

Education Committee

Oral evidence: Left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, HC 279

Tuesday 1 December 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 December 2020.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 204 - 246

Witnesses

[I](#): Edward Davies, Director of Policy, Centre for Social Justice; Matt Leach, Chief Executive Officer, Local Trust; Katie Sullivan, 'Get Active' Youth Work Co-ordinator, Regenerate UK; Miriam Jordan Keane, Chief Marketing and Sales Officer, National Citizen Service; and Suzanne Wilson, Research Fellow in Social Inclusion and Community Engagement, University of Central Lancashire.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Edward Davies, Matt Leach, Katie Sullivan, Miriam Jordan Keane and Suzanne Wilson.

Q204 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our Committee. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on parliamentary TV, please introduce yourselves and the nature of your organisation very briefly.

Edward Davies: I am Edward Davies, the policy director at the Centre for Social Justice. We look at root causes of poverty and, in particular, education, family breakdown, debt, addiction and worklessness.

Katie Sullivan: I am Katie Sullivan, the “Get Active” youth work co-ordinator at Regenerate, which is a youth charity in south-west London.

Matt Leach: I am Matt Leach, chief executive of Local Trust, which administers the Big Local Programme on behalf of the National Lottery. It is a programme that places £1.1 million in the hands of each of 150 neighbourhoods across the country, many of which missed out on their fair share of funding in the past. More recently, we have been taking learning from that and applying it to left-behind communities, particularly those that combine deprivation and a loss of social infrastructure. We have published a number of reports on that over the last two years.

Suzanne Wilson: I am Suzanne Wilson, research fellow in social inclusion and community engagement at the University of Central Lancashire. My research has, in the past, worked with parents from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not necessarily engage particularly well in education, but now I lead community, youth-led participatory projects.

Chair: We are going to divide this up into four sections, and I think you have been briefed on that already. David Simmonds will open the first section.

Q205 **David Simmonds:** As the briefing suggests, there will be a focus on different themes. The first one is that we are very interested in reflections on the role that family circumstances play. We have heard about the statistics relating to educational underachievement for disadvantaged white pupils. From your experience, what do you think are the principal causes of that underachievement?

Matt Leach: It is important to look at the impact of place on this as an issue. As you have heard in previous sessions, the educational attainment of different groups can vary quite significantly between areas. In the communities that we have been working in, communities that combine deprivation and a profound loss of social infrastructure—such as places to meet, community organisations to bring people together—where there has been a fraying of what Onward’s recent report called the social fabric, from the statistics there seems to be an association between that and some quite significantly poorer outcomes in educational performance. You



HOUSE OF COMMONS

see that most markedly post-GCSE in the numbers of people aged 16 to 24 moving on to higher education, although there are also issues at a younger age.

Communities that have become defined as left behind have that combination of factors. They are often peripheral estates on the edge of industrial or former industrial towns and cities. Often their populations are predominantly white British, 88% compared to about 80%, which is the average in England, and perhaps 60% to 65% if you are looking at deprived places in inner urban areas. I think that points to looking at this not so much through the lens of ethnicity but through the lens of place, looking at the particular characteristics of place when it comes to poor educational outcomes. That happens to be associated with particular communities, but in particular that combination of a fraying social fabric and significant levels of poverty seems to impact and is very important to what the Committee is looking at.

Q206 David Simmonds: Picking up Matt's point that place is a crucial factor, do you each have a view about what the Committee should focus on in the way that we can intervene in place? What makes a difference? Is it charities, voluntary organisations, schools, local authorities or business? What makes the difference in a positive direction?

Suzanne Wilson: Picking up on what Matt said, we often think of traditional white working class families as coming from left-behind communities who historically feel neglected by central Government policy. They experience hardship and perceive fewer social mobility opportunities. They are often in post-industrial regions where traditional employment avenues for working class families are no longer available. Many of these communities, like where I work in west Cumbria, also leave students vulnerable to something called educational isolation, where young people have fewer opportunities for new experiences and it can be more difficult to recruit and retain highly skilled teachers.

I strongly believe that place plays an important role. We all need to start looking at ways that we can build therapeutic communities around the families that most deserve and need our support, to stop working in silos and look at the way that schools can embed themselves as anchor institutions in the community. I think that would also break down barriers between home and school.

Q207 Chair: It was my mistake, because I could not see her on my screen for some reason, but I did not ask Miriam to introduce herself. Could you introduce yourself and your organisation, please?

Miriam Jordan Keane: I am Miriam Jordan Keane, the chief marketing and sales officer of NCS Trust and today I am representing Mark Gifford, our CEO. NCS is a programme committed to social mobility, social cohesion and social action and doing good in communities. It is for 16 to 17-year-old young people at the critical moment, on the cusp of adulthood. It is an intervention programme that engages with young



people and helps them to deal with issues of confidence, learning skills that you do not learn in the classroom, working very much with education.

David Simmonds: Thanks, Miriam. Welcome. Tom Hunt has a very quick question on the points that have just been raised.

Q208 **Tom Hunt:** Place being the key issue here, say if we are thinking about a coastal town that has not had the level of investment, deindustrialisation and so on, what would happen if we looked at that place? What analysis has been done to home in on a place and to compare the educational performance of white working class pupils and pupils from similarly low income backgrounds but different ethnic groups? Surely if we look at that comparison we can assess whether this is place or whether we believe there is still a factor specific to the white working class.

Edward Davies: The question of place is important and I will come back to that a bit later. I want to go back to the original question about family, because I think that is the absolute \$1 million question that is too often overlooked here. The CSJ works in all these different areas, but whether it is criminal justice, mental health or homelessness, all the statistics show that family is the big factor and it is very rarely talked about. The reason it is rarely talked about is that it is immediately personal and sensitive.

When we talk about family breakdowns, I think about my two mates currently going through a divorce, and so I am conscious that it does not sound judgmental or moralising or anything like that. But the issue we have is that we are going through a fundamental change in the way society operates with families, and it goes almost uncommented. Two weeks ago, the ONS announced that the leading cause of homelessness is now family breakdown. It is the leading cause of mental health problems and it is pretty much the leading cause of educational failure as well.

When you look at the statistics on what is going on in children's homes, it is absolutely no surprise to see which children are failing in school. The amount of research going on on this is getting bigger and bigger, and it is not quite breaking through. To give you a couple of examples, there was a big study from Princeton of 5,000 families last year and the final conclusion was that children who were in what researchers characterise as fragile families, where parents were cohabiting or a lone parent, were twice as likely not to graduate from high school and that is controlling for income and all the other factors. When we look at standards in schools, curricula and things like that, we talk about improvements of 10%, 20%, 30%. In family circumstances we are talking about double.

The CSJ has done the same research. We interviewed 5,000 people about their experience of a range of social issues and controlled for each other issue in their lives. We found the same result for children who have experienced family breakdown. They were twice as likely to fail at school. It is fundamentally important, not just to this hearing but the whole field



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of education. Children spend 85% of their lives outside school, mostly at home, and what is going on there is very important to everything that happens in school.

The last thing I will add is that on the ethnicity side it is quite hard to break down family stability by income and ethnicity and education all at the same time, but we can say that family stability is falling apart in our poorer communities and this has happened over the course of a generation. Using marriage as the best proxy because it is measurable, marriage rates over 100 years have been largely stable until the last 30 or 40 years. In our rich communities, on a call like this I would expect a marriage rate of between 80% and 90%. If we were doing this in a poor community, I would expect a marriage rate of between 20% and 30%. It is that stark. The stability of the home in our poorest communities is collapsing, and we are seeing it every day in our schools and expecting teachers to solve what is not within their power.

Q209 Jonathan Gullis: Edward, thank you for making that point. I think you have hit the nail on the head on the importance that family plays and what the school is able to control. The education reforms since 2010 have been very good in the classroom, but to get it right now we need to go beyond the school gates if we are going to make significant changes. You mentioned the breakdown of relationships in households. Are there any other characteristics of the home environment specific to white families that you think might be a driving factor for underachievement of disadvantaged white pupils?

Chair: Can you all respond as concisely as possible because we have a lot to get through? Thank you.

