



Focus Groups with young people aged 9-24 years in North Wales

Prepared by Social Change UK for Public Health North Wales

Introduction

This report captures the attitudes and views to health and wellbeing of young people aged 9 to 24 years living in North Wales.

Social Change UK facilitated three focus groups across three different age groups in March 2014. The three groups were split into the following age brackets:

- Primary school aged children (aged 9-10 years) from Cynfran School in Colwyn Bay
- Secondary school aged children (11-16 years) from Ysgol Bodedern in Holyhead
- College students (18- 24 years) from Coleg Cambria in Wrexham

Each focus group discussed mental and physical health, and how young people can be healthy. Each group lasted between one hour and one hour 30 minutes. The discussion guide (see appendix 1) was adapted in part to make it relevant to those participating.

Methodology statement:

Three focus groups were conducted across North Wales with young people aged 9- 24 years. 8-11 individuals were present in each of the group sessions. A researcher from Social Change UK facilitated each group session. A public health professional representing Public Health Wales was present at the secondary school focus group and the college students group session. A focus group discussion guide (appendix 1) was used when facilitating the focus groups, with minor alterations made to the questions to make it more appropriate for each age group.

The focus groups consisted of different components; a post-it note exercise to generate views and thoughts, small group discussions, whole group discussions and ranking exercises.

The post-it note exercise was used during these focus groups to gain views and attitudes towards health; this was used to generate thoughts for discussions that followed. The aim of this component was to gather individual thoughts rather than group thoughts. This then allowed the facilitator to discuss personal viewpoints as a group.

The focus groups were also split into groups of 2 or 3 and were asked to discuss among themselves what they felt about certain issues regarding health and happiness. In addition to this, the groups also completed a ranking activity of what they felt was most important for health and happiness, including what organisations or people are responsible for facilitating change and helping young people to stay happy and healthy.

Whole group sessions also took place where members of the group were encouraged to talk about different topics. All focus groups were recorded using a dictaphone, transcribed, and analysed through thematic analysis which generated key themes and insights. Primary school children were also asked to record what they felt made them

happy onto a large piece of paper as an activity to generate insight – this was also analysed through carrying out a thematic analysis which generated reoccurring views and thoughts.

The secondary school focus group was conducted in Welsh and then transcribed into English. All children were asked to sign an agreement to have their photographs taken for use in the North Wales Public Health Annual Report. All children were assured that whatever they said in the group sessions would not be attributed to individuals. This allowed participants to be open and honest with their viewpoints.

Incentives

Primary school children were given a kite as a ‘thank you’ for taking part in the focus group. Secondary School children were given a book that encourages young people to take part in different physical and mental activities.

Focus group with primary school children

Introduction

Ten children aged 9-10 years from Cynfran School in Colwyn Bay took part in a one-hour focus group. There were five boys and five girls in total. Each child was given a kite at the end of the focus group to thank them for their time.

My health and my life

When primary school children were asked what was important to them, all children wrote their family. A large majority also wrote down friends, and half of all children said pets. When asked how important friends are, a girl responded by saying that *“they (friends) are classed as my family”* and other children in the group agreed.

When the children were asked to describe how they felt about life right now, the majority said that they were happy. When asked to elaborate, a girl replied by stating that she has plenty of friends and family members who don't argue. Another girl stated that she's happy because she can see all of her friends. However, one girl responded with *“dumb”*, and elaborated by adding that she feels dumb because she *“can't spell anything”*.

When asked what made them happy, the majority of children mentioned their friends having an effect on their happiness:

“Going to see my friends because we have a laugh”, (Girl)

“Seeing my friends after school, dad every weekend”. (Boy)

Another common occurrence was spending time with family members:

“I feel happy because I have my friends and family and my parents are getting married...my mum and dad are going to be happy and that's all that matters.” (Girl)

Others mentioned playing with their pets or playing sport:

“I like to teach my dogs new trick” (Girl)

“My friends and football, and playing with my dog”. (Boy)

When asked whether they meant playing or watching football, he replied with *“playing”*.

The children also mentioned music. One child responded to this question by stating that the song “Happy” by Farrell Williams makes them feel happy, to which the group agreed. Most of the group said that they feel happy when listening to music. However, one boy commented and said that it depends on the song.

Sport and exercise

When asked who likes to play sport, all of the children raised their hands.

When the children were asked what makes them healthy, the group said sport and exercise was a key way to stay healthy. A range of different answers was given when asked what types of sport and exercise. Boys in the group mentioned football frequently. Cycling was an activity both boys and girls regularly participated in. One child replied by saying that they take part in sport and exercise as a family. Swimming, running, walking, and trampolining was also included in their main activities.

"I play football, dad does his cycling"

"Swimming, running, walking" (Girl)

When the children were asked whether they do any of the sports and activities they mentioned, they unanimously said yes. Overall, most children in this group take part in a number of different sporting and outdoor activities.

