



SOCIAL JUSTICE PULSE REVIEW 2025

COST OF LIVING, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND RACE EQUITY

Young voices in health science research: a holiday activity programme with an African community in Byker.

Luisa Wakeling (Newcastle University), Gaby Kitoko (African Community Advice North East), Ben Rutherford-Orrrock (Life Science Centre)

Project Summary

A four-day holiday activity programme engaged young people from an African Byker community with health science research through hands-on experiments, discussions, and creative activities. The project fostered collaboration with young members on health science topics that mattered to them and highlighted the importance of their involvement in health science research.



Day 1 at ACANE community Centre

A live scribe captured young members thoughts about health science.

Alt Text: A hand-drawn infographic capturing young people's ideas and thoughts on: what good health and bad health looks like; what affects health; what is possible in health science; advocating for youth education and voice within health sciences. The infographic also features hand-drawn cartoons and diagrams to illustrate these topics.

The Challenge

Young people from marginalised communities often face barriers to engaging with science, impacting future opportunities and health outcomes. This project addressed race equity and health inequalities by involving young members of the African Community Advice North East (ACANE) in meaningful science activities, aiming to build trust, relevance, and long-term interest in health science.

Findings

- Children enjoyed learning and hands-on opportunities.

- Misconceptions and stereotypes about scientists were challenged through creative activities.
- Health topics such as diet, exercise, and mental health were identified as important by participants.
- Participation remained high across all days, showing sustained engagement.
- Feedback highlighted the value of practical experiments and inclusive facilitation.



Day 2 at Life Science Centre understanding the nutritional value of different foods.

Alt Text: Young people visiting the Life Science Centre in Newcastle. The image on the left is a group shot of young people standing in front of a giant earth sculpture. The image on the right showcases young people enjoying a science activity at the Life Science Centre, wearing lab coats and goggles and witnessing a demonstration by a scientist.

Recommendations

- Continue funding inclusive science engagement programmes.
- Start sessions later in the day to improve attendance and engagement.

- Include snack breaks and physical activities to maintain focus.
- Empower older children as group leaders to foster peer support and future design.
- Strengthen communication and planning across partner organisations.
- Develop a shared code of conduct with young participants.

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Growing Food Justice – A Feminist Food System

Dr Julia Heslop (Newcastle University), Huffty McHugh, DCL (West End Women and Girls)

Project Summary

This project showcases West End Women and Girls Centre's working model for a community-led, local and sustainable food system based on the right of all people to good food. A report was produced in collaboration with an illustrator, using data and testimonials gathered from staff and Centre members on the integrated social, economic, health and environmental impacts. This is aimed at community organisations, practitioners and policymakers with the vision of sharing successful grassroots practice.



Alt Text: Young members of West End Women and girls enjoying a day out at the farm, excitedly holding spades and potatoes that they have grown.

The Challenge

One in five people in the UK suffer from food insecurity and the North East of England is the region with the highest number of people affected (Consumer Data Research Centre, 2024). Communities and individuals face systemic inequalities in accessing nutritious and sustainable food with resulting impacts which severely affect health, education and social cohesion, and have lasting consequences. This has been exacerbated by over 15 years of austerity, the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis. Many people rely on emergency food aids which are an immediate response to the issue rather than addressing the root causes of poverty.

Grassroots organisations which provide successful community-led models that innovatively address food resilience are often excluded from statutory reports and initiatives. They also often lack the capacity to share this vital knowledge and learning.

This project addresses that challenge for West End Women and Girls Centre, drawing on 44 years of expertise from staff and Centre members as they develop a community-led, socially and environmentally just, healthy, and sustainable food system. 100% of food used across the organisation is either grown sustainably, reduces food waste or is sourced locally through their:

- Smallholding in rural Northumberland
- Urban community garden and kitchen
- Edible Elswick – growing on local estates in Newcastle's West End.
- Surplus food distribution programme

Findings

Research shows that West End Women and Girls Centre has a unique approach to community food systems. While many UK place-based food programmes focus on individual initiatives such as urban growing, distributing surplus food, or connecting food with community wellbeing and environmental action, The Centre combines all of these - and more.

