources and support).
-  Access to activities, learning, volunteering, employment and enjoyment.
-  Involvement of marginalised communities (e.g. LGBTQ+, BAME and homeless people).

The Local People project in Brighton has funded, or part funded, a range of projects, activities and events, including:

- Inclusive art groups.
- Cooking groups and coffee and cake clubs.
- Family activities.
- Dance performances and circus sessions.
- Film screenings.
- Art exhibitions.
- Theatre performances.
- Information and awareness events.
- Swimming groups.
- Accessible office space.
- Peer support groups.
- Accessibility adjustments.
- Awareness raising campaigns and events.

Community engagement

The project started with a process of outreach to recruit people for the first listening workshops and Get Together meeting. The lead used a range of methods, including: placing leaflets in public spaces; contacting pre-existing disability organisations and services; posting on social media groups and neighbourhood notice boards; and asking disabled people to spread the word amongst their networks. There is a diversity of people within the group, including wheelchair and other mobility equipment users, those with mental health problems, and those who are neurodivergent, with wide age ranges and sexual and gender identities. This diversity has enabled different viewpoints to be heard, enabling decisions that reflect a variety of need and aspiration.

However, the group recognise that they still need to engage with other communities who are underrepresented. Over the last year, the group has made active attempts to recruit new people and have learnt from this process. Rather than asking people to jump straight into meetings or activities, members meet people for coffee, explain the project and its structure and ask people about their support needs. The group holds regular social events in order to develop stronger relationships between those that have been involved for a long time and those that are new. However, the reach of the project is impeded by the amount of work that it takes to keep the project running at its current scale. Supporting accessible activities, events and actions take a lot of time. More project practitioner time may allow the more nuanced work of supporting full accessibility at the same time as expanding the reach of the project.

The project provides opportunities for control, where people can take on a variety of roles with varying levels of responsibility. Involvement ranges from coming along to activities or events, coming up with ideas and applying for grants, sitting-on the committees of larger projects or getting involved in decision making as part of the Get Together group or Project Board.

The range of opportunities allows people to slowly build the confidence and skills needed in order to take control of the project. The Project Board and Get Together group are taking more and more responsibility from the project practitioner and have become adept at talking about the project and raising awareness within the wider community.

What difference has it made?

The Local People project in Brighton is leading to a number of changes locally:

Social connectedness and identity

Many involved have formed new relationships through the Local People project, and are developing a collective sense of identity through shared experiences. They have created a space where 'being different is OK' and some have combated the social isolation that they were previously experiencing. Networks have begun to spread with other Local People projects supported by Scope.

Knowledge, understanding and skills

The project has enabled people to explore and deepen their knowledge and understanding of their and others impairments, as well the range of support and social opportunities in the city. Some have developed the ability to stand up in a room and 'articulate their experience' and have gained facilitation skills and the skills to run and lead projects themselves.

People have also developed increased knowledge about structural change and, in particular, a greater understanding of the social model of disability⁴. This, combined with a greater sense of possibility about creating change, is in turn leading to bigger and bolder action being taken through the project.

"There's nothing wrong with me, there's something wrong with the world."

"People want to make more structural changes now. At the beginning, they thought things were just them and now people know that that's really not the case."

Confidence and a sense of control

The experience of being involved, having a say and being supported to act has increased the confidence and sense of control for those involved.

"I'm taken seriously and I'm being heard [...] it's a long way out of my comfort zone, but I've been given a huge boost in confidence"

"I feel empowered, that's a big thing for me. So taking back control of my life I can relate to that because that's what I wasn't feeling before. I was feeling as if everything was beyond my control and just happening to me for a very long time and I don't feel like that so much anymore."

Influence

The first Disability Pride Brighton⁵ and the press coverage of the event has "helped the group make in-roads with the local authority and to the bodies and charities that before wouldn't reply" (local lead, interview).

"[The] council have now changed their attitude to 'it is something we want to be involved in, what can we do?'"