Healthy diet

A healthy diet was also mentioned as a key way to stay healthy. One child said, *"What you eat"*. When asked what type of food, the child answered with *"healthy food"*. The children were then asked whether they were able to name any healthy foods. One child responded with *"fruit and vegetables"* while another said *"meat"*.

Another child said *"balanced diet"*. When asked what they meant by a balanced diet, the child answered with *"enough carbohydrates and enough vegetables and fruit, protein, milk"*.

When asked how many eat five fruit and vegetables a day, two children out of 10 said yes. Those children who don't eat five fruit and vegetables a day were asked why not. A child replied with *"effort"*, another with *"no time"*, a third with *"don't like fruit and vegetables"* while another child stated that their brother eats most of it and doesn't leave any left for them. These responses suggest that children in this age range had some knowledge and understanding about what food is considered healthy.

Sleep

One child brought up the importance of sleep when discussing what keeps you healthy:

"The right amount of sleep" (Boy)

When asked what is the right amount of sleep, one child replied with 8-10 hours of sleep. When the group was asked how many of them sleep for eight hours or more, only two of them said yes. One child said they sleep for five or six hours. This often left some children feeling tired throughout the day.

"I get 5 or 6 hours sleep" (Girl)

"Do you get tired in the daytime?" (Researcher)

"Sometimes" (Girl)

Mental health

When asked to write down what is the first thing that comes to mind when we say mental health and a poorly brain there was a mixture of responses. One responded by saying *“the brain, feeling sick, your heart, and smoking”*. A second child carried on this theme by stating that a *“healthy brain and smoking”*.

Another child answered this question by saying *“depressed people and happy people”*. This shows some level of awareness about mental health.

It should also be noted that a child answered this question with *“maths and English”*; they then added *“I’m not good at them”*.

The researcher noticed that two of the children had mentioned smoking. The children were then asked how many have parents or relatives that smoke – six children raised their hands. When asked what they felt about it, a child said *“I don’t like it”*, while two others tried to motivate their mothers to stop smoking – one of which resulted in their aunt stopping smoking, while the other was able to convince their mother to join a stop smoking programme.

“My mum and dad smoke, and I told them what happens to them, because my dad got ill he stopped, but my mum said that she’s going to stop soon”(girl)

The children were given an activity to carry out which involved them writing onto a sheet of paper what they feel makes them happy and what makes them healthy - the children gave multiple responses. Seven children said that parks or new parks would make them happy, this was followed by six children saying that sports make them happy with four of them stating that swimming makes them happy, while two said netball makes them happy.

Five children said that ice cream makes them happy, as well as family. Four children said that friends make them happy. Other responses included a non-uniform day on Friday, and banning smoking or getting people to stop smoking. A bigger playground came up on three occasions. Other responses included: having a healthy body, bungee jumping, pigs/cows, school, exercise, and meat. Two children reported that holidays make them feel happy as well as trampolining, farms, being eco-friendly, more playtime, staying slim, healthy food, a bigger school, education, sleep, pets, and parties. The children also enjoyed dancing and school discos:

“Anyone like dancing, or discos?” (Researcher)

“We have them here” (Girl)

“How often?” (Researcher)

“On special occasions, like Christmas, Easter, Halloween” (Girl)

“Do you enjoy them?”(Researcher)

“Love them” (Girl)

Cycling was also discussed. With many saying they regularly use a bike:

“Who’s got a bike?” (Researcher)

“I got one for Christmas” (Girl)

“We have Wheely Wednesday” (Girl)

“What’s Wheely Wednesday?” (Researcher)

“You can bring your bikes, scooters or rollerblades (to school)” (Girl)

The children mentioned that there was a proposition and vote for a new park, however no action was taken, due to an alleged lack of funding:

“They said that ages ago, because we had a vote here, to have a new park, they said that a year ago and no one’s doing it” (Girl)

“Does that upset you?” (Researcher)

“Yes” (Girl)

“We got to vote” (Girl)

“And they didn’t do it” (Girl)

“Why do you think it’s not happened?” (Researcher)

“No funding” (Girl)

When asked how many have tried alcohol, nine children raised their hands, however, none have tried smoking tobacco cigarettes or e-cigarettes.

“My mum’s got one of those (e-cigarette)” (Girl)

“They’re (e-cigarette) worse because of the chemicals” (Boy)

The children were split into two groups, a group of boys and a group of girls. They were given 10 activities that they had to prioritise from what they considered being the most important to the least important when it came to health. Their scores were ranked and added together to see the overall view of the children in the group. Below is the list of activities ranked from most important to least important:

1. Not smoking & spending time with family and friends
2. Feeling happy in yourself & a balanced diet
3. Drinking lots of water
4. Eating 5 fruit and vegetables a day
5. Exercising regularly
6. Taking part in outdoor activities
7. Spending time outdoors
8. Playing sports

There was a consensus between both groups that not smoking and spending time with family and friends were the most important. When asked why they ranked them high up in importance, both groups highlighted the consequence of smoking:

“It poisons your lungs” (Boy)

“It kills you”. (Girl)

When asked about the importance of spending time with family and friends, a boy responded with *“if you don’t you lose your social skills”*.