Katie Sullivan: For white families in particular, there is the impact of cultural influences and the role that place has in attitudes. This is from my own experience in a white working class family, as well as the young people that I work with. It is a massive assumption to say that there is less value placed on education nowadays. That is definitely true in some circumstances. A lot of parents have had a different experience of education, and that has changed dramatically over time. Now we are in a situation where a lot of parents don't know how to navigate the education system and relate to what their children are experiencing in their day-to-day lives. Not being able to relate to it means that you are unable to support and encourage it.

On the role of changing attitudes, when you are in a place where there is a lack of jobs where there used to be jobs, you cannot see the possibility for your own future and that leads to a lack of hope and aspiration.

Q210 David Simmonds: I am conscious of the question that runs through our thinking: do we understand what the prevalence is of family problems and why that is a factor across different social or ethnic groups? It feels like we do not fully understand it. If you agree that we don't, do we need to prioritise gaining a deeper understanding of that to have the right



HOUSE OF COMMONS

policy, and do you have a view about how?

Miriam Jordan Keane: We probably do not have as deep an understanding as we need to have, and we definitely could do with knowing more. We work with particular emphasis on the north-east and the south-west, in both of which there is a high percentage of working class white people identifying as white British. We know that the work we have done with the English Football League Trust and the football clubs can help us to get to the heart of the issues that are relevant to young people. Our learning is that, although what happens in the classroom is incredibly valuable, there is a whole area outside the classroom where we need to find ways to access the young people who do not necessarily feel that school is a happy place. We find that the local youth clubs, working through local authority groups and particularly with the football clubs, is a great way to get greater understanding because that is where young people bond together, open up and share more.

Q211 **Kim Johnson:** Edward, you mentioned the impact on these communities. Do you think that 10 years of austerity and the lack of funding to these particular areas has had a significant impact on children in these communities? Do you believe that additional funding, so there are greater levels of support staff in schools or Sure Start programmes, can play a greater role in supporting families and children in redressing the issues that you have raised?

Matt Leach: I will respond to Kim's question as a prompt. It is important to understand particularly in left-behind communities. Earlier in your question you asked how to prioritise impact on white working class educational achievement. One way to do that might be focusing on places where the population is predominantly white and where educational achievement is fairly low. There is potentially some significant bang for buck there. But overwhelmingly these are places that have not just seen a decrease in funding for community-based organisations and social infrastructure—places to meet provided by the state or by charities, for example—but have also often seen the withdrawal of the private sector. They are places where pubs and social clubs have closed, perhaps where shops have disappeared and then cafés have disappeared as well. There are some real issues there that are not just about public sector spending but are about the complete experience of people living in those communities.

There are certainly things that can be done in schools to address this. What is quite interesting is the role that Suzanne highlighted in her first contribution about the potential for schools to act as hubs and anchors for their communities. Just before the lockdown I visited St Aidan's School in Gateshead—Mr Mearns's constituency—where the headteacher had given the former caretaker's cottage to the local community organisation, Big Local Gateshead, to use as a drop-in centre for the community. When I talked to her about why she had done that, she said she can't teach children adequately in a community that is breaking down, so investment



in a successful, thriving community where there are good community relationships pays back in the educational performance of the children.

Chair: Matt, we will come to community later on in the session, but what you are saying is important.

- Q212 **Jonathan Gullis:** The use of a building is extremely important, and the school building is one of the biggest assets the community has, yet it is one of the most underutilised assets. I completely concur with what you said, Matt. I think Katie and Suzanne are pointing to opportunity in areas, something to aspire to, something to see they can reach. In the area I represent in Stoke-on-Trent there are not the high-skilled, high-waged jobs that you aspire to, and therefore people feel they are trapped in a cycle of factory work or low-skilled jobs. Suzanne talked about the experience of adults going through education and that they do not know how to navigate it. How can we correct that?

Suzanne Wilson: I wanted to pick up on what Katie was saying about parental attitudes and what we can do when working with families. Unfortunately there seems to be an assumption that white working class parents who don't engage with schools is a result of negative attitudes towards education and, indeed, it can come across that way. But my research has shown that, if you take time to understand the lived experience of parents, it is often a front to many underlying issues.

For example, I interviewed 77 parents who were classed white disadvantaged pupil premium and did not engage with school, and I found a number of things. First, there was a fear of stigma. They felt that they were judged on their current situation, such as being a single mum or being in poverty. They felt discomfort engaging with schools and teachers where they felt they could not communicate on an equal level. They felt a disconnection with school as an institution. Parents felt that the values of secondary school particularly were at odds with their own. They felt that schools were all about targets, where parents wanted to protect their child from harm. This comes across in a frustration with the system that can sometimes feel cold or against families, which is often, and quite understandably, expressed as a negative attitude to education.

David Simmonds: I am very sorry, but time is super tight. Ian has a very quick question. Then we have Ed, Katie and Miriam for a last word before we move on to the next section. You will get an opportunity to raise your points, do not worry.

- Q213 **Ian Mearns:** Matt was talking about the withdrawal of the private sector, as well as state organisations and charities, from particular neighbourhoods, and that is simply down to one thing. In those locations the community and the individuals in the community have also had a significant drop in disposable income. The private sector withdraws because nobody is spending money in their establishments, pubs, shops and so on. It is not rocket science, but you get that sort of collapse when what used to be a relatively well-qualified or semi-qualified and relatively



HOUSE OF COMMONS

well-paid population becomes a low-paid or non-paid population in former industrial areas.

Edward Davies: There were quite a few points raised there. I will try to cover them very briefly. On the wider issue, I am going to keep banging the family stability drum. For example, in Indian families, even Indian kids on free school meals do better than average because they have by far the highest rate of marriage, so there is that factor.

On Kim's point about whether austerity is a factor, public services matter, they can really help improve situations, but the situation in family stability has been declining since about the mid-1970s and there is a much broader cultural issue here. A very interesting factor in this is that one of the closest graphs to map the collapse in the marriage rate is the rate of union membership. There is something about individualism and culture that has completely collapsed in society and needs to be addressed.

The last thing is whether we know enough to address this. I think we need to know a lot more. We need much better data on the way that family interacts with this sort of thing, but actually we do know enough. We know that the family situation is collapsing and we have perfectly good evidence that it has an enormous impact on education.

Q214 **Chair:** We had the CEO of the Bishop Wilkinson Academy Trust, who said there is often "an engrained attitude by many of the families over generations. They have a disregard for education in many respects". It has been suggested to me by headteachers in my own constituency that it is a generational problem. Do you agree with that? How would you reverse it, if that is the case?

Suzanne Wilson: I think that kind of language is very damaging in building relationships between home and school. I understand that teachers are on the frontline. I am a pupil premium governor at a secondary school, but making assumptions that people have negative attitudes is quite shortsighted and will only build up the barriers that parents feel. They already feel judged and if they hear someone saying, "Oh well, you've got a bad attitude to education," I can't see how that can help build positive and co-operative relationships in education.

Edward Davies: If people have negative attitudes to education, it is largely because there is something else going on in their lives. They have something else to worry about.

Chair: What is being talked about is that it goes through the generations from one generation to the next.

Edward Davies: I am going to keep banging this drum. The instability of home life tends to map that generational shift as well, that if you have experienced that as a child you are more likely to experience it as an adult. Often that is a chaotic home life so that, "School is one thing too much for me," and it will go through the generations.



Katie Sullivan: This is going back to the point discussed earlier that poverty influences how young people perform at school. Austerity has definitely been a catalyst for this and when you have challenges in the home. We have a lot of young people whose parents work very long hours, with multiple jobs. They are not around and they are not able to provide support for their children. Then young people often become disenfranchised from the home and end up getting involved in other things, with friendship groups where they can find comfort. I think that influences some of the challenges in the school environment.

Matt Leach: The Committee has already taken evidence from the Social Mobility Commissioner, who published a very interesting report last year on the impact of extracurricular activity on long-term educational outcomes and the extent to which one of the greatest predictors of going on to university is whether you have access to the sort of out-of-school experiences that build friendship networks, socialise you, build your softer skills. The hard truth is that there is not a lot of that about in the communities we are talking about.

In the home you have high levels of single-parent households, out-of-work households. Those who have jobs often have to travel out of the area and are working in elementary jobs that do not provide much in the way of aspiration. There is a question around role modelling, aspiration and potential achievement for children in those areas and whether we are giving them the tools to achieve that.

