Knowledge Transfer Partnerships: Establishing Priorities for 11-14 year old young people in the Tyne and Wear conurbation.

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Introduction
The University of Sunderland in partnership with Newcastle University, initiated 3 discussion forums with a cross representation of service providers to explore issues relating to working with, and promoting the good health and development of, young people aged 11-14 years. Located within the Tyne and Wear Conurbation area, the forums gathered the viewpoints of a range of professionals working with young people. A range of representation from the voluntary sector including Barnardos and the Childrens Society; along with the police, social services and education were consulted and feed into this report. The objective of this consultation was to build on areas where the Universities were able to contribute to the development of ‘effective policies and interventions that lead to improved health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities’. In this way it was felt that such forums would also help develop, inform and sustain debate on how ‘policies on migration, fertility, social mobility, and local, national and international economic management affect and are affected by social groups’. These forums were also conducted in the context of very little information currently being available on the experiences of young people age 11-14. This group of young people in particular remains marginal to research or policy initiatives, rather they remain homogenized within the age range of 5-11 or 11 – 19. These Forums actively attempted to counter the marginalisation of young people, and in doing so provided the scope to identify regionally specific research priorities, gather existing good practice and identify those areas that required further development. Moreover by creating a dialogue between a wide range of professionals and the academic community, the forums provided the opportunity to enable the following areas to be explored:

- Identifying, establishing and prioritising current research needs for professionals within private, public and voluntary sectors in the Tyne and Wear Region, working with 11 – 14 young people.
- Reflecting upon current professional practice and initiatives for this age group and identify ‘knowledge gaps’ that can promote ‘better practice’.
- Considering effective ways of engaging with young people in enhancing knowledge transfer partnerships.
- Developing a sustainability strategy to facilitate future knowledge transfer between academic units and public, private and third sector communities.
Three forums were held across the Tyne and Wear Areas: Sunderland, Gateshead and South Tyneside. These forums were designed to facilitate discussion within local professional communities. These discussion forums were held within regional community fire stations across Tyne and Wear. The use of venue proved to be ideally located for enabling those within the community to attend, and provided the basis for both formal and informal discussions to unfold. The Forums took place between April and May 2010

**Contextualising the focus areas:**

Within the UK there is growing concern surrounding the increasing numbers of children and young people participating in activities that are impacting upon their well being, those of other young people and their wider communities (Every Child Matters agenda; Children’s Act 2004; Childcare Act 2006). However, young people aged 11-14 tend to fall between research priorities and major policy initiatives. National priorities tend to refer to those young people aged 14-19 or primary and early years phase for children up to age 11 (e.g. such as extended schools to provide breakfast clubs and after school care). Promoting children and young peoples ‘well-being’ requires consideration of the multiple influences upon children and young people’s development and learning. The need for multi-agency partnerships and approaches is imperative. Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards have emerged as the basis for integrated working between a wide range of professionals across private, voluntary and public sectors. Whilst integrated working and working in partnership was originally recommended within the Court Report 1976, it has not been wholly developed until more recently. Therefore, the Knowledge Transfer Partnership had the potential to identify future research, gather and share issues and good practice and to feed into regional and national Children’s strategies. The forums provided the opportunity for those professionally working with young people aged 11-14 to identify ‘on the ground issues’ and contribute to cross sector regional priorities.

