

*Enabling rights and advocacy to reduce health
inequalities*

2023 Conference



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Background

Help Through Hardship Project

Citizens Advice Wandsworth (CAW) and Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network (WCEN) work in partnership to deliver the Hardship Crisis project. The project, which is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aims to provide improved support to people in Wandsworth who face hardship crisis by placing advice within the community. This is our 7th annual conference together.

As well as providing direct social welfare advice, the project also trains volunteers and staff from community and voluntary sector partners to provide 'Advice First Aid' (AFA) so that people experiencing hardship can get the support they need to improve their circumstances within their communities. AFA training supports people to identify advice issues, provide timely information and signposting, and accurate referrals for additional advice and casework support. This approach aims to ensure people get help early, to prevent problems from developing into issues of hardship crisis. Through our partnership, we continue to build a network that includes a diverse range of community, faith, and statutory groups and services. We bring together members of these networks at our regular events and at our annual conference.

The annual conference is an important opportunity for organisations to reflect and network with community providers. It offers a safe space to talk about the issues affecting local people and to explore solutions to these problems. It also acts as an accountability forum, which enables us and our stakeholders, to measure achievements and to speak directly to policy makers and service providers.

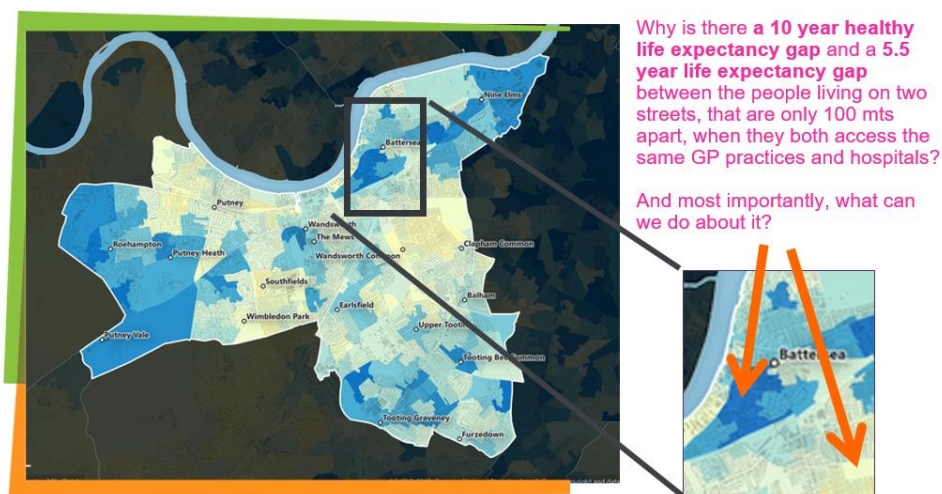
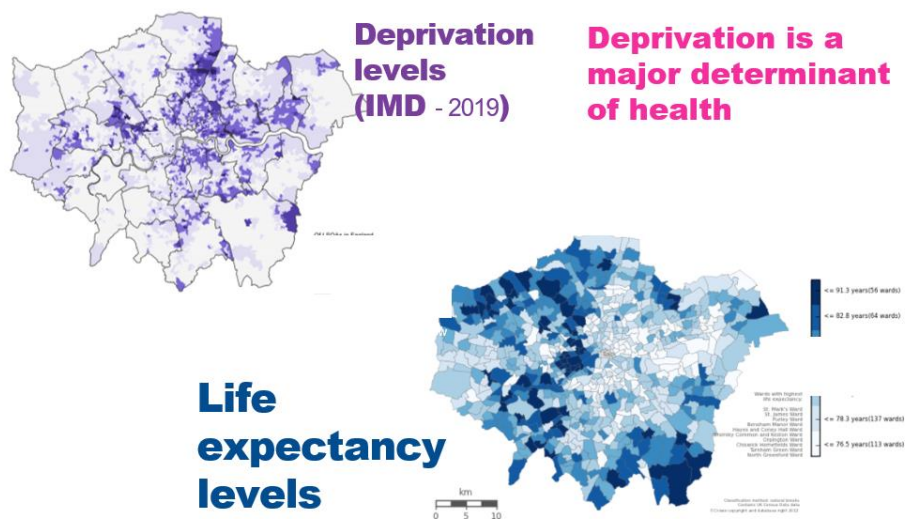
The 2023 Conference

We at WCEN and CAW wanted to host a community conference to raise the profile of health inequalities in Wandsworth. Increasingly, we've been seeing both the impact of health inequalities on our communities but also the potential for closer working with the health sector to make it better. So, we wanted to talk about the work that is already being done by us and others to address these, and to bring together community members and policymakers to co-design future systems.

Health Inequalities: what are they, what causes them and how do they affect Wandsworth?

Dr Farwa Hasan defined health inequalities as “Avoidable, unfair & systematic differences ” “Disparity of health status, access to care and wider determinants of health “. Things like; income, housing, environment, transport, education, and work all affect our health outcomes. As Dan Hopewell from the Bromley by bow centre pointed out, these are often left out of NHS priorities.