Q215 **Tom Hunt:** How important is it for disadvantaged white pupils' educational outcomes that their parents and families have access to support to help them engage in their children's learning? I am particularly interested in the role that family hubs can play here. In a previous session they were described as existing in a non-threatening way, that they are more seamless in the way they interact with parents. What are your thoughts on that?

Miriam Jordan Keane: It is a very interesting question. I should say that we focus on the young people themselves. Obviously the whole family background is incredibly important, but when you can get to the young person at that point of inflection, 16, 17, we can help them build a lot of the things that have been discussed this morning, the kind of confidence, resilience, friendship groups and skills that allow them to perform better than they would otherwise. We focus massively on disadvantaged young people. The left-behind white working class boys disproportionately engage with us. The young white working class people who are on free school meals engage with us disproportionately, as do members of the BAME community. Finding ways to get young people involved in extracurricular things can really help, and can help them with the tricky situations at home too.

Katie Sullivan: I see support and engagement with families as a triangle, being the family, school and youth organisations. We need to build capacity in that triangle to adequately support and engage parents.



Youth organisations like Regenerate are often in a unique situation where parents and young children are not engaging with the school. Maybe there is a breakdown at home, but we are engaging with them. Youth organisations are quite often dismissed as not holding value in that triangle of support. I have heard youth organisations described as people playing a bit of table tennis. No, it is helping to bring those two blocks together and build capacity within it to ensure no young people are falling through the cracks, and it is about communication within that.

Suzanne Wilson: As a trustee of two community organisations that work with young people, I totally agree with Katie. On supporting families, using the results of my research I developed a brief solution-focused coaching programme for parents with families who were just going up to year 7 and were not engaging well, and these were all pupil premium. It was a small sample, but data shows that participation in this programme improved attendance when compared with other pupil premium students. I found that getting children into school is the key thing. That is where we can get children exposed to the positive role models that we have been talking about.

Follow-up interviews with parents, teachers and those who delivered the projects showed that the key ingredient for success was the relationship that was built between the coach and the parent. Taking the time to listen to parents' hopes, fears, constraints and what they were already doing to help their children helped to build the parents' confidence and understanding of the role they might have to make a difference in their children's education. I stress caution when talking about promoting parenting programmes because that implies the fault is with the parent. As we have been saying, a more collaborative approach where schools, families and parents can work together is a much more effective direction to take.

Q216 Jonathan Gullis: Suzanne is hitting the nail on the head yet again, and all the panellists are, about the importance of not stigmatising parents. As my colleagues on the Committee know—sorry for repeating it weekly—I used to be a schoolteacher and I was head of year in white, working-class, deprived areas of London and Birmingham. The biggest challenge we had was to build relationships by empathising with the parents. Hilary Cottam's *Radical Help* book has opened my eyes to what needs to happen in the welfare system, and I think we are all repeating the same messages here about breaking down barriers.

How important is the new lifetime skills guarantee that has been announced by the Government—where any adult will be able to gain a level 3 qualification—going to be to try to engage parents or carers in these white, working-class, disadvantaged communities, getting them into the school building to access learning and educational opportunities to empower themselves, but also potentially to build some self-esteem that may have, sadly, been trampled on? Ian has correctly aligned that to areas where, over the years, they have seen a decline in the traditional



industry or jobs, like Stoke-on-Trent and Gateshead.

Suzanne Wilson: There was a workbook in the project I developed and parents took that home and did it with their children. It was about more metacognitive strategies they could use, but they loved that. They loved having the opportunity to do something with their children on an equal playing field. My interviews showed that a lot of parents dreaded their children coming home with their secondary school homework because they felt humiliated that they could not answer. We should lay the foundations where schools and community places are not perceived as threatening and it can be thought of as a joint effort between families.

Q217 **Christian Wakeford:** Unfortunately this is another question for Suzanne. I promise we are not picking on you. You talked about the collaborative approach between schools, organisations and parents, and I completely agree. To what extent do you think we need to bring back an interventional approach much earlier in a child's life, trying to engage at early years ideally, if not primary school at the absolute latest? There is already a barrier when trying to intervene at secondary school where there is potentially a fear of not being able to do homework, as you said. To what extent do we need to intervene at a much earlier level?

Suzanne Wilson: Primary schools are key institutions. They are embedded in the communities where parents live, so there is already an advantage there. With the parents I interviewed, in a nutshell, the doors were open at primary school and they were closed at secondary school. You can build informal relationships with teachers at primary school. For the parents, the most important thing was having that conversation when you are picking up your child from school. You do not have all the systemic barriers of booking an appointment with a teacher. I know a lot of secondary schools are trying to get over that with the use of digital technology, WhatsApp and things like that, but the relationship is key. The earlier we can form that the better. It is very important.

Edward Davies: I would even go a step further and say that education needs to think outside education about how early it can go. If you want the home environment to be set right in our poorest communities, the bottom 30%, half of children starting primary school have already seen their parents separate. It is going right back to perinatal care, to saying are we engaging dads at day one. We have seen during coronavirus that dads have been pushed out of hospitals screaming; they are not allowed to go to births and are seen as an additional extra. They are never referred to as dads; they are referred to as partners. The reality is that the vast majority of family breakdowns in our poorest communities—it is a generalisation—is dad leaving the family home in the first five years of a child's life. Engaging dads on day one will be absolutely crucial.

To pick up on your family hub point, the best family hubs do this. Ed Vainker presented to a previous evidence session. His family hub at Reach Feltham does this. They bring in parents before the children are in the school so that they are familiar with the school and they are likely to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

attend the school. They show them what is available, what support and parenting classes are available. It is all about getting in as early as possible, thinking beyond education, but also how you link education to health and welfare and all these different areas, which family hubs can do and do well.

Q218 Tom Hunt: The Chair has already touched on the issue of attitudes towards education in the community that we are discussing today. I know some panellists may find that unhelpful, but is there is a point that families who have been here for generations, who have a potentially entrenched attitude that the education system has not really worked for them, have come not to see it as a platform for advancement, whereas families from different ethnic communities who may not have been here for generations have a slightly different view of education and see it more as a positive platform? Is that a reasonable assessment?

Also a point to Edward and Matt about social community infrastructure. In a previous session a panellist said that one of the benefits that other ethnic groups have is the role of not just the extended family networks, but also things like the local mosque and temple and the role they play in the community. That often is not the case in white underprivileged communities. What are your thoughts on that?

Edward Davies: On your last point about the wider family and the wider social network, social capital is everything. If you go to the local mosque, you will meet people from all walks of life, from poor to rich, working in business, completely unemployed, and the same is true of churches, which are open to everyone as well. If you go to your local church, you will meet everyone from people attending food banks to people who run businesses. I mentioned the family decline coinciding with the union decline, and that has coincided with the faith community decline as well. Some of the social capital things in our communities have declined. Talking about place-based stuff and some of the community things, that is a very important thing to replace. It is not about saying we have to re-evangelise the whole country. It is about saying that we have lost a huge amount of social capital in those groups, but how can we refind that?

Tom Hunt: Mr Gullis would like to make an intervention, and then I will quickly move to Suzanne.

Chair: A brief point, Jonathan.

Q219 Jonathan Gullis: I will do. I have not been called Mr Gullis since December last year. Katie, on the school building, how do you see us building a closer relationship between the third sector and schools to help produce alternative family hubs within the school sphere?

Katie Sullivan: For that to happen, we need a role for somebody to do it. For example, Regenerate engages with the local schools and in doing that we are building community systems and providing mentoring for young people to go to at school, to attend our youth clubs. We have identified—*[Inaudible]*—to collect from our youth centre. We are building



those connections, but it is incredibly hard because schools have a lack of time and lack of resource, it is not top of their priorities, but it is something that has been a real challenge that is accessible. I think having somebody whose sole role is to build the connections between the school, the local council and an organisation and to manage that process effectively would mean it would happen a lot easier.

Matt Leach: I want to come back to the point about social infrastructure that Edward highlighted, the difference between particularly inner-urban areas where there is a lot of social infrastructure, and it is not just places of worship. The density of people in inner-urban areas means there is lots of stuff you can go to and participate in. The experience of life in the estates on the periphery—

Chair: Matt, I do not want to cut you off, but we are going to talk a lot about this specific area, so I would rather save you for that because there is quite a lot of stuff that we want to ask you.