It is widely recognised that the need for promoting children and young peoples’ well-being is of great importance and underpins the fundamental aspects of current policy and legislation (See for example Every Child Matters 2003, Children’s Act 2004, Childcare Act 2006 and the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child). Alongside this, policy recommendations have initiated the development of Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards as a mechanism to ensure integrated working between a wide range of professionals across
private, public and voluntary sectors. Such partnership working is complex and requires consideration of the ethics of information sharing not solely within area specific Local Safeguarding Boards but also between one geographical area and another. Promoting children and young peoples ‘well-being’ requires consideration of the multiple influences upon children and young people’s development and learning, thereby supporting the need for multi-agency partnerships and approaches. Priorities for children and young people can be individually or geographically located within specific areas making target and key performance indicators difficult to identify or achieve in full. At present within the UK there is growing concern surrounding the increasing numbers of children and young people participating in activities that are impacting upon their well being, those of other young people and their wider communities. Current government priorities recognise the impact such engagement can have upon young people who are involved with drug and alcohol dependencies, sexual relationships, gang related activities, and antisocial behaviours; all of which have featured highly amongst local and national media coverage. Whilst steps have been taken in tackling such wide ranging issues for young people much of this work relates to those young people aged 14-19 as a reflection of government policy for 14-19 year olds within the United Kingdom. Alongside this much work has been done within the primary and early years phase for children up to age 11, such as extended schools to provide breakfast clubs and after school care. However at present there appears little direct research relating to those children and young people aged 11-14 years. Regional government offices note children as those young people up to age 13 whilst ‘youth’ are aged 14+. The forums provided the opportunity for those engaged with young people aged 11-14 to raise issues specifically relating to this age phase. In this way the forums aimed to help identify cross sector regional priorities. These discussion forums also provided the opportunity for those involved to highlight areas or importance to them, as professionals, when working with young people aged 11-14.

Emerging Themes

1. Transition

One of the main themes to emerge during the research was the importance attached to young people and their transition from Primary to Secondary education. Such a transition was not simply at the level of an educational change but appeared to be indicative of a broader social, cultural and emotional process of change.
Much discussion centred around how young people ‘settle into the ‘big school’ and the vast impact this had on individuals both in the short and long term. Transitional preparations for young people entering their respective comprehensive school were variable not only across Local Education Authorities but also within respective Authorities. Whilst some schools had extensive and structured programmes lasting over the summer term for those within year 6 going onto year 7, other schools had a more streamlined approach. These findings suggest far more research is required into the impact into the transitional phase and wider exploration of what occurs now across a range of settings to identify opportunities for ‘best practice’. Such research needs to include, and follow through, those individuals who do transfer into their respective comprehensives over a substantial period of time if factors influencing wider life choices is to be fully explored and identified; and in this way provide insight into opportunities of engaging with young people in a manner that is both more readily effective and efficient in the future. Such exploration would provide long term cost effective efficiencies for a range of services, if this reduces the number of cross-agency service input requirements, in the longer term, for disaffected youth.

At the same time, the transition from Primary to Secondary schools was often described by practitioners as a space of growing independence. However, it was clear that independence often had numerous meanings from signalling a change in lifestyle to that of increasing responsibility. It appeared that although transition from primary school to secondary school was part of a schooling agenda, the social, cultural and emotional transition was often left off formal agendas and children were simply assumed to be able to take on this independence unproblematically. Although there appeared a notion of induction of formal education, there was little induction into their changing lifestyles. As mentioned earlier, there is a sense of universal personal and social education across the regions; however the need for a consideration of the challenge of transition appears under-considered. Professionals that we talked to identified a growing sense of boredom coupled with greater freedom at home, which led to what appeared to be a shift towards more risky behaviours such as drinking, smoking and drug taking. Alongside this, feelings of excitement and escapism accompanying such risky behaviours highlighted the difficulties of framing activities simply through rational models of behaviour. It was evident to professionals that such behaviours need to be engaged with emotionally. When young people’s emotions were discussed there is a tendency to simplify them through a deficit model and if they had more knowledge and information they could make more informed choices. Professionals in the field were highly sensitive to the complex situation find themselves in by recognising the
rational risk associated with particular behaviours, whilst at the same time understanding the emotional ‘pay off’ that such behaviours provided.

