Place-based approaches to support children and young people

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**Key points:**

- Despite the growth in place-based approaches across the UK, the evidence remains limited as to their effectiveness in improving outcomes for children and young people.
- This evidence does, however, support a role for place-based approaches in helping to mitigate the effects of structural inequalities and improve outcomes for the individuals and families living in disadvantaged areas.
- Poverty and inequality have a particularly profound impact on children’s lives, so place-based initiatives specifically for disadvantaged children have been developed in the US, Australia, and the UK.
- We can learn from promising practice but need to develop a localised, customised approach that pays attention to geographical diversity and different socioeconomic, political, and funding contexts. Local action should be connected with national and regional policy.
- Children’s zones, communities or neighbourhoods share some key characteristics: they take a holistic approach, ensure that services are integrated, and that the initiative is locally led.
- For children’s zones/communities to be effective, key services and organisations have to approach partnership working in a different way. This includes having a clear set of agreed goals and a shared sense of how these will be achieved, using a theory of change.
- Schools may play a central role in place-based approaches, in many cases reconceptualising the school’s role as more community focused, offering additional supports to families and the wider community.
- It is equally vital to consider how communities can be empowered to shape the development of place-based initiatives to support disadvantaged children and young people. Inclusion of children and young people themselves in decision-making is also key.
Introduction

This paper examines the key literature on place-based approaches to support and improve outcomes for children and young people. It focuses primarily on evaluations and reviews of initiatives such as Children’s Communities and Children’s Zones, which have been established in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia in recent years. These types of initiatives look beyond educational attainment towards addressing the broader needs of families living in disadvantaged areas, through customised, localised responses. As the Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland (CNS) model draws on these existing initiatives, capturing evidence of ‘promising practice’ from them is the key objective of this literature review. The paper will also draw on some additional literature on other types of place-based approaches, such as community schools and ‘extended services’ schools, which have a longer tradition but offer less of a ‘holistic’ approach. Much of the existing literature focuses on the role of schools, however where possible the community-based features of place-based approaches are discussed, as while the CNS model envisages a key role for the schools in the area, much of the work to support children and young people will be focused within communities more broadly. The paper begins with a summary of place-based approaches to tackling disadvantage before moving on to describe the types of children-focused approaches that have been established to date. It will then outline some of the key lessons from the literature, and finally suggest some implications for Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland based on the learning from this evidence.

Place-based approaches

There is no single, agreed definition of what place-based working actually means in theory or in practice (Bynner, 2016). One review states that there are examples of place-based approaches which are ‘arguably better described as a single service delivered in a particular place (e.g. a local childcare programme) alongside more complex collaborative endeavours to transform places across multiple fronts’ (report for the Scottish Government and Corra Foundation undertaken by EKOS consulting) 2018, p.1). The Scottish Government Working Group on Place-based Approaches offers the following operational definition:
A community of people bound together because of where they live, work or spend a considerable proportion of their time, come together to make changes to that place which they believe will improve the physical, social or economic environment and in doing so tackle issues of inequality (cited in Bynner 2016, p.6).

Placed-based approaches to tackling poverty and disadvantage have developed because the evidence clearly demonstrates that the effects of poverty are geographically concentrated: some areas experience higher levels of socioeconomic deprivation than others, and people’s life chances are shaped by where they live and grow up. It is crucial to be aware of the structural causes of poverty. Disadvantage experienced at a local level is shaped by regional, national and global structures and decisions which are taken outside of the neighbourhood (Dyson and Kerr, 2014), such as the effects of austerity and related welfare and public sector cuts. As such, it important to avoid representing particular areas or neighbourhoods as ‘problem places’ (Johnstone and Mooney, 2007). Dyson and Kerr state that there is a “fundamental question of whether disadvantage can be tackled at all without a serious interrogation of the features of schools and society that produce it in the first place” (2014, p. 90). Moreover, the reality is that there will be disadvantaged individuals and families living in better off areas where interventions are less likely to be in place to support them, and people living in disadvantaged areas who will ‘do well’ without the need for intervention.

