



Back row L-r Victoria Gilroy and Wendy Burke. Front row – Young people involved in the project - Abbie Armstrong, Alex Harrison, Oscar Daniel, Amy Bell and Bethan Corner

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Young people help to reduce the next generation's potential obesity epidemic

Researchers at Northumbria University in Newcastle are working with today's young people to help reduce obesity in future generations.

Based on recent figures it is estimated that by 2050 70% of girls and 55% of boys aged 11-15 could be overweight or obese. *

Currently nearly one in four children under the age of five and a third of 10-

11 year olds are overweight or obese, with at least 70% of obese children becoming obese adults. Three quarters of hospital admissions in young people are related to problems complicated by being overweight such as asthma, sleep apnoea and pregnancy complications, and the number of obese teenagers (under 18s) having NHS-funded gastric bypass or band operations has trebled in the last five year years, with the highest rates being in teenage girls. **

Obesity increases the risks of a number of long-term health conditions, including high blood pressure, diabetes and cardiovascular disease alongside potential mental health problems.

In 2016, the World Health Organisation stated that obesity in childhood is one of the most challenging public health problems of recent times, as the epidemic is increasing globally at an alarming rate.

Academics at Northumbria University have carried out a review of existing research into obesity in young people and conducted their own research with young people in North Tyneside, as well as school nurses across the UK.

The research, funded by the Burdett Trust for Nursing, showed clearly that young people felt they did not have enough information on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles and what information was available wasn't in a format that was easy to understand. It highlighted the important role schools should have in promoting healthy eating and exercise as well as issues around the costs and availability of healthy foods. Body image and stereotypes were an issue, along with fads. Peers and parents were seen as important in helping to change young peoples' behaviour and it was important that anyone working with parents and young people on the topic involved them, were approachable and trustworthy as well as knowledgeable.

A survey of 671 school nurses showed similar findings. They recognised they had a key role in working with young people and parents on the issue they were currently doing this reactively rather than focusing on prevention and they felt they could do more; helping with healthy eating, increased self-esteem and having a positive impact on the whole family. They felt that school had an important role to play and also raised the level and type of PE and food in school as being important. They identified stigma being an issue to accessing support and exercise and that local culture was important. They recognised they needed more information, training and resources to help

them.

As a result of the research, a training pack has been produced for school nurses across the UK to help them work with young people at secondary education level on healthy eating. Young people were involved in the development of the pack.

The pack includes a short film featuring young people expressing the views on the research, which aims to give an insight into young people's attitudes and behaviour, and how they think they could be changed. It also includes games, and a motivational film showcasing the best ways of questioning young people. The pack is being delivered to school nurses as part of a national training programme, which is taking place.

[View embedded content here](#)

[Young people help to reduce the next generation's potential obesity epidemic](#) from [Northumbria University](#) on [Vimeo](#).

An app, 'Health in hand', is also being developed by young people for young people, who also chose the name. It is expected to be launched in the autumn, to encourage changes in behaviour. It includes quizzes, recipes, personal goals and myth busters.

Victoria Gilroy, Senior Lecturer in Specialist Community Public Health Nursing Health Care at Northumbria University in Newcastle led the research. She said: "Obesity in young people is a serious public health issue and one which

is predicted to get significantly worse, without any intervention.

“Our research is quite unusual in that it targets today’s young people in order to change the behaviour of their future children. Young people are more open and amenable to change due to the stage of neurodevelopment so it’s an ideal time to target health interventions and support programmes and they have been involved throughout the research project, as they are key to helping us understand the issues and what will and won’t work to help change their behaviour.

“The project started two years ago with a joint research bid with the School and Public Health Nurses Association. School nurses have a key role in supporting young people and promoting healthy eating and healthy lifestyles, but many feel they don’t have the skills or resources to do this. This has led to the development of the training pack and course and we will be carrying out further research to find out what impact this has had.”

North Tyneside Council have supported the research project. Wendy Burke, the Council’s Director of Public Health is featured on the film. She said: “We are delighted to work in partnership with Northumbria University on this project. We have an epidemic of obesity in the UK. It is crucial that we engage with young people on healthy eating and healthy choices to turn the tide.

“We live in an obesogenic environment which means it is now much more difficult to maintain a healthy weight than it is to be overweight or obese. It has never been more important to tackle this to ensure future generations have long and healthy lives. If we equip young people, future parents, with the knowledge and information to make healthy choices we can help break the obesity cycle.

“Tackling this issue is tough and no one organisation can do it on their own; we all need to work together for the sake of our future generations and we need to involve young people. “

The film features pupils from John Spence School and from North Tyneside’s Young People’s project. Oscar Daniel, 13, is Young Mayor of North Tyneside. A Marden High School pupil from Whitley Bay Oscar has been involved in the project, appearing in the film and advising on the app.

He said: “We were asked to create our own cartoon images for the film which were animated and then we recorded a voiceover to sum up all the views from the research. It was great fun to make and really gets across young people’s views.”

Oscar is also a member of the national Youth Select Committee which is looking into body image. He already plans to raise the issue and highlighting the project.

Bethan Corner, 16, from Whitley Bay has been part of the Young Person’s board for six years. She has been involved with the project since it started and is the youth representative on the steering group. Her role is to provide feedback on every aspect of the project to ensure it includes their voice. She said: “It’s great to have been involved in this project from the start. We’ve all really enjoyed it and learned a lot ourselves. They’ve really listened to and involved young people all the way, which is crucial if it is going to work. Eating healthily and exercising is not always the easy option and there’s not enough information out there to help us. Schools play a really important role as we are there five days a week and they can be a big influence so it’s good that school nurses are being trained too.”

Abbie Armstrong, 14, from Whitley Bay at St Thomas Moor High school in North Shields is North Tyneside Council’s Young Cabinet Member for Health. She said: “I think this is a great project. I am working with a number of other young people to advise on the development of the app and it’s going to be great. We all have phones so developing an app makes sense – we can use it when and where we want. Health is a really big issue for everyone and it’s important that we are all aware of what we put in our bodies. In my new role I’m focusing on healthy relationships and am really passionate about health.”

Sharon White, Professional Officer at the School and Public Health Nurses Association, said: “School nurses are instrumental in helping to tackle this issue. The research project has led to some really interesting findings and I’ve no doubt the training pack and training course will be a great asset to school nurses.”

* Foresight (2007)

** HSCIC 2015

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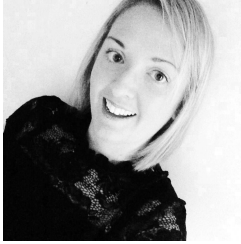


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