- West End Women and Girls Centre's work is a model for food sovereignty, going beyond alleviating food security which tends to focus only on food availability, to propose a localised circular food system which reclaims control from production to consumption, aiming to build a democratic and equitable food system and putting healthy communities and a healthy natural environment at its centre.
- West End Women and Girls food programme also helps tackle systemic inequalities in health and wellbeing and supports community cohesion. It provides a space for women and girls to share skills and cultural knowledge – such as traditional farming and cooking practices from across the world, passed down through generations of women. Women and girls spend time in the wilds, caring for animals, nature and the land, improve urban space and come together to cook and grow food. Every woman involved said the programme improved their health and wellbeing.



Alt Text: Community members and families enjoying a trip to the West End Women and Girls Farm, engaging with each other among the plants.

Recommendations

- This report offers valuable insights at both local and national levels. Support is needed to effectively disseminate its findings and engage with commissioners, policymakers, practitioners, and academics.
- Local authorities should adopt a hybrid policy approach that actively supports community-led initiatives to drive systemic change - backed by sustained and adequate funding.
- Support to enable peer-to-peer exchange is crucial to share and replicate best practice, influence policy and build the power of communities to shape their own food futures.
- With increased capacity and funding, West End Women and Girls Centre aims to scale this work and deepen its impact. Further research and support are essential to help realise this potential.

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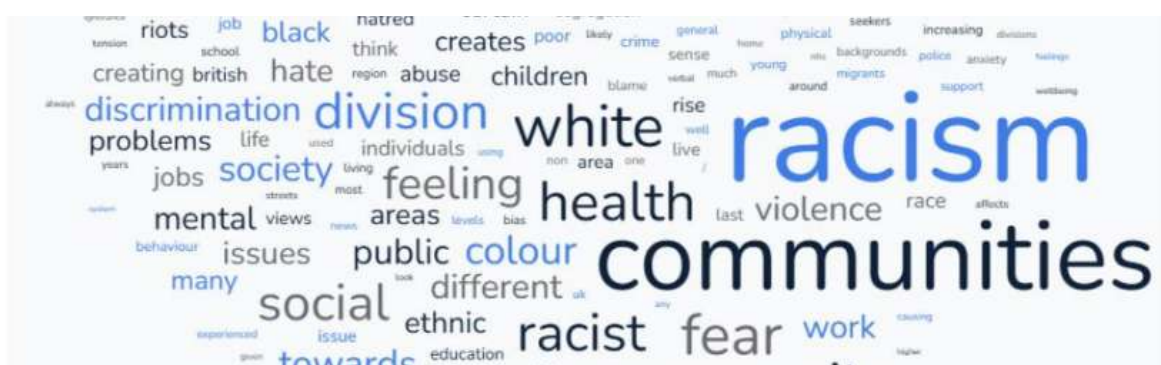
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COST OF LIVING, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND RACE EQUITY

Professor Peter Hopkins, Professor Heather Smith, Amar Elaydi and Renzo Szkwarok (Newcastle University) and Ngozi Lyn Cole (North East Anti-Racism Coalition)

Working in collaboration with the North East Anti-Racism Coalition (NEARC), Newcastle University has conducted a survey and collected evidence from organisations in the region about the nature and extent of racism in the North East. The survey attracted 639 valid responses. This included responses from all North East postcode regions (DL, DU, NE, SR and TS). The respondents include a diversity of ages from teenagers to the early 80s, ethnicities (51% white British, nearly 20% Black, 15% Asian, 3% Arab and 5% mixed race), faiths, and genders.



Alt Text: A word cloud with a variety of words including but not limited to: racism, communities, division, society, discrimination,

social, public, fear and health.

The Challenge

Following the riots of summer 2024, there was a recognition that this was just another manifestation of the discrimination that has persisted in society for generations. It was agreed that it was necessary to convene a broader community of people to help understand what was happening and to work towards creating a more inclusive region. NEARC was formed in response to this and as part of the conversations that emerged, it was identified that research about the nature and extent of racism was needed.

