Belfast
A World Health Organization
Healthy City

University of the
West of England

shaping healthier neighbourhoods for children

UWE
BRISTOL
University of the
West of England

Our Vision

Our vision is of a healthy, equitable and vibrant city where all sectors provide individual and shared leadership, enabling citizens to achieve their full potential.

Our Mission

Our mission is, through our leadership and innovation, to inspire and utilise the collective and individual strengths of partners to *deliver the World Health Organization European Healthy City Phase V (2009-2013)* goals and requirements and maximise their impact on health and inequalities.

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Preface

Children are an important group in our society: they reflect our hopes for the future, and will develop it through their own vision and achievements. The environment we offer children plays a vital role in shaping their opportunities, and indeed their aspirations. Similarly, the opportunities we provide for children to take part in decision making, the ways in which we encourage them to tell us their views and give them the skills required, affect their willingness and ability to participate in society.

This project directly engaged children, to give them an opportunity to think about their local neighbourhood and identify using photos how they use their local environment It provided children with the space to develop their own voice, and this report makes that voice heard. Such experiences are vital to help children and young people develop skills in expressing their views, and gain confidence that their views are heard.

It is important to note, as the views expressed in this report show, that children's hopes and wishes are very realistic. Children do not demand a complete redesign of our city. Indeed, their wishes are relatively simple: cleaner, calmer, greener streets and public spaces. The same wishes have been highlighted by other groups, and in many ways this highlights that a child friendly city might create a better environment for people of all ages.

This project has created a collaborative model for engaging children in shaping their environment. It can provide useful insights into how we can develop a child friendly city. I am pleased to endorse it, and in particular the Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children: A Children's Charter, and look forward to further development of this important area of people focused decision making.

Niall Ó Donnghaile

Councillor Niall Ó Donnghaile
Lord Mayor of Belfast

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Foreword

Child friendliness is about recognising the role that children play in society, and valuing their contribution. It does not mean that children need their own city, but that children are part of the entire city. In other words, child friendliness is about taking account of children's needs across sectors and policy areas.

Child friendliness also means listening to children. This project provided a space where children can express their views about their environment, and use their voice to share their views with decision makers. This was intended to highlight the valuable information and experience that children can bring to decision making on the physical environment, and identify the potential benefits of engaging children and taking account of their views, needs and wishes. The longer term aim was to begin exploring ways in which children can become effectively engaged in shaping decisions about their environment.

This project highlights children's views. The Children's Charter outlined in this report summarises these views and priorities, and it will be used to inform future policy and decision making.

Child friendly environments is a key sub theme of Belfast Healthy Cities' Healthy Urban Environment (HUE) core theme, and this project developed within this framework, with the expertise of the HUE working group. We will build on this project to explore further opportunities to work with children on shaping healthier environments for children.

It has been a privilege to work with the children on this project, and the schools and afterschool club. We wish to express our sincere thanks to all participants, and the teachers and officers working with them. We also wish to give special thanks to all those who contributed to making this project a success, and who are acknowledged within this report. Thanks also to Belfast Healthy Cities' staff, including placement student Susi Homma, all of whom helped make the project a reality. Special thanks must go to Jonna Monaghan within the team, who led the project and developed this report.

Joan Devlin
Director

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Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children: A Children's Charter

Maintain and strengthen green space. Green space offers opportunities for free and active play, which supports children's healthy development. It also offers a natural meeting place for people of all ages, which support social cohesion. As outlined in this report, this project also indicates that access to green space is a priority for children. This includes even small areas integrated into residential neighbourhoods, as these offer children a meeting place and a sense of ownership within their immediate home environment.

Enable active travel. Walking and cycling allow children a degree of independent travel, while they also support healthy and sustainable lifestyle choices in adulthood. Good active travel connections and facilities – with high quality footpaths and safe crossing points in key locations - can contribute to children's mobility, not least by reassuring parents that children can safely access local services and amenities.

Support traffic calming. Traffic calming, for example through 20mph zones or interventions such as street trees and greenery further contributes to safety and also makes the streets more attractive for all users.

Emphasise and strengthen key local amenities and services. Local amenities are important for children. Particularly important is access to green space and playable space, followed by access to youth clubs, leisure centres and other places with more formal leisure provision. This is important to consider in new residential development, but also in existing residential areas opportunities may be found to enhance provision, for example through supporting community gardens and initiatives by community organisations. Local amenities and services also encourage use by older age groups, and can contribute to social cohesion and a sense of community, which significantly supports wellbeing. This, in turn, may support new economic opportunities.

Maintain and improve cleanliness. Children, like other population groups, value clean streets, while cleanliness encourages active use of the physical environment. It may be helpful to explore opportunities to build on existing engagement with schools and youth groups to

capture this concern for the environment and encourage pride, for example through local competitions and 'best kept' initiatives.

Support informal surveillance. Children enjoy freedom from direct adult supervision, and feel that in particular local green space provides this. It has also been shown that such freedom contributes to healthy development. However, safety concerns are the main reason why parents, and also children themselves, restrict independent mobility.[1] An important opportunity for reducing these concerns is developing environments with informal surveillance, for example green spaces in the middle, rather than at outskirts, of residential development. In existing areas, alternatives may be explored, ranging from improved lighting and shrub maintenance to 20mph zones. Good footpaths and cycle lanes also support informal surveillance, as they encourage life on the street. Active and strong communities also form a type of informal surveillance, and community development plays a role in this.