2. **Teenage Pregnancy**

One of the priority areas for discussion considered teenage pregnancy within Tyne and Wear which continues to be higher than other regions across the UK. Whilst the under-16 conception rate has continued to remain above 7% across the UK, for those aged 13-15, the North East region continues to be unacceptably high and continues to struggle to reduce the teenage pregnancy rate. Whilst regionally some success has been achieved in reducing the number of young people who become pregnant the region continues to have the highest under-18 conception rate across the country, whereby “During 2004-06 there were 8,795 pregnancies to young women under the age of 18 living in the North East. 1,437 of these were to under-16 year olds, with 53.5 per cent of under-16 conceptions leading to abortion” (Regional Government Office 2009). In this way the Tyne and Wear Region, as part of the North East Region continues to reflect the highest teenage pregnancy levels within Europe and is second only to the USA for teenage conception rates. What is not clear within statistical information is how this may vary between geographical wards or Councils within the North-East. The discussion forums presented the opportunity for professionals from a wide range of service provision alongside academics to consider how variables may exist across the Tyne and Wear region with regard to teenage pregnancy rates for 11-14 year old females. The forum findings indicate the levels are variable within the region and that if further information was sought from ‘Ward’ areas, indicators would suggest a wide range of contributing factors. From this information further exploration needs to be conducted to determine why this may be so and in this way identify initiatives currently existing and those under development in order to target areas more readily, rather than implementing initiatives that cover wide ranging geographical conurbations. This in turn will enable cohesion within any approaches implemented towards reduction of conceptions. Such exploration is important in order to promote well-being for 11-14 year olds given the long term impact this can have upon womens health and well-being alongside the increased likelihood that children born to teenage mothers are three times more likely to become teenage parents themselves (Regional government office report 2009). Such exploration would also become increasingly cost effective in time, if successful, in more readily reducing high levels of teenage pregnancy, that limits life experience and opportunities for those who become ‘young mums’.
3. **Alcohol**

In addition the discussion forums explored relationships between alcohol and young people amid current concerns regarding young people’s relationship with alcohol. As highlighted by Rea (2007) “MORE teenage drunks have been hauled before the courts across the Northumbria force area than anywhere else in the country”. This has led to higher numbers of those aged 10-17 years across the region being arrested and charged with drunk and disorderly behaviour, cumulating in Northumbria Police brought 438 prosecutions last year – nearly three times as many as the next highest force, West Yorkshire, .... In total 1,640 underage drinkers were prosecuted in England and Wales last year, according to Home Office figures – meaning more than a quarter of them were in the North East.

The forums provided the opportunity to consider the rate of prosecutions of 11-14 year old young people related to alcohol consumption and reflect upon whether or not this varied between specific geographical locations. In a study conducted to investigate Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2008 involving 264 schools, 7,798 young people aged 11-15 were surveyed regarding their alcohol intake (Fuller, 2009). Results suggest “ Older pupils were more likely to have drunk alcohol than younger ones (from 16% of 11 year olds to 81% of 15 year olds). Among 11 and 12 year olds, boys were more likely than girls to have drunk alcohol, but by the age of 13 years this difference disappeared” Fuller (op. cit.). Thereby highlighting the importance of recognising the role alcohol has in young people’s lives, for those aged 11-14 years. In addition it was noted “... mean alcohol consumption among 11 to 15 year olds who drank in the last week increased from 12.7 units to 14.6 units. Taking into account the different methods of calculating units, this increase is within the range of mean consumption measured between 2001 and 2007; therefore it is likely that the trend in pupils’ drinking has not changed overall since 2001”. What is highlighted within this report suggests patterns and trends have not changed between 2001 and 2008. The study points to a mean alcohol consumption of approximately 11 units for boys and 14 units for girls aged 11-13 in the previous week (op.cit). If this pattern reflects a normative trend for 11-13 year old young people across the United Kingdom, concerns are raised about life trajectories and young people’s well-being within the Tyne and Wear Region, on the basis of alcohol consumption. Such findings are particularly concerning with
regard to female alcohol intake given evidence within the report suggests the mean consumption for that of 11-14 year olds is equitable to the recommendation mean consumption level for female adults.

