



Community needs appraisal of children and young people in East Northumberland

Overview report

Carried out by:



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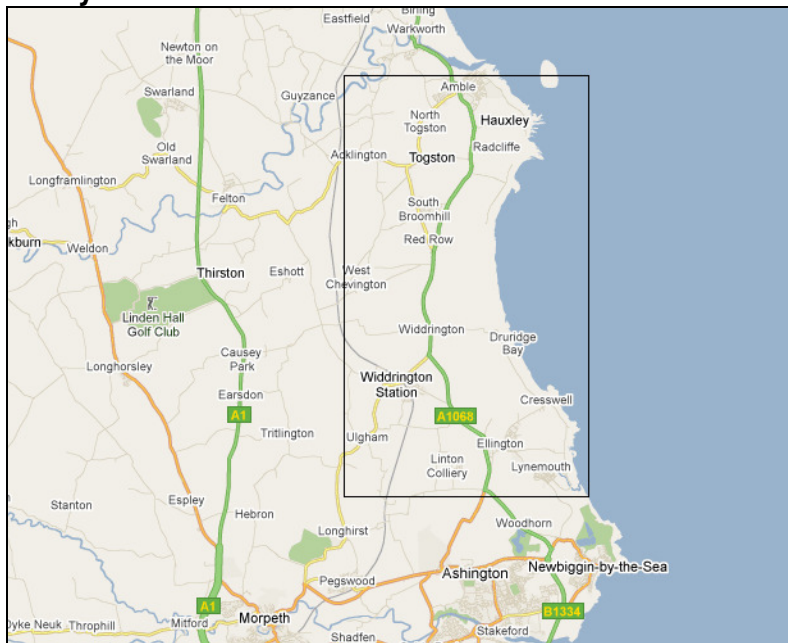
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Introduction

This summary report is a community needs appraisal of children and young people in East Northumberland¹. The needs appraisal has been carried out by Barefoot Research and Evaluation, an independent North East research organisation, on behalf of Children North East, a regional children’s charity².

The study area (shown in the highlighted area in the following figure) is roughly equivalent of the area known as the rural coalfields and has a population of around 11,000. It stretches from Amble at the most northerly point and goes through Hadston (not marked on the map but is to the north east of Broomhill), Broomhill, Chevington, Red Row, Widdrington and Widdrington Station, Ellington, Linton Colliery, Ulgham and ends in Lynemouth to the south³. For the purposes of this study, we are concerned with these named 11 towns and villages. The area to the south of this is serviced and administered by the urban centre of Ashington.

Study area



Source: Google maps

The study originated from an approach made by a community organisation in the locality to Children North East for support concerning youth provision. As a result

¹ Agencies interviewed included: Action for Children, Amble Youth Project, ATAC, Children’s Centres, Extended Services, Hadston House, Linton Community Centre, Noah’s Ark Nursery, Northumberland County Council’s Community Safety Unit, Northumberland County Council’s Youth Service, Positive Futures, Primary Care Trust, School Health Advisors.

² www.children-ne.org

³ There are named areas on the map which number only a small collection of houses and are not considered in this needs appraisal, namely Togston, Hauxley, Druridge Bay and Cresswell.

of this, although the appraisal considered all age ranges, from 0 to 18, we concentrated on the 10 to 18 age range (youth provision).

Needs of young people in the area

We found that there is a reasonable level of existing provision for children and young people in the study area, from nought to 18 years olds. However, there were several gaps identified.

The most significant gap found in the pre-school age range is for structured day care facilities; opportunities, such as play groups or nurseries, with the primary purpose of encouraging young children's development, as opposed to allowing parents to work. These would primarily benefit families from deprived neighbourhoods in the area. Such day care would encourage children who are not flourishing and would allow parents (who may be struggling to cope with their children) short breaks. Currently, there is only such day care available in Lynemouth or Amble. However, numbers are low for such a service elsewhere in East Northumberland and it is unlikely that provision will be created for such small numbers (around five to 15 children in each town or village).

The main area of need identified by this study was for the age group nine to 18. This can be divided into a junior (nine to 13) and senior (14 to 18) group, which can be classed as youth provision. There were three major categories of specific needs of these young people including:

- **Regular, long term and sustainable junior and senior provision** on at least two nights a week in each town and village in the area. Some areas currently have such provision, i.e. Hadston and Lynemouth, but others do not, e.g. Widdrington, Linton or Ellington. Youth provision needs to deliver a quality service which includes not only activities but also, information, advice and guidance and support.

Much of this provision is time limited and is either delivered by Amble Youth Project's Coastal Village Programme which ends in 2011 or by Positive Futures which is also likely to end in 2011. After these programmes end, provision will consist of limited statutory provision in Amble, Widdrington and Lynemouth and Amble Youth Project provision in Amble.