Following on from this, both groups ranked feeling happy in yourself and a balanced diet as joint second in importance. When asked more about the importance of feeling happy in yourself, the boys stated that *“you have to”* while another added *“not to be*

depressed". Another boy added *"if you go in to school and you don't like it, you'll be lazy"*. However, although as a whole both groups have ranked "being happy in yourself" very highly, there is a score difference of three, with the girls viewing it less important than the boys.

Drinking lots of water was considered to be the third most important, however, there was a difference between the groups as the girls viewed it as more important than the boys. This was shortly followed with "eating 5 fruit and vegetables a day" with a similar scoring difference between the girls and the boys – with the boys viewing this as less important than the girls.

Exercising regularly was ranked fifth by both groups; there was a slight difference of opinion between the two groups as the group of boys ranked it higher (5th) than the group of girls (8th). This was followed by taking part in outdoor activities, which seemed to have another difference of opinion with girls viewing this as the least important (10th) where as the boys ranked this as the 6th most important activity in order to have good health.

At the bottom of the list was spending time outdoors and playing sport, respectively. There was a slight difference of opinion between the groups with respect to spending time outdoors, as boys viewed that as less important (10th) than girls (7th). When the boys were asked why spending time outdoors was their least important activity, a boy responded by saying that *"it can be having a picnic outside, eating MacDonald's"*.

When the children were asked what physical activities they would like to do, the children responded with the following; gymnastics, biking, skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, horse riding, karate, and cycling. When asked how many of the activities they would like to do were available to them to do within their area, the children responded with the following; horse riding, running, biking, and scootering.

Other issues

We discussed the barriers that might prevent children of their age from going out or taking part in sport or exercise. Safety, money and time were the three most mentioned barriers (or 'things' as we called it in the focus group)

"We don't have time because of school" (Boy)

"It is quite expensive to do that (horse riding)" (Girl)

One of the children mentioned that there was a river nearby their house that they used to regularly swim in. This river was a place she would go to there with her sister but there are some concerns:

"Near my house there's a river and me and my sister go there, but in it there's loads of bottles." (Girl)

"There's litter?" (Researcher)

"It's also got stray cats there." (Girl)

"Do you still go to the river?" (Researcher)

"No, it puts us off. We can't swim in it" (Girl)

As mentioned safety was an issue to a couple of participants and this was explored further. Those who felt this was an issue reported to not feeling safe when they go out:

“It’s not safe outside” (Girl)

“You don’t feel very safe?” (Researcher)

“No” (Girl)

“I don’t feel (safe) when I’m going out now” (Girl)

“One of my friends, his brother was drunk when he came home one night, and he started having a go at my friend’s mum, then my friend’s mum just called the police on him” (Boy)

“Does that make you feel unhappy?” (Researcher)

“Yes, that’s why I never go round” (Boy)

Focus group with secondary school children

Introduction

This focus group was conducted at Ysgol Bodedern in Holyhead in Welsh. Young people in the group were aged between 11 and 16. There was a total of ten participants. At the end of the focus group all participants were given a book as a thank you for their time.

What makes you healthy?

The children were first asked to write down what makes them healthy and they were asked to share their responses with the group. Participants said an active lifestyle, school, a balanced diet, and plenty of activities after school.

“Health, fitness, physical education, sensible food”

“Eating well and doing things”

“Sports at school, plenty of activities after school”

All participants were asked if they did the things they said keep you healthy – such as exercise and eating healthily, and if not, what stops them from being as healthy. One child responded by saying *“Yes mostly but being busy sometimes means we can’t do everything, we don’t always eat healthily”* while another said *“the pressure of school work means we sometimes can’t be as active as we should be and we know we will sit in front of the computer instead of being active outdoors”*.

Although it is recognized that having a busy and active lifestyle can be a good thing, the children in the group felt that they have a very busy lifestyle and they are preoccupied with school, clubs/after school activities, and trying to manage a social life with their friends and they may find that there is little time to prepare a healthy meal and they favour food that is cheap and readily available to match their lifestyle.

“The pressure of school work means we sometimes can’t be as active as we should be and we know we will sit in front of the computer instead of being active outdoors.”

Mental health versus physical health

The group was asked what was more important – mental health or physical health. The majority said mental health:

“Good mental health has to come first as you can’t think about having a healthy body unless you have a healthy mind.”

When they were asked whether they knew anyone who has a poorly mind/ mental health problem, five people within the group knew someone with mental health issues. When asked what they would do if they came across somebody with mental health concerns, one replied:

“You need to be careful because you might not know their state of mind, you’d speak to your own parents, or your friends parents, teachers, other friends or encourage

them to go and see a doctor or the school nurse. There's a mental health board in the school - I'd point to that and encourage them to get help."

What being unhealthy means.

