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*It's a completely different aspect to my role as a pharmacist, allowing me to step out of the dispensary and into the community."*

**Stephanie Haughey, Pharmacist,**  
McCartans Pharmacy, Newry



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*I was privileged to meet some of the women and to hear at first-hand of how they are benefitting, in a positive way from the programmes offered by Centred Soul. This project provides an increased awareness of the choices available to local women through McCartan's pharmacy and the wider local community."*

**Prof Cathy Harrison, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer**



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*These projects have enabled us to share information, education and support to women in Northern Ireland, who otherwise would NOT have had access to a perinatal service."*

**Rosemary Deans, Founder of**  
Centred Soul





# NI punishment budget crippling our most disadvantaged children.

In this edition of BCPP News, we shine a light on the youth sector and share stories from BCPP projects working with children and young people across Northern Ireland. To set the context for these stories, we highlight the challenges for the youth sector and the current policy environment.

We are experiencing a perfect storm; a cost-of-living crisis, increased levels of child poverty, rising inflation and constant cuts decimating vital services. In Northern Ireland, more than one in five children live in Poverty (Loughborough University, 2023). Poverty harms children's health and damages their full potential. This year's DoH Health Inequalities report paints a dire picture of children's health as research shows over the last five years, the inequality gap of Primary 1 children classified as obese increased from 45% to 93% due to the rise in obesity rates in the most deprived areas. Early interventions help narrow inequality gaps between children from socially disadvantaged areas.

Our youth service is faced with never-ending cuts to early intervention and prevention services which will have a devastating impact on our children's ability to flourish and reach their full potential. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to underperform at school, earn less as adults and suffer poorer health. Disadvantage continues to persist from childhood to adulthood, if we look at the example of employment, research highlights those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to be employed and earn 20% less than those from affluent backgrounds, and report worse health (OECD, 2022).

Investment in early childhood development and learning programmes for disadvantaged children can strengthen our workforce, grow our economy, and reduce public spending. Instead of cutting vital programmes that help target educational underachievement, we need to narrow inequality gaps through investments in early childhood programmes. Lack of investment in early intervention and prevention services will have long-term financial consequences.

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The summer months are particularly challenging for many families as they are faced with soaring energy costs, childcare bills and the rise in food costs. Summer should be a happy time for families to create memories, however, it is another financial pressure due to the cost-of-living crisis. With the recent decision to cut free school meal payments, 93,300 children have been negatively impacted with many children experiencing holiday hunger as a result. The impact of these severe cuts will cause chronic stress and anxiety to thousands of families in Northern Ireland.

This year's budget is like a punishment budget which will have the worst impact on our most vulnerable groups. Continuous cuts to vital services do nothing to prevent or reduce our growing social and health inequalities in Northern Ireland, rather they widen inequality gaps. Significant investment is needed to tackle child poverty. Our children deserve better, we urgently need an anti-poverty strategy to tackle the root causes of poverty!

For a full version of this policy piece visit our website - <https://www.cdhn.org/policy>

**Shannon Keegan**

Policy and Communications Officer / CDHN



# Lagan Village Youth & Community Group with Boots Chemist

It takes a village...

Lagan Village Youth and Community Group (LVYCG) aims to inspire, motivate and support local residents. Their core mission is to strengthen local communities to tackle disadvantage and transform people's lives. Located in East Belfast, in the Woodstock area, LVYCG recognised intense clusters of deprivation in their local community. They offer a range of services to tackle educational disadvantage, improve health deprivation and reduce crime and disorder.

They recently completed a Level One BCPP project in partnership with a Local Pharmacist, Emma McConnell, from Boots Chemist on Woodstock Road. The programme supported a group of 15 young mothers from the Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) community and local mothers. The programme provided a peer support network for young mothers to share their experiences and offered parenting advice in a relaxed environment. Issues explored included maternal mental health, social norms, baby health and social isolation. As we come out of the other side of the pandemic, LVYCG recognised the importance of staying connected to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Emma the Pharmacist, George the Project Lead and the mothers worked together to plan informative sessions to get as much out of the project as possible. "Baby Blues" was covered at one of the weekly sessions. It was important that the women understood health risk factors associated with being a mother, managing expectations of caring for the baby at home and reaching out for support when it is needed.