Findings

Key findings from the survey analysis include:

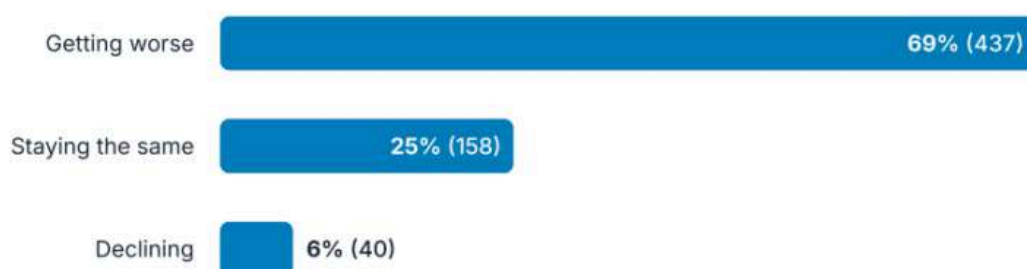
- 78% of those who completed the survey felt that racism was either an everyday or regular issue in the North East, and 69% felt that racism was getting worse.
- 54% of respondents had directly experienced racism and this included verbal abuse (85%), physical abuse (24%), and/or racism on social media (30%). 19% recorded damage to buildings and property.
- Most racist incidents took place in the street (62%), in a shop, restaurant or pub (43%) and on public transport (33%). Half the respondents had experienced racism at work, 26% at school, and 13% at college or university.
- 73% of those who had experienced racism did not report it to the police.
- 73% of respondents had family members, friends or colleagues who had experienced racism (14% said no to this) and the most

common form this took was verbal abuse (92%), on social media (37%) and/or physical abuse (30%). 21% referred to damage to property and buildings.

- 44% of respondents had a fear of experiencing racism, and 44% had altered their behaviours as a result of experiencing racism or due to a fear of experiencing it.
- 73% felt that racism had an impact on educational outcomes, 84% on employment opportunities, 68% on access to public services, 65% on access to healthcare, 80% on mental health and 88% on wellbeing and confidence.
- In terms of ethnicity, 69% said that you are at higher risk of experiencing racism if you are African, 54% said Arabic, and 49% said South Asian.
- In terms of factors that increase racism, 81% selected print media, with 79% broadcast media, 91% social media, and 88% the language used by some politicians and other public figures.

3. Is racism getting worse, staying the same, or declining in the North East?

Responses: 635



Alt Text: A bar chart showing responses to the question 'Is racism getting worse, staying the same, or declining in the North East?'. Out of 635 responses, 69% (437) said racism was getting worse. 25% (158) responded 'staying the same'. 6% (40) responded 'declining'.

Recommendations

- The findings should be reviewed by the NEARC research advisory group to assess their validity and to ensure their dissemination is maximised.
- The findings should be shared with specific groups (e.g. the police, educational and health leaders, local authorities etc) before formal publication in order to bring them on board and to encourage them to take action on specific issues, where appropriate.
- Once specific groups have been consulted, the final report can be launched.

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Connecting Futures: Co-producing Digital Skills Sessions with Hope Beyond Borders

Carrie Rosenthal, (Newcastle University), Katalina Sanchez & Sergi Ramon (Hope Beyond Borders), Alessandra Mondin (Connected Voice), Adam Parnaby (Newcastle University).

Project Summary

This evidence-based project supported a group of Spanish-speaking people from migrant backgrounds to access digital devices, improve digital literacy, and decrease barriers to digital inclusion. This supports them with important tasks such as searching for jobs, applying for benefits, and accessing healthcare.



Alt Text: Infographic for Spanish-speakers explaining how to prevent and stay secure from scams and fraud as well as how to use the NHS healthcare app.