When asked what being unhealthy meant to them, overwhelmingly the participants linked unhealthiness to inactivity and weight. Most participants responded with *"someone who is overweight or obese"*, *"someone who's lazy"*, *"people who are stuck to their PlayStation or computer"*, *"someone who eats too many takeaways"*, and *"someone who never leaves the house"*. However, one teenager stated that it could be mental health related by saying that *"people who may have mental health issues"* could be considered unhealthy.

When they were asked about how unhealthy people feel, a teenager responded by saying that it makes them feel *"insecure, they will worry about how they look, when you go to a gym you just see people who look healthy, if someone is unhealthy or overweight they feel ashamed –their confidence will be reduced."*

The group was asked to tell us how they could encourage people to lead a healthy lifestyle. Most participants talked about the involvement of others – either to facilitate change or to encourage change:

"Support them to take exercise and signpost them to services and facilities, people who are sportspeople should encourage others who are not in the team to take part, it doesn't matter how good they are at sport it's the taking part that's important."

Most participants felt that schools had a key role to play:

"There should be more awareness at school of the opportunities that exist that are not competitive so everyone can take part."

It was suggested that some of these ideas discussed could be implemented in schools to improve physical health and participation and increase individuals' confidence and self esteem through social links and support networks being created through participation in team sports.

When asked to give an example of a healthy person, the group collectively said:

"Someone who looks and feels good, eats healthily and has lots of friends."

When asked what they would recommend to somebody that isn't healthy, a teenager responded by saying:

"Being active helps you feel energised you feel you can achieve something, it helps you sleep better and you feel ready to tackle the challenge of the next day much better."

We asked the group to split into groups of two or three. The group was split into four groups – a group of two 16 year olds, a group with a 13 year old and a 15 year old, a group with a 12 year old and two 14 year olds, and a group of an 11 year old, 13 year old, and a 14 year old. They were given 12 activities that they had to prioritise from

most important to the least important when it came to health. Their scores were ranked and added together to see the overall view of the group. Below is the list of activities ranked from most important to least important:

1. Drinking lots of water
2. Avoiding drugs
3. A balanced diet & feeling happy in yourself
4. Not smoking & spending time with family and friends
5. Exercising regularly
6. Eating 5 fruit and vegetables a day
7. Spending time outdoors
8. Taking part in outdoor activities
9. Playing sports
10. Drinking alcohol in moderation

However, although this is how they perceived the most and least important activities with respect to being healthy and happy, there were interesting inconsistencies. For example, “avoiding drugs” was identified as the second most important in order to be happy and healthy, however, this was not considered most important across all groups, as the group of the 13 & 15 year olds alongside the group of 12 & 14 year olds ranked this as less important than the other two groups (9th and 5th respectively). However, all four groups thought drinking alcohol in moderation was the least important in being healthy.

Impact of organisations and people on health

The group was asked to prioritise a list of organisations or people who can support people to stay healthy. The council and family came out as most influential.

The teenagers were asked whether they were aware of anything that was being done locally to make people healthier, they responded with the following:

“Lots of the facilities are far from us – there’s no leisure centre close to us here – you have to travel, which is hard for us”

“There are not enough clubs to go to after school round here – you are dependent on people to take you”

“You also have to be 14 to use the gym and that means there’s very little for the younger pupils to do.”

Promoting alternative fitness methods for those that are too young to go to the gym would be welcomed by participants.

Participants were asked if they were aware of anything that was being done locally to address issues such as alcohol, drugs, smoking, obesity, safety, crime and bullying. The response was that there’s a health club at the school and there is a school nurse but they were not aware of anything else.

Community issues

Participants were asked to describe the biggest health issues their community struggles with. There was a consensus among the group that obesity was the biggest issue within their community:

“Since we have started school each year you can notice the change it’s a lot of difference –the pupils are getting bigger.”

“Too many people are playing games consoles.”

When asked what can be done to try and tackle unhealthiness within their community, the teenagers responded with the following:

“More gym lessons for school pupils, gym membership is expensive for people - it should be cheaper or free, takeaways are cheap (McDonalds is just £1) there should be minimum pricing.”

“At school eating healthy is expensive –a salad is more expensive than a full dinner – that doesn’t make sense – the council and the school have responsibility for changing that.”

When asked what they would do if they were part of an organisation that was aiming to make young people healthier, the children responded with the following:

“More resources such as parks and gyms close to where we live, we would be willing to travel 10 minutes to get to a gym or health facility,”

“Better maintenance of playing fields and things for older children to enjoy – the swings are broken, the grass isn’t mown and there’s lots of rubbish – how can we be expected to use them if they are dirty and not well maintained – if you want to play football on some playing fields the grass is long so we can’t practice properly.”

“More signposting to the natural resources we have here in Anglesey such as the coastal path and encouragement for local people to use them – lots of people who visit use them.”

“More encouragement for people to leave the car at home.”

How I feel about life

The children were also given an activity sheet to complete, which asked them how they feel about life right now; their responses were as follows:

“I feel happy about myself and looking forward for the future.”