Suzanne Wilson: We were talking about the generational issues with white working class communities compared to BAME communities. I think the challenge for the communities that we are talking about is the impact of intergenerational underinvestment. Where I live used to be a thriving mining community. There were pubs, there was a very strong sense of community, a sense of belonging. My current research shows that we still have that strong sense of belonging within communities. We have very strong bonding social capital, but very poor bridging social capital. Communities feel very let down and hence are reluctant to engage. I totally agree with Katie. Getting someone to build those relationships within the community is key, to give time, which unfortunately is often the most expensive commodity.

Q220 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have a quick question to pick up on something that Suzanne said about the ability of parents to help with homework. We know that if parents have the capacity to do the homework and the time to spend with the child, essentially they are providing one-to-one tuition, which we know from other inquiries is very helpful. Have you seen any work that has identified children who may have these difficulties because of their parents' prior educational attainment and anything that has worked to try to improve it?

Suzanne Wilson: There is a lot of evidence about the impact of what some academics call educational socialisation, which is essentially the time that one invests in doing homework and things like that with children. I have already discussed the barriers that some parents perceive in that. But what I found with my research was that parents were doing loads of good things, but they did not have the confidence to apply it to the children's education. If little Tommy did very poorly at a football match, Mum felt that she had the skills and ability to support him. She could still use those strategies with maths homework. She does not need to have a degree in maths to help him with the bolts of the



thing, but she can provide the support. We found that finding the skills and building on the capacity that parents already have is most helpful.

Q221 Tom Hunt: We are running out of questions for this particular session. We have a little more time so I am going to try to combine the final two questions. How important is it for schools and other organisations such as youth groups to form strong relationships with disadvantaged white families to build trust and engagement in education? What steps can the Department for Education take to support schools in building these relationships?

I would like to make a quick point in addition, which is that in the constituency I represent some of the best youth community groups have been bottom-up groups that have been formed from the community. There is one area of town where we have had lots of antisocial behaviour problems and one tragedy took place about a year and a half ago. The father of the individual who lost his life has set up a community youth organisation, and the close-knit community has really bought into it. It has over 100 young people attending, and it is seen as being completely unthreatening. It is from the community. What are your views on that?

Katie Sullivan: One of the most important things is building trusting relationships because out of them you can provide opportunities and experiences to broaden young people's horizons. It is an educational process, essentially, and it is a key way that we can provide young people who may not necessarily like or get involved in the school system with alternative means of engaging with opportunities to develop their soft skills, which are not seen as valued in our education system today. It is very important, and it is important because those trusting relationships are what young people feel they can always come back to. We have young people who we engage with from the age 11. We do not see them for a while and they disengage, but they will still come back at 16 and ask for help with writing their CV. It is building the pillars in a community and building relationships that young people know they can rely on.

Q222 Tom Hunt: This particular club is called Reflections Youth Club, and it is very much a deprived part of town where we have had issues of county lines and so on. It has provided a safe space for young people, who may have been at risk of being caught up in some of these things. They talk to other adults, share any concerns they have. Of course the problem is that it has not been able to operate during Covid, so the sad thing is a lot of the progress they have made could be undone if we are not careful. Do you have a point you would like to make on that?

Katie Sullivan: I do.

Chair: Very briefly, please, Katie.

Katie Sullivan: What you say about a safe space is fundamental. That is exactly what it is, it is a safe space for young people to provide emotional support, social support and relational support. It is also often a good space for young people to relate to one another in places where



sometimes that can be quite difficult. There is talk about county lines. Youth organisations provide common ground for a lot of young people to relate to each other and to explore things that may be challenging.

Miriam Jordan Keane: It is critical to make the point again about safe spaces. One of the things we find from our impact assessments is that when you bring young people together and create that safe space for them, they bring that back into their local communities and can also build communities outside of their local communities and build bridges. That is incredible for social mobility and social cohesion. We must not forget with Covid how young people have been able, where possible, to create communities in a space where they feel very comfortable, the digital space. We work to encourage and keep connected there.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to bring in Fleur to chair this section. The good news, Matt, is that a lot of this will be you and Miriam. It is an important session on NCS and community social capital.

Q223 **Fleur Anderson:** I have a few questions. First, Regenerate is in my constituency in Roehampton. It is fantastic to see you here, Katie, and great to hear from frontline youth workers on the Education Select Committee, it is so important. Thank you for outlining that triangle, which was a very helpful way of explaining how you see it.

This is a question for Miriam, to bring you back in, and for Katie specifically. Briefly outline, if you could, the key benefits of initiatives like the National Citizen Service and Regenerate UK's projects for disadvantaged white people? What are the top three key benefits? How do you evaluate these in terms of educational outcomes? Are you able to do that? What kind of information do you have to see the educational impacts of your projects?

Miriam Jordan Keane: The three key benefits of NCS, which we keep hearing time and time again, is young people building confidence and resilience, particularly those young people from the more disadvantaged parts of society who frequently come on the programme with very low levels of confidence and are not necessarily good at social interaction. Through the activities they do on the programme, through the skills that they do not learn in the classroom, they develop that resilience and confidence. When they go back into their communities to do their social action and doing good, they bring that confidence into the activities they do and they bring it back into their homes. That has an impact on the other siblings and on the parents. We get so much feedback from parents and guardians, and almost every one begins with, "I cannot believe how much more confidence my young person has having spent that time on the programme." That confidence then helps them to do better in the classroom.

We do impact assessments. We have independent impact assessments from DCMS, and we do our own impact assessments. We see a considerably higher proportion of young people, particularly those from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

disadvantaged backgrounds, going into further education, going into higher education, going into apprenticeships and getting opportunities in life that they would not have otherwise had.

Katie Sullivan: I completely agree. It is all about opportunity and it is how we are increasing access to opportunities, because the young people we work with face multiple barriers. It is a class issue primarily. Our role is about increasing access to those opportunities. These opportunities allow young people to realise skills that they may not have realised they had, and in doing so that makes them realise the potential they have. For them to find a real purpose of who they are and what they can achieve offers young people a real sense of direction and hope for the future. That supports educational attainment simply because of goal setting, people are able to set goals and are able to see that skills they can learn right now can have an impact on their future.

Specifically in terms of engagement in education, youth organisations are thinking about how we physically engage young people in educational and training opportunities. Through the projects that we put on, we are thinking about how we can develop their awareness of the world of work and industries, how we can help them write their CVs and provide them with experiences that they may not be afforded because of their circumstances. It is providing opportunities and access to those.

Q224 **Fleur Anderson:** I have a follow-up question, which is also double-headed for both of you. Again, briefly as we have other things to come on to. What are your specific challenges with engaging disadvantaged young white people in your programmes? Are there any specific barriers that you have for white working class in engaging? Following on from that, how would you recommend that we can best work with schools? You have already talked, Katie, about having a dedicated person in a school. Are there ways it works best to work with schools and provide this engagement specifically for white working class?

Miriam Jordan Keane: In the 10 years since we have been funded we have been addressing the barriers. We have worked hard to reduce the barriers to entry for young people. We are keeping the cost very low; the cost of our programme is £50. For young people on free school meals, for young people who are in care and for young people who have special needs, we reduce that down through a bursary to £10 so that it is accessible. We have an inclusion fund that allows them to travel, to have food, to have accommodation, to be looked after while they are on the programme. We do all the things we can to make it accessible to everyone.

The biggest opportunity we unlocked is delivering a national programme with locally tailored delivery. We work with a network of over 100 local providers so we can target by geography, so in those rural areas—where there are lower numbers of young people, higher levels of isolation and so on, social isolation and lower social mixing—we can reach those people through our local providers. We work with over 150 local authority



groups. We have worked across the 12 opportunity areas. This autumn we piloted a series of digitally delivered programmes. We got 70 young people from different areas, which was particularly beneficial in those most disadvantaged rural communities. The more that you are working with the grassroots, with the local communities, with the local youth clubs and with the football clubs, as I mentioned earlier, the easier it is to overcome the barriers because we are part of where the young people feel is familiar, where their families are and where their homes are.

Katie Sullivan: My response is not unique to the white working class; I am referring to working class young people in general. One key thing is the mistrust of services, which is built out of poverty. Drawing on some of the things we were talking of earlier about challenges at home and how that displays at school, often young people are alienated from the school system and are labelled. This is particularly something for white working class people, who feel that they may have to conform in order to fit into what it looks like to be the bright middle class student. Often that might lead to exclusions or alternative forms of education, which serves to alienate young people.

