



ESRC Festival of Social Science

“Growing up healthy in Gateshead”

The Sage, Gateshead 16th March 2010

Post-event Report

The ESRC Festival of Social Science is part of the National Science and Engineering Week, and offers academic institutions the opportunity to disseminate their results creatively to a wide audience.

Gateshead has one of the highest rates of childhood obesity in the country, yet there are many diverse and successful schemes being implemented by the council, PCT and NHS Foundation Trust to change this statistic around, with an aim to becoming the healthiest region of the UK by 2030. Newcastle University complements these schemes by hosting the Gateshead Millennium Study, an investigation into the growth of children in Gateshead.

Professor Ashley Adamson at the Human Nutrition Research Centre, Institute of Health & Society, together with collaborators from the Universities of Durham and Glasgow, leads the Gateshead Millennium Study which has regularly assessed the health of 1029 children born in Gateshead in 1999-2000. The study started with a particular focus on babies who didn't grow as well as expected, and this wealth of early growth data means the study is well-placed to investigate the rise in childhood obesity and the lifestyle characteristics that influence it.

The ESRC Festival presented an unmissable opportunity for Newcastle University, Gateshead Council, Gateshead PCT and Gateshead NHS Foundation Trust to come together and showcase current and future work in promoting healthy childhoods, and discuss with a wide audience of people interested in child health - health care providers, community leaders, researchers, teachers and parents - the policy direction of child health in Gateshead.

The event was split into two parts: displays of current schemes with information and 'have-a-go' opportunities, demonstrations and tasks. This included exhibits from Early Years, Healthy Schools, Balance-It!, Play, Extended Services, Youth Service, the Gateshead Millennium Study, and two local flagship healthy schools – Chopwell Primary School and Cardinal Hume Catholic School (secondary).

There followed a series of presentations and interactive questions from key members of each of the contributing institutions. Councillor Catherine Donovan opened the event, highlighting the importance of trying to improve the health of children. Margaret Whellans, Group Director of Learning & Children at Gateshead Council chaired the presentations and discussion.

The audience of 79 comprised 42% council employees, 23% NHS employees, 11% from the university and 24% parents, teachers and other people interested in child health.

Presentations were given by

- Kirk Green (Gateshead PCT) – Child Health in Gateshead: The Facts. Kirk gave an overview of obesity levels in Gateshead and the local NHS strategies in place to combat the rise.
- Ashley Adamson (Newcastle University) – What does the Gateshead Millennium Study tell us? Ashley used data from this local study to describe the eating and activity patterns of children in Gateshead, and evidence from parents on the subject of perceptions of childhood overweight.
- Ken Youngman (Gateshead Council) – Health Promoting Strategies in Gateshead. Ken described the investment and schemes across Gateshead working to increase healthy behaviours in children, and Vision 2030 – Gateshead Council’s ambition to create the healthiest communities in the UK. This included a demonstration of “Hoop hop” from children at St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School.
- Anne Dale (Gateshead NHS Foundation Trust) – Treating Childhood Obesity in Gateshead: The Balance-It! Programme. Anne talked about this successful multi-disciplinary intervention programme, which is showing long-term weight reductions in overweight children.

A series of questions for the audience started and ended the proceedings, with answers submitted via handheld devices. Topics covered childhood obesity, school food, breastfeeding and child protection: Questions included:

“Is childhood obesity a problem in Gateshead?” (95% of the audience voted “yes”)

“Whose responsibility is it to prevent childhood obesity?” (votes tied between parents and schools)

“Should school meals be compulsory?” (35% yes, 65% no)

“Do you think formula feeding is a contributing factor in childhood obesity?” (38% yes, 21% no, 41% partly/not sure)

“Childhood obesity is a child protection issue” (59% agree/strongly agree, 21% neutral, 20% disagree/strongly disagree)

Discussion in between the questions ranged from the responsibilities of the media in advertising food to children, to the increasing role that grandparents play in raising children.

The event concluded with the unveiling of the new Gateshead Millennium Study logo. A competition was held for the GMS children to design the new logo, and two winners were chosen, Avrohom Miller and Emma Drewett. Emma was able to attend the event with her family to be presented with her prizes.

Feedback from the event has been very positive, with most people scoring the day as ‘very’ interesting and enjoyable.



Councillor Catherine Donovan opened the afternoon's presentation series



Kirk Green, Gateshead Primary Care Trust



Ashley Adamson, Newcastle University



Ken Youngman, Gateshead Council



Hoop hop demonstration by children from St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School



Margaret Whellans (Gateshead Council) presented certificates to the children



Hoop hoppers with their instructors and certificates



Anne Dale, Gateshead NHS Foundation Trust



The new GMS logo was unveiled and competition winner Emma Drewett was presented with her prize



Everyone was encouraged to try Hoop hop for themselves after the presentations