There is only limited coordination of the existing provision (through the Coquet Problem Solving Partnership in the north of the study area and this mainly concerns issues of crime and disorder opposed to the content and quality of the provision). There is little coordination elsewhere.

- **Improving the content of existing provision.** In the context of the provision which already exists in East Northumberland, it was reported by agencies that there was always a need for more and diverse activities. Activities including

camping, residentials and trips, arts (drama, music) and a range of different taster sessions, e.g. archery.

It was identified that there is currently very little specific activities for girls. It was pointed out that existing provision is very activity based and there was very little other choice. This absence was particularly felt with female coming of age issues.

There were other gaps in provision identified which dealt with health and training (as opposed to personal development), such as: sexual health services, particularly for young males who were felt to need a male professional to talk to; drugs and alcohol guidance and safety; and education, employment and training (services) which related to the 'moving on' of young people from youth provision into adulthood.

- **Mental health services** including emotional, relationship and behavioural aspects. It was reported that many young people between 13 and 18 were presenting at school health services with a range of mental health related issues. Many of the mental health problems that young people present with, manifest as behaviour issues that have their origins in family and relationship problems. Many issues are also felt to be closely related or compounded by the isolation⁴ of the locality.

Whilst issues are dealt with to the best of the ability of the school health advisor service, referrals of serious cases are often made to Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services (CAMHS). CAMHS however has a waiting list. The school service does some anger management work with children and they have referred some families to parenting courses in Blyth. The service attempts to support 'resilience factors' amongst young people and looks to build these up amongst children in local schools. Some middle schools have started 'nurture groups' and have set aside rooms for children to provide extra support.

There have been a number of consultations and need assessments carried out by agencies in East Northumberland in the last five years. In 2009, Northumberland County Council's Youth Service undertook a major piece of consultation which consisted of focus groups with young people from the ages of 11 to 16 across the Hadston area and Widdrington (over 200 young people were consulted). The consultation, called *Leisure and me* examined what young people in the area wanted out of their leisure time. There were three dominant themes to come out of that research: that young people highly valued 'psycho-social' determinants, such as friends, families, relationships; they wanted more activities to be involved in; and they worried about local crime and disorder and their safety. In another piece of consultation with young people in East

⁴ This isolation is due to its poor transport infrastructure and the low socio-economic status of some parts of the local population which results in low mobility.

Northumberland, the dominant finding was that young people wanted youth provision which was static and which provided them with somewhere to 'hang out'.

The findings from this appraisal and the consultations agree with each other: young people in East Northumberland value regular and varied youth provision which is carried out in a safe environment.

Box 1. East Northumberland Regeneration Initiative (ENRgi)

The East Northumberland Regeneration Initiative was conceived by the Rural Coalfields Development Plan in 1998 as an instrument of change, delivering economic regeneration in deprived communities located within the Northumberland Rural Coalfield (now often referred to as Coastal Villages) and adjacent towns and villages. ENRgi ended in March 2009.

In 2008, they began a three year Young People's Project, which consisted of a project manager and two workers. Local community groups and individuals had identified the isolation of young people in their communities as a major issue. ENRgi, in its facilitative role, promoted the work to the local authority. Funding was sourced from a range of places including Castle Morpeth and the Coalfield Regeneration Trust for a three year project to 'identify and engage with young people not involved in community activities'. During the project, youth sessions, trips, events and capacity building activities were delivered.

One of the activities delivered in 2009 was a weekend of skills development training and capacity building for 30 local volunteers from across the area to help develop local youth work skills. These individuals, who had been identified through the Young People's Project workers, came from towns and villages across the area and had all expressed an interest in youth work. They received training in areas such as general youth work, health and safety and child protection. The aim of this activity was to develop their skills to enable them to deliver youth work in their own communities. Unfortunately, the accreditation of the training was never realised.

Another key activity of the Project was taking young people from the villages of Chevington, Ellington, Hadston, Linton, Lynemouth and Widdrington on a trip to Serbia. The objective of this activity was to extend horizons and develop aspirations.

Themes

There are a number of themes to come out of this needs appraisal. These include:

1. There is a reasonable level of provision for children and young people that exists across the area. However, this provision is mostly uncoordinated and therefore fails to fulfil its collective potential. There has been an attempt in the past, through the ENRgl initiative, to coordinate youth services in the area and this showed some success and potential. If this is tried in the future, all partners both statutory and voluntary sector, must engage on an equal footing.
2. A significant part of this provision (the Coastal Villages Programme and Positive Futures) is short term. As the situation currently stands, after March 2011 levels of provision will be significantly less.
3. The quality of this provision, in terms of the range of activities and its time-bound nature, is less than what is needed.
4. There are pockets of deprivation across the area that exist in parallel with communities of relative affluence. The young people within the deprived communities experience a range of issues that require a more profound level of support, i.e. regular, long term, consistent youth provision with engaging activities, compared to young people from the more affluent communities who may access youth provision in different areas and ways.

