

Assessing the co-benefits of a community initiative to reduce, re-use, recycle using a health impact assessment approach

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A Transition Town is a grass-roots initiative:

To explore and then follow pathways of practical actions that will reduce carbon emissions and dependence on fossil fuels.

To build the town's resilience, that is, its ability to withstand shocks from the outside, through being more self reliant in areas such as food, energy, health care, jobs and economics.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

is: A combination of procedures, methods and tools that systematically judges the potential, and sometimes unintended, effects of a programme or project on the health of a population, and identifies appropriate actions to manage those effects.

AIMS TO:

- Consider this community-based initiative within a broader public health context
- Consider the potential for such an initiative to reduce health inequalities
- Make recommendations regarding the delivery of such projects in order to mitigate negative effects and enhance positive effects – particularly in respect to equity and disadvantaged communities.

METHODS

A 'rapid' HIA, applying a range of iterative approaches, including:

Scoping of Transition Together documents and health intelligence reports.

Assessment of the evidence at a participative workshop using an appraisal tool.

Interviews with 'key informants' drawn from the local community, including people involved in the project as well as local councillors.

Reporting of potential impacts, enhancements and mitigation strategies. feedback of potential impacts was acted on and key areas re-examined 12 months on.

A HIA template was used for data collection that focused appraisal of the evidence on health and wellbeing in the following domains: Equity / Equality; Lifestyles; Social Environment; Education; Income; Physical Environment; Quality of Services; Sustainability of the Scheme.

FINDINGS

Suggest the potential for significant physical, mental and social wellbeing impacts. For example:

One positive impact is the potential for greater disposable income due to increased energy and water efficiency and increasing awareness of and referral to housing repair funding schemes. Potential for improvements in insulation, increase of warmth and reduction of damp; targeting those in fuel poverty requires active engagement of housing and health services in order to reach those groups.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlighted the possible associated wellbeing benefits of engagement in such an initiative, and the potential for building social capital, whilst also raising concerns regarding inclusivity and access. The HIA process illustrates the important links between Transition Towns and the wider Public Health agenda, and demonstrated how a HIA approach can be applied to a community-based initiative.

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