

Unequal lives, unjust deaths

Health inequalities and transitions

24 June 2014



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Unequal Lives, Unjust Deaths Programme

Scotland's health is improving. However, the gap in health outcomes between the most and least advantaged groups in society is widening. People who are part of a lower occupational class or have a lower level of income, with a lower level of education, have greater health problems, are sicker for longer and die at a younger age than more advantaged groups.

These inequalities are apparent from the earliest stage in life, and their impact can build throughout a person's life. However, the good news is that they are not inevitable; they can be prevented, reduced and reversed.

These inequalities are caused by a complex combination of factors, which cannot be solved by health agencies alone. A number of factors, such as housing, education and employment all impact on people's life chances and help shape individual opportunities and responses. All agencies across all sectors need to work together to eliminate a social injustice that is unacceptable in 21st century Scotland.

One goal. Many Sectors. Unlimited potential

In May 2014, Voluntary Health Scotland launched a programme of events to examine these inequalities, and their impact on people's health, across the life course:

- Children and the early years
- Transitions from youth to adulthood
- Vulnerable adults
- Older citizens

Each event will support voluntary health organisations gain a better understanding of health inequalities, to share learning and experience about the interventions that make a difference, and to encourage and support collaboration and partnership between public and voluntary sectors.

Transitions – 24 June 2014

Voluntary Health Scotland and the Scottish Transitions Forum jointly delivered the second seminar in this series of events, examining young people who face inequalities in the transition from youth to adulthood.

Vulnerable young people face challenges as they move between childhood and adulthood. Young people with additional support needs can find their future health and life chances compromised by the increasing gap between the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged in society. Today's complex economic and social conditions have resulted in more unpredictable pathways to adulthood. Young people have to negotiate transitions, including educational, biological, cognitive, social, geographical, financial and within services themselves.

In particular, legislation, health and care systems and services for children are very different from those for adults. Some voluntary sector service providers describe the difficulties vulnerable young people encounter as they enter systems geared to adults' needs as akin to "falling off a cliff".

Research suggests that strengthening protective factors such as resilience, through early intervention and working with individuals, their family, school and communities, and improved services at key times, can help people get through difficult transitions. However, there is little systematic evidence of the effectiveness of interventions to reduce, prevent and reverse health inequalities in transition services. Oliver et al¹ note that most intervention evaluations recruit young people through schools or agencies such as social services, which can often result in excluding the most disadvantaged people.

With the help of keynote presentations, we set out to explore how and why some of Scotland's young people face a life where their health will be poorer and their lives shorter. Through table discussion, we identified how and why the voluntary sector is a key partner in helping public agencies prevent, reduce and reverse the health inequalities facing too many young people.

Participants had a rich knowledge and experience to share concerning young people identified with additional support needs, young carers, disabled young people, those with a long term condition, and those who have been in the care system or the youth justice system. Central to these discussions was the recognition that young people should be involved in all decisions that impact their lives, and that empowerment and working in partnership are central to building resilience and reducing risk factors.

The seminar received presentations from the following speakers. Presentations from Ruth Jepson, Marion Henderson and Helen Sweeting included PowerPoint slides and these are now available on the Voluntary Health Scotland website:

¹ Oliver S, Kavanagh J, Caird J, Lorenc T, Oliver K, Harden A, Thomas J, Greaves A and Oakley A (2008) *Health promotion, inequalities and young people's health: a systematic review of research*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

Ruth Jepson, Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP) – Ruth spoke about the evidence base for tackling health inequalities in transition services, including the context around tackling health inequalities in transitions, critical transition points and the evidence for what works for reducing risk and strengthening young people’s resilience.

Laura Meikle, Support and Wellbeing Unit, Scottish Government – Laura spoke about the current and emerging policy and legislation and its impact on transition pathways for young people. This particularly included the two main legislative catalysts supporting transitional planning:

1. The Additional Support for Learning legislation that has specific provisions relating to transitions, the planning for which should take place no later than 12 months before the pupil’s expected leaving date.
2. Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill - for all children to have a Named Person, and a Child’s Plan if they need one, will apply until the young person leaves school or reaches their 18th birthday, whichever is later.