The second Disability Pride Brighton event was larger, and received more funding.

Confidence and knowledge gained through the Local People project means that those involved are now keen to take action that is aimed at

longer-term, more gradual but bigger and bolder changes. For instance, through a project researching and campaigning to increase beach access in the city, participants are engaging with the local council in action to make the beach more accessible, and to enter into a power sharing relationships.

"Rather than the local authority making assumptions about what people want and need, it's like, well we know all our experiences and we've spoken to all of these different people. So our main ask is that (a) this needs to happen but (b) we want to be part of that and do it with you. We don't want you to do it for us."

"People are thinking a bit larger now that they are more confident, now that they feel they've got more skills to work together"

Those in positions of power are starting to recognise the group as a collective, and groups involved are building more and more connections.

"Now that there is this public facing user led event, people are thinking maybe we should pay some more attention"

Increased sense of purpose

A sense of purpose has developed by making a difference through the Local People project.

"I don't know about the skills developing but I feel I've got so much more purpose to my life being involved in this, you know."

Mental health and wellbeing

Feelings of control, empowerment and purpose as well as reduced social isolation and improved social connectedness have led to improved mental health and wellbeing for several participants of the Local People project.

"Now that people have empowered me and taken me seriously and, as I say, being a part of something [...] It does do wonders for your overall wellbeing and mental health and perhaps I think that's much more significant than therapies and medications and all of that."

Future plans

The project is forming established networks and knowledge which contribute towards a sustained series of activities. Some projects (including Disability Pride) have acquired new sources of funding and set themselves up as their own group independent of the Local People project. The group now hope to continue to build on their success, as well as the connections, confidence and knowledge gained, to create lasting, long-term and structural change in Brighton and beyond.

How was the research done?

The evaluation team visited Brighton in November/December 2017 and interviewed 11 people (the local lead, Project Board members, Get Together attendees and funded groups). They returned in January/February 2019 and completed twelve more interviews (some were new interviewees, others were repeated), alongside participation and observation at activities and meetings.

Five people completed a peer research project as part of the case study research. After training, the group used surveys, conversations with disabled people and engagement events to understand further the issues that people face trying to access the Brighton beach and seafront. This whitepaper was then presented to Brighton & Hove City Council, alongside a petition for the group to work with the local authority to address these barriers.

Footnotes

1. Communities of interest are projects funded by People's Health Trust which connect groups of people with shared identities, experiences, characteristics or common interests who face additional barriers to good health due to discrimination and inequality.

2. Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010). Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. PLoS Med 7(7): e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316> (accessed 1 October 2019)

3. Whitehead, M, Orton, L, Pennington, A, Nayak, S, Ring, A, Petticrew, M, Sowden, A & White, M. 2014. "Is control in the living environment important for health and wellbeing, and what are the implications for public health interventions?". Public Health Research Consortium.

4. The social model of disability is a way of viewing the world, developed by disabled people that says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. (Scope, 2020) <https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/>

5. Disability Pride Brighton is now an annual event celebration of and for all people with disabilities which was initially supported by the Local People project.

Written by People's Health Trust, New Economics Foundation and Leeds Beckett University

Cover images:

Local People project in Brighton, supported by Scope.



People's Health Trust

-  020 7749 9100
-  peopleshealthtrust.org.uk
-  enquiries@peopleshealthtrust.org.uk
-  facebook.com/peopleshealthtrust
-  twitter.com/Peoples_Health
-  linkedin.com/company/people's-health-trust



New Economics Foundation



-  020 7820 6400
-  neweconomics.org
-  info@neweconomics.org
-  twitter.com/nef

Key contact: Daniel Button



**LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY**

Leeds Beckett University

-  leedsbeckett.ac.uk
-  [@leedsbeckett](https://twitter.com/@leedsbeckett)

Funded through



The Health Lottery scheme manages ten regional and two country society lotteries that operate in rotation and each represents a different geographical region of Great Britain.