

Our story through COVID-19



Wallsend
Children's Community

written September 2020

In Summary

This report shares some of the activities and achievements of the Wallsend Children's Community between March and September 2020 during the pandemic.

During this time the core team and story of place staff have been working remotely from home. This has had its challenges but certainly also many opportunities. The work of all the staff has become so much more closely aligned during this time, sharing information and learning from a wide variety of sources, to help inform all areas of the system.

The staff working on story of place worked across social media and also to maximise the personal relationships they have in Wallsend to bring an authentic picture of how our community was responding to Covid 19.

The core team coordinated a number of one to one conversations and community surveys, to aid and back up our understanding of opinions and experiences. Over 1,000 people have participated in these surveys.

As a team we have attended a wide variety of formal and informal forums to learn and share in each context. These insights have been truly valued by a wide range of decision makers.

Coming out of our research and observations of how the area was responding to the crisis, the Core Team set out to support a few projects, activities and initiatives. We brought together partners and brought in resources which based on our learning we believed would have the most systemic impact. (See infographic on next page for more information.) This included:

- Emergency Response Grants
- Early Learning Resources
- Creation of a Community Facebook Page
- Working with Wallsend Action for Youth

There is much more information further on in this document about the successes in these areas and case studies.

Our Learning during this period

We have learnt a lot over this time, but especially that faced with a common problem, as a Children's Community we can act collaboratively and with great agility and achieve amazing things.

Community spirit in Wallsend was alive and during the lockdown it was wonderful to see how people looked out for each other.

In Summary (cont.)

Organisations really wanted to hear from a wide range of community voices and were especially appreciative of our insights from Story of Place and community surveys. With people so keen to have this information we found between us creative ways to share and gather information.

We have seen especially through our work with Wallsend Action for Youth, how a small investment of money can attract additional money and buy in from other organisations. Also, when a number of organisations are invested in a topic, cause or opportunity as a collaboration the impact and reach is so much more.

Our next steps

1. Build upon the community engagement our team has undertaken.
2. Help foster and build up the positive relationships and mutual respect between schools and families.
3. Continue to help support schools accessing resources to support families..
4. Strengthen the partnerships across the system
5. Secure future joint funding for activities during school holidays.

OUR ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

Between March - August 2020

Part of the work of the Core Team at this time has been helping facilitate activities and projects to benefit families in Wallsend. Here's a flavour of what we got up to!

EMERGENCY RESPONSE GRANTS

Recruited 7 local organisations to deliver grants. 82 families received a grant of up to £340 to support the home learning environment. A further 180 grants have been secured for families in our area.

SURVEYS

1,043 completed surveys
728 Residents participated in 3 Community Surveys
140 members of staff from 6 schools completed a Staff Survey
121 participated in our Pupil Survey

LEARNING RESOURCES

400 Early Learning Resource packs delivered to families in Phase One

1400 Early Learning Resource packs delivered to families in Phase Two

THE HEART OF WALLSEND

Video on Facebook: been viewed over 12,000 times, reaching over 19.5 thousand people.
Adding to the overall growth of our newly created Facebook Page.

SUMMER PROGRAMME

50 children (aged between 5 and 13) attended an activity programme over 3 weeks in the summer holidays. Feedback from parents and pupils was overwhelming positive.

£49,500

Secured from Big Lottery by working in partnership with Wallsend Action for Youth to build an online platform to support young peoples and parents learning and engagement

Table of Contents

Content	Page
Introduction from our Executive Lead	3
A Children's Community in Covid 19	4
Ways of working during lockdown	5
The work of Story of Place	6
Social Media	9
Research Surveys	11
Conversations and Forums	12
Projects, Activities and Case Studies	14
Emergency Response Grants	15
Early Learning Resources	19
Community Facebook Page	20
Working with Wallsend Action for Youth	23
Our Learning	27
Our Next Steps	29
<i>Appendix: Survey Summaries</i>	30



Getting involved with the Summer Challenge Activities

Introduction from our Executive Lead

This report aims to highlight the power of the relationships, connections, collaborations, passion and determination of our community and demonstrate the impact this approach can have through the most challenging of times.

The report will show how our community came together with clarity and purpose and used live evidence to inform its decision making, where and how best to deploy resources, and develop a strategic direction to support easing and return to schools.

There's very little to celebrate in these times, but we should absolutely acknowledge the hard work, dedication and commitment of a whole system approach and the positive impact this had with and for our community.

On behalf of the WCC core team, we can't express our thanks enough to all the partners who so readily engaged and came with such openness, flexibility and a resolute can do attitude. Their collaborative approach and their (almost daily) adaptability meant collectively we achieved things overnight that in other times would have taken months or years.

This is testament to the culture that has been built in the Wallsend area over many years, that despite changes in

organisational structures, turnover of staff and financial and other pressures, remains the foundation of a placed based approach.

We hope that these unprecedented times demonstrate what we're all capable of and give us the confidence and courage to continue working in this way as we move through this crisis to the next phase and beyond.

Whatever our thoughts were at the outset of this pandemic, in terms of how long it would last or what impact it would have, there is no doubt now that the effects will be long lasting and for ours and many other communities, deep and life-changing.

We hope this report will offer hope that despite this the depth of work that lays ahead, as a community we have the capacity to mobilise, adapt and together work to ensure that the future of our children is secured.

Paula McCormack

Executive Lead, Wallsend Children's Community Core Team

Paula McCormack, Executive Lead



A Childrens Community in Covid 19

A Children's Community

The aim of a Children's Community is to improve outcomes for children and make life better for families and children in the area of Wallsend.

We hold a shared vision for a better future for our area. Everyone in a Children's Community area works together to understand our area, our assets and our strengths.

This knowledge is used to bring together and empower every person who makes up the system: pupil or head-teacher, parent or counsellor, youth worker or police officer.

With a placed-based focus, we come together to find new ways to work together to change the system where it is not supporting young people to succeed.

Our place, the NE28 postcode, is an area covering 4 square miles, made up of four wards and home to 44,000+ people all living within their identified 'place' called Wallsend. Part of North Tyneside Local Authority, Wallsend sits between Newcastle Upon Tyne and the coast. Wallsend is a distinct town and still retains its own strong identity.

A place-based approach targets an entire community and aims to address issues that exist at the neighbourhood level. By

considering the whole community—how it works and what it needs—and collaborating with different sectors and the community itself, a place-based approach aims to make a lasting difference to people's lives.

The opportunity to test this was never more pertinent than through Covid-19 when the whole of Wallsend came together to ensure children and young people remained safe and connected through this unprecedented time.



Getting involved with the Summer Challenge Activities

Ways of working during lockdown

When lockdown was introduced, many of our normal routes for information and story gathering disappeared completely as the system itself went into lockdown.