Marion Henderson & Helen Sweeting, Medical Research Council Social and Public Health Sciences Unit (MRC SPHSU) – The effect of transitions on young people’s health and health-behaviours. Marion and Helen presented research they are currently working on at the MRC, including:

- School, post-school transitions and young people’s well-being
- The new SEED process: aiming to smooth transition from primary to secondary school

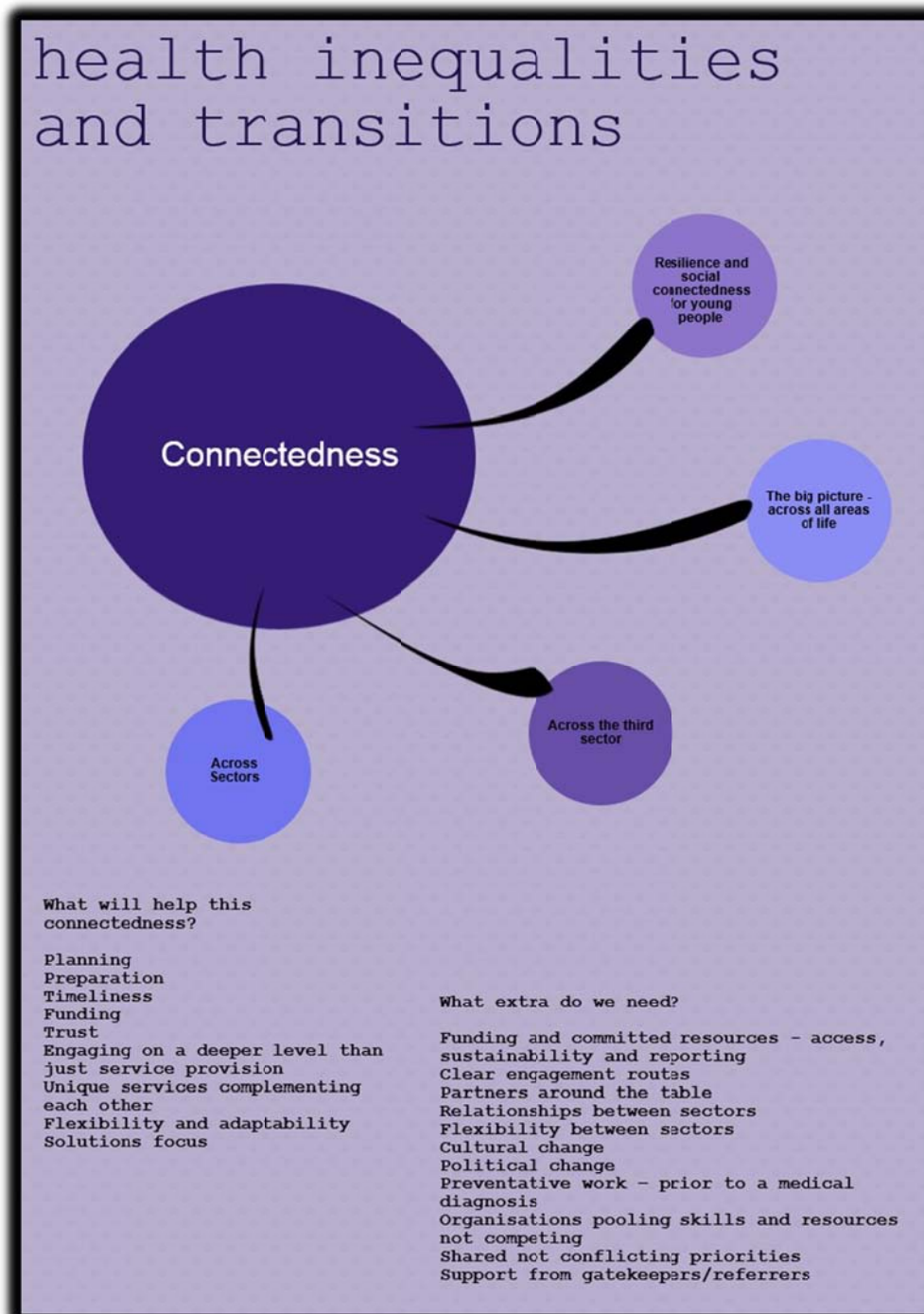
Pamela Barnes, Includem – Pamela delivered an interactive presentation that took us through the lives of three young people and their experiences of transitions. She highlighted the importance of relationships and wellbeing and how these can impact on someone’s transition pathways and highlighted the intensive support delivered through Includem’s additional support project.



Themes

Following the presentations, the session split into smaller discussion groups to discuss third sector work that reduces health inequalities for young people in transition, challenges and opportunities and further support required to facilitate organisations' work.

Main Themes



Group Discussions



Third Sector work

Who works in the third sector to prevent, reduce and reverse health inequalities for young people undergoing difficult transitions?

There are a wide variety of organisations in the third sector working to tackle health inequalities in youth transitions, ranging from the local to the national, operating in health and social care. They support young people and adults, young people with additional support needs, families and carers, and they liaise with a host of complementary organisations – health boards, local authorities and GPs. Many of these organisations are issue specific or offer unique services and tend to grow with the population they are supporting.

Organisations represented at the event included:

Caledonia youth – They work with young people by offering a range of quality services and support that covers personal relationships, emotional issues and sexual wellbeing.

Cornerstone – They provide services and support across Scotland, including sexual abuse survivor support, community justice, supported living, community support and family placements.