When that happens, it builds mistrust in services and authority figures as a whole. That is definitely something we have experienced in the young people that attend our sessions. They are out of school, we lose contact and it is very hard to re-engage them. One of the key recommendations is how we can prevent that alienation in the school system and also, if it does happen, how we can utilise the community groups to ensure those young people are supported effectively.

Q225 **Fleur Anderson:** What is your feeling about the support for groups like yours so they can build that trust and work together? What are the biggest threats for you as an organisation in being able to carry on?

Chair: In a nutshell, please, Katie.

Katie Sullivan: Can I clarify what you mean, support from who?

Fleur Anderson: Support to Regenerate. Do you have enough support to carry on, or do you feel the future of youth services like yours is under threat? What are the biggest problems you face as an organisation in being able to provide those services?

Katie Sullivan: Youth provision has seen a massive decline. I live in Roehampton and I am literally next to two youth clubs that have been shut down in the past 10 years. Regenerate has a lot of support and has been in the community for a long time, but we are an exception and more needs to be done.

Edward Davies: A couple of important points have been mentioned. The first one is on role modelling. The power of role models in our youth services is absolutely huge, it is fundamentally relational. It comes back to some of the family stuff. You get a lot of young guys who do not have good male role models, particularly thinking of those deprived white



HOUSE OF COMMONS

communities. I happen to know Regenerate a bit, and I know the founder is one of the most fantastic, charismatic people in the world. It is no coincidence that that is why it is successful. Likewise, I think of my own boss, who used to run a very similar organisation and is a charismatic, gregarious person. Kids are drawn to that. You also see the flipside of that. We did a drug dealer roundtable recently, and kids are drawn to the drug dealers on their estates because they are the big, outgoing characters with money. Therefore having good role models is absolutely key.

The second thing I would say on sustainability, closures and things like that, is that the funding and the lives of youth centres goes up and down and up and down. Something we have been looking at very closely at the CSJ recently is whether we can put in some kind of youth infrastructure that says, "Do we have the train track to get the trains to run on?" We have been working with OnSide Youth Zones, which is a great big fancy "jazz hands" thing. They are fantastic to look at, and there is a dozen of them around the country. They have climbing walls, football pitches and all kinds of things. They are not the answer, but they are the place to host the relationships that can be the answer. We have been looking at whether you can build an endowment, put that in place and have 100 of these around the country, funded in perpetuity, where places like Regenerate know they can meet and places like the local football club know they can meet, whether there is something we can do around that to give them a bit more sustainability.

Q226 Kim Johnson: It was suggested this morning that NCS attracts higher levels and numbers of young black working class people in comparison to white working class. Does your data support that statement, and can you tell us whether there is any regional variation in terms of the take-up?

Miriam Jordan Keane: I am happy to do so. We have traditionally over-indexed against the BAME community, and we have evidence of that. We also have evidence that we are, particularly in recent years, over-indexing highly for white working class young people. That is particularly as we have set up two divisional hubs, one in the north-east of the country and one in the south-west, where there are high populations of white working class people and children on free school meals. Yes, we absolutely are seeing that, across the board, our participation tends to be more disadvantaged young people, a much higher percentage of young people who are given free school meals. Therefore I think it is clear that we have evidence and data to support that fact.

We deliberately want to reach out to those young people who are more marginalised, who are more disadvantaged. In order to deliver against our vision of social cohesion and a society where everyone feels at home, we believe that everybody has to have access to the same kind of opportunity. For those people who, through circumstance, are not getting the same opportunities as the better-off young people, it is a very important part of what we do and why we do it.



Ian Mearns: Rob was going to ask you whether it would be possible or effective to target support at youth and outreach organisations that specifically engage with disadvantaged white pupils. Is there any way we can do that?

Chair: Thank you, I think my sound has come back.

Ian Mearns: Fantastic.

Q227 **Chair:** Thank you, I do not know why it just vanished. Matt, you have done an incredible amount of work in terms of community and social capital. To start and set the context, can you explain what you mean by social capital and community needs? Then I want to come to the different measures that you are focusing on and whether you specifically looked at cold spots where community assets are low and whether those areas are predominately where we have white working class or disadvantaged boys and girls.

Matt Leach: The Big Local community is what we were founded to deliver, and it is one that involves putting money directly in the hands of communities with the idea that, by trusting communities to make decisions on where funds are applied, you build their capacity and confidence and you help them build their own local organisations to make a difference. If you look at, say, Jonathan's constituency, you will see the Big Local in Stoke North, Chell Heath, Fegg Hayes. There is also the Gateshead Big Local or, indeed, the Aberfeldy Big Local. Often these communities, which were selected back in 2010-12, were places where there was not an awful lot going on, where there were not community groups in place and where they had not had their fair share of funding because, frankly, there was not anybody applying for it.

The real insight we got over the last eight years of working with these communities is that the communities where it is hardest to rebuild civic capital to create these community-based organisations working with young people and others are those where the starting point is that there is not much there to work with, where there are not the places to meet and where the community groups have perhaps fallen apart or they got old and disbanded. Often these are also places that have perhaps become a bit disconnected and inward-looking. When the Committee was talking earlier about the need for role models, these are communities where the jobs have moved away and you are talking about perhaps 50 jobs per 100 of the working population as opposed to 80 in most other places. They have both lost the stabilising effect of rich civic life and have also lost a lot of connection to the sorts of resources that you can get from the outside world.

In social capital terms, if you look at Robert Putnam's definition, it is a combination of bonding capital—the stuff that brings communities together when they meet, when they build friendship bonds, when they build trust—and the bridging capital, the ability to bring in resources from the outside. The challenge in a lot of these areas is that it is not enough simply to come in and drop in help from outside, because often these are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

places that are naturally quite distrusting of external intervention. They do not want the council to come and sort them out because, quite often, they feel they have been let down by all sorts of different parts of the state. The challenge is to try to build that resourcefulness and that capacity within the community itself.

Going back to the point that Edward was making earlier, the importance of strong civic life, of strong social capital, is its stabilising effect across the whole community. Whether that is on personal relationships between households or indeed within households, strong civic capital makes for much more successful communities and also provides the building blocks for the sorts of interventions that Katie and Suzanne have been talking about.

Before lockdown I visited an estate in Birmingham and met a parent who was working incredibly hard to get a local youth club going and to make it work in not particularly great surroundings. She pointed at the five or six locations on her estate where there had been youth facilities when she was growing up. She described them as a place of safety. She grew up in a difficult household, and it was a place where you could go and seek stability, where you could find role models, where you could connect to sources of help that perhaps were not there in your community.

You can see within our Big Local areas that a lot of communities, when they are given the money to apply to making their areas better, will apply it to trying to provide some of the stuff that appears to have disappeared or degraded over a number of decades. It is not about the last decade's austerity; there has been a long period of decline in this.

Q228 Chair: Matt, when you say you want to, "capture different measures from the Index of Multiple Deprivation, focusing on civic assets, connectedness and community engagement" I think that is a brilliant idea, but what does it mean in practice? What do you define as civic assets? Do you mean lots of faith groups or Scout groups? What does it mean?

Matt Leach: We took the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which is great at looking at deprivation, but does not really deal with these issues. We partnered with OCSI, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion, which is the organisation that built the IMD for Government and got them to scrape a lot of national data that would help us explore this social capital issue. We mapped every meeting place in the country—every village hall, every community centre, every pub, every leisure centre—and created a domain around the places to meet.

We then created a domain around connected communities—we mapped every charity, every community organisation and all the small grants going out of the lottery—to create a heat map of where communities appear to be active. Then we also looked at connectivity measures. We found that you could create an index that pretty neatly mapped the country in terms of civic assets, in terms of social capital.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Where it was most interesting was where you overlaid it on top of deprivation. When you overlay a map of social capital and social infrastructure on top of deprivation and you take the worst 10% of each, you find that where they overlap you identify probably 200 to 250 communities, mostly peripheral estates on the edge of northern towns—and there are a few coastal communities, I guess Mablethorpe, which is north of Ipswich, and places on the edge of Stoke and Birmingham in the Midlands—where communities seemed to be both poor and also lacked those civil assets to make a difference themselves.

