

Preston

CASE STUDY: EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING IN PRESTON

ARC NWC Theme: Improving Population Health (IPH)
NHS Priority Area: Sickness to Prevention

KEY FINDINGS

- Introduction of Community Wealth Building (CWB) in Preston was associated with reduced depression diagnosis and antidepressant prescribing compared with similar areas without the programme.
- Average life satisfaction increased by around 9% among residents after CWB was introduced.
- Median wages rose by approximately 11%, indicating improved local economic outcomes.
- The programme was associated with a 4% increase in employment rates compared with expected trends without CWB.
- Employment gains were greater among disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and those with lower educational attainment.
- The findings suggest that local economic policy interventions can influence mental health, wellbeing, and employment outcomes over a relatively short period.

IMPACT SUMMARY

The UK has some of the widest health inequalities in Europe, with poorer communities facing shorter lives and more years in ill health. These disparities stem mainly from economic disadvantage. Preston piloted a Community Wealth Initiative involving local public and third sector organisations (Anchor Institutions) to boost the local economy by supporting local suppliers, improving job conditions, and using assets for community benefit. Our research assessed the social, economic, and health impacts of this initiative, comparing Preston to similar areas that were not using community wealth building, and develop tools to guide other places in adopting effective, health-promoting strategies.

The analysis found that after Community Wealth Building was introduced, people in the area were prescribed fewer antidepressants and fewer were diagnosed with depression compared to similar areas without the programme. People also reported being more satisfied with their lives, on average, life satisfaction improved by 9%. Incomes went up too, with median wages increasing by 11%.

People also reported being more satisfied with their lives, on average, life satisfaction improved by 9%. Incomes went up too, with median wages increasing by 11%. We analysed survey responses from 95,476 individuals. The introduction of the CWB programme was associated with an increase in the employment rate of 4% among people living in Preston, compared to what would have been expected in the absence of the programme. The effect on employment was greater among people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, men, and people with lower levels of education. Our findings indicate that CWB can have a positive impact on employment over a relatively short period of time, which disproportionately benefits people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. This evidence can be used to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of CWB strategies in other places. Preston's CWB programme may represent a strategy to achieve more equitable economic growth and reduce health inequalities.

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IMPACT CONTINUED

The results of the research and the success of the Preston model have inspired other local authorities, and even countries, in the UK to undertake their own community wealth building initiatives. Our research was referenced recently in an impact assessment of community wealth building initiatives in Scotland and in reports for the Centre for progressive policy-replenishing our roots. The work was also cited in CLES' amendments to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment bill, a bill which may give local economies a way to rewire to work for their people.

IMPACT DETAILS

- [The mental health and wellbeing impact of a Community Wealth Building programme in England: a difference-in-differences study](#)
- [CPP Replenishing-our-roots-Report April-2023-BV2.pdf](#)
- [Let's do devolution right: CLES's amendments to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#).
[CLES](#)

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