Dan showed us what this looked like in Wandsworth, where deprivation mapped onto life expectancy.



CAW's perspective

At CAW we see the cyclical relationship between health and our advice. Where health issues cause poor health and ill health causes people to need advice.

Cost-of-Living

We started by revisiting our cost-of-living data to check how that was impacting our clients. We know that the cost-of-living is having a big impact on mental health. We're offering even more support to people in crisis situations than we were last year. This inevitably means people are coming to us with higher levels of stress and anxiety which has an impact on their overall health.

Housing

CAW showed some data to show worrying trends in housing in the borough with an increase in issues coming to us. We know more people are being asked to leave their property or forced out, leaving people at risk of homelessness. We also know that the quality of temporary accommodation in the borough is very poor and people are being housed in temporary accommodation for long periods of time. Sometimes away from their family and friends and support network and from their local GP or health provider.

What are you seeing in your community?

What health issues are you seeing in your community, and how are they linked to social factors and living environments?

Housing

- Not enough good quality rented or social housing in the borough that is affordable.
- Mold in properties with landlords/councils/housing associations not taking the problem seriously.
- Poor quality temporary accommodation and people being moved far away from support networks.
- Residents staying in temporary accommodation for up to 6 years – never being told that they would be there that long.
- Transient neighbourhoods, people don't know their neighbours like they have done before.
- Homeless hostels being unhealthy places for people to be and feel safe.
- Overcrowded housing – families having to share rooms.
- People experiencing homelessness being passed back and forth between agencies and can get lost in the system.
- Cheaper housing is located near main roads with worse air quality.

The strain of living in poor accommodation impacts mental health (stress, anxiety) and problems such as mold impact on physical health (asthma, wheezing, respiratory infection, allergy conditions).

Money

- The constant stress of worrying about debt and money has an impact on mental health.
- There is a lack of jobs that Wandsworth residents can get the pull them out of poverty.
- People feel embarrassed so less likely to seek help because of stigma attached to poverty.
- Lack of money can lead to malnutrition as people skip meals or eat poor quality meals.
- Young people in deprived areas joining gangs for financial gain, being exploited, and often criminalised and not supported.
- Leads other people to criminalized behavior, such as shoplifting.

It's hard to focus on your physical and mental health when the primary focus for some people is on surviving.

Loneliness/community

- Loneliness affects different parts of our communities - people who can't afford to socialise, new parents, older people, people new to Wandsworth.
- This leads to a lack of awareness about what services can help.
- There is a lack of social spaces/affordable spaces to host community events.
- There is a lack of support networks to help with mental and physical health problems.
- Insecure Immigration status – and fear of being deported - can affect the ability to integrate.
- Digital exclusion – as more services are moving online - those who are not digitally literate are missing out.
- Isolation and lack of community can mean people have no one to reach out to in the instance of domestic violence.
- Lack of support of people with English as a second language.

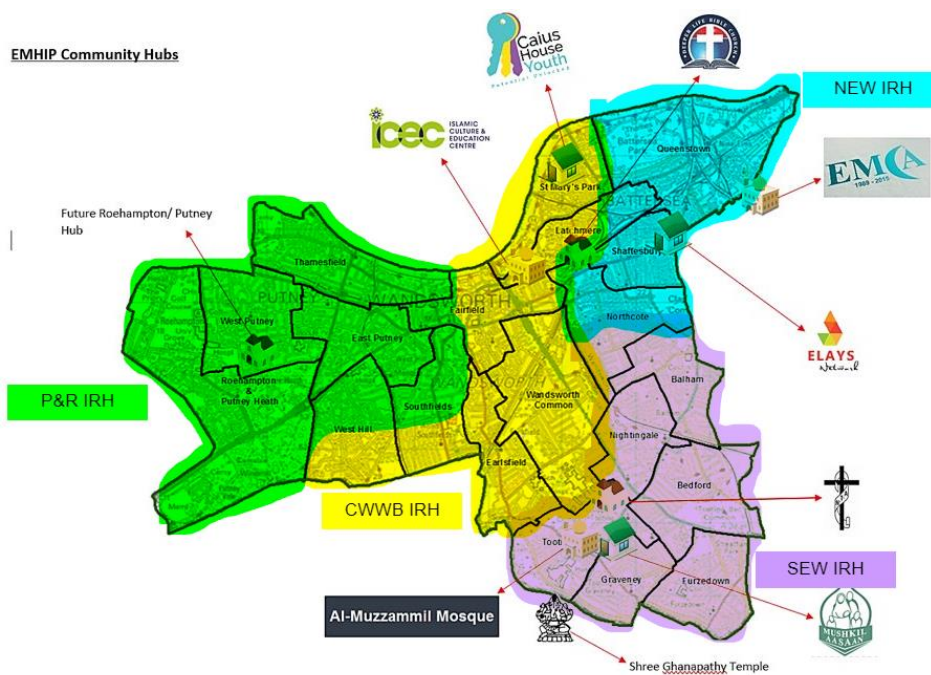
Other

- Immigration status – the stress and fear of insecure immigration status 'survival mode'
- Addiction – to drugs, alcohol or gambling can be secret issue within our communities
- Air quality – living near main roads (often cheaper places to live) means worse air quality

NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) - An opportunity for genuine transformation

ICBs were legal established on 1st July 2022 to replace Clinical Commission Groups (CCGs) to take on the NHS planning function for local areas. A core part of their renewed mission is to tackle inequalities in access, experience, and outcomes of healthcare interventions. Voluntary and Community Sector Groups play a critical role within local health and care systems in helping to deliver improvements and reduce inequalities- as we are often working more closely with communities.