“I’m happy with my life right now. I always have things to do; I dance 4 times a week and have different clubs I go to in the week.”

“I feel happy with my life right now as everything is going great.”

“My life is very good because I’m healthy, doing plenty of exercise and keeping fit.”

“Good as there is no problem with my life at this time.”

“I’m pleased and thankful, as everything is ok, my family and I are healthy.”

“I feel happy about life; I’m enjoying life very much. I interact with a lot of people, which helps.”

There is a consensus between the group that they think that life is currently good and is pleasant. One child stated that they think school is asking for too much of them and that they’re busy:

“I feel that school is asking too much of me – busy.”

Healthy lifestyles

We asked participants if they eat five or more fruit and vegetables a day. Four said that they always eat their five a day, but six said that they sometimes eat their five a day.

We asked if they have a balanced diet. Seven said that they always have a balanced diet, while three said they sometimes have a balanced diet.

We asked if they exercised regularly at least three times a week and for at least 30 minutes. Nine agreed and one said sometimes.

We asked the group if they drank lots of water. Five said that they always drink lots of water, while five said they sometimes drink lots of water.

When asked if they feel happy, only half of the group (five people) said “I feel happy in myself”. The other half of the group 5 said they sometimes feel happy in themselves.

The entire group said that they didn’t smoke cigarettes and that they had never taken drugs. Two people said that they sometimes drink alcohol. Eight members of the group said that they had never drunk alcohol.

When asked if they take part in outdoor activities regularly, four people said they always take part in outdoor activities, while six said they sometimes take part in outdoor activities. Nine said that they always play sport, while one person sometimes plays sport. The entire group said that they spend lots of time with family and friends.

Focus group with college students

Introduction

12 college students from Coleg Cambria in Wrexham took part in a one hour and 30 minute focus group about health and happiness.

What makes you healthy

We started the session by asking participants to note down on post it notes if they first considered themselves to be healthy and if not, what could make them healthy. Three participants described themselves as healthy and said that they would need to incorporate the following – which they do – to stay healthy:

“Dancing and eating home cooked meals” (Girl)

“Balanced diet, exercise, and sleeping” (Boy)

“Keeping fit, eating healthy, being with friends, and good mental health” (Girl)

Nine participants felt that they were not healthy and wrote down the following ways they could be more healthy:

“Exercise, fruit, and water”

“Diet”

“Fruit and exercise – I eat fruit but don’t really exercise”

“Diet, I have a really unbalanced diet. And I put substances down as well like alcohol and smoking – I do both so I’m not that healthy”.

“Same as above, diet, and a lack of sleep”

“Diet, I eat like 3 or 4 takeaways a week, and I don’t get a lot of sleep – I get 5 or 6 hours a night”

“Eating healthy food and exercise, I wouldn’t say that I exercise. Eating healthy food is a must but because of work, and when you’re on your break there’s not many places you can buy healthy food from”

“Diet and exercise. “The only exercise I get is walking from home to here, and with diet I get really easily distracted and I can lose track from what I’m doing - it happens a lot.”

“Exercise and healthy food and drink”

The majority stated that a good diet and exercise is imperative to staying healthy, even though they don’t consider themselves to be healthy. They were asked whether a healthy lifestyle is appealing to them, they agreed that it was and there was a suggestion that more could be done to raise their awareness of healthy and cheap alternatives to unhealthy food such as takeaways.

“Healthy food is refreshing and it makes you feel better” (Girl)

Following on from the comment that a participant made about eating three or four takeaways per week, the group was asked how many of them eat takeaway at least once a week; the majority of the participants raised their hands. They were asked whether they thought that the limitation of places to buy healthy food is a barrier - they agreed.

“Not much variety” (Boy)

Participants also tended to eat takeaways in the evenings – sometimes late at night.

Participants were asked if there were any other barriers might be stop them from becoming healthier. The majority of participants said that they lack motivation, and have stated that there are distractions such as TV, catching up with friends, gaming (video games) and a lack of time to do exercise:

“Watching TV or playing on games” (Boy)

“I (would rather) relax rather than just go for a walk” (Girl)

“Don’t have time, always working” (Girl)

As well as stating that they do not have much time to take part in physical activity (or choose to use their time doing something else), a number of participants said that the cost of going to the gym was an issue for them.

“The cost of going to the gym is quite high, for a student if you don’t have a job it’s expensive to go to the gym and pay the gym fee”. (Girl)

Overall there was a perception in the group that being or becoming healthy is costly.

“Make healthy food cheaper” (Girl)

“Healthy food is more expensive than junk food” (Boy)

Participants did say that when friends are healthy, this can act as a personal motivator. Having a friend or personal trainer to encourage you can be quite powerful:

“Having a friend with you can act as a motivator, or a personal trainer because they tell you what to do and how to do it. If I got a gym membership and went to the gym I wouldn’t know what to do”. (Girl)

Most of the group collectively agreed that they would be more likely to participate in physical activities if their friends came together to form a team:

“If your friends joined in as well, I’d do it then” (Boy)

“Other than cost, what do you think would motivate you more?” (Researcher)

“If a friend was going” (Student)

Some students lacked confidence in themselves when considering the gym as a place to get fit. Using gym equipment or taking part in classes was daunting for people who had not done it for some time or had never done it before.