The core team has shifted from being based in our community, engaging in multiple face to face meetings each day, to overnight working from home with only one member of the team living in Wallsend.

We immediately moved to working online making use of Microsoft Teams. We reconnected with our partners and encouraged regular online forums with combinations of stakeholders to create space for more systemic conversations. Based on existing relationships we were also invited into several forums. These forums included, for example, the Wallsend Schools' Partnership and the Howdon and Wallsend Partnership (with the Local Authority, Primary Care Network, VODA and Health Watch).

Our role as systems stewards in these meetings has been to bring in the intelligence which we gather from across the system. The intelligence was gathered both from across the system but also from our work directly in the community. The information was disseminated across the system, consistently building upon itself through each forum. This also enabled us

to identify the gaps in information and intelligence and on behalf of the system, seek out what would best support this.

Through Covid-19 we have been the eyes and ears for many organisations and institutions supporting them to navigate government guidance within the context of the specific communities of Wallsend, always with particular focus on the impact on the child.

To achieve this, we have leveraged all our relationships, both with those who are working to support families and with families themselves. We brought robust insights directly from our community into forums to support understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on Wallsend. Through that learning, we supported the development of appropriate and bespoke solutions and the development (or enhancement) of partnerships and collaborative working.

We have ensured that the consequences of decisions taken in the moment were considered holistically and with longevity. We have developed systemic strategies and we've listened to what additional information, research, evidence and insights are needed to support effective decision making, and acted accordingly to provide it.

The work of Story of Place

Kate and Gill the ethnographic researchers have remained in contact with the Wallsend community during lockdown. Obviously, this had to be done remotely through social media channels such as Facebook and twitter, phone calls and text messages. It was soon apparent that parents responded best to questions late at night because they were home schooling their children during the day or just couldn't find space to reply until the end of the day.

With this in mind they set out a communication strategy where texts to certain groups were sent after 9pm and social media posts were posted early morning or weekends if they were trying to provoke a response. As soon as isolation rules relaxed Kate and Gill spent some time walking around the area, seeing what was open, how many people were shopping, wearing masks, using parks and other facilities. This was all recorded to help inform how the area was responding.

Story of Place has stayed up to date with organisations in the area by following their social media channels and recorded the reaction they are having in the community. For the initial few months of lockdown they studied schools' websites and Facebook pages on a daily basis. This led to the understanding of how much parents were turning to schools for the latest information and relied on them as a trusted source of information. It was also important to keep abreast of national

issues which was achieved by following government briefings, TV and radio programmes, news and private groups on Facebook.

Kate and Gill made sure they followed the lead of the community. Watching programmes that they were watching and following the same new threads, this was so they could get a clear idea of what they were worried about and what sources of information they were getting. These channels included BBC Breakfast, Good Morning Britain, This Morning, Loose Women, the Jeremy Vine Show, Sky News. They were also active on several social media group chats including, Peanut the parenting app, Netmums, community chat pages such as Howdon Covid-19 support, North Tyneside Covid-19 support, My Wallsend Town page, and the chronicle, and live commenting threads from the news channels when daily announcements were made.

When the government made significant change, Kate and Gill would connect the members of the community they had already established a connection with before Covid-19 and asked them what they thought of the changes and how they thought it would affect their lives moving forward through the pandemic. All of which when fed into other areas of the Core Team's work helped to build up a picture of how families in the area were feeling.

The work of Story of Place (con't)

Some of the issues which they have recorded were:

Confusion and differences of opinion over **easing of restrictions**. There was a lot of conflicting opinions between the community about what was and wasn't allowed. However, the majority of people were respectful about other people's actions.

Concerns of both parents and young people about **GSCE/A-Level results** created a lot of posts on social media leading up to results day however the two secondary schools in Wallsend had good results so social media in the community was much quieter than anticipated. Also, our observation was that both schools put out a good range of communications to support families.

Mental health and wellbeing of children and young people was a concern for most parents and professionals. After reading research about school connectiveness and the effect on wellbeing by the core team, SoP could see evidence of it through social media across Wallsend as well as in the national media. This was echoed in meeting with schools and youth providers. This learning was fed into local charity Wallsend Action for Youth (WafY) which inspired them to apply for funding to develop an online platform (more information later

in this document) to try and keep children and young people connected through COVID-19.

Through personal relationships and ongoing contact with the community, it was evident that there was a problem with **boredom of children and young people**. This was not helped by issues with accessing parks and other leisure services. The researchers kept in contact with local police during lockdown and were advised that some young people were not adhering to the lockdown restrictions and were gathering in local parks. They used this intelligence to put messages out through Facebook about keeping safe, warning parents of the trend in using nitrous oxide canisters.

Home schooling was a much talked about topic. Some people loved it and reported that their children were thriving being at home with siblings, but most parents really struggled with it. They found it difficult to motivate their children as time went on. For some parents it was difficult as they don't have access to the internet and were using mobile phones on which they didn't have enough data. Another issue was where they had more than one child who needed to use a computer but they only had one per household, this difficulty was increased if they parent was also working from home and needed to use the same computer.

The work of Story of Place (con't)

There were a lot of concerns over **accessing GP services** and confusion as to whether they were actually open. It was noticed that GP surgeries were not very good at communicating with their patients and made a lot of assumptions about the community. Because SoP fed these concerns to the WCC core team, the information could be shared with the CCG which provoked them to start releasing information on social media about their opening hours, what to expect on visiting, how to book appointments etc.