The Challenge

Many of the people who the charity Hope Beyond Borders work with face language or cultural barriers, along with limited access to

digital devices, and little or no experience with technology. When combined with a transition to a new country with different and often complicated systems, these challenges often stop them from accessing services, finding work, or continuing their education. Through this project, we aimed to reduce these barriers and help individuals and families become more confident, independent, and connected.

We delivered a 12-week digital skills drop-in, first understanding current difficulties with internet/computer usage, and then asking the group to choose the topics they wanted to focus learning on. They chose translation apps, using email, cybersecurity, AI, and more.

Research undertaken by part of the project team before the start of the course (the article now in preparation will be available from the authors) showed the importance of:

1. Relationships, trust, and intra-organisational collaboration in the provision of effective digital inclusion services
2. Teaching digital skills through co-production. Identifying tasks that are important to participants is more effective than designing a one-size-fits-all course, and this project's design was co-produced with participants and with a digital inclusion specialist to avoid common pitfalls of digital inclusion work.

Findings

- The project strengthened the relationship between Hope Beyond Borders and the University, by fostering relationships, strengthening evidence about effective digital inclusion projects, and providing access to all course participants to language

learning tools available through the University's Language Resource Centre.

- Current difficulties with internet/computer usage were identified as: accessing medical/dental services, using translation apps, using GPS, emailing, using word processors, safety and security, and general computer skills.
- Because the participants had identified the themes, there were real-life examples to work through for each of the topics.
- The friendly atmosphere, food provided, flexible pacing, trusted location, and delivery in Spanish allowed for exploration of each of the themes, and for the participants to support each other in learning.
- The in-person group delivery led to peer-to-peer support both within and outside of the course.
- Opportunities for immediate practical support included Digital Voice delivering a session on using the NHS App.
- Feedback from the course was very positive, and participants' confidence grew in many areas of using the internet and technology safely. One participant identified that not speaking English is a major barrier for them, but that learning translation tools has made them feel safer.



Alt Text: Left to right: Sergi shows the group a poster for the course. Sergi demonstrates the power of AI to create realistic but fake photos. Match the icon with the name of the translation app. One participant uses AI to create an image of the national bird of

Venezuela, doing the national dance, the Joropo, and reminds Chat GPT to add the correct shoes.

Recommendations

- When purchasing digital kit for a project, ensure that it is modern, accessible, and that it fits in with devices participants already are using.
- Secure additional funding to continue the course for changing needs and technological updates.
- Continue to teach tools and strategies for migrants to use technology to adapt to, understand, and utilise the services and opportunities in a new country.
- Replicate the course trialled here in other settings, using the same principles of trusted location, trusted people, co-production, and delivery in first language.

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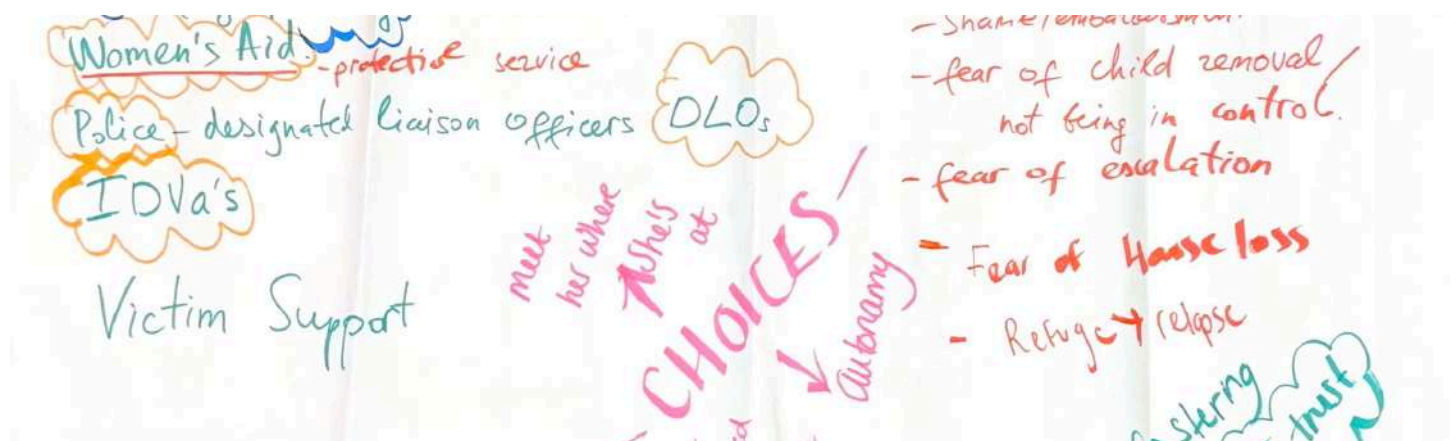
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Supporting Women in Crisis and Beyond: Mapping and Engaging with Services in the North-East of England