We started off looking for deprivation and lack of social capital, but when you dig under that and look at these places you find that these are places where they also score particularly low on a bunch of other social outcomes. Educational performance is significantly worse in these communities that are both poor and lack social assets, which lack the social stability that brings. You are looking at 27% of children entering university compared to 33% in the average worst 10% of deprived neighbourhoods across the country and 40% across England. You are looking at significantly more young people aged 16 to 24 with no qualifications.

We are not an education charity, we are a social capital charity as much as anything else. We started looking for where deprivation and social infrastructure had declined. We ended up finding a bunch of peripheral places that are predominately the white working class places, 88% of the population is white, where educational performance and, indeed, health outcomes and employment outcomes are all significantly worse than other places in England. A lot of it comes down to that social stability point. You need social stability, and internally sourced social stability, to achieve change in the long term.

Q229 Chair: Have you found areas where there are low levels of economic capital, high deprivation, but high levels of social capital? If so, is the performance of disadvantaged students, white working class boys and girls, better in those areas where, even though there is no prosperity, they have a lot of community assets?

Matt Leach: What we have explored in data terms is the negative. If you go chasing places with low levels of social capital and social infrastructure, you find places where educational outcomes are definitely worse. That does not mean to say there are not places where there is high poverty but high levels of social capital. In lots of inner-city areas, particularly where there is quite a lot of social infrastructure, you can find that. London's educational performance is perhaps a case in point.

What we see in some of our more deprived communities, where we put money in the hands of local people to get them to deliver solutions, is that local people often know what they want to achieve. They will deploy that money themselves to try to make a difference to outcomes for their children. For example, in the Arches area of Chatham, which is a particularly poor community out on the Medway—Tracey Crouch's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

constituency—you will find they prioritised a programme called Fit and Fed. They encourage children to come to get fed because getting fed properly is an issue in those communities. Once they have them through the door, the real focus is on socialisation and providing a place of security for those children.

They found that, for the children who are coming into that activity, they are seeing a decrease in exclusions, a decrease in the number of kids who might be classified as troublesome. That is because they are bringing these kids into a stable and safe environment, teaching them soft skills that are incredibly important and probably teaching them trust as well. Jonathan was talking earlier about his experience of teaching in communities like this. The issue of trust within communities—

Q230 Chair: Sorry to interrupt, I have a lot of colleagues who want to come in and this is such an important part of the evidence. The reason I was asking my question is that if you have places with high levels of social capital, even if economic prosperity is low, you can learn from them and replicate it in places that do not have the social capital and also have economic poverty.

When you say you invest in left-behind neighbourhoods through the Community Wealth Fund, the Town Deals and the Shared Prosperity Fund—I get all that—what does investing in left-behind neighbourhoods mean in terms of building up social capital? You cannot just ask for a church to be built or a faith community or to get more Scout organisations on the ground or whatever it may be.

Matt Leach: That is absolutely right. Investing in social capital and social infrastructure in communities where it has been allowed to degrade is something that takes time. In the communities we have started work in, which have faced particular challenges where there are not many assets—having been in Gateshead, there is an amazing guy, Lawrence O'Halloran, who has worked incredibly hard as an asset in his community to turn things around—but not every community has a Lawrence O'Halloran. Where communities are low on skills and low on confidence, you can be talking about a five, seven or 10-year journey to build community organisations, to give them skills to help them gain confidence to make a difference. That is the experience that the Big Local programme has had of working with communities.

We do not judge or fund projects. We say to communities, “We will support you to build the capacity to decide what you want to deliver for yourself, using money that is under your control so you are not reliant on external agencies coming in and delivering to you.” That is a huge ask. One of the challenges with the very welcome levelling-up fund and Shared Prosperity Funds is that they are relatively short term, it is money over the course of the Parliament, and often it is money that is being deployed at a local authority level or at a functional economic area level when the challenge we are talking about here is often at a neighbourhood level. We are talking about neighbourhoods that need support.



That is one of the reasons the All-Party Parliamentary Group for “Left Behind” Neighbourhoods has been particularly looking at the case for building very long-term funding settlements that help these communities rebuild themselves, in some cases from scratch. That probably requires a 10 or 20-year commitment to make a difference, not simply a five-year short-term relief programme to deal with the symptoms.

Suzanne Wilson: At the Centre for Citizenship and Community, where I am based at UCLan at the moment, we have a connected communities approach—Matt was talking about connected communities—and through that we work with communities to do their own community research to better understand their needs. That is stage 1. Stage 2 is picking the research to develop and coproduce interventions where the community works with the local authorities and local organisations, but that first part is so important in engaging communities. I have been doing that with four communities in Cumbria, where I have worked with children from white disadvantaged backgrounds. We found from delivering it through schools and different community groups that just being involved in this research, there were positive impacts on children’s wellbeing, their capacity and their sense of citizenship. At my research centre, we conceptualised that as community capital.

I remember the first time I went into one classroom, year 5, so about 10 years old, one little girl stood up and said, “What is the point of this? We are not going to make a difference.” After they had done the research and worked with the local authority to develop a children’s charter, which is now policy, she stood up again and said, “Can I ring my mum? I am so excited.” That is important.

When I did my follow-up focus group, the same little girl was a little bit angry with me because she cared about the community. We were going in and doing all this exciting research, talking to police and housing associations, but when that went away, so did that aspiration.

Incremental and longitudinal are important as well, which again is less appealing because it is more expensive and less glamorous, but to get that sustainable impact, where children believe they have a stake in their community, it is worth trying for. We need to invest in longer-term projects.

Katie Sullivan: I was also going to touch on that point about building capacity in communities. I know from my own experience in Roehampton a few years ago, where I was involved in a community capacity-building project, where an individual was specifically hired to build capacity in Roehampton to do exactly what we are talking about. That was helpful. I was involved as a resident and as an employee of a youth organisation, and I was involved in the recruitment process for this individual and again in identifying the need. I believe we have seen some good impacts from that. Fleur, obviously you will know about the Roehampton



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Response Network. In Covid a network was created, the community finding their own solutions.

Chair: I would like to bring in a few colleagues. Along with all the evidence, this is an incredibly important part of the evidence. Can I bring in Jonathan Gullis first? I ask all colleagues to be as concise as possible.

Q231 **Jonathan Gullis:** I feel like we are living through Hilary Cottam's *Radical Help* here when we talk about empowering communities. You know you are on to something when you have Fleur and I both nodding along at the same time, and I am sure Fleur won't mind. We are putting party politics aside. It is quite obvious that the existing hierarchical structures simply do not end up delivering the way they should and empowering and engaging communities. Giving them the assets and the tools to build their way out is the common-sense approach. I am sick of talking about it; I hope we start seeing it delivered on a much wider scale from Westminster.

We have talked a lot about social infrastructure and social capital. It is good to hear the panel's opinion. Do we all agree that it is not just physical buildings that make a difference and that having mentoring programmes, role models in the community, investment in tutoring opportunities are as important as physical structures?

Matt Leach: Yes, it is not about buildings. Buildings are clearly important. If you do not have places to meet, it is incredibly hard to do anything. Having places to meet that are accessible to the community is important as well. There are some challenges around some of the models for the marketisation of provision of community centres where they get filled out with Zumba when what is needed is to fill them out with activities that do not generate as much wealth, but might generate significant social returns.

There needs to be a bit of a look at how we make best use of them, but to make best use of buildings, you need community organisations and you need community organisations capable of reaching people, being trusted by them and bringing them back through the doors. In communities that have lost that capacity and those networks, and where trust is low, it takes time to rebuild, but Jonathan is absolutely right. You need more than just bricks and mortar. It is about the social fabric of the place.

Q232 **Kim Johnson:** One of the wards in Liverpool received the Big Local funding. Has any kind of longitudinal study been undertaken on whether there have been any lessons learned that you could share with us? Will any further funding be made available to other communities?

Matt Leach: In fact, there are three significant evaluations, one by the Third Sector Research Centre running alongside the programme for its entire duration, looking at learning to be gained from it. In one that we particularly commissioned over the period of the Covid response, we have been looking at communities both with our money and without our



HOUSE OF COMMONS

money in left-behind areas over the last year. That might be relevant to the last part of this discussion. Learning is about where you start from and how you support communities to build capacity themselves. Parachuted solutions do not work if you want to achieve long-term change. That is our particular learning.