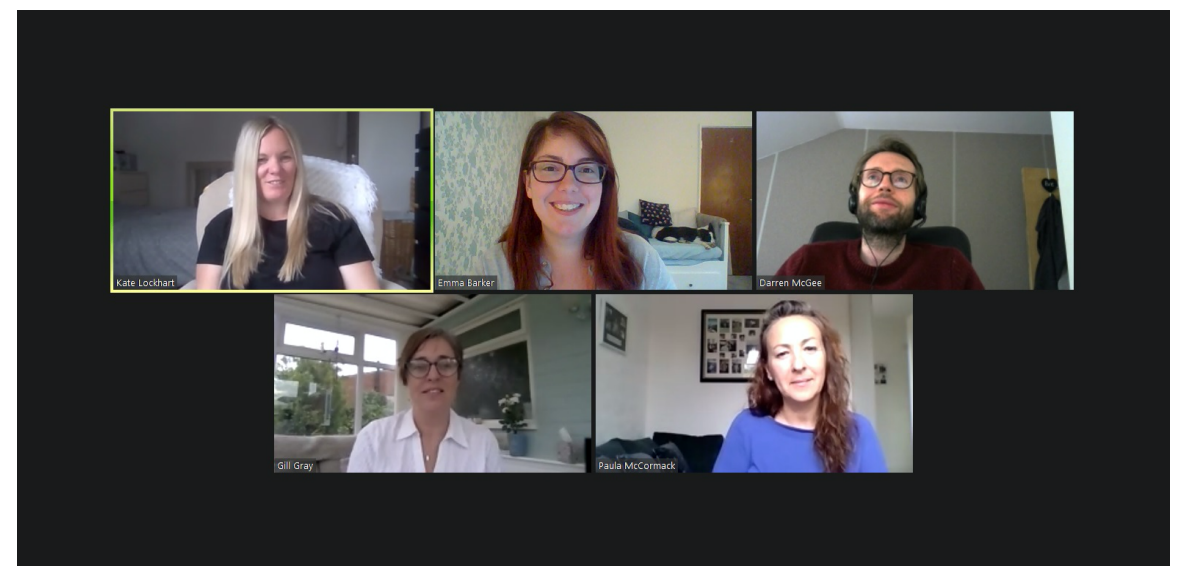
Mixed **messaging around further easing of lockdown**. As the government made further decisions to ease lockdown and returning to work/offices, schools, re opening of pubs and the ending of the furlough scheme there was more discussions around how some of the rules were self-explanatory and some seems so confusing. This caused confusion and anger especially with parents.

Most parents had concerns about the protocols for their **children returning to school in September**. Their main worries coming up because they were receiving conflicting messages from different sources. In light of this WCC worked with Wallsend Schools Partnership to produce a booklet to explain what would happen and what was expected from parents/children and school staff. This was shared widely on Facebook and twitter.

These and many other insights have been fed back in meeting with the core team which has enabled us to react in a positive way to address some concerns, such as, developing a series of weekly summer activities.

Kate and Gill have provided information for presentations for Wallsend Schools Partnership and Young in Wallsend meetings, they have recorded interviews with the core team over weekly Zoom sessions in an effort to capture knowledge in 'real-time'. Kate has kept a lockdown blog as a parent of a 3 year old.

Story of Place became much more closely aligned with the work of the Core Team over this period. They joined the core team in meetings twice per week and whilst researching daily on social media and organisations' websites they have captured evidence in screenshots and reports.



Social Media

To gain direct community insights we quickly embraced social media to learn about our community and how they were feeling through lockdown and beyond.

This was backed up by the work of our community researchers who maintained contact on the ground. We set up a Facebook Page and Twitter Account and used them as a research and engagement tool to understand our community.

Social media has been a hugely important resource for many people during lockdown and has helped to capturing the covid-19 story. During this time, we have been able to capture the voice, thoughts, and anxieties of the community when everything was changing so quickly on a daily basis.

It provided an outlet for people to get a more understandable view of what the government was saying and the rules and regulations that were being put in place. It provided a safe space for people to ask questions, share knowledge and share a bit of positivity through a difficult period.

Social media provided a space where everybody could connect around a shared problem and it really produced a sense of community spirit especially within Wallsend. Quickly there sprung up several covid-19 support pages and groups. Community members offering help to go shop for others who

maybe were shielding or in need. These groups also provided a space where people could be honest and ask for help knowing that they were not being judged for doing so.

Social media also provided a space for light relief. People would share funny pictures and memes of their experiences in a light-hearted way that most could relate to. What we saw in the beginning of lockdown was a true bond between community members, organisations, and schools. No one was trying to preach or trying to be better than anyone else, everyone was on the same page and trying to be supportive.

As lockdown went on social media became many things to many people. Some groups developed into spaces where people could talk through their problems and get help from other locals, providing information like “does anyone know when the pharmacy is open?” or “what are the opening hours for the post office?” or even “does anyone know if anywhere on the high street is selling toilet roll?”

Some other groups expanded and opened up phone lines for anyone who needed extra support or maybe needed care packages sending out.

Social Media (con't)

It was also a great way to receive quick, live and updated information from organisations such as schools who needed to get quick information out to parents. For young people's organisations it meant they could keep a close eye on people, checking in on them and their process while they were home schooling and having to stay at home.

What the social media platforms provided for mothers and families was a safe space where they could share and not feel alone. They felt like they could express themselves with how they were doing as a family while having to maybe juggling children home schooling, trying to carry on a job working from home and keeping a home on top of all of that. It enabled people to be honest and share their experiences and encourage others.

As lockdown continued people's presence online started getting less and less. Social media shifted slightly as lockdown started to ease, groups are still present online but have taken a general form and are not just Covid-19 support groups but are now community support groups.

For example, the 'Howdon covid-19 support' page has now become 'Our Howdon community support' page. This means there is still an online space for community interaction and spirit to continue.



Research Surveys

Social media gave us some great insights, but we were conscious that people present only a version of themselves online. To give a broader view we produced a series of community and young people's surveys which have been distributed widely and have been well responded to. Analysis of these surveys has given us many new insights which in turn have helped various organisations in their decision making, planning and strategy development – and therefore, our communities.

The appendix at the end of this document shows a summary of each of the survey's which we have undertaken.

Case Study

The findings from these surveys have really helped local organisations in their decision making. We asked Louise Wells, Head Teacher at Battle Hill Primary School, how it had helped her and her school.

“The insights from the survey weren't just interesting but helped us to make decisions as a school.

As a school we get individual feedback from people when speaking to parents, for example when they come into school to collect something or if we visit them in their home. Those

conversations however, are very much on an ad hoc basis and they don't really give you a feel from the community overall.

With the WCC core team putting out a range of surveys to the community and young people, this was great because it gave such a broader view and certainly helped us to understand more of how the community members are feeling.

Of these, the parents survey was particularly useful to me and our governors. It has been particularly interesting finding out and understanding out how anxious people were feeling regarding sending their children back, when the government proposed that schools reopened to certain year groups from 1 June 2020. It was good to really understand our parents' opinions on the topic and coupled with the insights from Story of Place help us understand why they held some of the views they did, that was very useful.

When I took this to governors, I was able to give them real insights of how people were typically feeling and what we as a school could put in place to accommodate the children in terms of staffing and how to set up bubbles. The insights really informed our return, we didn't have a great response to people wanting to come back on the 1 June so we put the date back to the 15 June which worked well for all us, gave everyone time to adjust and the pupils settled back in well.”

Conversations and Forums

Part of the work of the core team as systems stewards is to ensure that we are engaged in collective forums that both provide insights and learning and support the collective to build on insights the core team share that they have gained elsewhere.

Thanks to the dedication of all those partners, most of these forums moved online within the first month of the pandemic's lockdown. Whilst this was a very new way of working, it was surprising for many how quickly we all adjusted and made it the new 'norm' on Zoom and Teams.

