

Young People's Public Health Reference Group

Pilot Project - Final Report
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Executive summary

Background

The Young People's Public Health Reference Group (YPPHRG) was established by the Public Health Research Consortium (PHRC) in November 2005, as a pilot project to contribute to its research work on public health issues relating to young people. The National Children's Bureau (NCB) is a main collaborator in the PHRC and facilitates the YPPHRG with support from the PHRC and INVOLVE (an organisation which promotes public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research). This report looks back over the progress of the group during the period November 2005 – December 2007, and makes recommendations for the future.

The overall aim of this project was to establish a model for a reference group through which young people could contribute to the UK's public health agenda. Specific objectives were:

- to provide an opportunity for young people to articulate their views and priorities for public health, including public health research and policy,
- to contribute to the work of the PHRC,
- to feed into the work of other agencies seeking to promote the interests of young people and the development of public health.

Group membership

At the start of the project 15 young people were recruited from across London and the South-East, and a core of around eight to ten have maintained engagement over the last two years.

Meetings

To date seven all-day meetings have been held, with one further meeting scheduled for February 2008. The content for each meeting was agreed in consultation with PHRC members, INVOLVE, and group members. A variety of methods have been used to maintain the young people's interest across the day, including ice-breaker games and focus group discussions, and stimuli such as statement cards and mind mapping were used to explore group member's views and develop ideas.

Meetings included discussion of topics that reflected the priorities of the PHRC (eg obesity and smoking), as well as exploration of group members' own priorities for public health research. These priorities will inform the PHRC's own priority-setting for a new 5 year programme of work starting in 2010. Several PHRC members worked with the group on specific activities related to their research - including designing a young people's summary of a research report on child health in England; contributing to a focus group on self-harm and giving their views on a project website. The group also received training on research methods and the research process, and worked with INVOLVE and the NCB group coordinator to consider how they, and other young people, could best be involved in public health research.

Dissemination and publicity

In addition to information about the group being placed on NCB and PHRC websites, information has also been disseminated through INVOLVE (including a paper at their 2006 conference), 11 Million and other networks. A summary produced by the group of an Association of Public Health Observatories (APHO) report was disseminated nationally, and publicised via NCB and APHO websites and press releases. A proposal for a poster version of the summary will be presented at the UK Public Health Association conference in April 2008.

Evaluation

In order to assess the effectiveness of the group's contribution to the work of PHRC, INVOLVE and the wider public health agenda, and to identify any lessons that can be learnt, an evaluation of the project was conducted by NCB's Research, Evaluation and Evidence Department in collaboration with the project coordinator. NCB, PHRC and INVOLVE informants involved with the project were interviewed, and two focus groups were run with young group members. All participants testified to the learning enabled through the pilot project. The evaluation found that while the group's activities have been limited by time and resource constraints, what was always an exploratory project has already demonstrated development in line with young people's aspirations. As well as more intangible gains, concrete outputs have been produced and tasks completed to the satisfaction of all concerned, and already some of the group's work has reached and generated interest among a wider audience. It is also encouraging to see that young members' aspirations for the future of the group were shared by its supporters in the PHRC and INVOLVE, and that there are opportunities for the group to make a growing contribution to the public health agenda.

The future

In July 2007 a proposal was submitted to the Wellcome Trust by NCB and the UCL Institute of Child Health, with support from the PHRC. In December we were told that a conditional award had been made, subject to amendments currently under negotiation. The proposed project will build on the work of the YPPHRG by setting up a number of young people's reference groups, development of a related website and other activity (including conferences, training and other young person-led activities/outputs) so that public health

research can be communicated by, to and between children and young people.

As well as continuing to build on the links between NCB and the PHRC and INVOLVE, the project will encourage dialogue between children and young people and the wider public health research and policy community. The desired long-term outcome is that both the research and policy agendas in respect of public health and young people are better informed, more relevant and therefore more likely to be successfully applied because of the inclusion of young people's perspectives within the process.

NCB promotes the voices, interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives.

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