On funding, we were founded in 2012 to deliver £1 million of support to each of 150 neighbourhoods that at the time were seen to have missed out. Looking at them now, you can easily see that there might be 200 to 300 other places that could do with support. It is very much a matter for the Government. The lottery money will be spent by 2026 and there simply is no further commitment of funds at this stage.

Q233 Tom Hunt: I completely agree with what Matt is saying about the approach by neighbourhood. It is strange that the Towns Fund came up because one of the things I specifically called for is in a deprived part of Ipswich where there is a BMX track, which is unique in bringing young people together, and is one of the things that I am trying to fund through that Towns Fund.

I want to ask a question about the Holiday Activities and Food Programme. There was also one of those in Ipswich, but it has been rolled out across the country now. It cost about £220 million. I visited one of those programmes in Ipswich and what is interesting is that it has brought the community together. A lot of the young adults volunteering were from the local community as well. I thought that was quite interesting in terms of building social capital. What do you think about that programme and its potential?

Edward Davies: Coming back on the point of building capital in areas where there basically isn't any to start with and how important neighbourhoods are, we did a year's study looking particularly at white working class areas: Clacton-on-Sea, the Rhondda Valley and Birkenhead, where they were very low on the indices of multiple deprivation, with quite high white working class residents. The thing we found was that when you go to these places, there are assets, but they are never the assets that Governments recognise.

In the Rhondda Valley the thing we found was Mary's sweet shop. Mary does work experience for kids. She has computers where you can work on your IT skills, but she is fundamentally a sweet shop. She is not somewhere that Government would naturally fund. Likewise in Essex, we found a brilliant charity called Lads Need Dads. For this hearing, they are fantastic. They work with kids who are about to fall out of school, at risk of exclusion and things like that, and they just give them male role models. It is small groups like that, at almost neighbourhood level, very local. The question for Government becomes how much risk you can stomach, because funding Mary's sweet shop to do this stuff is not within the Government model. There is a very big question for politicians to say, "We are going to step out, we are going to totally devolve a lot of this



HOUSE OF COMMONS

finance to a neighbourhood level and take our hands off it. We are going to take that risk." That is the big question for politicians.

Q234 **Chair:** Matt, do you agree with that approach when you talk about investing in community assets?

Matt Leach: Yes. Across most big local areas, the standard of accountability to which local people hold themselves when they are accountable to their neighbours for making a difference to their lives is astonishing and humbling. The extent to which local people, when they are given responsibility, absolutely look to get value for money and to extract as much as they can, is astonishing. It is often the public sector that says, "You cannot trust local communities because where is the accountability?" but when you look at the list of public sector failures, you wonder whether the right questions are being asked.

One of the challenges we have as an organisation at times is encouraging local communities to take a few more risks because often in poorer communities the idea of taking risk is quite alien, because you don't do that in your personal life. It is not about wasting the money. Very rarely do you find the money is wasted.

Chair: When all is said, if something goes wrong, the national newspapers say, "Scandal in local charity from Government money" and so on.

Suzanne Wilson: Going back to what Jonathan was saying about the buildings, one of the community groups I worked with, Girls' Gang, took great measures to ensure that it was a physical and symbolic safe space. We talked about safe spaces before with families, and I would like to bring us back to the whole point of this meeting being about engaging families and getting children involved with things, so it is important that we look at that and think about how we can make schools be perceived as a safe space.

In terms of the mutual aid groups that Tom was talking about, I think this shows a great capacity that already existed within communities and, because it was an emergency situation, many local authorities were able to put systems in place where communities did have power. I welcome the concept of community power sharing in the Kruger report, but we also need to be mindful that, even within these mutual aid groups, there are inequalities in social capital. I am writing a paper about that at the moment.

Q235 **Chair:** Could one of you answer Tom's question about the holiday activities programme?

Edward Davies: It is good. It is a start, and we have to recognise that. Building those relationships in the holidays, particularly in deprived areas, and giving kids things to do is important. I would come back to this original thing that a lot of the reasons that kids need these holiday programmes are not straightforward. They are the root causes of why



HOUSE OF COMMONS

things are going wrong in their lives. A lot of what we are seeing from Government at the moment is plugging holes and filling gaps. That is partly because of this particular year we are in—lots of gaps being created, sticking our finger in the dam there, then sticking our finger in the dam over there—but when you look into what is going on in the lives of most of these people, we are not talking about that stuff.

We are not talking about the breakdown of their families. We are not talking about the alcohol problems their parents are living with at home. We are not talking about the debt that they are trying to repay that sits within or without their welfare payments. These are the kinds of things that, when we get them right, we need to plug the gaps slightly less. I would like to see much more of a long-term focus on these big driving causes of poverty than on some of these small interventions that we make in Government.

Q236 Fleur Anderson: To follow up on what we said earlier about homework clubs and mentoring, are there examples? I used to run a homework club. We identified that, for the community I was running, that was the one. It was not a white working class community; it was a refugee community in Battersea. For them, homework club was the unlocking of their educational achievement throughout, from primary school to secondary school. Are there examples across the country of similar projects? Could the Select Committee have any data to evaluate whether this would be an important recommendation, or to find that it has been tried and does not work—or does not work for that community or anything like that—just to understand that a bit more?

Edward Davies: There is one in your constituency, in Ronald Ross Primary School. There is a homework club that does exactly that kind of thing, and there are little examples like that all over the place.

Fleur Anderson: Yes, there is. I was wondering if there is anything more national that we can put together, rather than just the odd example. That homework club absolutely works the best. It has bridged that gap between home and school, and the direct result is educational achievement.

Q237 Chair: Matt, I would be very grateful if you could send us any more information about your mapping and what you are doing to learn from communities that have high levels of community capital but low levels of economic prosperity. If you could send that to us, that would be valuable, and any other information on the mapping that you have done on top of what you have already sent would be good.

Matt Leach: I would be very happy to do that. I also highly recommend the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for “Left Behind” Neighbourhoods, particularly their first report, which has a lot of very good data in it.

Q238 Apsana Begum: Thank you to all the panel. As a Committee we have been taking a lot of written evidence, which reflects many of the themes



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that have emerged through this discussion about the impact of coronavirus on the white working class community. We have picked up that greater financial hardship may be a factor, the lack of access to learning and also the risk of unemployment. We understand that the pandemic is likely to have a complex impact on disadvantaged white pupils, but how might the pandemic, in your view, particularly affect disadvantaged white families? What effect could this have on educational outcomes specifically for those children?

Edward Davies: A lot of the work we do at the CSJ looks at a whole range of areas in deprivation. What we have noticed is that it has not created new ones, but it has exacerbated the existing ones. In our addiction work we see it accelerated about 40% over lockdown, which is going to have a huge impact on children living with parents with addictions. Likewise, domestic abuse has received a fair amount of publicity. That has gone up a lot. There are a lot of issues like this that are ramping up and that we are going to see more and more of. Unemployment is disproportionately affecting the poorer communities as well. It is not that they are necessarily throwing up new things, but they are exacerbating existing problems in our poorest communities and that is going to need serious addressing.

Going back to the original question around families, the report from Ofsted that came out two weeks ago is very interesting and shows some horrific data about how some children have regressed, have forgotten how to speak or eat and things. But one of the interesting points that has not received much publicity is the idea from Amanda Spielman, who said it was not necessarily all in line with deprivation; a lot of it is down to the support structures in home. That is true even for children in care. The better your relationships are outside of school, the better you will survive the coronavirus.

Some kids have done very well. There is some research saying that some children's mental health has improved during lockdown because their home lives are stable and they have good relationships. Again, it is thinking long term. This will happen again. We have had recessions before. We had one 10 years ago, we had them in the 1990s that were worse, and in the 1980s worse again. This will happen again. It might not be a virus, but it will happen again. The question is what gives children resilience to get through it? The answer from Ofsted is all about the stability of their home relationships because that will be the difference in the mental health, the education and so on for children.

Q239 **Apsana Begum:** Earlier in the session you mentioned specifically the important role of dads in family relationships. From the work you have done, what practical things do you think could be done to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on these children?

Edward Davies: In terms of fathers, again there is short term and long term. We need to have a bit of grace for people at the moment. A lot of this is not about Government, it is about employers. I know that, where



HOUSE OF COMMONS

possible, allowing parents to spend time at home with their children, having that flexibility—I know it is not possible in a lot of jobs—is important. It is thinking about longer term. If you have a father present when a crisis hits, and it will hit, life is just going to be easier for you.

