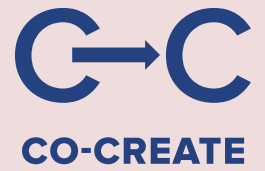


October 2020



CO-CREATE Youth Alliances' Policy Briefs

The United Kingdom



Introduction

CO-CREATE tackles the current gaps in obesity research by focusing on adolescents, their perspectives and the factors that influence their health. The project is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and led by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. It brings together 14 international research and advocacy organisations to work with young people to create, inform and promote policies for obesity prevention. CO-CREATE provides young people with the policy tools, knowledge and infrastructure they need to make the healthiest choices.



By working together in groups, known as alliances, young people participating in the CO-CREATE project have developed policy ideas to address the systemic factors which influence adolescent obesity and health in their respective countries. This brief summarises the policy ideas of CO-CREATE alliances in the United Kingdom and outlines the steps they took to finalise their proposals. This brief aims to inform relevant stakeholders, such as policy- and decision-makers, about policies relevant for adolescents to tackle excess weight and obesity and to introduce a model on how to actively involve young people in the development of policies.

Youth participation and co-creation

Young people are still rarely involved in addressing issues that are directly relevant to their lives. Co-creation with adolescents through participatory action research has proved to be an effective tool for young people to tackle inequalities on various social issues, in particular those which directly affect them, such as health, and to successfully promote civic and political engagement among young people .

United Kingdom

Summary of childhood obesity levels in the United Kingdom

One in ten British adolescents (10-19 years) is affected by obesity.¹ From 2005 to 2018, the prevalence of childhood obesity in England fluctuated between 14% and 17%.² In 2018, 13% of children aged 2 to 15 were overweight and a further 15% were obese.

The prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity increased with age; 16% of boys and 23% of girls aged 2 to 4 were overweight or obese compared with 36% of boys and 37% of girls aged 13 to 15. The proportion of children who were obese was higher in the most deprived areas,³ with 19% in the most deprived quintile compared to 11% in the least deprived quintile.⁴



Childhood obesity level of the areas where the alliances were established

In Greenwich, around 29% of children aged 5 are obese or overweight. Prevalence of excess weight among 5-year-olds increased from 26% in 2008 to 29% in 2014, against a generally downward trend for London and England. By the age of 11, around 40% of Greenwich children are obese or overweight (5th worst rate in London). Furthermore, 64% of Greenwich adults are obese or overweight (3rd highest prevalence in London).⁵

METHODOLOGY

1. Based on Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR), young people in CO-CREATE alliances were empowered to develop policy ideas to address the systemic issue of adolescent excess weight and obesity.
2. Supported by trained CO-CREATE country staff and assisted by co-facilitators from youth organisations, young people received information and training to help them develop and refine their policy proposals.
3. Using their newly acquired skills and knowledge, they held discussions, did research and worked with relevant stakeholders to finalise their ideas.
4. They met regularly over the course of several months, both in person and online.
5. Policy ideas were often reviewed and revised based on information gathered by alliance members after conducting their PAR activities.
6. The young people also participated in dialogue forums with relevant stakeholders; here, alliance members met with policy-makers and business leaders to discuss their policy ideas and translate them into possible action, follow-up measures or practical steps. Policy ideas were often then refined based on the knowledge gained at these forums.
7. The finalisation of the brief included a feedback round with some of the alliance members as well as input from the CO-CREATE task force; a small group consisting of representatives from alliances in different CO-CREATE implementing countries.



CO-CREATE Greenwich Alliance's Policy Idea

Social Media and Healthy Food Promotion



- Ensure that healthy food is represented on key social media channels.
- Have more local groups of young people (school and other council youth groups) running healthy lifestyle social media accounts.
- Create strategies to increase the appeal of social media accounts which promote healthy food in order to increase the number of followers.