Participants were asked how many of them drink alcohol. Ten people raised their hands in response to this question. The students drank between 1 and 5 times a week. Those drinking alcohol regularly said that they reported to mostly drink on a night out when it's a student night, as drinks are cheaper. Participants reported to have started drinking alcohol from as young as 13, with all trying or drinking by the time they reached 16.

Mental health

Participants were asked to say the first thing that came into their head when they heard “mental health”. Eight participants were aware of somebody who suffered from a mental health problem, some of whom had family members that were suffering with depression, bi-polar, schizophrenia, and dementia. The most frequent responses of their first thoughts surrounding mental health were depression and friends/family, alongside less frequent responses such as medication, self-esteem, and anxiety.

When asked what they think people think about mental illness, a participant responded by saying that:

“They ignore it because...it's not a physical illness, because it's not a physical illness people ignore it, they don't know what to do”.(Boy)

The group was then asked what contributes to good mental health, participants all focused on the importance of being social, whether it's with their friends or family members, as long as they're in the company of others.

“I just go see my friends or family”(Girl)

“I think it you stayed in and not gone out, like if you go to college and come back home and you're an outcast in class and you're on your own, it will start deteriorating from there.”(Boy)

The group participants were film and media students and they regularly made videos. Participants were asked if they could think of any ideas they may have for creating a video to try and make individuals more sociable or to raise awareness of the importance of good mental health, and one individual responded with the following idea:

“I'd probably do it in 2 colours, one in black and white and one in colours, and the one in colour would be them with a social life and you'd see them going out, and the other one stays home a lot, and you can see what happens to them.”(Girl)

Another participant responded with the following suggestion:

“Show them stuff they can do that’s creative so that they can express themselves, so if they’re a little bit down then they can do something - like music.”(Boy)

When asked how they would approach the situation if they had a friend that was introverted and they weren’t sure on how to approach the situation, a participant responded with the following:

“Maybe ask them if they wanted to do something they wanted to do? Maybe everyone else is doing something they don’t want to do, and maybe ask them what’s wrong and ask them if they wanted to go out and do something they wanted to do instead. Say like if we went out all the time, and we’d go to the cinema, because that’s what they’d enjoy.”

A participant brought up the option of phoning a helpline instead of talking to a family member or friend as they might be worried about being judged. The group was then asked if they would call a helpline if it was either for themselves or someone they knew – nine participants raised their hands in agreement to calling a helpline.

Participants were asked which they viewed more important, mental health or physical health. The majority agreed that mental health was more important, one of the participants said:

“If you’re not happy then you don’t want to [do exercise]”, with another adding that “you can be in really good shape but you can be really stressed”(Boy)

Participants were asked what makes them happy; this was mixed yet some shared similar answers. As a whole, the most re-occurring responses were “friends”, “TV/film/gaming”, “family” and “music”. A participant stated that his cat makes him happy, and that it changed their mentality in a positive way, with another participant reinforcing this by arguing that pets aren’t just animals, but rather *“they’re your best friend”*. Another participant stated how sleep makes them feel happy and how it could have an impact on their mentality during the day if they don’t get enough sleep. A number of participants in the group struggled to get eight or more hours sleep with some saying that they managed on just four hours a night.

Impact of organisations and people on health

When asked about the role the council plays in helping local people to stay healthy, the group had mixed views. Overall the group felt that the council has a role to improve facilities in order to encourage more people to go outside and that it had a role to provide access to more open space and create more places for older teenagers:

“More places for older teenagers to go, if it’s sunny and you go to the park it’s overrun with kids and younger teenagers.”(Boy)

“More parks”(Girl)

“More open space”(Boy)

When they were asked what there was for them to do in the local area, they felt that there isn’t much to do in Wrexham, and so have to take the bus to go to Chester in order to do something fun outdoors. The group thought that to incentivize individuals

to go out, the local council could host barbeques, have fun days, and have regular fairground rides for the public to enjoy. The group was also asked whether there were any festivals in Wrexham, a participant replied by saying that there are festivals in Chester but none in Wrexham. Festivals or outdoor events was very much welcomed by the group and something they wanted to see more of.

When asked on the role that the local council has on the health and wellbeing of the members of the public, 10 people agreed that the local council plays a key role but that they often don't do a good job in listening to what the public want. One participant said that they act as decision makers and that "*just say yes or no, they don't know what people think*". Another participant disagreed however and said:

"They (Council) got a few different things in place for people our age because my auntie used to work for one of them, and people can go in town and record in music studios...they put that there for people who aren't healthy, so people that are struggling socially can go there".

Another participant added that "they don't test ideas and they say no it's too expensive".

