

# The PARC Study

Physical Activity and the Rejuvenation of Connswater

Sept 2014

Issue 4

The PARC Study is an evaluation of the public health impact of the Connswater Community Greenway on the local population in east Belfast, led by the UKCRC Centre of Excellence for Public Health (NI). The Greenway involves the development of a 9 km linear park, including the provision of new cycle paths and walkways ([www.communitygreenway.co.uk](http://www.communitygreenway.co.uk)). This issue of the PARC Study ezine provides an update on the development of the Connswater Community Greenway and summarises some of the key findings from papers that have been published in academic journals in short, easily accessible reports. For more information about these papers click [here](#).

## Update on the Connswater Community Greenway

Significant progress has been made with the development of the Greenway with Phase 1 now complete. Phase 1 focussed on the Orangefield and Victoria Park area. Key features include:

- realigned Knock River which now flows through the heart of Orangefield Park
- new Sam Thompson Bridge, connecting Victoria Park to Airport Road
- 2 new bridges in Orangefield Park
- new pond dipping area in Orangefield Park
- 3kms of new walking and cycling paths in the parks
- viewing areas
- new outdoor gym equipment
- lighting, benches, landscaping and planting

Phase 2 will start later this year and will involve the development of the C.S. Lewis themed civic square at Holywood Arches, new play areas at Avoniel and Loop River Park, 13kms of new paths for walking and cycling, and improvements to the rivers.

- new bridges, crossings and signage
- improvements to the rivers
- flood defences
- lighting, benches, landscaping and planting



**Keep up to date with the Connswater Community Greenway:**

[www.communitygreenway.co.uk](http://www.communitygreenway.co.uk)

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**Figure 1:** New developments at Orangefield Park and Victoria Park



## Identifying solutions to increase participation in physical activity interventions within a socio-economically disadvantaged community: a qualitative study

### **What we wanted to find out:**

We aimed to explore local residents' and leaders' perceptions of past physical activity initiatives and suggestions for future schemes, in order to improve our understanding of the needs, expectations, and factors relevant to the design and delivery of future physical activity initiatives in socially disadvantaged communities.

### **What we did:**

We interviewed 113 local residents living in Ballymacarett, The Mount, Woodstock and Island; and 12 community leaders from statutory or voluntary organisations, who had experience of working in the area and had a remit for planning or delivering physical activity initiatives in the area. These organisations included local charities, business organisations, community and social partnerships, and in the local Council, Healthcare Trust, Education Board, Police Service and the Public Health Agency.

Participants were asked questions relating to (1) their perceptions and knowledge of current and past community physical activity initiatives in the local area; (2) what they thought were successful and unsuccessful aspects of physical activity initiatives; and (3) what they thought had worked, and would work to promote physical activity in their community.

### **What we found:**

#### *1) Awareness of physical activity initiatives*

Interviewees highlighted a poor awareness of previous and current physical activity schemes. Comments reflected little linkage or shared communication between or within statutory or voluntary sectors.

#### *2) Factors contributing to success of physical activity initiatives*

Interviewees perceived that there was value in involving community members from the start to ensure community "ownership" and to guarantee that plans would be relevant and tailored to the local community. Funding, community engagement and volunteer support were also thought to be vital for the success of any initiative.

#### *3) Barriers to participation in physical activity initiatives*

Apathy was identified as a barrier to physical activity promotion both individually and within the community as a whole. Apathy was also linked to poor self-esteem and leaders suggested that there was a need for specific programmes to support the development of personal skills e.g. socialising with others, confidence building, and increasing self-esteem. Interviewees also reported that access to resources and having established facilities within the locality would promote engagement in physical activity in the longer term. They also felt that the community lacked knowledge of the benefits of physical activity for health and recognised a communication gap in current approaches to promote physical activity. Promotion strategies highlighted the importance of face-to-face contacts and social-networking in communication, involving 'word of mouth'. Residents also highlighted the value of being kept informed about the ongoing progress of initiatives and that this encouraged community engagement.

### **Why this is important:**

When planning physical activity schemes, consideration should be given to the multiple factors which influence physical activity behaviour in socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Our findings provide examples of the value of involving residents to engage target communities from the outset and how public engagement can identify local problems to inform the design and development of interventions which target disadvantaged groups. Giving communities a sense of ownership should empower individuals and increase their capabilities. Therefore, those designing and delivering physical activity initiatives that are planning to utilise the CCG should involve residents from

**Citation: Claire Cleland, Ruth F. Hunter, Mark A. Tully, David Scott, Frank Kee, Michael Donnelly, Lindsay Prior, Margaret E. Cupples. Identifying solutions to increase participation in physical activity interventions within a in socio-economically disadvantaged community: a qualitative study. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act 2014;11:68.**

## PARC Study workshop—“Statistically Speaking”

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In August, the PARC Study team in collaboration with the Connswater Community Greenway, held a workshop for key stakeholders interested in the health, social, environmental and economic benefits of the project. The purpose of the workshop was to review, challenge, understand and discuss the key PARC study research findings.

Thirty participants attended from a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations including Belfast City Council, the Public Health Agency, Sustrans, Community Development and Health Network and East Belfast Community Development Agency.



Figure 4: Participants at the PARC Study workshop

## Other News

### *New staff/students:*

Dr Sharon Cruise, a Research Fellow in the Centre for Public Health, joined the PARC Study team in June 2014. Sharon will undertake a number of analyses investigating the influence of the built environment on physical activity, mental wellbeing and social capital.

Niamh O’Kane, a 2nd year student at Queen’s University Belfast doing a BSc in Human Biology, undertook an 8-week summer studentship with the PARC Study team. Her work involved investigating the influence of environmental quality on park and green space usage.

Emma Lawlor, a MSc Public Health graduate undertook a 3-month internship with the team investigating the correlates of active travel.

### *Other funding:*

Prof Frank Kee and Dr Ruth Hunter led a successful funding bid to the National Institute of Health Research to investigate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the Physical Activity Loyalty Scheme for maintained behaviour change. This study started in September 2014 and will involve 1400 public sector employees in Lisburn.

Dr Ruth Hunter has been awarded a prestigious Career Development Fellowship from the National Institute for Health Research to investigate the use of social network interventions for physical activity behaviour change.

### *Awards:*

Dr Mary Dallat, PhD student, won the Stevenson Prize for public health trainees for her work investigating the projected cost-effectiveness of the Connswater Community Greenway.

Dr Ruth Hunter, Research Fellow and PARC Study Project Manager, won the Queen’s University Belfast Early Career Impact Prize for her work on the PARC Study.

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Figure 5: Dr Mary Dallat—winner of the Stevenson Prize



Figure 6: Dr Ruth Hunter—winner of the Early Career Researcher Impact Prize