Key steps to engaging children in decision making on the physical environment

Identify children as a key user group: highlights children as equitable with other population groups and helps shed light on special requirements

Seek children's views on proposal: key step in identifying what children's needs are, and how these might be met.

Integrate children's priorities in evidence: gives children a voice and helps identify unique as well as issues shared across population groups.

Build ongoing relationships with children: enables children to gain confidence in the decision making process and may be a useful tool for building ownership in the wider community. Schools, youth clubs and community centres may be suitable venues for this type of engagement.

1 Villanueva, K et al (2011) 'How far do children travel from their homes? Exploring children's activity spaces in their neighbourhood'. In Health and Place, in press, corrected proof, available online September 2011. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829211001936

charter

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Section 1: Our voice: giving children tools to express views

Introduction

Children use the environment around them to play, meet friends, and explore themselves and their skills. A quality environment, which supports walking and cycling, allows physical play and offers children natural spaces in which to meet friends as well as other adults also underpins children's healthy development and helps build healthy habits for life. However, children's needs and voices are not always heard in the design of our built environment, although children as well as young people have valuable experiences which can help develop an environment supportive of all users.

This project engaged with 9-11 year old children in the Lenadoon and Suffolk areas of west Belfast. The focus of the project was to give participants an opportunity to identify what they like about their physical environment[2], and what changes they would like to see. Photography was used to describe the environment the children experienced, and art was employed to identify what participants would like to see in their environment to make it work for them.

The project was intended above all to allow children to think critically about their environment and their expectations for it, and give them an opportunity to express their views. The second aim was to gain information directly from children that can underpin guidance on shaping healthy urban environments for children. This report, and in particular the Children's Charter, is a first step in developing such guidance. It focuses on highlighting children's views, but also describes the process used to engage children, and links this to the existing academic literature. The Children's Charter builds on this evidence and aims to outline initial key principles of making environments more child friendly.

The project was developed in a context of growing emphasis on engaging children in consultation and decision making processes. This has developed as a result of long term work by the children's sector, including the office of the Children's Commissioner established in 2003. In terms of land use and transport planning policy in Northern Ireland, reference is made to children's needs for a supportive environment, and this emphasis is also growing. The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 also provides a new basis for developing new approaches to policy making, as it states that the purpose of planning is to further sustainable development and improve social wellbeing. The project also fits within and contributes to the priority of Child friendly places that the World Health Organization (WHO) has set for all European Healthy Cities.

Methodology

Photography and art were chosen as the means for expressing views, as it was felt that this would help children of all ages and abilities express themselves with confidence. It broadly corresponds to the Photovoice method, which was developed in the late 1990s by Wang and Burris. The focus of the Photovoice method is to enable people of all backgrounds to express themselves in a way that can reach decision makers[3]. It has been extensively used in participatory research and action, and children have been a primary group with which Photovoice has been used in the UK[4]. Indeed, photography

2 Throughout this document and project, 'physical environment' is used as a phrase that covers both the built and natural environment. This was chosen in order to enable children to think about their environment in the most holistic way possible.

3 Wang, C & Burris, M (1997). 'Photovoice: Concept, Methodology, and Use for Participatory Needs Assessment'. In Health Education and Behavior, vol. 24 no. 3 p369-387.

4 www.photovoice.org

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has been utilised as a participatory method to explore children's perceptions about their environment[5]. It has also been used to explore children's school journeys[6]. Results to date indicate that photography is an effective method for engaging people, in particular those who may find it difficult to engage through traditional consultation methods such as written exercises or public meetings.

Choice of location and participants

At the planning stage, an opportunity was identified to link this project to an ongoing project, 'Healthy Choices', which was initiated in the Suffolk and Lenadoon areas of west Belfast in Autumn 2010. The "Healthy Choices" project focuses on tackling childhood obesity in the area through physical activity interventions and healthy eating campaigns, primarily for children but also families. It is coordinated by a local partnership, including Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group, Belfast HSC Trust, Integrated Services for Children and Young People, Surestart, Lenadoon Community Forum, Suffolk Community Forum and Suffolk Eco Club.

In the academic year 2010-11, Healthy Choices engaged three local primary schools[7] and an afterschool club. The Healthy Choices steering group felt that a built environment dimension would add value to the project, while Belfast Healthy Cities and partners felt that the potential number of participants was appropriate for the Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children project. In addition, the location was deemed helpful for the project objectives, as the schools and afterschool club are located in different types of environment. Each of the schools also differ in their catchment, while the afterschool club is closer to the participating children's home environment.

Each school and the afterschool club that took part in Healthy Choices agreed to participate also in this project. Following discussions with the schools and afterschool club, the groups engaged were:
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, an Irish medium primary school
- Two P7 groups (children aged 10-11)

5 Pearce, A et al (2009). 'Gaining children's perspectives: A multiple method approach to explore environmental influences on healthy eating and physical activity'. In Health and Place, vol 15, issue 2, p. 614-621.