Notable forums that operated almost weekly in the thick of it, included the Wallsend Schools Partnership and a collaboration between the Local Authority, the Wallsend Primary Care Network, VODA and WCC (Healthwatch joined latterly). Through these forums the core team were able to bring live evidence of our communities' responses through the phases of lockdown, easing and into the summer holidays. This undoubtedly informed strategies, decision making and the deployment of resource.

The 'Young in Wallsend' collaboration almost met regularly and the insights from these meetings informed the approach that Wallsend Action for Youth took to developing its strategic response and in turn fundraising and building new

collaborations. It also informed the type of research the core team needed to undertake with young people and how.

Regionally the core team engaged with a number of forums to ensure we gained insight into what was happening within other areas and sectors to ensure that we were continually learning from other partners experience and applying where appropriate to Wallsend.

Our extended thanks goes to VONNE in particular who hosted fortnightly meetings bringing diverse stakeholders together around emerging themes. The core team have built new collaborations as a result.

Nationally too, we engaged in a number of forums with; the Children's Communities Network, other placed-based initiatives, and a wide range of research-based organisations. This enabled us to raise the profile of Wallsend and given the depth and live nature of our research, did influence policy and campaign themes. A brief example of this was when e-vouchers were announced to replace free school meals.

Conversations and Forums (cont.)

We quickly mapped the Wallsend area and were able to highlight immediately that the supermarkets engaged with the e-voucher scheme were not present in this area. With some campaigning Government extended the variety of supermarkets and with further insights, eventually include small more localised convenience stores.

The tiering of local, regional and national gave us a much broader perspective and enabled us to quickly move from a reactive to a very proactive approach and in turn provide insight to partners that may not have otherwise been available.

Moreover, these forums provided the opportunity for our communities' voice to be heard in a way that had not previously been possible. The live insights directly from our community helped us all not only to know what our community was feeling, but also what they needed and wanted to support them.

This was the underpinning of every one of the forums we engaged in - to share their voice to shape responses and to hear the voice of other communities to understand how this difference could genuinely shape localised placed-based responses.



Case Study

"The insights and research which WCC Core Team, and Paula who attends the meetings, brings into the space are incredibly interesting and helpful. They're often things which hadn't occurred to me to think about!

For example, she brought some interesting insights into where people shop in Wallsend and how therefore the Free School Meal Vouchers from the government would be hard for our families to use. This really caused me to change my thinking."

Member of the Wallsend Schools Partnership

Projects, Activities and Case Studies

Coming out of our research and observations of how the area was responding to the crisis, the Core Team set out to support a few projects, activities and initiatives which based on our learning we believed would have the most systemic impact.

Over the next few pages you'll find information about some of the areas we focused on. Each one was done in partnership with other organisations, either locally or nationally. The role of the core team was broadly to:

- facilitate new and existing partnership working based on our relationships. For example, recruiting the best placed organisations, with the strongest connections to families, to become referral partners for the Emergency Response Grants.
- securing of funds to respond to the needs of the area. For example, working with Wallsend Action for Youth to bid for and receive funding to deliver the Summer Programme to support 50 young people during the holidays.
- take on the role of independent evaluators for organisations now delivering activities. For example, we will be working with the organisations contracted to deliver the Growing Up in Wallsend Online platform to measure the impact of this online opportunity.
- facilitate communications across the systems, making insights and information accessible for a variety of audiences. For example, our communications with community members through our Facebook Page.

OUR ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

Between March - August 2020

Part of the work of the Core Team at this time has been helping facilitate activities and projects to benefit families in Wallsend.

Here's a flavour of what we got up to!

EMERGENCY RESPONSE GRANTS

Recruited 7 local organisations to deliver grants. 82 families received a grant of up to £340 to support the home learning environment. A further 180 grants have been secured for families in our area.

SURVEYS

1,043 completed surveys
728 Residents participated in 3 Community Surveys
140 members of staff from 6 schools completed a Staff Survey
121 participated in our Pupil Survey

LEARNING RESOURCES

400 Early Learning Resource packs delivered to families in Phase One

1400 Early Learning Resource packs delivered to families in Phase Two

THE HEART OF WALLSEND

Video on Facebook: been viewed over 12,000 times, reaching over 19.5 thousand people.
Adding to the overall growth of our newly created Facebook Page.

SUMMER PROGRAMME

50 children (aged between 5 and 13) attended an activity programme over 3 weeks in the summer holidays. Feedback from parents and pupils was overwhelming positive.

£49,500

Secured from Big Lottery by working in partnership with Wallsend Action for Youth to build an online platform to support young peoples and parents learning and engagement

Emergency Response Grants

Both our informal research and engagement with the community and the formal survey directly with our community members, highlighted that schools had become families' key source of support and trusted information throughout the Covid-19 crisis. This gave us insight to additional pressures presenting due to poverty, the absence of many services and, alarmingly the gap that would be left for families when schools closed over the summer. In addition, parents were reporting difficulties with keeping their children entertained at home, and that their children were experiencing high levels of boredom.

With this evidence, we were able to leverage funds through Save the Children to support Early Response Grants which provide a mixture of Argos and supermarket eVouchers, furniture and toys/activities for families up to £340. We were well positioned to immediately engage referral partners who were working directly with those families.

Further insights through these additional grants and partners, positioned us uniquely within the community to give us the foresight to anticipate what will be needed in September and beyond. This enabled us to work with Save the Children to leverage even further grants and extend the programme to December 2020 to ensure that our schools are well positioned to work with families upon their return to school from September.

The pilot phase

As this was new to our area, the initial phase worked with a limited number of referral partner organisations (RPOs) as a pilot. The four RPOs were made up of three primary schools and a charity working with people experiencing domestic violence and abuse. They all fully engaged in the ERG programme and together spent the initial £10k budget. This was funding that had been repurposed from the Wallsend Children's Community (WCC) budget originally allocated to support seedcorn projects.

In addition to managing their own families, the initial RPOs have also supported families working with other organisations such as 'Walking With' who were supporting a family who just arrived in the UK the week of lockdown. This has provided new collaborations within the system.

Some RPOs were apprehensive about how to engage the conversation with families, specifically schools who may not have had this level of intimate relationship in the past. However, this was very quickly overcome, and schools are now reporting that this has both increased their profile within their community and trust more generally with the community and families alike.

Emergency Response Grants (cont.)

The second stage

The success of this initial pilot to understand the appropriateness of this type of intervention through RPOs and determine the level of need for families within the community, led to a further ask from WCC to SCUK, who secured additional funding of £2k through smaller foundations and at the end of June an additional £25.2k was secured through Bvlgari. This brought a total of 94 grants into Wallsend.