Fast Forward – They work with young people to give them the skills, education and choices to lead healthier lives, with a particular focus on substance misuse and related issues.

Shelter Scotland - The Safe and Sound Project is a partnership between Shelter Scotland and Relationships Scotland that tackles challenges faced by young people resulting from housing instability and family relationship breakdown.

What type of activities do third sector organisations carry out?

Third sector organisations fulfil a number of functions, from service delivery, to support, to capacity building and empowerment. At the event, delegates highlighted work in the following areas:

- Specific transition projects which try to bridge the gap between very child friendly projects and adult services
- Providing a holistic, flexible approach to maintaining and promoting good health and wellbeing
- Filling gaps for statutory services
- Specialist programmes or support for specific groups – for example, community justice
- Working directly with young people to find out what's important to them
- Involving and empowering young people's ownership of their lives, and working with them to identify their own solutions
- Setting up community assets, clubs, facilities and support
- Building relationships and building trust
- Working with new partners to engage with those previously unengaged with, helping to identify the hard to reach and the hard to know
- Pool resources – share knowledge – best practice – reduce duplication

What added value does the third sector bring?

Delegates highlighted a substantial need for the third sector, largely centred around trust. Third sector organisations can build trust with young people and their families by listening to their concerns, addressing the issues holistically and offering solutions to challenges encountered through engagement with statutory services.

Preparation and preventative action is key – there was focus on the importance of unmet need, identifying people outside of statutory services that may have fallen through the net, those that may not access, not know that they can access support or know that they need support. Preparation is essential when working with young people, to understand what is happening and prevent/minimise disengagement from services.

When are third sector services appropriate?

Early intervention is key, with organisations working with young people as early as possible, when needed and for as long as needed – with some participants remaining part of a service and volunteering.

Some organisations offer services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

However, support is sometimes limited depending on funding, staff recruitment and training.

How can the third sector work together to tackle health inequalities?

Delegates highlighted the need to develop services, systems and support that is holistic and empowering, and that works across a range of sectors and areas.

This often requires multiple agency involvement and engagement across the third sector, health boards and local authorities. Third sector interfaces can be used as a gateway for this engagement.

There is also a need for organisations to be aware of, and work in partnership with, other third sector organisations. Organisations need to be complementary rather than in competition with each other, ensuring that the person is at the heart, ensuring services are adaptable to need and that organisations are complementary and working in a holistic, enabling, empowering manner where there is greatest need.

Challenges



We asked delegates what the main challenges the third sector faces when addressing health inequalities in transitions. Answers were grouped into the following categories in order of prevalence:

1. Effective third sector and statutory sector working, including managing expectations of partners and working with inflexible systems that are not suited to young people.
2. Funding and its associated politics, including the contradictory concepts of short term funding vs. long term planning to effectively tackle health inequalities.
3. Continuity and capacity of third sector service provision.
4. Partnerships within the third sector, including working together instead of in competition, and TSI interfacing.
5. Measuring and evaluation to demonstrate the impact of projects and organisations and to learn from good practice.
6. Engaging and building trust with young people, their families and carers.
7. Political processes that are not best suited to young people in transition.
8. Undiagnosed problems and accessing people who are missed in mainstream services.
9. Recognition of the work of the third sector.

Opportunities

We also asked delegates what opportunities there are to further tackle health inequalities in transitions. A number of these closely correlate with the challenges identified, including:

- True partnership working and successful integration of statutory and voluntary organisations
- Learning and sharing best practice through multi-agency working.
- Flexible working in the third sector, the ability to offer a different perspective and build rapport with young people and organisations.
- Helping young people develop and input to policy.
- Raising awareness of reasons behind health inequalities

What further support do we need to create our vision?

We asked delegates what further support is needed to tackle health inequalities in transitions. Answers were grouped into the following categories in order of prevalence:

1. Addressing the balance of power between the third and statutory sectors, alongside increased co-operation and participation.
2. More research and evidence of what works and what is happening in the third sector, as well as bridging the gap between researchers/academics and organisations.
3. A main source of information, sharing good practice and a place where organisations can go for advice.

4. Changing attitudes, culture and the political landscape – and promoting the recognition for the work of the third sector within that.
5. Changing to established funding systems and support for obtaining funding.
6. More help with interpreting and influencing policy.

Contact

Voluntary Health Scotland

If you would like further information on the programme of events or the work of Voluntary Health Scotland to prevent, reduce and undo health inequalities, contact Susan Lowes, Policy and Engagement Officer susan.lowes@vhscotland.org.uk

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Scottish Transitions Forum

The Scottish Transitions Forum aims to improve the experience of people with additional support needs, particularly those with high support needs, as they go through life transitions. The forum has a focus on the transition of young people from school or college to adult life.

The Scottish Transitions Forum is provided by ARC Scotland and supported by the Scottish Government.

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