6 See eg. Fusco, C et al (2012). Toward an understanding of children's perceptions of their transport geographies: (non)active school travel and visual representations of the built environment. In Journal of Transport Geography. vol 20, Issue 1. p. 62-67.

7 Primary schools are the first tier of education in Northern Ireland and enrol children aged 4-11 in seven year groups, known as P1-P7 (year groups are determined by age on 1 July, eg. P5 in 2010-11 included children born between 2 July 2001 and 30 June 2002). In addition to English language schools, there is a small but growing number of schools providing education through the Irish language. The broad curriculum is the same for all schools.

St John the Baptist Primary School
- P5 class (children aged 8-9)

St Oliver Plunkett Primary School
- P5 class (children aged 8-9)

Suffolk afterschool club within Suffolk community centre, which is managed by Belfast City Council
- Afterschool club for 7-11 year olds

Approach

Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children was delivered entirely in the school and afterschool club setting. This was a practical decision, as the aim was to focus on the children's perspective and give all children an opportunity to participate. Due to the children's age, it was decided not to incorporate an element of photography of school journeys or home environments, as it was felt that some children would require parental support to an extent that may limit independent expression.

The practical engagement with the children consisted of a series of three workshops lasting around 90 minutes each. The workshops were delivered between March and June 2011.

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Workshop 1: Introducing the issues

The first workshop introduced the children to the idea that health is more than illness, and helped them explore how the physical environment shapes their lives and wellbeing.

The format of this workshop was developed in collaboration with the University of the West of England, and specifically the WHO Collaborating Centre for Healthy Cities and Urban Policy within the university, which has been instrumental in developing the healthy urban environment concept with the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. Marcus Grant, Deputy Director of the Collaborating Centre, delivered the first workshop in two of the participating schools in March 2011.

Workshop 2: Picturing our environment

The second workshop was the key element of the project. Children were given single use cameras, and taken on a walk around their school or afterschool club to photograph their environment. The walk was guided, and facilitators supported discussion as a way of helping children identify what to photograph. Verbal comments made during the walk were noted down by facilitators to the extent possible. Back in the classroom, children completed a short worksheet to summarise their experiences.
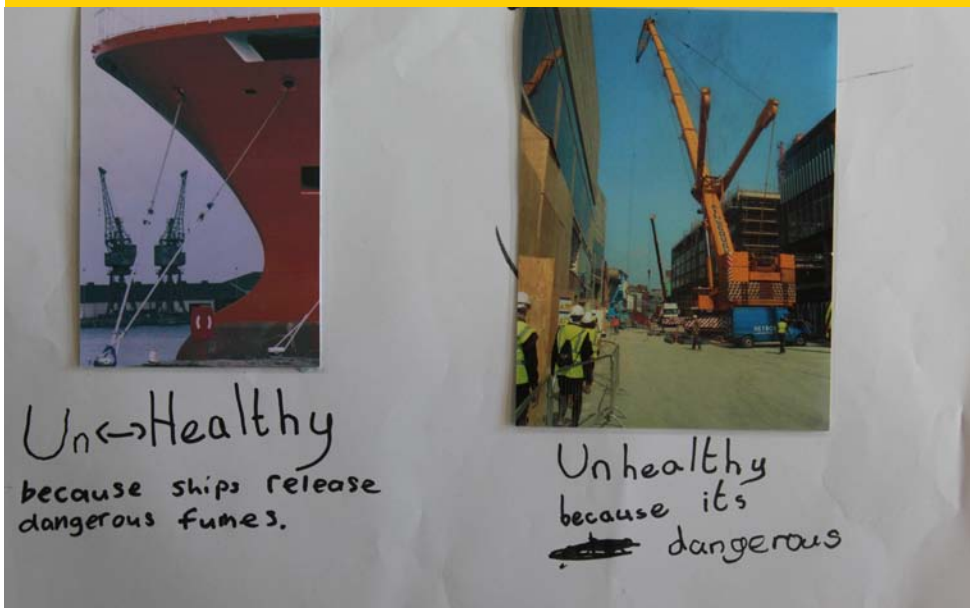
The walks were led by Belfast Healthy Cities' staff. Facilitation was supported by class teachers and classroom assistants in the schools, and Suffolk community centre staff in the afterschool club. Key support was also given by staff from Upper Andersonstown Community Forum, working under the auspices of Integrated Services for Children and Young People.

Workshop 3: Imagining our environments

In the third workshop, the developed photos were returned to the children, and used to develop a series of presentations focusing on good aspects of the environment they saw, bad aspects, and things they would change. In each group, particular emphasis was put on issues that had arisen during the walk. The formats of the presentations included collages, scrapbook stories and electronic (Powerpoint) presentations. Care was taken to ensure children were able to express their own views, and also to facilitate a range of abilities. During the artwork, discussion of the issues was also encouraged.

As in workshop 2, the session was led by Belfast Healthy Cities' staff, with support from staff from Integrated Services for Children and Young People as well as teachers and classroom assistants in the schools, and Suffolk community centre staff in the afterschool club.