In relation to youth work, there is a need to provide young people with long term and sustainable contact with positive adult role models in a youth work setting. Short term activities aimed at young people in the area (a project based approach) are likely to reinforce the practice of projects coming and going in the area and create despondency.

It would appear therefore that there needs to be a level of infrastructural investment in youth work which provides regular opportunities, with consistent staff, who can build relationships with young people, demonstrate choices and options, provide support and be the 'critical adult' in their lives.

A key issue to the infrastructural investment is who will provide the youth work. Northumberland County Council is under resourced and lacks capacity, voluntary sector and national initiatives are time limited and essentially come and go (with the exception of provision in Amble). There has been one small attempt at creating a grassroots capacity through the ENRgl training event (see box 1). This latter effort demonstrated that there was the potential to create a network of local people who were qualified in delivering youth work in their communities. However, it should be noted that ENRgl had a dedicated resource to coordinate and support this initiative.

Developing local capacity would also address an identified youth skills gap in the local community. There was much discussion during the appraisal about the lack of suitably qualified youth workers and the difficulty in attracting them. Certain respondents felt that the reason for this was a lack of adequate part time (felt to be a minimum of 28 hours per week) or full time positions in youth work in the area and so there was a difficulty in attracting people to the area (qualified youth workers were felt to go elsewhere, e.g. Tyne and Wear). Others felt that this was due to a lack of education and training opportunities in youth work in the area⁵, which meant local people with an interest in youth work were unable to provide a local service. It was felt that funds for provision could be found, e.g. from Parish Councils and Community Safety Partnerships, if there were suitably qualified local people. Other respondents felt that there was a lack of awareness amongst local people that youth work was a viable option that would provide employment opportunities.

The development of a network of local people experienced in youth work would address the issue of sustainability. As one professional noted: *“you need to build up a core group of workers who can build up a relationship with young people”*.

Conclusion

East Northumberland has a population of around 11,000 people, which includes approximately 500 nought to four year olds, 1500 five to 15 year olds and 1100 16 to 24 year olds. It is an area which is sandwiched between areas of deprivation and high investment (Ashington) and affluence (Morpeth and Alnwick). The area itself has similar communities, deprived and affluent and these two communities will have concomitant outcomes. For the less affluent communities, there needs to be macro level investment in employment and transport to tackle its most pressing issues.

This needs appraisal was commissioned to identify what needs existed in the area concerning children and young people. The appraisal has not identified major needs and there is currently either adequate or good provision across all age groups, from early years through to seniors. However, the appraisal has identified that the provision for children and young people from nine upwards (junior and seniors) is time limited and next year a good proportion of that provision will end. As such, provision will drop from adequate to poor in 2011/12 and so sustainability is a major issue.

The appraisal has also found that there are certain areas which are better served than others, e.g. Amble and Hadston, and other areas such as Widdrington

⁵ However, the NCC Youth Service in Ashington has recently developed a Level One OCN accredited training package, called Working With Young People, aimed at people wishing to strengthen their ability to deliver youth work and includes components such as types of youth provision, safeguarding issues, first aid, drugs and alcohol, etc. In the 2009/10 academic year, a total of 12 people enrolled on the course.

Station are less well served. Thus, we would conclude that Widdrington Station needs more junior and senior provision.

We have also found that provision in the deprived areas (Amble, Hadston, Lynemouth and to a lesser extent Widdrington Station) focuses (although not always exclusively or explicitly) on provision for those young people deemed 'at-risk' of offending or who offend. Thus certain groups of young people may be excluded from current youth provision in certain areas. There are also few appropriate activities specifically for girls in the area.

Our biggest identification of need would be for a sustainable network of junior and senior provision across the area. This would have to be delivered in each town or village (due to the poor local transport and young people's territoriality). As numbers are low in each town/village and need is also less extreme than in other deprived areas in the region, it is difficult to find a justification for a specific delivery project that would be attractive to either a charitable or statutory funder. This leaves the option of building capacity, through training and support, for a defined period of time with a clear exit and support strategy.

Therefore, on the basis of the appraisal, we would recommend that consideration is given to developing a capacity building programme in East Northumberland for a period of between two and three years. This would consist of: identifying, training and supporting local individuals to gain qualifications in youth work; supporting them in delivering youth work, including providing a small funding pot; and training them in issues relating to sustainability and fundraising. There also needs to be an element of coordination to the project; in other words creating a sustainable coordination structure for youth services in the area.