Additional RPOs had already been identified and were ready to immediately engage and quickly identified families who would benefit from a grant. These RPOs included the Local Authority's Locality Teams – both Early Help and Health Visitors, A Wallsend based VCSE organisation and additional schools.

Complimentary Limited Offers



Early Learning Packs



Essential Household Goods, ELPs and Vouchers



Emergency Response Grants (cont.)

Stage three and onwards

Having foresight on the emerging needs from September onwards when schools returned, WCC continued to work with SCUK to secure additional funds to extend the ERG programme to December. Through national campaigning, a further £1m was raised across the four nations of the UK.

Wallsend were well positioned to take a further 180 grants and initiate a strategic approach across the system of RPOs, to ensure the greatest and most effective reach possible to Wallsend families.

By the end of August 2020, of the 95 grants (£35k) that were initially made available, and over seven RPOs (and 5 other organisations the RPOs supported), 82 families have benefitted from the ERGs. The ERG programme was developed to ensure that every family had their specific needs met through a mixture of products up to the value of £340. This means there needs to be a really trusted relationship between the RPO and the family to truly understand and meet the needs of the family. Despite the value being up to £340, thus far the average grant value has been £250, meaning that more families can be engaged.

Items have ranged from beds and bedding packs to stair gates and dining room tables. Argos vouchers have been used to purchase white goods and supermarket vouchers to purchase clothing, household essentials and food. All families have benefited from early learning resources such as 'story block sets' and 'maths play sets' as well as gifted products from Hasbro and Lego.



Emergency Response Grants Case Study



Louise Wells,
Head Teacher,
Battle Hill Primary School

"The grants have been a way for us to build new relationships across the area and deeper relationships with some of our families."

"It has been great to have the emergency response grants come into the Wallsend area, thanks to the existing relationship with Save the Children. To be able to put things in place for families, so easily and so quickly has been amazing. The ease of application, speed of receiving items - which are of excellent quality - has been exemplary. I was at first a little bit worried about how I could approach people, but I soon got over that because we have such good existing relationships with families. We were already in people's homes delivering lunches, and resources and it was easy to talk about the grants as an opportunity to support them.

People have been very grateful to get some help and as a school it has been very rewarding to be able to help practically rather than just giving out advice.

I hope the relationships with the families will be even better because of receiving this grant, I hope they'll feel more open to come into school and discuss their worries or issues. I have had some very positive feedback from people about the difference the grant has made. Some families have shared with me beautiful photos of their new bunkbeds or other furniture.

One family who received a grant has five children including a little boy in our reception class and baby twins. She received bunk beds, a safety gate, and a grocery voucher. She said in her feedback "This has been fantastic and has come at the right time. I was struggling and worrying about how I would afford a new bed with the little one coming out of his cot and into a bed. Thank you so much I cannot believe how quickly it has happened."

The WCC Core Team has been brilliant in setting this opportunity up and securing additional grants. Through this I have had the opportunity to work with other people in Wallsend, including the Walking With Charity and other schools such as Beacon Hill and St Aidan's who aren't referral partners. I have also found out additional new information, for example that one of my families is working with Family Gateway and has a great relationship with them."

Early Learning Resources

With Save the Children, the core team coordinated distribution of Early Learning Resources (ELR) through our partnerships to get directly to families to additionally equip parents in supporting children to be engaged and less anxious through this time.

Phase one was received very well received both as an online resource and as a printed one.

SCUK secured additional resource through their collaboration with Peppa Pig™. Overall, we received 400 packs, 400 Peppa Pig™ Magazines and 400 Peppa Pig™ Reward Sticker books. These were distributed to all primary schools, a couple of nursery settings that had remained open along with a batch to the LAs Locality Team.

Feedback from partners suggested that families had found these incredibly useful for supporting their children, both in having conversations about Covid-19 and engaging them in activities within the home that were both fun and educational. For the partners themselves, schools particularly reported that engaging with both parents and children when giving out the resource, had enabled new and different types of conversations. For some, this opened discussion for engagement in the ERG programme

Phase two of these resources ([found here](#)). We bid for additional printed copies with SCUK this time and secured a total of 1400 printed the packs which were distributed via schools to families across our area. These resources were designed to support children through the 'boredom' and 'frustration' phase of still being socially isolated.

Case Study

One parent who received an ELR said, "it came in really handy as my child is not sure of numbers but them being

able to see the numbers and count has helped so much."

The parent sent lots of photos of her son working on his numbers with the resource pack to his teacher through the school app See Saw. It was the first time she had engaged with the school in such a way and they were able to provide more support to build on what he had already done.



Community Facebook Page

As a research tool

Through our Facebook page, we continue to keep our community well informed with factual, well-researched information that cuts through political or complex language. Through our posts, we sought to ensure that we removed any confusion and provided clarity around conflicting messaging, particularly given the pace of change in government guidance e.g. facemask requirements, GCSE/A-Level results, what's open locally and latterly, a Guide for Parents to schools re-opening.

Throughout, we have encouraged interaction with our page both with other locally based social media platforms and our community directly. This has had a dual purpose; to maintain genuine connection with our community and in understanding their needs, ensure that our communities were kept well informed about the things that were important to them and that we were responsive to their needs.

"The Heart of Wallsend" video

The purpose of our Facebook page is to retain connection with our community and ensure they are well informed. At the start of June, when it became apparent how much our community were reliant on schools for support and information, we realised how important our Facebook page would become

when schools closed for the summer. Knowing the reach schools have into their communities we worked with the entire partnership to produce a video called "The heart of Wallsend".



The Heart of Wallsend ❤️

12 weeks ago · 12.9K views

Whilst the Wallsend schools have been working in Partnership for many years, we knew this may not be that apparent to our community. We believed it was important that our community knew how hard the partnership was working together behind the scenes for the whole community.

Community Facebook Page (cont.)

The partnership of schools knew that over the summer they couldn't directly support families in the same way but had a plan for this, working with their charitable arm, Wallsend Action for Youth, and WCC.

The video was incredibly well received by the wider community, the video post had a reach to 19.5k people and the video has been viewed over 12,000 times. For a small page, with at the time about 180 followers, this was a huge amount of engagement. The post was shared by many different organisations including schools and even an estate agent!

The comments on the video were full of love for the schools and their support. There was a clear sense that the community were really brought together, and it was fantastic to see it having such a positive response.