What is becoming increasingly recognised is the relationship between alcohol consumption, smoking and drug taking. Whether or not young people do engage in under-age drinking is also related to whether or not they have engaged in smoking and drug taking (Fuller 2009).

“...it is estimated that in England in 2008 around 190,000 young people aged between 11 and 15 were regular smokers, around 550,000 drank alcohol in the last week, around 250,000 had taken drugs in the last month and around 460,000 had taken drugs in the last year”. Whilst the age of regular smokers varies between gender and age from age 11 years the higher rates for girls emerges by age 13. 6% of girls regularly smoked by age 13, rising to 17% by age 15 (Fuller 2009). Alongside this whilst there has been an overall decrease in the number of young people who are involved in drug use across the UK as many as 9% of young people aged 11 had used drugs increasing to 28% by age 14. Within this 4-5% of young people aged 11-14 used drugs daily (Fuller 2009). Such findings are important and provided a basis for further discussion amongst those attending. The forum discussion findings point to indicators that such concerns are realised across the Tyne and Wear conurbation area, in so much as many young people are engaging in alcohol and drugs. Across this region specifically alcohol was more prominent that drug taking for young people, with suggestions that ‘drinking’ had become the norm and part of the transition between child and young person. Whilst there are legislative opportunities to remove alcohol from young people, if found, indicators suggest that young people are becoming more aware and devise a range of strategies to prevent this happening; for example using carbonated drinks such as ‘Cola’ to disguise alcohol they are carrying with them. In this way it is not until a more obvious offence such as drunk and disorderly is committed that intervention can take place.

Furthermore the purchasing of some ‘drugs’ is not only more readily available but also inexpensive for young people to purchase. This added to the availability of alcohol enables young people to engage in both drinking and drug taking from an early age. At present findings suggest current campaigns to highlight the dangers for young people and limit the number of young people engaging in such risk taking behaviour has limited impact. Such findings highlight the importance of seeking new and innovative means of engaging with young people to reverse the current trend of buying alcohol and drugs as a behaviour trend norm for young people aged 11-14 years.
4. Community Policing

Alongside this, discussion reflected upon entry into the youth justice system for young people. In the Tyne and Wear area for 2007/08, South Tyneside had a higher rate of young people entering the Youth Justice System for the first time (3,120 per 100,000 10-17) than the average for the North East (2,710 per 100,000 10-17). However over the same period Sunderland had over 3,000 per 100,000 young people aged 10-17 entering the Youth Justice System for the first time, whilst Newcastle had marginally less. The forums enabled such data to be considered against a range of factors that emerged as life impacting influences upon young people’s well-being in a regional area of multiple deprivations. The North-East as a region has the highest average rank of wards identified as influenced by multiple deprivations. Within this the average rate of income deprivation for Tyne and Wear is 31.5% that is consequential to a region that has the highest percentage of children in families that claim means tested benefits at 42%. However, one of the areas that professionals felt could be seen as detrimental was community policing.

A tension that underpinned the effectiveness of police relationships with young people was that of enforcement and enhancement. On one hand police representatives identified the pressure to reduce crime rates, whilst on the other there was a need to form positive relationships within the community. Police are under increasing pressure to produce results that can be quantitatively measured. However, the nature of community policing is based upon an ethos of long term results in the form of trusting long term relationships, reflecting a more qualitative service than quantitative results alone can demonstrate. There were numerous examples of how community based policing, which sought to enhance crime prevention through the positive relationships, were effective and productive. The police identified that it was particularly important to make positive relationships with young people at very early ages and but some communities or parents could be detrimental to ensuring this if the notion of the ‘police’ is used as a ‘threat’. However, there appears to be a period between 11-14 years of age where such relationships become less influential. Professionals feel that self-perception and the perception of others has major part to play in the relationships that are formed with the police and other professionals. Having an established relationship with younger people can facilitate more understanding at a later age. It is also important to establish communication between the police and young people at a level that young people can relate to. Although there is a tension between enforcement and community and enhancement, forging those relationships is also subject to those in the
police making a career. It was suggested that community policing may be seen by some personnel as a role that could help facilitate promotion within the police force, thereby providing no more than a stepping stone within an individual’s career trajectory. Further research might be needed to explore whether the more effective community police officers are those who do not move away from the area and do not secure higher ranks through promotion opportunities.