Participants were then asked on whether family and friends play a role in keeping people healthy. Some of the participants said that they do play a key role. One of the participants qualified this by saying that "*it's not their obligation but they can help, they can make it easier for you unless you're on your own*" – this raised the question of whether they thought that friends and family are their biggest motivator/ influencer to be healthy, to which all of the participants agreed.

"If everyone is eating healthy food, they'd be better motivated to do it."(Girl)

"Your parents, if they buy healthy food instead of just putting pizza in the fridge, so then you've got more of a choice."(Boy)

They were then asked about supermarkets and whether they play a role in keeping healthy. The overall view here was that it is the supermarkets responsibility to provide cheap healthy food or alternatives.

"I went to the shop once and I picked up a fruit salad and it was like £3 and there was a buttie for £1.50 and I got that because it was cheaper"(Girl)

The next organisation was the government. Again, participants tended to agree that the government plays a role in influencing individuals on their health. Some were aware of the Change for Life campaign, which has been promoted by the government.

When asked about the role of local businesses, a participant responded with the following:

"The thing about the shops, they need to put the fruit at the front and you see them first, and they must do a deal like save up for 2 bags of apples instead of a burger, if they do deals on healthy stuff that will work."(Boy)

Participants were also asked about community groups and associations, and their significance. A participant pointed out that when he was at school there was an initiative that was funded by the Welsh government called 5x60. 5x60 is a school sports programme, which encourages students to participate in 60 minutes of exercise a day for 5 days a week.

“Well in school they used to do this thing called 5x60, and I used to do swimming and water polo. I used to do that and it ended when I left school, and I lost motivation to go back into swimming after 5x60... I didn’t want to do it anymore because I didn’t have another group to do it with.”(Boy)

Participants mentioned that there was another college (Deeside college) had facilities and equipment that were available to use, but the same isn’t reflected in their college.

“We were filming at Deeside, we walked past and they had a massive gym in there where you can go in and use it, where as we don’t have that.” (Boy)

The other students agreed that if prices were lower and more affordable they would be able to go and join the gym:

“There’s not a gym on campus but one 5 minutes away - it’s £27 a month, if they were available and at a good price, then I would go. If I did have money to pay for the gym, it would motivate me to go because you’ve already paid for that month so you want to get good usage out of it.”(Girl)

When the group was asked whether they found cost to be a barrier, three participants raised their hands. When asked whether motivation was a barrier, more students raised their hands.

“I’m just lazy to be honest. Sometimes I just can’t be bothered” (Boy)

When asked about the role that the NHS plays, there was an agreement among the group that the NHS plays a big role, with one of the students adding that *“you can get healthcare in the day, you don’t need to worry about money”*.

Following this, the group was asked whether schools have a role, and if so, how big was their role. Again, there was a consensus among the group that schools have an influence on an individual’s health. However, one of the students added the following:

“The problem with schools is that they choose what you do, and they choose certain sports because I didn’t like football and that’s all we pretty much did...you do it every week you stop doing it...I think it would be better if they had more choices”(Boy)

Finally, the group were questioned over the role that the individual has on their health – a student responded by saying that it’s *“the biggest one, because it’s your body and mind at the end of the day”* while another added *“self motivation to get problems sorted and stay healthy, mentally or physically. So it is down to you pretty much, you just go to the others for help pretty much”*.

To end the focus group, participants were asked whether they think that life has got worse or better since they left secondary school – Seven participants felt that life had got worse – and their health had deteriorated. One participant commented “*less exercise, more drinking*”. Many did feel that not being forced to do sport and PE and the desire for a social life and drinking with friends has taken a toll on their physical health and wellbeing.

Appendix 1: Discussion guide

Children and Young people are our future

Discussion guide: Primary and secondary school aged children

Part A: Introductions (5 minutes): Introduce self, observers and each other.

Introduce format of focus group (2 minutes):

Cover the following:

- Why we are here
- Confidentiality
- Freedom to express views
- Respect for others
- Recording of conversation

Suggested wording for the introduction: We are here today talk about young people and health. We would like to explore what needs to happen to ensure that the young people of today are healthy – physically and mentally throughout their lives. We are here today because we think it is important to get your views. We want everyone to feel free to say exactly what they think (no matter how silly or crazy it might seem). The purpose of this group workshop is to talk and have opinions.

EVERYTHING you say here will be kept confidential and anonymous - no one will ever know what you personally said (–unless we deem that there’s a risk of harm and we will talk to you about this on a 1:1 basis) (only what everybody's combined responses are). Please speak up if you disagree with what's being said - we want lots of different ideas and opinions. We would ask that when another person is talking, we listen and do not talk over each other please.

What I'll do is begin by asking some general questions to get the discussion going, I will be writing down what you say (with no names of course! This is totally anonymous), and just in case we can't get everything down on paper we're tape recording this session. This is really to help me write up what was said after today. We have a number of exercises that we would like you to take part in which I will explain throughout the session. Any questions before we start?

