

# Alliance for Childhood London Forum

City Hall, London 10th January 2019

7th Meeting of the London Forum. Attended by 20 people

**Dan Lescure, Senior Programme Officer (Health)** gave a presentation on the GLA's mental health initiatives.

The Health Inequalities Strategy was launched last year. It has 5 objectives in the areas of children, minds, places, community and living. They are expanding the Healthy Schools strategy to cover early years. 32 boroughs are involved. They have produced a mental health in schools tool kit as an online resource. Here are links to the relevant websites:

Some schools may have counsellors and others not. However the approach of the Healthy Schools Strategy is to involve the whole school, including teachers, support and administrative staff, governors and pupils, to catch early signs of mental health problems. They want to ensure that everyone is aware and involved.

There is the possibility of support from the Young Londoners Fund.

## **Youth Mental Health First Aid**

The government has produced a green paper on transforming mental health for young people. The Mayor is not satisfied with this, saying it does not go far enough.

Thrive London Culture is looking at opportunities provided by art and culture to improve mental health. Dan mentioned examples such as Hendon FC and Hendon School, the work of the Peer Outreach Team and Mental Health Digital. He mentioned the Good Thinking website.

## **Questions and Comments**

This year London will have National City Park status. Is getting out into nature part of the strategy? There will be a festival 20-28 July. There is a funding programme for small grants (launch 1 Feb) There is a Hackney project combining art and culture and getting children outdoors.

There is a request to be given plenty of notice of these initiatives because it takes time for schools to organise for children to take part.

Some schools say they have enough resources to deal with mental health issues and others do not. It would be helpful to look at data over boroughs. Concern was expressed about a lack of expert advice. However the policy puts the emphasis on early intervention, before this kind of support is needed.

The Mayor has expressed concern about school exclusion. The numbers are rising nationally.

**Susan Crisp** led on from this by speaking about the background to the **Boys on Track report** which was launched at the end of last year. Education and Health commissioned the report. Schools in London are doing better than schools in other regions, but not all children have good results. On a London level, 2 groups of children who do least well are black Caribbean and white school meals eligible white boys. The study looked at common themes. It is a literature review of research combined with interviews with practitioners and young people. They looked at London and the kind of interventions that might be helpful, engaging with practitioners, professionals and young people. They arrived at a list of 7 areas of focus which are best bets and areas where energy and focus should yield results. The top of the list is wellbeing and mental health.

A momentum is being built from the focus on mental health initiatives in London.

The report is here: [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lkmco\\_boys\\_on\\_track\\_report.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lkmco_boys_on_track_report.pdf)  
It is helpful to recognise the interplay between factors as a whole to see where the gaps are. The GLA is not able to cover all the issues so it is asking other organisations to think about it and review their own activity.

## Questions and Comments

*How are gaps discovered?* Meetings like this Forum are an example. There is a focus on schools. However the responsibility for delivery of the areas on the list are not wholly the responsibility of schools. It's one place where the majority of young people pass through.

*One participant was on the London Challenge Board in 2004 and the issue was raised then. There has been some improvement, all pupils are doing better, but there is still a gap.*

*Tower Hamlet had scheme to get all girls with a qualification. Something similar is needed here.*

*How do we get mental health as part of the schools activity?* It needs someone tracking the situation. There is a budget for this. It is important to work with planners, architects etc. to build the social infrastructure. For example, where are the children's centres, playing fields and so on.

*Liza Fior from her work with land owners and developers sees that they are aware of the needs of office workers for green spaces and places to rest and take time out.*

*Where does ACE's work in? We need a systematic and universal approach to respect and compassion for children and parents. Mental health improves with that.*

The GLA is scoping an ACE approach elsewhere. Youth workers and people working with children are experienced people. the trouble is linking up. What is happening? What really works?

**Liza Fior, a founding MUF architect and one of the Mayor's Design Advocates** took up from there.

Liza is working with the London Plan Good Growth agenda, looking at the effects on communities where growth and development happens. Different small teams are exploring specific themes, one of these is children. There are a number of different initiatives which are covered in their inclusion of children whether this is TFL & Healthy Streets with includes a requirement of designing for all ages or the emerging London Plan which includes design guidance on making space for children and their mobility. She is happy to be a filter for the knowledge we in the room have.

But of course making space for the child and young people extends to all aspects of the built environment.

She illustrated some examples from MUF projects of how making room for children

One project involved introducing loose parts play in a container in Gillette Square, 3 days a week a play worker opens it up and the square becomes a playground.

muf also showed a permanent scheme for a play route through Kings Crescent Housing scheme in Hackney as a shared space rather than the residential courtyards which are only for residents.

The Mayor's plan works with Child Yield calculations to determine how much play space to allocate. Many developers develop a cynical attitude where they find ways to get round this. How can space be incorporated everywhere?

The spatial requirements of play are everywhere and at all scales.

From small

Eye contact between child and parent or carer is important and plays into the design of buggies. Does the child face back towards the adult or to the front? The interaction happens in a space of 1.5 metres.

To masterplanning of London

Liza showed a drawing of the A12 which has 3 school sites (two built one planned) next to the road.

Where does the school get built? For example by a green space or next to the A12? Land values may determine this. It does not save money in the long run. We need quality, not quantity.

### **Balconies are an indicator of what is missing from a flat.**

If they are being used for storage it can be a sign of lack of storage space indoors, especially regarding toys. A square balcony is better than a thinner one. It could be off the kitchen as well the living room to give more space for children to run around. What do you look out on to?

### **Example of Barking Town Square**

Caps on Housing Benefit are leading to families renting 1 and 2 bedroom flats. It is not just the architecture having an impact But these families live on a public square which is used as a shared living room for families throughout the summer. Public space can be essential space.

### **Example of a housing scheme**

Tower Court , next to Clapton Junction has play space which is accessible for everyone on the site

Independent mobility is important and tis can be hampered for example by the use of fobs. Rae's team are looking at independent mobility in the Healthy Streets initiative.

### **Internal design guidance is important.**

There are minimum standards for the clear viewing corridor between a sofa and a TV but no guidance for space for play, for example space to play with Lego and leave it out.

Limited inside space makes the outside more important, for example libraries and 'marker spaces'.

Young people use study spaces and the adult library for homework and study.

There will be new guidance on school design for new buildings but if there is limited outside space what other spaces are there within 5 minutes.

An example is Dalston Holy Trinity School. The school is on the first floor of a multi-storey block and the play area is on the second floor.

Next to the building is a community garden project which gives a forest school type of experience This is outside version of the role of library for overcrowded accommodation.

### **Another example is the Magpie Project**

A shared "living room" with under 5's support

Children should be involved set he earliest stage of the design process.

You can contact Liza by email: [liza@muf.co.uk](mailto:liza@muf.co.uk). muf website: [muf.co.uk](http://muf.co.uk)

**The next meeting** of the London Form is on Tuesday 26th March 2019 from 9.30 to 11.30 am.

Notes by Marion Briggs (edited)