It is putting in place some of those cultural things very early around perinatal care that is saying, “Your role as a dad matters. It fundamentally matters in the life of the child. It matters to their education, it matters to their mental health and it matters to them experiencing homelessness and things like that.” The factors are huge. We can get quite caught up today in, “What can I do now?” and that is important, there is an important part to that, but when this happens again, have we built resilience? That will come through stable family relationships.

Suzanne Wilson: My research during the Covid crisis, which has involved talking to professionals, families and children and young people themselves, has identified the following as the main impacts of Covid in terms of their education. The food and financial hardship has had a massive impact. If we think of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the fundamentals of children’s lives are not being met, so how are they meant to learn? We know about digital exclusion. Early years provision has suffered from lockdown measures, which has a massive impact on the lifelong trajectories of children. Household stress has increased, which will obviously have a massive impact on the whole learning environment. It has been massively reported among marginalised children, particularly those in areas considered left behind.

All these factors, while probably affecting families other than white working class families, will have a detrimental impact on opportunities to learn and thrive. We know all about the primary and secondary effects that have uncovered existing inequalities in society, but let’s remember that before the pandemic 4.2 million children were already experiencing poverty, or to put this another way, 30% of children were estimated to be experiencing poverty and 66% of those were from working households. It has been estimated that another 200,000 will be forced into poverty as a result of this.

In terms of moving forward, we are always talking about the new normal, aren’t we, but are we seeing much evidence of that happening? During the first lockdown we did see evidence of local authorities working collaboratively. It is very easy for us all to go back to old ways of working, but we need to think about how we could all build a therapeutic community around the families.

Katie Sullivan: In reference to the young people we work with, we found the key impacts that Covid had was on young people’s mental health, and that being around anxieties about their education and their future, their ability and confidence within that. Just like you said, it is food poverty and financial hardship. I have spoken to quite a lot of parents in the



provision of community boxes who are just so stressed because they haven't worked since March, they can't afford to pay the bills and they are just struggling to put food on the table. That is a common experience for some of the young people that we are working with.

Regarding what to do about it, in the short term something that a lot of communities have done very well is rallying together, supporting each other and providing their own means and solutions. Long term, we need to be better at that and build capacity in communities, and to be doing it from now and not wait for a crisis to hit before we start having to do that.

Miriam Jordan Keane: I echo what everybody else has said about the impacts on young people, but during this summer of Covid we delivered a programme of social action volunteering, which we called Keep Doing Good, because we wanted to focus on helping young people deal with mental health issues, issues of isolation and loneliness. We have 7,000 young people connecting with their local communities. We got nearly 200,000 hours of volunteering. One in five of these young people was on free school meals, and 9% of them had special educational needs. As a result of doing these things in their local community, feeling necessary and feeling engaged, despite the isolation issues and the lockdown, we learned that nine out of 10 developed skills they will find useful in the future, that they felt positive about their future prospects, that they made new friends, which gave them more confidence and they felt capable of more than they possibly realised.

While I completely echo and understand what other witnesses have said about the impact of Covid on our young people, where we can get them to feel they have an important role to play in the rebuilding of communities that gives them a real sense of belonging and a real sense of having an important role to play.

Q240 **Apsana Begum:** How is that achieved, Miriam? What do you think could be done to mitigate that impact? What kind of things allow young people to rebuild?

Miriam Jordan Keane: It is a very interesting question. We have been focusing quite a lot on what we can do in this space. What really helps them is that sense of coming together with others who are different, people from different backgrounds, because we are completely passionate about crossing divides, building bridges both within and across communities. I think there was a sense during Covid particularly that you are very alone in the feelings that you are having. It is that sense of recognising that you are not on your own, that others are feeling the same way and that working together, even adhering to all the social-distancing guidelines and so on, you can still come together and make a difference. We have seen young people go out and work, for instance, in charity shops in high streets once the first lockdown lifted, and they did that to protect older people who are more vulnerable to the disease and the pandemic. What we found from those young people is that their sense of purpose and their sense of self-worth was really enhanced by



the feeling they were doing something to make their community safer and better.

Somebody mentioned optimism and hope earlier. There has not been a lot of it around this year, particularly for the most disadvantaged. Our passion is to try to ensure that we can reach those young people, bring them together, give them reasons and also, as has been mentioned, a lot of the time provide them with great role models. One of the brilliant things in our 10 years is that people who have been through the programme come back into their local communities to deliver for others.

Chair: Apsana, we are going to have to wrap up in a couple of minutes.

Q241 **Apsana Begum:** Yes. Matt, we have heard about mental health and building capacity in communities. What could be done to mitigate the impact of coronavirus on these pupils? Is there something that needs to be done in terms of access to youth and community services for disadvantaged white pupils?

Matt Leach: Looking at coronavirus specifically, because there is only limited time, what we saw in particular in the areas we worked in were real challenges around support for home schooling. For families who might have low educational attainment and who were already struggling with homework, providing support for home learning was a step further and needed to be acknowledged.

We have talked about digital exclusion. There might be internet access in a household, but it might be through an inappropriate device and with limited data. That has been a major issue. Particularly in peripheral areas, the availability and affordability of broadband is a massive issue and will be, irrespective of Covid.

The final issue is one of the ability of communities to have the structures to support themselves. We know that when we look at the mapping of mutual aid activity over the Covid crisis that, in left-behind neighbourhoods, there are about 3.5 mutual aid groups per 100,000 population. In England the average is 10.5. These are communities that lacked the ability to pull themselves together when they needed to. It is not that they did not want to, it was having the tools and structures to do it. That flowed through to accessing funds, so on average, per 100,000 of population, communities received £60,000 in charitable grants in the first three months of the crisis, and left-behind areas received about £20,000. They were not getting access to the funds, and that is at the root of it.

If you want to make a difference in these communities, you need to build social structures. Whether that is brought to a head in crises like Covid or in the long crises we are facing now, that is fundamental and the key to turning around issues in these communities, which are predominantly white working class and living on the edges of the towns and cities that we know very well.

Chair: Someone wrote in the paper today that Covid is an acceleration of



existing problems rather than a reset. I think that is very good.

Apsana Begum: That is also why colleagues are interested in understanding regional disparities and brought that up earlier in the session. It is quite important as a Committee for us to go away and look at access to youth and community services in that frame as well. I will hand back to the Chair as I am conscious of time, but that has been very helpful, Matt. Thank you.

Q242 **Chair:** Thank you. Am I wrong to say, Suzanne, that you wanted to make a final point?

Suzanne Wilson: I can do. Involving children and young people in the response is key, as Miriam was talking about. These children are going to be the victims of this crisis and, if we can involve them in the response effort, we can gain out of that. We can show that children and young people do have a stake, that it is worth having a go and being involved in civil society.

Q243 **Chair:** Ed, a final brief point?

Edward Davies: I realise I have been banging the family drum a lot. I would just reiterate that kids spend 85% of their lives outside school. Their attainment in school is utterly dependent on that 85%, yet there is very little focus on that in what we are talking about, so just to focus on home environment.

Q244 **Chair:** Particularly talking about male role models?

Edward Davies: Yes, dad in particular. The stark reality, particularly for white working class boys, is they are experiencing dad leaving the family home in the first five years of their lives, and the consequences of that are enormous.

Q245 **Chair:** This is not happening in the same way in other ethnic groups?

Edward Davies: No, in different ethnic groups you have completely different rates of stability. Indian and Chinese families, very high rates of family stability and marriage; in black Caribbean and white working class, very low rates of stability.

Q246 **Chair:** Katie, last words?

Katie Sullivan: On that point, it is very important that we emphasise more of the class dimension of this as opposed to the race one. While obviously there are disparities, emphasising the white working class rather than the working class often casts a bit of a shadow over the structural inequalities that lead to poverty and the results of that, which we have been discussing today.

Chair: The whole inquiry is about disadvantaged white working class boys and girls because they are the group that predominantly underperform compared to other groups, and that is what we want to try to understand. Thank you all for your very valuable evidence. It has been



HOUSE OF COMMONS

absolutely superb, and thank you for your time. We will definitely reflect it in our report.