Part B – “My health and my life”

This is a post it note exercise. Individuals are asked to write on post it notes individually and then discuss in the group.

- What matters to you most in life?
- How do you feel about life right now?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you healthy?

Discussion: Looking at what makes you healthy, do you do what is written on your post it notes? If not, why? What stops you from being as healthy as you could be? Discuss. Ask participants why they gave the answers they did.

Exercise:

I have a number of activities here on cards, working in pairs, can you place the activities in order deciding what you think is most important to keep you healthy. (Testing: What activities do young people prioritise and think is more important?)

The list:

1. Eating five fruit and vegetables a day
2. A balanced diet
3. Exercising regularly
4. Drinking lots of water
5. Feeling happy in yourself
6. Not smoking
7. Drinking alcohol in moderation
8. Avoiding drugs
9. Taking part in outdoor activities
10. Playing sports
11. Spending time with family and friends
12. Spending time in the outdoors

(For secondary school children) I have a sheet here with all those activities on and space for you to put the things you have written on your post it notes. Can you tick the boxes on the sheet which best describes you and your attitude and behaviour to these activities.

- Do you think you could be more healthy?
- What do you think you have to do to be more healthy?
- What is stopping you from being more healthy?
- What are the things that help you lead a healthy life?

Mental health

- Back to your post it notes, I want you to write down the first words or thoughts that come to mind when I say 'mental health' (use healthy mind for younger audiences)
- What is more important: physical health or mental health? Discuss.
- Do you know anyone who had a poorly mind/ mental health problems?

- If you came across someone with mental health concerns what would you do? Discuss.

Part C – “Health and others”

- What does unhealthy mean to you?
- What do you think are the biggest health issues your family face?
- What do they do that makes them unhealthy?
- How do you think it makes them feel?
- How can they be healthier? What role could you have to help them to be more healthy?
- How do you describe a healthy person (or what is a really healthy person?)
- What do you think makes them healthy? What do they do?
- If a friend or family member wanted to be healthy or healthier, what would you say to them?
- What would you recommend them to do?

Secondary School pupils only: I have a number of organizations or people here on cards. I am going to hold them up and for each I want you to consider if they have a role in supporting a community to be healthier? And if yes, what kind of role do they have?

The list:

- The individual
- The NHS
- Schools
- Community groups
- Police
- The local council
- Family and friends
- Supermarkets
- The government
- Local businesses
- Gyms and sports clubs

(Ask the group if we have missed anyone out)

- Out of all of these, who do you think can help the most in helping people to stay healthy?
- Are you aware of things that are being done locally to address issues such as alcohol, drugs, smoking, obesity, safety, crime, bullying etc.

Part D – secondary school aged children

- Are you aware of things that are being done locally to make people healthier? If yes, what? Where are they? Discuss.
- Are you aware of things that are being done locally to address issues such as alcohol, drugs, smoking, obesity, safety, crime, bullying etc.

- Do you think there are health issues in your local area? Discuss. Or: What are the biggest health issues your community struggles with?
- If you think there are some health issues, what do you think they are? Or: What are the challenges that your community faces in staying healthy?
- If there are some health issues, how do you think they should be?
- Thinking again about the people and organizations we have talked about, who has the biggest responsibility to get people to be more healthy in the local area?
- If you were in charge of this organization and your mission was to try and make more young people healthier (assuming organization and not self) what would you do to get your community healthy – physically and mentally? If self: how can any of those organizations motivate you to stay and keep healthy and get more people to feel motivated?
- In small groups (4-5 each) Thinking about your local area can you make a list of all the people, places and things that help people to stay healthy – give participants big sheets of paper.
- Looking at the list, what is missing and you would like to see added that will help young people and children to keep healthy (add to list)

Part D – Primary school aged children

- Make a list of all the people, places and things that help people to stay healthy – give participants big sheets of paper. (Discuss after exercise)

Closing discussion

Thinking about all that we have talked about today I want to ask some final questions.

- What single thing would most improve the health of young people in general in your community?
- What single thing would improve your health?

Activity Sheet

Age _____

Male/ Female

How I feel about life right now

Please circle the answer that best reflects your attitude and behaviour to the following:

				Comments
I eat at least five fruit and vegetables a day	Always	Sometimes	Never	
I have a balanced diet	Always	Sometimes	Never	
I exercise regularly – at least three times a week for more than 30 minutes	Always	Sometimes	Never	
I drink lots of water	Always	Sometimes	Never	
I feel happy in myself	Yes	Sometimes	No	
Smoking cigarettes	Yes I smoke	I sometimes smoke	I do not smoke	
Drinking alcohol	Yes I drink alcohol	I sometimes drink alcohol	I never drink alcohol	
Taking drugs	I take drugs	I have tried drugs	I never take drugs	
I take part in outdoor activities regularly	Always	Sometimes	Never	
I play sport	Yes – I play sport	I sometimes play sport	I never play sport	
I spend lots of time with family and friends	Yes	Sometimes	No	