Ruby Bolton (Newcastle University), Dr Ryc Aquino (Newcastle University), Elaine Slater (Tyneside Women's Health) & Julia Lyford (Women's Workshop).

Project Summary

Women in the North-East (NE) suffer from poor life-course outcomes and health and care inequities compared to their peers across England. The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector can support women facing acute and chronic crises (e.g., mental health, domestic/sexual violence, poverty). We explored available support and engaged with NE organisations to develop ways of working together to support women in crisis and beyond.



Alt Text: Flipchart findings from research workshop that explores different services, choices, barriers and opportunities for women experiencing crisis in the North East.

The Challenge

Evidence demonstrates gendered inequities in health where women often suffer more than men from a host of nonfatal, disabling physical and mental illnesses (Borrell et al., 2013). Moreover, women live fewer years in good health despite having a greater life expectancy than men. Health disparities between men and women are related to socio-economic status, ethnicity and geographic region (Allen and Sesti, 2018). Social and economic factors influence health, including early childhood experiences, education, family building, and working life. Their impacts extend into retirement and older age. VCSEs make meaningful contributions to addressing health and care gaps. However, we know less about women-led support offered to women in the region and how organisations work together to effect change.

We undertook a mapping exercise to identify organisations and support accessible to women in Northumberland, Newcastle and Gateshead. Building on this, we delivered two in-person workshops (29 participants) to bring together organisations and women to explore engagement and support (e.g., barriers and opportunities for improved collaboration).

Findings

Of 17 non-statutory women and girls' organisations in Newcastle-Gateshead and Northumberland, 15 are women-led. These focus on the empowerment of women and girls and advocacy for those

experiencing multiple disadvantages, including support for women impacted by domestic abuse or who are socially vulnerable.

Workshop participants identified:

1. Public misunderstanding of women's representation in society and what their health and well-being looks like.
2. Gaps in understanding the remit of available services and support in the region:
 - Information can be overwhelming/complex to navigate, and needs better coordination
 - Training on other organisations' procedures/processes is needed for appropriate referral and maintaining confidentiality and rapport with women.
 - Funding model within women's/VCSE sector leaves organisations to 'battle' for funding; this risks good, sustained partnership working between organisations and women.
3. Barriers to accessing services: Cost/financial issues (e.g., taxis, parking) and transportation issues, particularly in rural Northumberland.
 - Lack of time to engage with services.
 - Feelings of shame and embarrassment due to stigma associated with adverse life events (e.g., trauma, violence, substance misuse).
 - Fear e.g., losing one's home/children after disclosing problems, being let down by organisations.
 - Mainstream services are often constrained to deliver a particular model of intervention, which is rarely holistic or women-centred. Women want a say in what they feel might be best for them.

Recommendations

- To enhance communication/collaboration between organisations and women, participants suggested:
- Regular networking events between organisations and women, to deepen connections share how organisations work
 - Increased contact with statutory services to help promote regional women-focused support.
- Ongoing mapping exercises to facilitate understanding of available services and changes in referral/access, to support promotion of best practice.
- More longitudinal research to develop knowledge around organisations and support for women and girls, and their impacts on women and girls' lives.
 - More opportunities for co-production with organisations and women.
 - Explore the social return on investment of women's and girls' organisations to demonstrate their impact.

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