"Fabulous! And so lovely to see so many old friends! Keep up the great work everyone x"

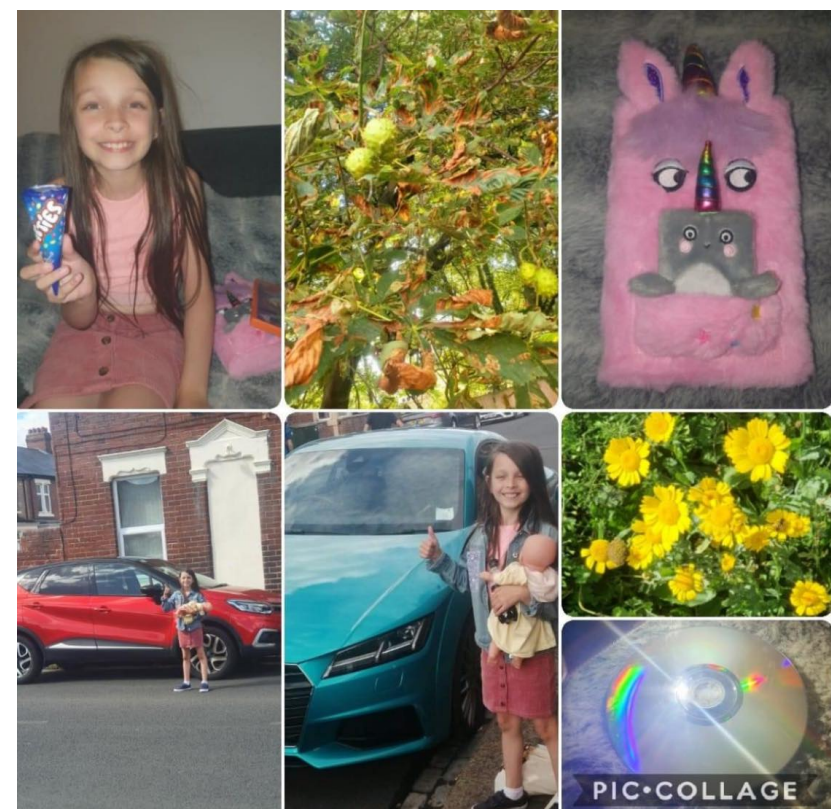
"Lovely to see so many familiar faces! Fantastic video can't wait to hear about all of the plans x"

"This is fantastic, finley was pleased to see Mr. Carruthers x"

"This is fab well done xxxxx"

Summer Challenge

The Heart of Wallsend Video acted as a catalyst for greater engagement and since then page likes have increased by 241%. As summer approached we designed to run a series of summer challenges for young people in the area, which we launched through our Facebook page. There were different themed weeks; animal week, rainbow week and back to school week. Each day a fun activity was shared and a small but loyal cohort got actively involved participating in the activities.



An entry for the photo scavenger hunt as part of the Summer Challenge Series

Community Facebook Page (cont.)

This helped us in gathering community insights. For example, one day one of the activities was to answer this question: "If someone asked you in 20 years to describe your experience during the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown what would you say to them?"

One parent said "If someone asked me what it was like during the pandemic am not going to lie its scary been a lone parent with kids and lonely because as much as I have friends and family there vulnerable. So we've been keeping ourselves busy in our own bubbles and it's not easy entertaining three young girls ages 4, 5 & 7 - they are hard work."

A child (sharing through her parent's Facebook account) said: "It's been hard for everyone we haven't seen family and friends properly for a long time and we haven't been to school. It's scary to know a virus has hurt so many people but we have been OK and we have been happy. We just want to go to school and see our friends."

Trusted information

As our Facebook page audience grew, we used it as a place to signpost and share trusted information with community members. This was particularly useful around results days when there was lots of mixed messaging about from central

government. We also were able to advertise opportunities for young people and families in the area, such as interest groups and the community school uniform scheme.

We also produced a guide to schools reopening with representation from all the schools in the area. This kind of content has gone down very well with our audience.



We made use of being members of various existing community Facebook Groups, including the recently created COVID-19 groups, to add information into there too.

Working with Wallsend Action for Youth

The Summer Programme

The findings in our community surveys highlighted the fundamental importance of schools within (our) communities. Schools became the 'go-to' place as sources of information, connectivity, activity, food and access to wider services. As such, in relation to covid-19, we identified a significant gap that will be left when schools closed over the summer period.

With summer fast approaching, to address the imminent gap, the core team worked with the schools and Wallsend Action for Youth to provide a Summer Programme. We worked across the system with a diverse range of partners and stakeholders to reduce the impact of schools closing, together, a Summer Activity Programme was designed.

Ultimately, it was a smaller programme than we all would have wanted, due both to funding restrictions and the fact that other lockdown restrictions remained in place limiting the buildings/ facilities available as well as the numbers that could potentially engage safely.

Families self-identified and schools also brought it to the attention of those they knew would benefit most.

It was designed to provide a range of activities (i.e., sport, art & crafts, etc.) to encourage children to socialise, build their

confidence, and make new friends. This in turn would also support parents either to enable them to work or to offer respite for them and their children from the confines of a lengthy lockdown. A hot meal was also provided each day. It felt for some months that we were a lone voice talking about summer provision way back in May when schools and other organisations were 'in the river', trying to support families on a day to day basis. However as system stewards, we could see that this was the role we needed to take based on our research to help prepare the system and ensure families had much needed support.



Young people taking part in the Summer Programme Activities

Working with Wallsend Action for Youth

The programme was an amazing success, both for families and for the providers themselves. Over a period of two weeks, 50 children and young people attended Churchill Community College daily from 9-4pm, Monday to Thursday - with drop-out only occurring due to holiday or self-isolation. A further week's programme took place in Battle Hill Multi-Use Centre supporting twelve of the original 50, all under the age of 11.

New partnerships were formed between providers and collaborations were developed which enabled us to draw in additional resource and funding. Our thanks goes out to:

Wallsend Action for Youth for their drive and determination in working alongside us to ensure the programme was delivered.

Churchill Community College who gifted their facilities and staff to host two weeks of the summer programme.

Linskill Foundation who repurposed funding to pay providers and who gifted the use of their building for a week.

Active Futures and Wallsend Boys Club who came together for the first time to deliver a truly bespoke programme of activities that saw children and young people, aged 5-13 grow in confidence and have amazing fun.

Park Farm Catering Company who catered the three weeks, getting to know each child and their needs and ensuring that within a limited budget, she met as many needs as was possible.

Ballinger Charitable Trust for supporting the WCC core team to repurpose their funding to support this incredibly important intervention.



Young people having their lunch together during the Summer Programme

Working with Wallsend Action for Youth

Case Study: Gill Gray, Chair Wallsend Action for Youth



"Back in April the core team started to open conversations about the summer holidays. They knew that this time would be tough for our families in Wallsend. They had been working so hard to ensure free school meals were getting to eligible families and so knew the extent of increase on eligibility and that getting both healthy food and dietary requirements met was proving challenging. Through their surveys they

also knew that both parental and children's mental health and wellbeing was in decline. As the charitable arm of the Wallsend Schools Partnership, we were working alongside them and our schools to raise funds to deliver a summer programme.