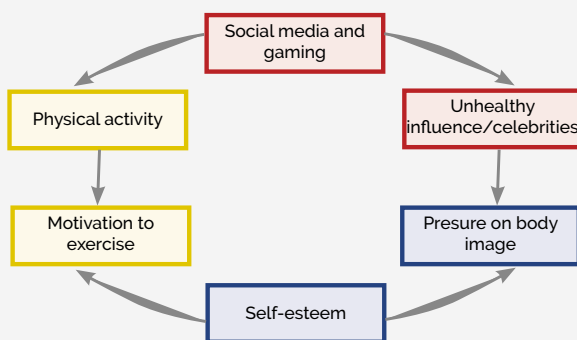


Summary of the policy

The policy idea aims to use social media as a tool to promote healthy foods and healthy eating. The Greenwich Youth Alliance wants to create school-, local- and/or national-level social media accounts that promote healthy foods/eating that are primarily geared towards young people and focus on making appealing content so as to generate a large number of young followers.

The problem

There is an abundance of social media accounts that promote and glorify sweets, cakes, fast food, junk food, etc. which make these foods appealing to young people and negatively influence their eating habits. There are significantly fewer visible accounts that promote healthy food in an appealing way that are based on reliable/factual nutritional information and that make a concerted effort to reach young people. Consistent exposure to images of unhealthy food normalises these foods and can, in turn, increase the desire and consumption of unhealthy and junk foods.



Greenwich alliance's system map showing the link between social media use to body image perception and motivation to exercise

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. The group worked on the obesity system maps and added their own views to the maps with handwritten notes.
2. The group identified the impact of social media use as an area of focus for their policy idea.
3. They then consulted the Greenwich Obesity Public Health officer during one of the alliance meetings and discussed possibilities and opportunities for collaboration.
4. Alliance members and LSHTM researchers co-designed surveys to get a snapshot of social media use amongst their peers and used the results to help shape their policy idea.

CO-CREATE Greenwich Alliance's Policy Idea

Council Funded Cooking Classes for Young People

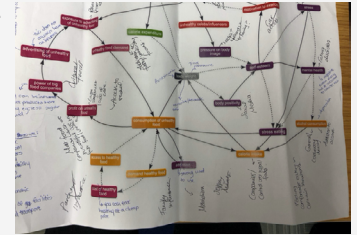


- Have Greenwich council provide free cooking classes, including budgeting and meal planning and 'take-home kits', for 14-18-year-olds.
- Provide the classes in multiple locations across the borough to make them more accessible.
- Implement marketing strategies to make classes desirable and appealing to young people.



Summary of the policy

This policy idea aims to provide free cooking classes for young people that focus not only on technical cooking skills but also on practical skills, such as budgeting and meal planning. Young people in the Greenwich alliance want classes to be provided at various local locations (e.g. schools, community centres) and include a 'take-home kit' with ingredients and recipes.



The problem

Many children and young people, especially in more deprived areas, do not have access to healthy food due to its availability and cost and the fact that they do not have the skills and resources to prepare healthy food at home. Many of these deprived neighbourhoods have less healthy foodscapes, with high exposure to low-cost fast food, which could be contributing to established and widening socioeconomic gradients in diet and health.⁶

To the left is an amalgamation of the four different maps produced with young people in England with notes and additions from the Greenwich alliance members—it was used for a system mapping activity where alliance members added and changed anything they felt was missing from the original map following a brief training/overview of systems mapping/systems thinking.

Activities youth undertook to develop the policy idea

1. The group discussed the obesity system maps and added their own views to the maps with handwritten notes.
2. They identified access to healthy food as a key area that they wanted to address. They then came up with a cooking class policy as a means to increase the accessibility of healthy food.
3. Alliance members were presented with the NOURISHING framework policy examples so as to provide them with information on existing policies pertaining to cooking/nutrition.
4. They then consulted the Greenwich Obesity Public Health officer and learned about the council's local cookery programmes for communities, which could be extended to include teenagers, in line with their policy idea.
5. Alliance members and LSHTM researchers co-designed surveys to gather information about their peers' cooking habits. They then used the survey results to help shape their policy idea

Follow-up

At the time of writing this brief, the UK alliances are preparing for two dialogue forums in the autumn of 2020, during which they will meet policymakers and business leaders to discuss their policy ideas and receive feedback and input for revisions and possible implementation.