At another weekly session, LVYCG worked in partnership with East Belfast Sure Start and ALTERNATIVES to expel the myths around certain childhood ailments and health and wellbeing practices. The mothers focused on the practice of touch in healing and building a rapport with their babies.

In collaboration with the community Pharmacist, the programme provided health information, advocacy support and complimented expert advice on issues that most impacted the mothers. Educational resources and tailored support for health and wellbeing were provided to those women who did not speak English as their first language. This helped break down barriers to service provision to improve the group's health literacy, allowing them to take more control of their health.



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The women on the programme were able to speak about their children's health and wellbeing but found it very difficult to speak about their own personal health issues. As we progressed through the programme, they found it more comfortable and easier to talk and highlight their own concerns about their health issues. This programme allowed me to come to an understanding more about the difficulties that exist in the community regarding people's health and wellbeing".

**Emma McConnell / Pharmacist**

Workshops on nutrition took place, focusing on the importance of healthy eating for the baby and the mother in reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease, and diabetes, and educating the group on how healthy food can have a positive impact on their mental health.

The project was a huge success as true friendships were made and continue to flourish with the mothers meeting up outside of the programme to offer peer support. The community centre is now seen as a place to come for a chat over a cup of coffee, where the mothers can let off steam and share their concerns when they feel overwhelmed.

The BCPP funding enabled the Pharmacist to build trusted relationships with women in the local community, enhancing their understanding of health and addressing their health concerns through an interactive and informal approach. This funding allowed the women to share their lived experiences which helped the Pharmacist's understanding of issues that impacted the group. Medication safety was explored throughout the programme, with the Pharmacist reporting that she will now ensure that her patients understand their medication in terms of why they are taking it and how to take their medication. Emma is confident that she will be the first point of call for these young mothers and is seen as a trusted person in their healthcare journey.

This Project has highlighted that more work needs to be done in the Woodstock area to improve health literacy in addressing health inequalities. LVCYG hope to apply for Level Two BCPP Funding to delve deeper into the health issues reported by the young mothers and to continue to build partnerships with local pharmacies.



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*I have never really spoke to the chemist before only to pick up my prescription, now I can go in and talk about my health and concerns without being embarrassed. Being part of the chemist programme give me the confidence to speak about my health concerns to others*

**Jenny / Mother (Participant)**

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*People's health and wellbeing is a main concern for us with a host of issues around personal health problems. We also have a high rate of people not fully understanding their own medication and the Pharmacy programme allowed us to address all these issues. This programme was a major benefit to people in not only understanding medication and health problems but also building the relationships with the local pharmacist who they can confide in more easily".*

**George Newell / Lagan Village Youth and Community Group**



# FutureProof with Parkes Pharmacy

Future is looking bright...

FutureProof work with young people aged 11-25 years old in the Banbridge and Craigavon area. FutureProof engages with young people to tackle a range of health and social issues, such as Drug and Alcohol education and Mental Health and Wellbeing. They have a daily drop-in service, offering support, advice, education and signposting to other agencies. The project targeted The Cut and the Edenderry area, both ranking in the top 25% deprived Super Outputs Area (SOA).

Building on their Level One BCPP Project's success, FutureProof secured Level Two Funding and was awarded £12,000. They worked with a group of 13 young women over 14 weeks. The young people co-produced the programme, exploring issues such as sexual health, relationships, mental health and coping strategies, personal safety, substance misuse and smoking/vaping.