Despite us talking about it, and it feeling like a looming issue, no one else seemed to have summer provision on their radar, as organisations were so focused on the immediate problems. The core team were identifying and supporting us to raise funds for the programme, but when the continuation of free school meals was announced by government, funders shut down as they deemed a summer programme with food to be double-funding.

With the persistence of the core team, the support of the schools and repurposed funding from WCC, we eventually got a three-week programme running. It was highly targeted using insights from all our partners, and particularly the schools to ensure that the most vulnerable were given a place.

On day one of the programme, there was quite a few parents crying as they dropped their child off. They were so worried about their children having not left their sides for so long and feeling that their confidence was so low. The children were amazing and within an hour they were freely engaging and having enormous fun. By day three, there was a visible shift in parents faces, lighter, happier and relieved. The children too were so happy to be back in a structured environment with trusted adults and other children.

"Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity the kids have thoroughly enjoyed it and are excited to go tomorrow. It has helped us out so much and the children have made new friends and had so much fun the whole team involved has been fab." *Rachel, parent of 2 children aged 6 and 9.*

The core team have been brilliant and developed a pre and post survey for the children and for parents.

Working with Wallsend Action for Youth

Growing up in Wallsend Online Platform

The Core Team worked with and supported Wallsend Action for Youth (WafY) in submitting a bid to Big Lottery, Covid-19 Response Fund to develop and maintain an online platform for 6 months. They were successful in their request for £49,500.

Through insights from questionnaires completed by young people in the community it was found that it would be beneficial to develop a way to reach other young people who currently, and for the past six months have been becoming increasingly isolated through Covid-19.

We envisage one way to do this is by the creation of an online platform to safely facilitate engagement with young people and families online. To enable this to happen we have created a fit-for-purpose web-based platform which allows organisations to stay connected to the children and young people of Wallsend. This aims to enhance the face to face work already happening in youth and play work.

The platform will have a range of sections to include youth work, support for play, parenting and early years, signposting and advice and guidance around a wide variety of issues, alongside bespoke support for children and young people presenting with additional issues.



The platform will also host a wide-range of resources, which will be brought together from existing available materials and new information from partners.

This platform, Growing Up in Wallsend, will become live in September.

Our Learning

Over the period to which this report refers we, and our partners, have learnt so much about our communities, the power of being a Children's Community and our role as the Core Team.

Here are seven things we learnt.

1. Faced with a common problem **we can act collaboratively and with great agility and achieve amazing things** and when we're in this place we can work around any challenge.

The power of a place-based approach to not only mobilise quickly but to be in possession of such depth of knowledge that we know exactly what to do and can deploy resources effectively and efficiently.

2. Mental health research shows if you strongly connect with school or another organised group, and have a good connection with the people within that group, it acts as **a strong support structure for Mental Health**. We saw this in practice through the summer programme where within a short space of time the pupils quickly got back to the normal of being in an environment with other children. It will be interesting to see if this is also the case when pupils return to school.

3. Faced with such unprecedented times organisations were **keen to hear from community members and valued their experiences** and insights in new ways. Across the system in Wallsend we heard and responded to our communities, things changed in response to our learning. We must continue this and build upon it going into the future.

4. **Community spirit in the face of a crisis** encouraged self-organised groups to pop up rapidly. These groups were a place to find support and help. Over the time those groups have grown into different forums. Where organisations have engaged well with these groups it is an opportunity for their messages to be spread and heard. For example, getting clear understanding to families about provision for free school meals in each school during the early stages of lockdown.



Getting involved with the Summer Challenge

Our Learning (cont.)

5. **When different organisations feel a part of something and ownership for it there is much greater traction and impact.** For example, schools who truly understood the value survey support could offer them, and invested time, gained much wider and deeper insights. Another example would be The Heart of Wallsend video which was shared on Facebook and all schools came together to participate in. The levels of trust and this way have working during this time have increased, it will be interesting to see how they build on this.

6. A challenge for Wallsend Children's Community has always been data and collecting the true insights to help us to inform the system. During this time, when organisations were very **keen to learn how different parts of the system** were working we collectively found innovative ways to gather data from a wider variety of sources with their consent.

Where we have done this, for example through our community surveys or our insights gathered by story of place speaking directly to the community, and the data has been really rich we have been able to analyse this and give real insights back to the system and also compare to national data.

7. During this time we have seen **the impact of what a small investment of funding can do to** bring other partners and additional resources into the system. This is something we had

known for a while, but given many partners were seeing the need but struggling to know how to respond, collaboration became essential.

An example of this is the Summer Programme, which received funding from WCC and then attracted additional funds and resources to make it happen. It will be interesting to see how we can build on these new partnerships and willingness to share and collaborate.



Lockdown artwork in Wallsend

Our Next Steps

Based on all our learning we believe the next steps we need to take, as a Core Team are as follows:

1. Build upon the **community engagement** our team has undertaken. Through story of place recruit a team of community champions, signed up to our charter to bring more active community members voices into decision making processes.
2. Help foster and build up the **positive relationships** and mutual respect between schools and families that we saw so much of during the time of home schooling.
3. Continue to help support schools **accessing resources** to support families, for example the Emergency Response Grants.
4. **Strengthen the partnerships** across the system, encouraging them to engage in Memorandums of Understanding
5. Secure **future joint funding** for activities during school holidays to build upon the success of the Summer Programme.



Getting involved with the Summer Challenge Activities

Appendix: Survey Summaries

We produced a series of community and young people's surveys which were distributed widely and have been well responded to.

Analysis of these surveys has given us many new insights which in turn have helped various organisations in their decision meeting, planning and strategy development - and therefore, our communities.

Response rates

Five Surveys completed by 1,043 people

3 community surveys completed by 782 residents

1 school staff survey completed by 140 people from 6 schools

One Wallsend Pupil survey completed by 121 pupils

Survey Summaries

Over the next few pages we give a summary of each survey, including when it went out and the target audience. There is also information about the topics covered in the survey and the main insights. There is also a link to view a more detailed report about each survey.

Please contact us if you would like more information about the findings of any of the surveys.

School Staff Survey

From 20th May to 12th June 2020

Staff all schools in the schools' partnership.

Completed by 140 staff from 6 local schools.

Topics Covered

A broad range of topics and included questions that asked staff to rate how they were feeling about the government's plan for reopening schools; about how the reopening of schools was affecting their mental health and well-being; and about how safe they felt it was for staff and children to return to school.

Main Insights

The main insights showed that staff are quite anxious overall, that they do not trust the government's response, and that they do not think that the government is drawing on science to inform their decisions.

