

# The contribution of the natural environment to tackling health inequalities

Claire Spence

Health Improvement Specialist



Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Health and Wellbeing

Big plans for the health of our people

**Close your eyes and think of a time you played  
as a child.....**

Where were you, who did you play with, how long did you stay there, why did you play at that particular place???

# With the person next to you, share your childhood experience of play, thinking in particular about the below questions:

- What skills do you think you were developing?
- What knowledge do you think you were developing?
- What risks did you take?
- What challenges did you overcome?

Group feedback

# Building resilience

- Being assertive
- Relaxation techniques
- Interests and hobbies
- Being with friends
- Sleep well
- Physically active
- Change of scenery
- Resolve conflicts

([www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk))

Managed exposure to risk is necessary if children are to learn coping mechanisms (Barnardo's, 2014)

There is evidence that risk and challenge in a supportive environment is positively linked to emotional well-being, resilience and mental health and that small mistakes and minor accidents can offer some protection against negative effects of future failures (Tovey, Nursery World, 2014)

# Access to green space

The most affluent 20% of wards in England have **five times** the amount of green space compared with the most deprived 10% of wards.

People who live in the most deprived communities are **ten times** less likely to live in the greenest areas than people who live in the least deprived communities





- Health inequalities are the result of complex interactions between physical, social and economic environments
- Low-income areas are associated with lower quality housing and education, poor diet, and less access to good quality green space
- Life expectancy is on average 7 years shorter for people living in the lowest income areas and they will live more of their lives with disabilities



- but there are also health inequalities within the North East:

Life expectancy is 16.6 years lower for men and 12.2 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Stockton-on-Tees than in the least deprived areas



Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Health and Wellbeing

Big plans for the health of our people

# Natural Environment White Paper (2011)

“If every household in England were provided with good access to quality green space, an estimated £2.1 billion in healthcare costs could be saved. On the other hand, a poor local natural environment can damage people’s health and contribute to health inequalities”.



# What can we do to help?

Directors of Public Health across the North East would like to see a new initiative:

- with a theme of ‘the outdoors’ – so suitable for more than one activity
- aimed at children and families
- focusing on reducing health inequalities and encouraging people in more deprived areas to take advantage of accessible opportunities
- linking to North East tourism offer but also engaging people ‘on the doorstep’ currently not using the available parks, green spaces and natural assets of the North East

# Discussion

Why are some groups of people are less likely to access green space than others?

In groups:

In planning an outdoor initiative across the North East we want to not only encourage people (particularly from areas of high deprivation) to access the natural environment but also to give them some ideas for physical activity for children and families when they get there – what would be your top 5 suggestions?

and if you have time...any suggestions for the name of the initiative would be welcomed!