Tree planting: Celebrating end of school based work

Tree planting ceremonies were arranged in all schools and at the community centre to mark the end of the practical part of the project, and in particular to give the children a sense of completion and achievement. The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Niall Ó Donnghaile, was invited to participate and took part in the ceremony at St Oliver Plunkett PS.

Two apple trees and a berry bush were donated to each school and the afterschool club. This approach was chosen to reflect the high priority children gave to a green environment, and to provide a memento that will last over time.

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Children's views: What we see around us

The outset: good basic knowledge

At the outset of the workshops, it was clear that the children had good knowledge of how important healthy eating and exercising are for health and wellbeing. The idea of a link between the physical environment and wellbeing was new, but the majority of children quickly came up with practical examples of impacts. This was shown by comments such as 'I like to play in the street, but sometimes I don't feel safe'. Other children commented that their parents did not allow them to go far from home alone; safety concerns appeared to be an underlying issue, although few children mentioned this explicitly. Green space and calm traffic were key priorities in all groups from the outset.

A key observation made in all groups was the emphasis on the value of green space for socialising. Children said that they like public green spaces, because they can 'hang out with friends' without direct supervision by adults. It is notable that children valued even very small green spaces, such as strips of land between houses and a main street, or between buildings. The residential neighbourhoods in

the project area consist of a high proportion of social housing, and have few publicly accessible, formal play or outdoor meeting places. The children's spontaneous emphasis on these small amenity spaces highlights the significant value of all available green space.

Litter: a safety concern

During the walks, a significant observation was that children in all four groups highlighted similar issues. It was also notable that they did so spontaneously, reflecting on what they saw and heard.

The key issue raised was litter, including dog dirt and walls daubed with paint. Conversely, the value and quality of formal street art was debated quite explicitly, particularly in one group whose walk passed by large murals. Children typically described dirty places, such as a set of steps leading from a main road to a residential area, as unsafe and said they would avoid them if at all possible. Poor lighting was another concern, and better lighting was mentioned on several occasions as a key element that would help make a neighbourhood child friendly. Not least, this was because children believed their parents would then allow them to spend more time outdoors.

Traffic: busy roads safety concern, active travel socialising opportunity

Busy roads and traffic was a feature of all walks and attracted a lot of attention. A key issue was crossing roads, and children in all groups called for more crossing points. Noise was raised in particular on one walk which followed a route the class took regularly. Specifically, one comment noted was 'We can't hear each other or the teacher, because the cars are so noisy'. On this walk, safety was also highlighted; the footpath was frequently interrupted by side streets and shop laybys open to parked cars, which meant that vigilance for sudden traffic crossing the path was required: "It's hard to know where cars will come from, and all the parked cars make it less safe to walk because we can't see the traffic very well".

However, children made fewer comments about the speed or volume of traffic. Indeed, many children seemed to view cars as the most

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important road user, which they had to accommodate and avoid. Over the duration of the project, children were encouraged to question this, and began to think about a reallocation of road space. Children who walked to school did not seem to think of school journeys as special in any way, but many children who were driven to school said they would prefer to walk or cycle, as they could meet friends on the way.

Green space and community facilities: key to a pleasant and playable environment

The third main issue raised by children was green space. For example, in one group children were eager to photograph flowers in the school grounds, and in another, greenery in the school grounds in general became a key topic. In a third group, children mentioned the Black Mountain as a positive backdrop to their everyday environment. A fourth group identified the local river as an important play space and a distinctive feature of the neighbourhood.

Where it was possible, children also pointed out birdsong. In almost all groups, street trees and greenery along roads became a potential photo theme only after prompting. There was also some discussion about the relative value of private and public space. Typically, children preferred public space to private gardens, even when this was little more than a grassed area, "because you would have to be invited to someone's house to play in the garden".

A range of other topics were also raised during the walks, prompted by reactions to or knowledge of something. For example, children on one walk commented on accessibility to sports pitches: "Those pitches are good but you must belong to the club to go there". In the discussion that followed, it was agreed that sports facilities should be as open to all as possible". On two other walks, a local community centre was highlighted as a positive place. Generally, children who lived in the neighbourhood of the walk route were eager to tell facilitators about their private landmarks, which implied an underlying pride in being able to do this. Overall, children in all groups were very focused and stayed on task throughout the walk.

Back in the classroom, children were supported to complete a short assessment form, which was intended to help them collect their thoughts on what they saw and heard, and reflect on what they walk could or should feel like. There was significant variation in how children rated the walk and its different elements, two key issues emerged as priorities in all groups: more green space – especially flowers; more accessible play areas, and cleaner environments. Many groups specified more bins as a key wish.

The artwork: Starting to imagine new opportunities

The final workshops focused on the themes identified during the walk. This was intended to reflect the children's priorities, and to enable all children to contribute.

The aim of the session was to support children to reflect on the walk through the photographs, and use these experiences to think about what kind of environment they would like. Each of the larger groups was divided into 3-4 small groups and worked on a slightly different medium. Final products included collages describing main concerns and ways of remedying them; scrapbooks highlighting key points on the walk and ways of making the walk better overall, and electronic presentations summarising the project, as well as highlighting key concerns and solutions.