For more information

Contact Darren McGee, Data Evaluation and Impact Advisor
darren.mcgee@ntlp.org.uk

Community Survey 1

From 6th April to 16th April 2020

Aimed at community members in Wallsend

Completed by 51 residents.

Topics Covered

The survey aimed to understand how Wallsend residents were coping during lock-down; what they thought about their own community's response to the lock-down; and how, and in what way, the lock-down was having an impact on their children.

Main Insights

Most residents indicated that they were coping well with the lock-down restrictions and that they were maintaining good levels of mental health. Furthermore, most residents indicated that they felt connected to their community and that their community was doing a good job of supporting local people. Nevertheless, residents indicated that they were missing close, physical contact with friends and family.

Many residents were also concerned about how others in the community were not adhering to the proper social distancing rules.

In addition, parents indicated that their children were very worried about Covid19, specifically regarding how it might affect the health of family members, particularly elderly family members such as grandparents.

Parents were also worried about the social development of their children: in particular, parents were worried that their children were missing out on important social interactions with other children.

For more information and full analysis

Contact Darren McGee, Data Evaluation and Impact Advisor
darren.mcgee@ntlp.org.uk



Luna working on activities in the Early Learning Resources Booklets

Community Survey 2

From 27th April to 10th May 2020

This survey was shared by schools to parents in the Wallsend area.

Completed by 342 parents.

Topics Covered

This survey replicated many of the questions from our first community survey, but also included questions about accessing free school meals and out of work benefits.

Main Insights

Nearly 40% of parents with children eligible for free school meals did not access free school meals (fsm) during this phase of the lock-down.

There were three main reasons for this: 1) the fsm were not needed; 2) parents felt that the fsm should go to other families who were more in need; and 3) parents did not want to risk leaving their home, due to concerns about catching the virus, to collect the fsm.

In addition, there was a significant change in how residents saw their own community: overall, residents felt less connected to their community compared with those who responded to our first community survey. It is hypothesised that this decline reflects 'attitudes about community' returning to normal levels, following an initial burst of community activity at the start of the Covid19 crisis.

There was also a significant decline on the 'ability to cope and mental health' questions compared with our first community survey, with responses indicating that the prolonged lock-down was having an impact on residents' ability to cope and mental health.

An additional, important finding from the survey emphasised the importance of schools to the local community: residents indicated that schools were a vital source of information and support during the lock-down.

Concerns about children missing out on important social interactions with other children were frequently cited by parents. Parents were also concerned that the lock-down was having an impact on their children's mental health and emotional well-being.

Regarding other concerns about the Covid19 crisis, residents indicated that they were very worried about family or friends becoming seriously ill from the virus; they were worried about others not adhering to the correct social distancing rules; they were worried about the potential economic impact of the virus; they were worried about how long the lock-down and virus would last for; and they were worried about home-schooling and entertaining their children at home.

For more information and full analysis

Contact Darren McGee, Data Evaluation and Impact Advisor
darren.mcgee@ntlp.org.uk

Community Survey 3

From 22nd May to 8th June 2020

This survey was shared by schools to parents in the Wallsend area.

Completed by 389 parents.

Topics Covered

This survey replicated many of the questions from our first and second community surveys, but also included questions about schools reopening and children returning to school.

Main Insights

With the easing of the lock-down, indicators of mental health and the ability to cope improved for residents. This corresponded with an increase on questions that measured leaving the home (e.g., for shopping or exercise).

Most parents (72%) indicated that they would not be sending their children back to school before Sept, and most parents held either mixed or negative views about schools reopening before this time. On the flip side, children indicated either mixed or positive views about schools reopening, which showed a clear difference between parent and child views on this matter.

With schools being closed, children indicated that they missed their school friends, their teachers and having a routine the most (top three most frequently cited), with 17% of children indicating that they were not missing school at all.

About a third of parents felt that their children were worrying more than usual, were lonely and were struggling to find things to do. Over half indicated that their children were often bored.

In addition, 28% of parents indicated that their children were not getting enough physical activity; 15% indicated that their children were sleeping too much; and 22% indicated that their children were eating too much junk foods. More positively, most parents (78%) indicated that their children were enjoying having more time with their family.

When asked about returning to their normal place of work, the most frequently cited concern pertained to safety in the workplace (fear of catching virus; lack of PPE; people not socially distancing). The next most frequently cited concerns were lack of childcare, balancing working from home with home schooling, and catching the virus and bringing it back home to family members.

The most frequently cited concern regarding working from home was balancing work priorities and childcare (evident in 50% of comments), specifically regarding concerns about home schooling. Other prominent concerns involved creating space to work at home and lacking the appropriate equipment (computers/laptops, desks, WIFI, etc.).

For more information and full analysis

Contact Darren McGee, Data Evaluation and Impact Advisor
darren.mcgee@ntlp.org.uk

Wallsend Pupil Survey 1

From 18th June to 20th July 2020

This survey was shared by schools to primary and secondary school pupils in the Wallsend area.

Completed by 121 pupils.

Topics Covered

The purpose of this survey was to capture the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of young people in Wallsend at point of the lock-down when it began to fully ease. Specifically, the survey included question about returning to school, using social media, eating and sleeping habits, and feeling states.

Main Insights

Most pupils reported increased feelings of boredom, almost 40% reported higher levels of worry, and about a quarter reported feeling frightened at times, feeling unhappy and feeling lonely. Importantly, girls reported feeling more unhappy, more boredom, and more loneliness.

Almost two-thirds of pupils indicated that they had been eating more snacks and over half indicated that they had been doing less physical activity. Nearly 40% of secondary school pupils indicated that they often forget to eat breakfast, whereas only 13% of primary school pupils indicated doing so.

Most of the young people surveyed indicated that they had been using social media more since the lock-down, with only 7% indicating that social media negatively impacted on their feelings. In fact, when asked to indicate which emotions are experienced when using social media, 'happiness' was the most frequently selected emotion, which was selected by 75% of pupils. Nevertheless, 20% of pupils indicated that they had, at some point, been bullied online; and about one-third of these pupils did not report this incident to a parent or teacher

Most pupils indicated that they have either mixed/indifferent feelings or positive feelings about returning to school, with about 20% of pupils indicating that have negative feelings about returning to school

Just under half of pupils believed they would be able to catch up on their learning when returning to school. Nearly 40% were not sure if they would be able to catch up, and 16% of pupils did not think that they would be able to catch up on their learning.

For more information and full analysis

Contact Darren McGee, Data Evaluation and Impact Advisor
darren.mcgee@ntlp.org.uk



For more information visit:
www.childrenscommunitynetwork.org.uk/our-communities/wallsend

Report produced September 2020