



News Release

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT ON NEWCASTLE'S COMMUNITIES

Newcastle's unique approach to working with communities to tackle health inequalities will receive international attention at an important World Health Organisation (WHO) conference taking place in Norway this week.

Nick Forbes, Chief Executive of Community Action on Health, Sarah Cowling, Chief Executive of HealthWORKS Newcastle and Lucy Thomson, Community Engagement Manager for Newcastle Healthy City, will be speaking to delegates from cities across Europe at the World Health Organisation's European Healthy Cities Networks conference in Sandnes, Norway on 17-19 June.

Newcastle is one of only 6 UK cities to have been given special recognition by the World Health Organisation for its commitment to improving the health of local people. Approximately 100 cities will be either designated as European Healthy Cities, or in the process of being designated, by June 2010. The theme of the conference is 'The Hidden Cities: Addressing Equality in Health and Inclusiveness in Cities'.

At the conference, Nick, Sarah and Lucy will each outline the complementary work of their organisations in developing a variety of opportunities for communities to fully participate in Newcastle's economic, social and cultural life, explaining how this leads to a better understanding of the diverse needs of communities in the city.

Newcastle Citizens Assembly, which was launched in autumn 2009 to give every citizen the chance to get involved in improving their city, will be highlighted as a key example of this approach. Set up by Newcastle Healthy City, on behalf of the Newcastle

Partnership and Newcastle City Council, it is an exciting new way for anyone who lives, works or studies in the city to 'be the change'.

Lucy Thomson said: "This major conference is an exciting opportunity to share our experience of creating the Newcastle Citizens Assembly with other European cities that are seeking to improve the lives of their communities. Over the past few months hundreds of people from across Newcastle have influenced change in the city by showing their support for a range of proposed improvements and giving us their comments. At events we held in November and April, groups from across the city came together to present their ideas for city-wide improvements and to discuss with key decision makers how they may be taken forward".

A wide variety of improvements, 22 in total, are now being supported and progressed ranging from ideas developed by schoolchildren to encourage use of litter bins to a women's group seeking informal health information sessions and a walking group aiming to keep Newcastle free from dog mess.

At the conference in Norway, Lucy Thomson will explain that there is no formal membership of Newcastle Citizens Assembly. It is about participation rather than representation and aims to encourage a wide range of citizens to get involved in ways that are appropriate to them. All aspects of life in Newcastle are being considered from the economy, health and wellbeing and the environment to creating quality places to live, safer communities and improving the lives of children and young people.

The process is focussed on finding solutions and community groups are encouraged to propose a range of ideas that could make their improvement a reality. They then discuss their ideas with key decision makers so that together they can find ways to bring about changes that will benefit the whole city. Regular feedback events are held to report on the progress being made.

Lucy added: "Information on the proposed city-wide improvements and how to give your support can be found on our website, www.newcastlecitizensassembly.org.uk. There is also information on how groups can come forward with suggestions for further improvements, which we can then bring to future events. I would urge everyone to take this opportunity to be the change".

Issued by:

Julie Elliott, Marketing Consultant, Newcastle Healthy City

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