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Children took some time to fully understand the idea, which was that children have valuable insights about their environment and can formally express them. With support, however, the majority of children saw the opportunity and were able to clearly state why they liked or did not like a specific element of their environment, and how they might change it. For example, one small group had a long discussion around potential uses for a disused green space, and the relative value of different options. In another group, imaginations came to life as the group began to think that change is a real possibility: "Do you mean you could actually do something about that? [well we can certainly tell other people about what you want..but we can't promise right now] Oh great, well in that case.."

The session encouraged considerable discussion about future potential and alternatives, which in turn helped children develop their thoughts and artwork further. Proposed improvements particularly emphasised the need for slower traffic – indeed less traffic and more space for pedestrians – and green space. Formal play areas did feature in the artwork, but children stressed that they preferred open space. The reason given for this was that the informal nature of such space lets them come up with their own ideas for play, and also allows them to just 'hang out' with friends. To some extent, it was also an

age issue: "It gets boring, because a lot of the equipment is for small children". The most preferred play equipment was swings and slides.

An important observation made from the artwork was that the wishes and proposed solutions expressed are largely realistic and not fanciful in terms of cost or general concept. The issue of resources was not explicitly raised by facilitators at any stage, and therefore it appeared that children were aware of this in an implicit way. While the evidence from this project does not allow for generalisation, this finding nevertheless implies that children are able to rationally consider what can be done in an existing setting, and implicitly appreciate that resources are limited.

Next steps: building on learning

This project piloted a novel way of working with children to explore their views about their local physical environment. It was well received by the participating children, and gave them an opportunity to show how they perceive their environment. In addition, it provided important information on how these particular groups of children view their environment, and also some key insights into how they perceive their role in the physical environment.

Teachers were also very positive about the project, and said that the project had supported learning across a range of topics in the curriculum, in a way that engaged the children. The teachers involved felt that the project would be useful also for other primary schools, and felt that a pack outlining the project format would be a valuable teaching resource.

This report is the first step in identifying what a child friendly environment looks like, and how children can be better heard in decision making. Child friendly environments is a key theme of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, and this project will inform future work on the topic in Belfast and beyond. This project indicates that children are capable of participating in decision making about their environments, and the findings also reflect a key rationale for this area of work: environments that support children, support people of all ages.

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Section 2: Creating child friendly environments – existing evidence and links to Shaping Healthier Neighbourhoods for Children

Child friendly environments is a relatively new area, but is beginning to receive increasing interest, both in terms of policy and research. To date, much of the academic work on children's relationship with the built environment has been carried out in the US and Australia, but UK and Europe based studies are beginning to emerge. Meanwhile, there is a growing body of work on engaging children in decision making.

The built environment has a significant impact on children's lives, and a good environment contributes to healthy development. For example, opportunities for active and free play encourage physical activity, while access to local meeting places supports mental and social development.[8] For older children and teenagers, a degree of independent mobility is important to support this.[9] However, most children are restricted by their parents in the distance they can travel from home on their own, and the services they can use. Existing studies indicate that allowable distances for children up to 12 range from 250 to 1600 metres from home[10].

8 Edwards, P & Tsouros, A. Promoting physical activity and active living in urban environments: The role of local governments. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen 2006. http://www.euro.who.int/InformationSources/Publications/Catalogue/20061115_1

9 Barton, H (2009) 'Land use planning and health and wellbeing'. Land Use Policy 26S (2009) S115–S123

10 Villanueva, K et al (2011) 'How far do children travel from their homes? Exploring children's activity spaces in their neighbourhood'. In Health and Place, in press, corrected proof, available online September 2011. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829211001936

11 Mitchell, H et al (2007). 'Nuances of neighbourhood: Children's perceptions of the space between home and school in Auckland, New Zealand'. In Geoforum, vol 38, issue 4, p. 614-627.

12 Holt, N.L. et al (2008). 'Neighbourhood and developmental differences in children's perceptions of opportunities for play and physical activity'. In Health & Place, vol 14, issue 1, p. 2-14.

13 Veitch, J et al (2006) 'Where do children usually play? A qualitative study of parents' perceptions of influences on children's active free play'. In Health and Place vol 12, issue 4, p 383-393

Evidence from existing studies shows, however, that children's experience of their built environment can be of mixed value. Typically, children's use of their environment is restricted by parents who are concerned about personal as well as road safety.[11] The children who participated in this project reported the same restrictions. While they did not question the need for boundaries, it also appeared that greater independence would have been welcomed, and that in particular safer walking routes and better access to play areas would have supported this: "It's OK to play around home…but it would be good if we had places we could go to, now we just play in the street". Others commented that their parents took them to hobbies, including sports activities, elsewhere, but also implied that they would enjoy easily accessible space close to home.

In the literature, streets are identified as both actual and potential play places, with safety as a key barrier to use. It is notable that while studies report major concerns by parents from all socioeconomic groups[12], parents from the lowest socioeconomic groups appear to place the greatest restrictions on their children, citing the poor environment as the reason[13].

