

Stories of life and health in Wick: qualitative insights from a community development project in Arun

Kate Birrell, Public Health Lead, West Sussex County Council¹
Supervised by Professor Jackie Cassell, Brighton and Sussex Medical School
With thanks to Belinda Brighton and the Chilgrove House community

1. Introduction

The Wick estate in Arun is in the 10% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas nationally; residents have significantly worse health than other national/West Sussex populations.

This research was carried out in collaboration with the project lead and volunteers at Chilgrove House, a community development project in the Wick estate. The project aims to address health inequalities and to increase community resilience. The project lead and volunteers informed the development of the research and enabled its delivery.

"We used to cook meals from scratch, whereas now you can't afford to do it. And it's cheaper to live off processed food, you know. Whereas beforehand, we were able to do it."
Michelle

"You've just got, you've just got to pick yourself up. And you'll find a lot of people around here do that. Pick yourself up."
Jenny

4. Results

Four themes were identified:

(1) Experiences of adversity – traumatic experiences, multiple health conditions, significant illnesses and serious accidents were prominent in people's stories and seen as an inevitable part of life;

(2) Resilience and caring – resourcefulness and resilience were important aspects of people's lives, and generosity and caring for others was central to their identity;

(3) Threats to health – social, economic and environmental circumstances presented challenges to participants' health e.g. housing problems, low income;

(4) Wick as a strong community – interviewees expressed their love for Wick and felt supported by their community; Chilgrove House embodied this and was seen as a force for good transforming lives for the better.

Interviewees felt strongly that **being part of the Chilgrove House community positively impacted on their health** and quality of life. They described improvements in their physical and mental health, including healthy eating, more exercise, stronger social connections, better self-esteem, and a sense of meaning and purpose.

"I really love the community feel. I like how people get on. [...] I want to say it makes me feel secure."
Amy

5. Conclusions

The findings show the impact of living with adversity on people's health, alongside strengths and assets at individual and community level as sources of resilience. Through building on these assets, Chilgrove House is enabling participants to improve their health and wellbeing despite living in challenging circumstances. Research findings have informed wider action e.g. PCN sessions on pain management and mental health at Chilgrove House.

"Sometimes it is depressing and I don't want to leave the house because there's no reason other than the shopping. Whereas now I've got a reason [volunteering at Chilgrove]. It's what I'm doing."
Denise

Denise



Kitchen in Chilgrove House

2. Aims

This qualitative study aimed to understand how Wick residents experience the health impact of their social and economic circumstances, in the context of the community project. Findings contributed to a 6 month evaluation of the Chilgrove House project.

3. Methods

One hour interviews with five women and two men were undertaken at Chilgrove House (April-June 2022). A topic guide was used and interviewees were encouraged to talk about what was important to them. Transcribed interviews were analysed using thematic analysis².

What has been learned through the collaboration?

- The success of the community development project is built on trust, and this provided a strong basis for the collaboration.
- Chilgrove House staff and volunteers were able to recruit research participants who would not have got involved otherwise.
- Working collaboratively enabled the research to inform future development of Chilgrove House activities to meet people's needs.

What has excited the collaboration?

- There has been interest in the research from organisations across the system and it feels like people's voices are being heard.
- The research has helped to demonstrate the impact of the project, which can contribute to making the case for future funding.
- From a personal perspective, it was exciting to have the opportunity to talk to people and listen to their stories.

1. Contact details: kate.birrell@westsussex.gov.uk

2. Braun V. and Clarke V. Thematic analysis: a practical guide. London: Sage Publications Ltd; 2022.

Acknowledgements: This research was supported by West Sussex County Council, Arun District Council, and the Chilgrove House community.