

Thriving Places' family meal and homework club: parents' experiences of social capital

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Introduction

This is a short report about a research project done in 2016 as part of a Masters degree in Global Health at the University of Glasgow. The project worked with Glasgow Community Planning Partnership who deliver Thriving Places. Thriving Places uses social capital as part of its plan to tackle health inequalities in Glasgow. Social capital means the links and shared values in society that mean people can trust each other and work together. I wanted to find out about social capital in Thriving Places' family meal and homework club by looking at parent's experiences of social capital using four research objectives:

1. Parent's experiences of how the club has helped develop **social networks** through **bridging** and **linking** social capital
2. The development of **mutual trust** through these networks
3. **Active participation** in the club through responsibilities that contribute to the running of the club
4. How the club promotes **community engagement** with other services and activities outside of the homework club

Methodology

I interviewed six parents and observed two cooking sessions at the club which involved up to 16 parents and staff. Through visiting the club for six months before data collection, I became a familiar member of the club which limited disruption of behaviour during observations and hoped to create a detailed and honest interviews. I used a topic guide and observation proforma to guide the interviews and observations according to the research objectives. The interviews and observations were audio-recorded and notes were manually written up and analysed for expected and unexpected themes of interest. Analysis was done after each session of data collection so unexpected data could be used to shape future data collection sessions.

The study was approved by the University of Glasgow ethics committee before any data was collected or any participants were recruited.

Key findings

Analysis of the interview and observation data uncovered six themes which matched closely with elements of social capital from the literature. All of these elements contribute to increased levels of social capital in the club which can be used to have positive effects on community health.

1. Voluntary association

Voluntary association, or what keeps parent's coming back to the club, was enabled through a sense of belonging and through a break from the mundane duties of day to day life.

2. Bridging social capital

Horizontal relationships between parents appeared to be created between different cultures; different geographic locations; and different primary schools.

3. Linking social capital

Vertical relationships with staff and teachers appeared to have improved parents' confidence in communicating with higher powered professionals and led to opportunities to be more actively involved in the community.

4. Mutual trust

Trust between parents appeared to be put into action through childcare as some parents helped look after the children while others cook.

5. Active participation

Active participation involved helping clear up at the end of the club. There were expectations to help clear up from both staff and other parents. Although this can have positive effects on helpful behaviour, it can act negatively on specific, less involved individuals.

6. Community engagement

All participants reported at least one other area of the community they were involved in as a result of coming to the club. This included use of the community centre, qualifications and school-related activities. This was a result of improved confidence, communication and social networks.

Conclusion

The results suggested that several well established elements of social capital are being successfully put into action in the family meal and homework club. This suggests that Glasgow's efforts to reduce health inequalities using social capital as part of the approach are successful and it is a strategy that may contribute to better health in Glasgow and the UK. Details about how these elements are used in the day to day lives of individuals who use the club can inform the future development of this club and direct other similar programmes that use social capital in their approach.

Future research

- The **long term effects** of the club on social capital. For example, how the desirable weak networks are sustained and how new families are engaged
- The **interaction** between different Thriving Places clubs within and between communities in Glasgow in order to explore the bigger picture of social capital in Glasgow