5. Belonging

The important aspect of talking to professionals is the recognition that many of the children involved in difficult transitions, are from families well known to the area. Furthermore, these are families that are generally not interested in support and professionals have a difficult time trying to implement behavioural strategies that may have any longer term beneficial impact on such families and wider communities. Interventions with parents are seen as of assistance however, there are a range of difficulties involved in engaging families.

Many of the young people who were deemed at risk were those who were looked after by the traditional family. Consideration for young peoples choices that impact directly upon their short and long term well-being for the Tyne and Wear region needs to included those young people who are ‘Looked After’ by local authorities. Within this region one Local Authority had 83.6 children in care for every 10,000 under 18 year old – higher than average rates for England and for similar councils. Furthermore, in 08/09, 14.4% of school age children in care missed 25 or more days of schooling (above national average). Such findings are important to the discussion proposed in that research points to those children who truant or are excluded as more likely to engage in alcohol consumption, smoking or drug use. Moreover in 2007/08 children in care in this Local authority were 2.36 times more likely to receive final warnings and convictions than their peers locally. The forum provided opportunities for interrogating the multi-faceted nature of development and learning in the Tyne and Wear region for young people aged 11-14 with respect to the issues raised for young people. Findings point to the immense impact transition from primary phase to secondary phase education had for many young people.
Mental health issues.

Mental Health issues need to be focussed on this age range as findings point to a large number of young people identified to have mental health issues, ranging from depression, stress, dietary behaviours to more serious illness as they grow older such as chronic depression or drug/alcohol dependency. For this reason well being at this age is of particular concern, as there is very little tracking or information in this area and limited service provision due to increasingly heavy workload requirements. There is a sense that many of the interventions currently being addressed are targeted towards older young people such as those 14+. Work on the early identification of risk is important and could provide a ‘prevention’ rather than ‘cure’ approach to well-being. An evidence based approach is required to ascertain with teachers what works and what doesn’t. It was argued that universal provision is effective for some whilst others found that such provision was disproportionately allocated across the region.

There is required a greater focus on resilience and what this means to young people, particularly where domestic violence is evident within the home environment. The impact of domestic violence upon children’s well-being is both long and short term, as it is for those adults subject to violent abuse. Professionals indicated in their experience there were higher levels of risk taking behaviour from those children and young people who were known to be living within a home environment where domestic violence was suspected or confirmed. There is the need for emotional resilience a sense of well being that can be developed to improve self-identity and self-image alongside self-confidence for young people. How to develop resilience in young people aged 11-14 is a variable ideology that requires far more interrogation and investigation. What emerged consistently throughout all of the forums was a belief that 11-14 is a crisis point not only in young peoples emerging identities but also in terms of professional input. It is at this age agencies begin to lose young people and the influences of previous relationships begin to diminish. Such resilience can also be limited when seeking parental input and influence. It was felt during the discussion forums a number of opportunities to engage with young people were not equally promoted within the home environment, and often parents were barriers to positive fostering of young peoples identity and esteem; in so much as some parents were not only difficult to engage but also resisted professional input. Such home environment working is then built
from a must partake rather than desire to partake basis, which in itself contains parental and young persons resistance towards possible initiatives, intervention or positive outcomes.