Resources

The policy ideas developed by the Youth Alliances engage with, build upon and are in line with a number of existing policies regarding adolescent obesity in the UK. Several relevant policies are listed below.

- Online Harms White Paper, tackling online content harmful to users with proposed statutory duty of care for social media platforms (April 2019).⁷
- Healthy breakfast clubs in schools⁸
- Sugar Reduction Programme⁹

The Online Harms White Paper¹⁰ puts forward a proposal for a system of accountability and oversight to impact the amount of harmful content online and to allow citizens to more safely enjoy the benefits of social media platforms. The Greenwich Youth Alliance shared similar sentiments in the sense that the amount of negative content surrounding diet culture had a negative impact on their body image, mental and physical health and lifestyle habits.¹¹ In an effort to increase the amount of 'healthy' online content related to diet and physical activity, the group focused its policy on creating social media accounts that are designed by and specially targeted towards young people.

Seeking to address the lack of healthy food consumed by and available to children and young people, the Greenwich Youth Alliance built their policy idea around providing a cooking programme to equip young people with skills to prepare healthy food and incorporate it into their lifestyles. This expands on many of the same ideas targeted in the implementation of Healthy breakfast clubs in schools¹² by helping young people to eat more healthily. The Sugar Reduction Programme¹³ in the UK pursues a similar goal by employing strategies to reduce young people's sugar intake and thus influence healthier diets.

Acknowledgements

This brief was written by Talia Macauley, Heike Rolker, Cecile Knai, Natalie Savona, Sherria Ayuandini and the Greenwich Youth Alliance members as part of the CO-CREATE project. This brief was designed by Margot Neveux (World Obesity Federation).

With special thanks to Harris Garrard Academy, the University of Amsterdam and public health and obesity leads at Greenwich and Bexley local authorities.

Contact details

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
15-17 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9SH

For enquiries related to this policy brief, please contact Talia Macauley at talia.macauley@lshtm.ac.uk

References

1. Lobstein, T., & Brinsden, H. (2019). Atlas of childhood obesity. London, United Kingdom. http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/woffiles/11996_Childhood_Obesity_Atlas_Report_ART_V2.pdf
2. Health Survey for England 2018 Overweight and obesity in adults and children. NHS Digital. <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/52/FD7E18/HSE18-Adult-Child-Obesity-rep.pdf>
3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/837907/cmo-special-report-childhood-obesity-october-2019.pdf
4. 2018 Health Survey for England
5. All figures provided are based on the Royal Greenwich Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2024
6. Maguire, E. R., Burgoine, T., & Monsivais, P. (2015). Area deprivation and the food environment over time: A repeated cross-sectional study on takeaway outlet density and supermarket presence in Norfolk, UK, 1990–2008. *Health & Place*, 33, 142-147
7. Social Media Regulation. House of Commons Briefing paper Number 8743 26 February 2020
8. Breakfast Clubs Setup and Implementation: Briefing for School Leaders, March 2017 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/603947/Evaluation_of_Breakfast_Clubs_-_School_briefing.pdf
9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-progress-between-2015-and-2018>
10. Social Media Regulation. House of Commons Briefing paper Number 8743 26 February 2020
11. Savona N, Macauley T et al. "Identifying the views of adolescents in five European countries on the drivers of obesity using group model building" *European Journal of Public Health* (in press)
12. Breakfast Clubs Setup and Implementation: Briefing for School Leaders, March 2017 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/603947/Evaluation_of_Breakfast_Clubs_-_School_briefing.pdf
13. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-progress-between-2015-and-2018>