The aim of the project was to increase the young women's awareness of health issues that impact them, encouraging them to make positive choices. Building on the work from Level One Funding, Jude the Pharmacist was able to provide expert advice on prescription drugs, alcohol-misuse and smoking cessation resources. She informed the young people of services that the local pharmacy offered such as emergency contraception and minor ailments. FutureProof teamed up with a number of community and voluntary partners which specialised in health areas that the group wanted addressed to improve their health literacy.

With the ABC Council area ranking the second highest area for drug seizure in NI, FutureProof partnered with Dunlewey Addiction Services to deliver an educational session on the harmful effects of using illegal substances such as 'Spice', Vaping and Cannabis.

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“ We are almost halfway through the programme, the young people are really enjoying and learning from the Pharmacist. We have been able to dispel any myths and reinforce healthy behaviours which will impact positively on the young people taking part in the programme”

Lucinda Love-Teggarty / Lead Community Partner

Some of the young people have experienced difficulties in school setting and do not enjoy formal sessions. However, this project provided them with a sense of belonging, allowing them to feel valued and listened to whilst learning invaluable educational information on health and social issues that impact them. Another positive aspect is the relationship between the pharmacist and the young women.

“ It has been fantastic to see how the programme has been having a positive impact on the young people - each week I have noticed they are opening up more and showing great interest in the health topics we have covered and the pharmacy services we have discussed. Working alongside the girls has been invaluable for me, it has given me a great understanding of the needs of young people which I will take back to my work as a community Pharmacist”

**Jude Mayer** / Pharmacist



“ The course is going well, everyone is enjoying it including me. Great opportunity for us.”

"I like learning about drugs and the different categories. I've learned the pharmacy has different services like blood pressure and blood sugar levels."

**Young people / Participants**

This project has strengthened the relationship between the pharmacist and the young people, who now feel more equipped to avail of the pharmacy services which is as a result of this project.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the young people that FutureProof support. To overcome this, the group benefited from the Mental Health and Well Being Programme delivered by PIPS Hope and Support. This particular session was priceless as it built on pertinent issues such as coping strategies, how to build resilience and signposting the young women to services when they are struggling.

The informal nature of the sessions allowed the young people to talk about their health issues in a relaxed and non-judgemental environment. The young people had fun using interactive props such as glucometers and sphygmomanometers to test their peer's blood sugars and blood pressure levels, whilst increasing their awareness of the services that the pharmacy has to offer. The programme was just as beneficial for the Pharmacist, as it improved Jude's awareness of the health issues that impact young people in the local area. Early intervention and prevention played a key role throughout the programme as the group became more informed of community services in their locality, relieving strain on statutory services in the future.





# Progeny Teen Support with Ballee Pharmacy

Changing attitudes...

progeny  
supporting young people

**Connect-Ed is a trauma-informed post-primary learning centre, registered as Progeny Teen Support. Situated in the Ballymena area, they work with young people who have been impacted by school attendance difficulties because of anxiety, bullying and trauma. The centre provides a safe space where young people can connect socially and grow in confidence, whilst gaining practical skills to prepare them for life through education and life skills tuition. The aim of Progeny Teen Support is to provide a much-needed escape from the high-pressured school environment, re-integrating socially isolated young people into the community, to build their confidence and self-esteem.**

Progeny recently completed Level Two BCPP Funding and was awarded £12,000 to work with Stephen Burns from Ballee Pharmacy. The need for this project arose from the impact of the severe anxiety and isolation experienced by the young people within the local area which led to school de-registration. In 2021, 10.7% of those at post-primary age had an attendance of less than 85% in Northern Ireland. The impact of the lockdowns has certainly increased feelings of loneliness and social isolation experienced by the people that Progeny Teen Support targets.

Over the months, the programme was designed based on the issues faced by the target group such as healthy eating, managing anxiety, depression and stress, exercise, the immune system, money management, first aid and social media/cyber addiction. Stephen, the Community Pharmacist led the sessions, using a holistic approach to tackle the issues that the young people were experiencing. Over time he built positive relationships with the group and provided expert advice. Many of the young people felt that others didn't understand their situation, however with Stephen, they were able to share their lived experiences which made them feel empowered as they were listened to and felt understood.