OUTCOMES
The project is committed to engaging and benefitting a range of professional and academic users and achieved the following outcomes:

*Links with External Organisations*
The project established links between the University of Sunderland and the University of Newcastle with a diverse range of cross sector external organisations; including representatives from Barnardos, Northumbria Police (safeguarding and community policing), South Tyneside Local Safeguarding Board, Regional Government, Gateshead Local Education Authority, Sunderland Education Authority and Gateshead Local Authority; all of whom attended the discussion forums. These links provided the basis for Knowledge Generation Partnerships and connected academic researchers with those working with young people. Importantly, the initial forums were not simply a ‘one off’ series of events. The forums enabled a commitment to be established with those partaking to seek to develop research opportunities for the future; which would develop a sustainability plan and in this way ensure that the relationships between academics and those working with young people continued *after* the duration of the forums.

This was achieved by:

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<td>• Regional meetings of those working with young people and academic researchers at the University of Sunderland and Newcastle</td>
<td>• Establishing a list of organisations and contacts working with young people age 11 – 14. This included academics and non-academics.</td>
<td>• Ongoing relationships to update and focus future research priorities. • Development of research opportunities to encourage research practice amongst professionals working with 11-14 year olds</td>
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*Advancement of Knowledge: Academic Communities*
The project made a significant contribution to the academic and research community by advancing the awareness of research needs of professionals working in the area for those representatives from Sunderland and Newcastle Universities and in this way successfully
informed academics and researchers of the challenges in these areas. The forums provided evidence from existing practice and contribute to establishing information on stakeholders’ research priorities. Furthermore, by involving stakeholders across sectors the forums promoted and cultivated cross sector awareness. A major aspect arising from the forums was to ensure that young people have a future voice in the setting of research priorities as a crucial feature.

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<td>• Promoting a dialogue between stakeholders in different sectors.</td>
<td>• Distribution of research information across Sectors.</td>
<td>• Developing effective research priorities that have ‘real’ beneficial impacts for young people.</td>
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<td>• To build young people into future agenda and research priorities.</td>
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**Conclusions: Resilience**

The discussion forums were both timely and valuable to those partaking, providing evidence of a wide range of projects ongoing in dealing with issues across the Tyne and Wear Conurbation area for 11-14 year old young people. However what was highlighted throughout was the immediate need for further developments in this area, and funding to support such development. What transpired provided a depth of information from which future development can be explored more readily, and the opportunity for the University of Sunderland and the University of Newcastle to use the information gained in future research possibilities in partnership with those who work directly with young people in this age range. Whilst two potential funding opportunities have been explored, neither at present has resulted in necessary funding to take the potential projects further. Whilst the current climate economically may restrict funding alongside developmental opportunities the long term benefits could enable long term cost effectiveness. This became apparent throughout the discussion forums, whereby it was recognised that many children do not live in ideal or suitable environments in order to survive and thrive, however these children do appear to manage overall whilst in primary phase education, which by nature of provision does provide a level of security and routine to children’s lives. By contrast, it appears that once children transfer from year 6 into year 7 and move into the ‘big school’ the uncertainty and
level of risk increases, in so much as the level of responsibility placed upon children
increases in unfamiliar surroundings leading to a sense of insecurity, instability and
uncertainty, underpinned by a need to belong; and for young people to identify ‘a place to
be’. This can then leave children feeling more vulnerable and open to a wide range of risk
taking behaviour opportunities. Understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a
young person requires far greater clarification, generated from the voice of young people
and compared and contrasted against how parents and the wider community perceive
young people in the 21st century, rather than simply identifying or using the pathology of
blame for young people. More immediately there is also a need to generate a wider
understanding of agency support across the region and how initiatives within one area may
be developed with or balance initiatives in another area. There is certainly scope for
developing more readily the management of activities and behaviours of and for young
people within this age range, generating a wider understanding of multi-agency and cross-
sector support. For this reason both the University of Sunderland and Newcastle University
will continue seek and explore possibilities in this field.

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