Active travel and children's school journeys has been a popular topic for research in recent years, a lot of the studies focusing

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on the relationship between the built environment and choice of transport mode. The cross cutting finding is that walkable areas, which offer good connectivity on foot, support and encourage active travel to school[14]. Fewer studies have explored children's views and motivations about school journeys, but the overwhelming consensus from those that exist has been that children would prefer walking or cycling to being driven.[15] In this project, children who walked to school did not seem to think of school journeys as special in any way. However, many children who were driven to school said they would prefer to walk or cycle, as they could meet friends on the way.

In this project, children identified green spaces as ideal places for play and socialising, but were also concerned about safety and cleanliness. This is reflected in academic studies, which indicate that the quality of the space is a key factor that encourages or discourages use.[16] Green space is valuable for children as it offers opportunities for stress relief and free, even vigorous play. There are also some indications that a green environment can support concentration and alleviate symptoms of attention deficit disorders.[17] Indeed, several studies recommend developing local green spaces, such as community gardens, play areas and neighbourhood parks, as they offer easy access from home, which is essential to enable and encourage frequent use. It is

14 See eg. Panter, J et al (2010). 'Neighbourhoods, route and school environments and active commuting'. In American Journal of Preventive Medicine, vol 38, issue 3, p.268-278; The Foresight programme (2007) Tackling obesities: future choices. London: Government Office for Science. Available at http://www.foresight.gov.uk/OurWork/ActiveProjects/Obesity/KeyInfo/Index.asp.

15 See eg. Mitchell, H et al (2007). 'Nuances of neighbourhood: Children's perceptions of the space between home and school in Auckland, New Zealand'. In Geoforum, vol 38, issue 4, p. 614-627; Fusco, C et al (2012). Toward an understanding of children's perceptions of their transport geographies: (non)active school travel and visual representations of the built environment. In Journal of Transport Geography. vol 20, Issue 1. p. 62-67

16 See eg. Castonguay, G & Jutras, S (2009). 'Children's appreciation of outdoor places in a poor neighbourhood'. In Journal of Environmental Psychology, vol 29, issue 1, p. 101-109.

17 Bell, S, V Hamilton, A Montarzino et al (2008). Greenspace and quality of life: a critical literature review. Stirling: Greenspace Scotland, available at http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/pdf/greenspace_and_quality_of_life_literature_review_aug2008.pdf

18 Barton, H (2009) 'Land use planning and health and wellbeing'. Land Use Policy 26S (2009) S115–S123

particularly important for less mobile groups, including children, older people, people without cars and people living on low incomes.[18]

In conclusion, the views expressed by children in this project largely mirror existing research evidence. The methods used also reflect recent work undertaken with children with a view to strengthening their voice. It therefore appears that learning from this project may be helpful for local decision making processes.

The Children's Charter for Supportive Environments, included at the beginning or this report, draws on findings of this project and existing evidence. While general in nature, the points are intended to be relevant both to strategic policy making and concrete local level projects.
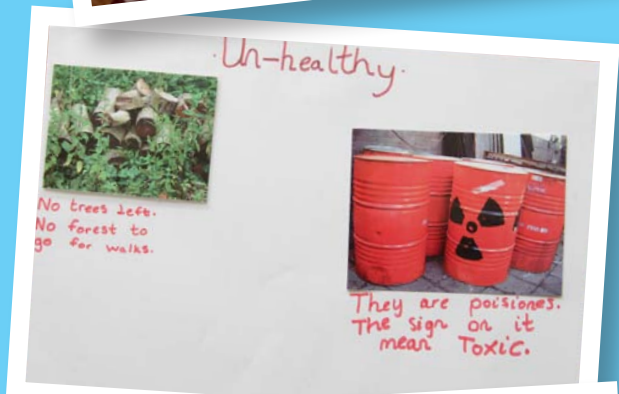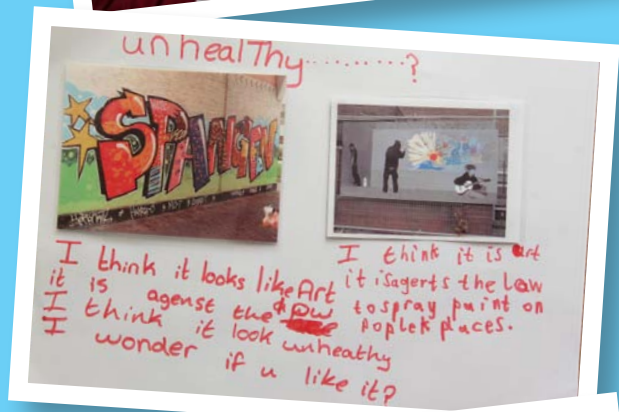
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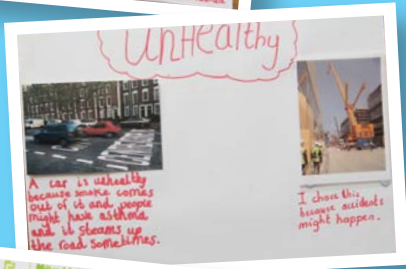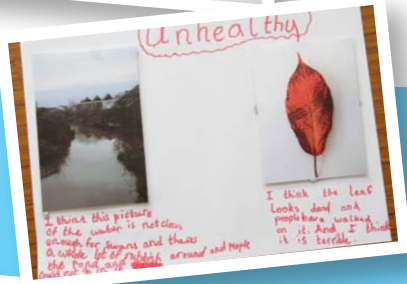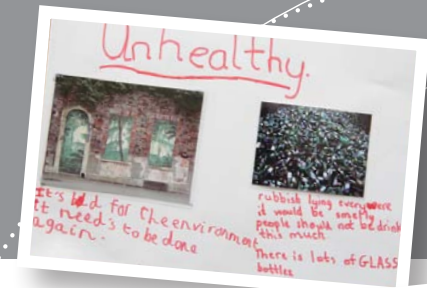## Section 3: Our work: what we think about our area