At the beginning of the programme, the young people went to the Mill in Portadown for a team-building day. This exercise helped create positive relationships and build trust with the target group and community Pharmacist to ensure meaningful engagement. The group also went to Forrest Fitness where they completed an assault course as they were hungry for a challenge!



'The Big House' facilitated one of the weekly sessions, with Stephen the Pharmacist which educated the group on coping strategies to manage their mental health due to low self-esteem and struggling with their thought life. This is a prevalent issue here in Northern Ireland as 1 in 8 young people were considered as having anxiety in 2020. Another important topic that the young people wanted to explore was money management.

The target group admitted to spending too much time on social media and gaming, with some feeling addicted. Research highlights strong links between heavy social media usage and the increased risk of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts. To tackle this issue and encourage healthier habits, 'Love for Life' lead a session on setting boundaries around screen use and relationships online and offline. Many of the group felt anxious about their own health and the safety of their family members. With the BCPP Funding, St John's Ambulance was able to teach the young people basic skills such as first aid and CPR to build their confidence and self-esteem to be able to respond in the case of an emergency.

The project afforded the young people with information and support to help them make better choices that will lead to positive outcomes, inform them of support systems that are available in their community and empower them to take control of their lives. As a result of taking part in the programme, the group's health literacy has improved as they have learned how to self-manage social factors that impact their well-being such as anxiety, stress and isolation. With the growth in confidence, the programme hopes to aspire the young people to provide support in their local communities through volunteering.

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*"I have really enjoyed the programme with Stephen this year. He is so easy to talk to and I feel I could go to him for health advice on anything I was concerned about"*

*"I looked forward to our sessions with Stephen as they were interesting and I learned so much that I didn't know"*

**Young People / Participants**

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*Having Stephen come in this year has been fantastic. Through taking the time to get to know them individually he has built a great relationship with each of them and has helped inform them on many of the issues they face"*

**Karen Wilton / Lead Community Partner**

Following on from the Project, the young people have taken a huge interest in their health since working with the Community Pharmacist. Three are now members of the local gym, going more than three times per week as a result of learning how exercise can help manage anxiety and depression. Six of the young people also signed up to take part in 10,000 Steps a Day Challenge for Cancer Research back in March. One of the young men has secured a Saturday job, putting into practice the tools of saving money as well as the confidence that he gained from the programme!

The project was just as beneficial for the young people as it was for the Pharmacist, as it improved his understanding of how anxiety can have a profound impact on a young person's health and wellbeing, making them withdraw from social situations. Stephen's awareness of this prevalent issue has improved through his involvement with BCPP and he will be able to signpost similar young people to appropriate services and support. Progeny Teen Support, the Lead Community Partner, gained a lot from the programme as they have gained great partnership working with a local Pharmacist.

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*Working on the BCPP project with connect-Ed has been a real privilege, getting to spend time covering health topics with such an engaging and thoughtful group of teenagers has been a real highlight this year"*

**Stephen Burns / Pharmacist**

# OUR LIVES, OUR MEDS, OUR HEALTH: Exploring Medication Safety Through a Social Lens



CDHN have launched their new research report 'Our Lives, Our Meds, Our Health: Exploring Medication Safety through a Social Lens'. This exploratory study was the first of its kind in Northern Ireland (NI) to improve the understanding of how people's social and personal circumstances can influence how they take their medications safely.

The report highlights that medication safety is a health inequalities issue, often underreported in health research, policy, and practice.



In late 2021, the Department of Health (DoH) Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) commissioned the cross-sectoral, collaborative research with people in communities as part of the Transforming Medication Safety in Northern Ireland (TMSNI) plan.

In NI, people from the most disadvantaged communities suffer a heavier burden of illness and have higher mortality rates than people from the least deprived areas (DoH, Health Inequalities Report, 2023). In addition, 50% more prescription items are dispensed in the most deprived areas of NI compared to the least deprived (NI General Pharmaceutical Services 2021/22).