To support this vision, WCEN has been collaborating with the NHS to establish health and well-being hubs in and alongside local community groups, to make available support and services that are coproduced, and culturally capable, towards, in the first instance, reducing race disparities in service access, experience and outcomes. These services include not only those coproduced with the NHS, but also direct Advice support through the Advice First Project (AFA), and emergent relationship with Pro Bono Lawyers to ensure that a much wider range of rights-based services can be accessible and available.



Learning from the WCEN work, and work from across the AFA network, and from your own experiences : What are the important things to go into the strategy linking health, rights-based advice, and community?

Sharing Knowledge

- People need to know about their rights and entitlement with housing, benefits, education, health, debt, immigration.
- Residents need to know about services in their area that can help them, including offers to help reduce isolation.
- We should be improving health literacy (including young people) to help people understand their health.
- Be able to access knowledge about rights and advice in community settings.
- Empower community hubs and council spaces (such as libraries) to tackle health inequalities.
- People need help to navigate the system, it's too complicated for 'ordinary' people to understand.

Advocacy and campaigning

- Lobby local authority for change e.g., on digital connectivity.
- Communities should have more input into what they want their health services to look like
- We want the NHS to listen to and value community and faith voices in their service design.
- More access to legal advice and advocacy in local places
- Involve young people in campaigning and help them to understand the democratic process so they know it is there and they can participate.
- Set up fund for travel to events where there is an opportunity to influence.

Better relationships between local organisations and with NHS

- More NHS staff attending community events and getting to know people in the local community, acknowledging the power imbalance and the 'whiteness' of the institution at a higher level.
- There needs to be more of a connectedness of people with lived experience to policy makers.
- Visibility of mental health support teams- early intervention working with schools
- Stop using BMI as overarching measure of health.
- NHS to update on progress against these and enough is enough report.
- Change the mindset to shift to real partnership working – set a norm of sharing policies with partners.
- Reducing bureaucracy in the system, making it more transparent (avoiding jargon to include people in discussions)

Conclusion – Towards health justice partnerships

“Law is both a social determinant of health, and a remedy for addressing health inequalities”.

Professor Dame Hazel Genn - Director National Strategy for Health Justice Partnership, University College London

This conference highlighted the wide-ranging links between health and rights-based advice and advocacy plus, showed eagerness from both our community partners and statutory counterparts to harness the power of advice and advocacy in tackling health disparities. Although many of the initiatives outlined in this report are geared toward our colleagues within the NHS, they represent a collective effort from our community to champion these important issues. We look forward to more opportunities for our community and local NHS colleagues to co-produce a system aimed at diminishing health inequalities in Wandsworth.

Appendix 1 – Photos

Photo credit –Integrated Care Support Services <https://www.integratedcaresupport.com/>





Appendix 2 – Organisations represented

- Age UK Wandsworth
- AME Zion Church
- ARDEN UNIVERSITY
- Balham Community SDA
- Balham Community Church
- Be Enriched
- Buckinghamshire New University
- Carney's Community
- Central London Community Healthcare
- Citizens Advice National
- Citizens Advice Wandsworth
- CitizensUK
- CLCHT (NHS)
- Enable
- Epsom & St Helier Hospital/ ICSS
- Estate art
- Family Action
- FOUNDATION
- Healthwatch Wandsworth
- House of Parliament
- ileto Caribbean Peoples Network
- Integrated Care Support Services
- LBRuT
- Mapfre
- Muslim Women's Network UK
- NHS SW London ICB
- New Testament Church of God Tooting
- Parent Power
- Parental Mental Health Service Wandsworth
- PHP Network
- Policy in Practice
- Putneymead Group Medical Practice
- Ransom Pentecostal AME Zion Church
- RCJ Citizens Advice
- Richmond and Wandsworth Councils
- Smile Dove Nigeria Limited
- Sound Minds

- South West London Health and Care Partnership
- South West London ICS
- South West London Law Centres
- Spear
- St Augustine's Upper Tooting and Holy Trinity Tooting
- SW London Integrated Care Board
- South West London & St George's
- Together Southark (Diocese of Southwark, which covers South L & part of East Su)
- Tooting Community Kitchen
- UNAIDS
- Wandsworth Care Alliance
- Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network
- Wandsworth Libraries
- Wandsworth Mediation Service
- Wandsworth Older People's Forum
- Welcare
- Youth Legal