



## Headlines from Community Think Tank

# *Health Champions in Social Housing: Building Wellbeing in Local Communities*

Held at Trafford Hall on 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>st</sup> May 2017

1. **Depression and anxiety, disability and other long-term health conditions** disproportionately affect low-income people and areas. This is the result of both environmental conditions (such as vandalism) and individual and family circumstances which cause depression and anxiety, e.g. financial difficulties, debt, unemployment, lack of job security, etc.
2. **A warm, damp-free home environment** is a prerequisite for health and wellbeing. Fuel poverty mainly affects people on low-incomes. Austerity causes people to make the hard decision whether to “eat or heat” their homes. Cold and damp cause respiratory problems, heart problems, strokes and arthritis.
3. **A well-kept neighbourhood environment** with lots of green spaces and safe roads is important to encourage people to be outdoors and feel proud of where they live. Feeling safe, being outdoors and living in a well-kept environment is linked to a sense of self-esteem and self-worth. These engender a sense of well-being and positive mental health.
4. **Mental illness** is a serious health concern and anxiety and depression affect 8% of the UK population – nearly 1 in 10 people. Reducing the stigma around mental ill-health will help people suffering from depression and anxiety to seek help and receive the support they need. Eating well, exercising, having a purpose, practicing mindfulness, keeping a gratitude journal are all mental health promotion strategies, which help build emotional resilience, alleviate anxiety and prevent rebounds of depression.
5. **Social isolation** is a silent killer and a growing issue, not just among elderly people but also across the population. Friendship clubs, coffee morning, conversation circles – are all great ideas to get people to get out of their homes, meet new friends and expand their social network.
6. Building **healthy living skills** should start from school. Involving children and young people requires creativity and imagination. Street games can get young people actively joining in and gives them a sense of purpose while having fun and building friendships.

7. **Eating a healthy balanced diet** is key to health and wellbeing. Eating healthily can be no more expensive. It requires meal planning and food preparation but it is a skill that can be easily mastered. Eating healthily is good for the body and helps maintain the delicate biochemistry of the brain in balance.
8. **It is never too late to start exercising.** Walking briskly for 30 minutes 5 days a week is enough. Exercise releases feel-good hormones called endorphins. Exercise is good for overall health because it improves our heart, lungs, muscles, weight and general fitness. Group exercising (such as walking groups, dancing and keep fit classes etc.) encourage people to get together and build social networks as well as keep fit.
9. There are many ideas that can be **implemented by community groups** to promote health and wellbeing locally, such as: community gardens; walking groups; coffee morning and social clubs.
10. **Community gardening** ticks lots of boxes at the same time: it is a form of exercise; it can make healthy, home grown food accessible and cheap; it offers seasonal food and persuades us to cook from scratch; it is group activity and, as such, it breaks down social barriers. Growing fruit, herbs or vegetables is possible for most people and any small space will do!
11. **Partnerships with social landlords and other local stakeholders** helps to get projects off the ground. Local partners can offer resources (tools, money, skills etc.) and facilities (space, land etc.) to help volunteers set up their project at minimum cost. There are funding opportunities that community groups can tap into such as the Big Lottery's 'Awards for All' fund. Some social landlords have community grant schemes which community groups can apply for.
12. Building **healthy communities** is not just in the interests of social landlords but, ultimately, of society as a whole.