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*Our findings highlight that any improvement in medication safety will require health and social care systems to take into account people's unique lives, experiences, and the social circumstances that they live in. We know just how busy people's lives are; juggling jobs with caring responsibilities, and social factors that can reduce people's ability to take their medication as prescribed.*

**Helen McNamee** / CDHN Research & Policy Manager



# Our Lives, Our Meds, Our Health

Exploring medication safety  
through a social lens

Helen McNamee, Caoimhe Shields, Joanne Vance



The final report is available to download  
on [www.cdhn.org](http://www.cdhn.org).

## The research calls for the following recommendations to be implemented:

- Review staff training to include better two-way communication with people about their medication to improve their health and well-being outcomes.
- A trustworthy community engagement programme, tailored to local needs on using prescribed medicine safely, reporting any medication errors, and clear guidance on disposing unused medication.
- Improved public information and access to medication reviews to empower people to discuss and make decisions about their medication.
- Improved guidance and pathways for offering people alternatives to medication within the community health and social care setting.

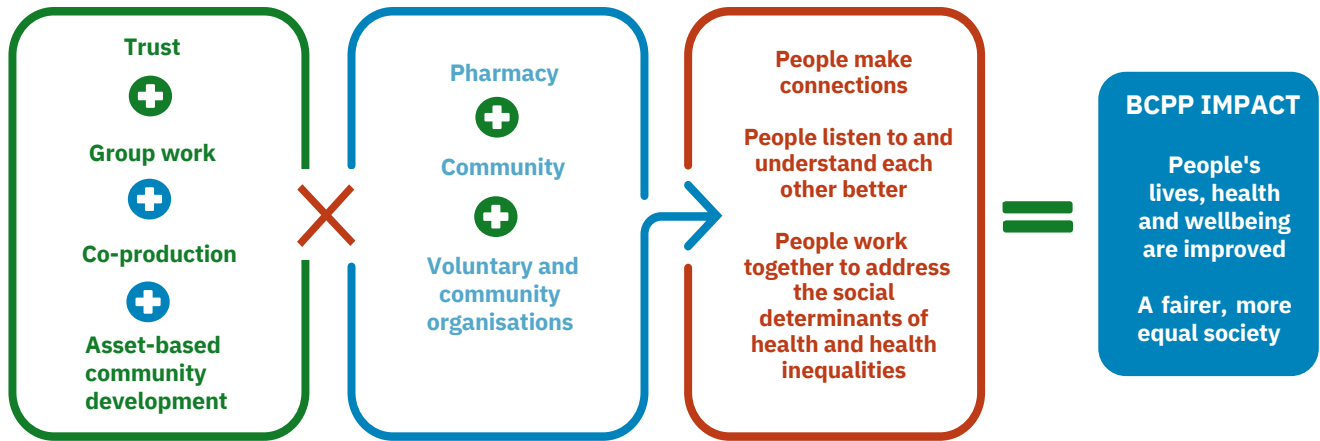
“ We are grateful to the research participants, and everyone involved in the co-production of this study. Your invaluable insights have shown why medication safety is a health inequalities issue. We know how the unequal distribution of power and resources, contribute to medication harms both locally and globally. Our challenge now is for communities and our health and social care system, to share resources and work together, to empower patients and improve economic and health outcomes for all”

*Joanne Vance / Director of CDHN*





To bring pharmacy and community together to reduce health inequalities using an asset based community development approach



**LEVEL 1** funding – grant up to **£2,500**  
project lasting up to six months

**LEVEL 2** funding – grant up to **£12,000**  
project lasting up to one year

Application forms and guidance notes are available from [cdhn.org/bcpp](http://cdhn.org/bcpp) along with the closing dates for the next round of funding. If you have an idea for a project, please contact a member of the BCPP team who will be happy to guide and support you.