St Oliver Plunkett PS is a co-educational primary school with 574 pupils. It is located on the Glen Road, a main arterial route through west Belfast. The schools' catchment area is primarily local, but with some pupils from elsewhere in the city.

The participating group from St Oliver Plunkett PS was Mrs Hanna's P5 class, which had 28 pupils aged eight and nine. The walk with this class followed the main road outside the school, through a residential street to a currently disused green space – Half Moon Lake. The route back used a footpath through a green open space, past the local youth club and through the school grounds.

The class focused on thinking about traffic, opportunities for the Half Moon Lake and cleanliness of the area. Key issues identified by pupils were the need for a crossing of Glen Road at the school; traffic calming; and opportunities for walking and cycling. The Half Moon Lake was seen as a big opportunity, for uses ranging from an informal green play and meeting space, to a more formal playground. The importance of clean and well lit streets was raised many times, as it makes the area safer and more attractive particularly for children, but also adults.

St Oliver Plunkett Primary School

Unhealthy.
It's bad for the environment. It needs to be done again.
rubbish lying everywhere it would be smelly people should not be drinking this much. There is lots of GLASS bottles.

Unhealthy
I think this picture of the water is not clean enough for swans and there a whole lot of rubbish around and people the road and...
I think the leaf looks dead and people have walked on it. And I think it is terrible.

Unhealthy
The wall has graffiti on it and it makes it look unhealthy
The others glass if it is get can they kill they smashed

Unhealthy
A car is unhealthy because smoke comes out of it and people might have asthma and it steams up the road sometimes.
I chose this because accidents might happen.

HEALthy Healthy
I picked finds because i though i chose this because people think its good for a park.

HEALthy
I choose this image because it a fire people's will know.
I choosed flowers because flowers make the city look nice Alot

Healthy
Trees are very Healthy. they make your breth fresh.
I choosed a tree because trees gives us fresh air and trees gives us fruit.

Getting it healthy because it keeps you fit and good for your legs.
I chose this because it gives us oxygen.

shaping healthier neighbourhoods for children

St John the Baptist PS is a co-educational primary school with 413 pupils. The school is located on Finaghy Road North, a busy road which acts as a key route linking west and south Belfast. A significant proportion of the school's pupils live close to the school, but pupils come from neighbouring areas as well.

The participating group from St John the Baptist PS was P5B, Mrs Bell's class, and had 25 pupils aged between eight and nine. The walk taken with the class followed their walk to the local leisure centre, which the class took regularly to attend swimming lessons. The return took a different route through a residential area.

Traffic along the route is heavy, and the children spontaneously raised concerns about the noise and frequency of traffic. The class also focused on cleanliness and greenery. Key issues identified were safety on footpaths, the importance of street cleansing, and the positive impact of flowers, trees and plants both in the school grounds and on the street.

In their wishes and suggestions, the class focused on these issues and highlighted limitations to traffic. A particular wish raised was for improvements to an area of open land on nearby Andersonstown Road, where an otherwise culverted river runs open for a short stretch. The children described the area as 'a dumping ground', but felt that it could at least be cleaned up to provide an attractive green space, and some suggested it could become a play area.

St John the Baptist Primary School

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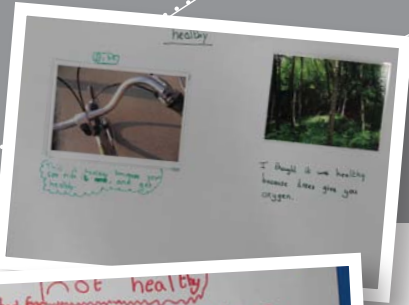
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste is a co-educational, Irish medium primary school with 228 pupils. It is located within a residential area off Shaw's Road, which connects Glen Road and Stewartstown Road, two main arterial routes in west Belfast. The school's catchment area is city wide, although a notable proportion of pupils live close to the school.

Both of the school's two P7 classes participated in the project, as a group of 36 ten to eleven year olds. The walk with this group followed the Shaw's Road from the school to nearby shops, and also focused on the school grounds.

The group emphasised the potential in their school environment and stressed the importance of public green space and playable space. As there are murals in the area, discussion also ensued about what they are and how they differ from other wall drawings or scribbles. Safety was raised in many ways, and the children also stressed maintenance in general as important for creating a good environment.

There was a general feeling that the area has potential but that for example access to sports facilities or playable space could be improved. The group made suggestions for improving cleanliness, and stressed that it helps create a sense of safety, in the same way that calm traffic does.

Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
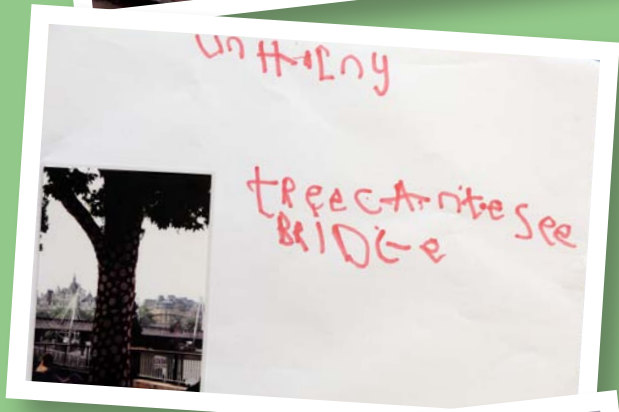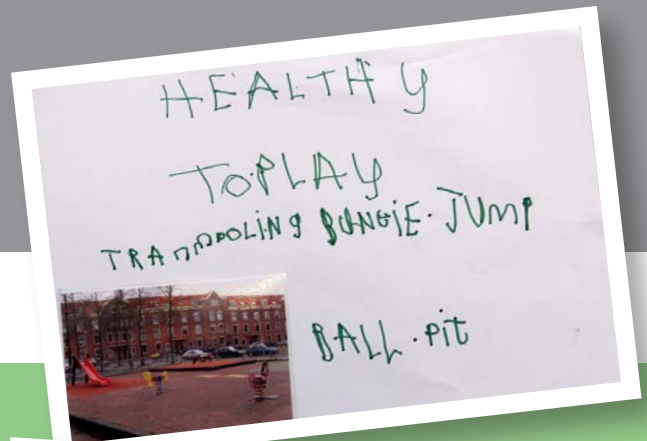
shaping healthier neighbourhoods for children
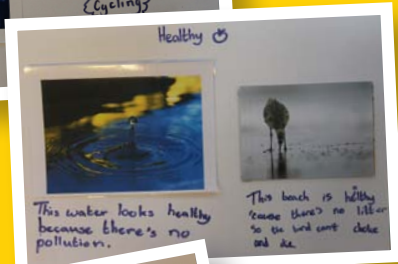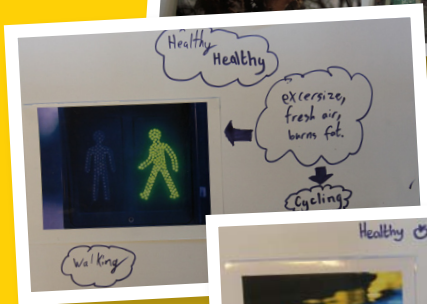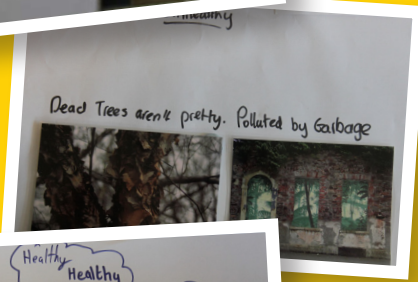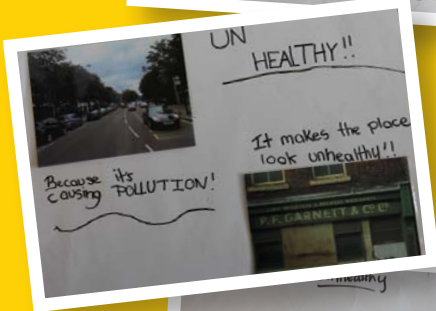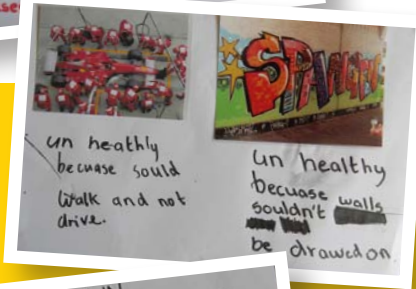
Suffolk afterschool club is one of the activities within Suffolk community centre, which is run by Belfast City Council. There are two clubs, one for 7-11 year olds and one for older children, and both run once a week. The clubs reach a total of 50-60 children in the neighbourhood.

The afterschool club for 7-11 year olds took part in this project. The walk followed the local river, which runs alongside the community centre and is a popular play area for local children, took a tour along Black's Road, and returned through residential streets.

Nature and play opportunities were key issues highlighted during the walk. Safe crossing points were also mentioned; traffic can be heavy particularly in peak hours on Black's Road, which provides a link between west and south Belfast and also a connection to the M1 motorway. The children highlighted the importance of cleanliness, and external facilitators also noted the high level of cleanliness throughout the area.

Nature and play opportunities were also highlighted in the children's wishes. A particular issue that arose was travel to school outside the area, and a wish for a local school to reopen was expressed quite strongly.

Suffolk afterschool club

shaping healthier neighbourhoods for children

Acknowledgments

Healthy Choices steering group (2010-11)

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Michael Doherty	Lenadoon Community Forum
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Caroline Murphy	Suffolk Community Forum
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'Healthy Choices Project'