Place-based approaches to tackling poverty are, at a theoretical and practical level, not without limitations, and Lankelly Chase (2017, p. 23) argues that historically these “have failed to address the structural causes of poverty”. Targeted place-based interventions have to look beyond ‘mitigating’ the localised impact of poverty to be truly effective. While mitigating the effects of structural inequalities and improving outcomes for individuals and families living in particular areas is important, such an approach could be termed ‘reactive’. As well as responding to conditions which affect the life chances of individuals and families in a local area, it is important to think about how place-based initiatives can influence upwards and outwards. In this respect, it may be useful to draw on the health inequalities action framework (NHS Health Scotland, 2013) which details three levels of interventions: mitigating the impact of inequality on health; preventing inequality; and undoing inequality (2013, p. 1). Preventing and undoing inequalities more broadly requires structural change,
so place-based initiatives should ensure this is built into their approach. Lankelly Chase (2017) emphasises the importance of connecting action at a local level with regional and national policy. They note that in the USA, initiatives have shifted away from viewing communities as ‘target populations’ towards “the idea that a place-based initiative can actually provide a platform for collaborative learning, improving alignment and introducing changes in larger-scale systems” (ibid, p. 23).

The rationale behind newer place-based approaches, therefore, is that it is more conducive to focus on a community or ‘system’ as a whole – its material, physical assets, the social environment, and ensuring integrated services – as opposed to focusing on disadvantage at the level of the individual or the family (Moore and Fry, 2011). Dyson et al., (2012) explain that in the most disadvantaged areas “customised approaches may be necessary to tackle a complex web of issues – and draw on a network of resources – that are not configured in quite the same way anywhere else”. Principles of collective impact underpin these initiatives: collective impact representing a structured approach to collaboration, the key elements of which are:

- a common agenda
- strategic learning and measurement
- focus on high leverage strategies
- community engagement and communication
- backbone support (The Children and Youth Area Partnerships, Victoria).

Although there are challenges in measuring the effectiveness of place-based approaches, and we require a stronger evidence base, evidence suggests that a more holistic approach to tackling disadvantage that combines neighbourhood regeneration, support services that are better integrated, and community development that engages and empowers local people can effectively respond to the effects of inequality.

As a result of the evidence discussed in this section, the Scottish Government has chosen ‘place’ as a “guiding principle for public service reform” (Bynner 2016, p.2). For further detail on place-based approaches, see Bynner (2016), Lankelly Chase (2017), IRISS (2015), and Moore and Fry (2011), and for collective impact see Kania and Kramer (2011), Cabaj and Weaver (2016).
What are Children’s neighbourhoods, communities or zones, and why do we need them?

Poverty and inequality has a particularly profound impact on children’s life chances, which are shaped significantly by the areas in which they grow up. Rising child poverty rates – approximately one in four children in Scotland are now living in relative poverty\(^1\) (The Scotsman, 26 March 2018) – and the uneven geographical concentration of poverty discussed in the previous section emphasises the necessity of developing effective place-based responses. In 2017, the Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality noted that many children and young people face significant barriers on the ‘road to adulthood’ in early years provision, primary and secondary schooling, and post-school education and employment opportunities. Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland aims to respond to these issues and improve outcomes for children and young people. In doing so, the CNS model draws on similar place-based initiatives for children that have been established in the United States, Australia and in England.

The most well-known place-based initiative to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children is the Harlem’s Children’s Zone (HCZ) in New York, established to create a “continuous pipeline of support” from early years to early adulthood and “break the cycle of intergenerational poverty”. Following a pilot project in the 1990s, HCZ expanded via a ten-year strategic plan in 2000 and now serves over 10,000 young people and 10,000 adults (HCZ website). HCZ provides support and interventions at the different stages children and young people most require it when growing up. The “doubly holistic” approach is summed up as follows:

“HCZ’s vision is to ‘create a tipping point’ in the neighbourhood so that children are surrounded by an enriching environment of college-orientated peers and supportive adults” (Dobbie and Fryer 2009, p.5).

As well as education, the “pipeline of support” also involves intervention in areas such as health and welfare services for children and young people, and their families:

“With this vision in mind, Harlem Children’s Zone services are structured to fit into a ‘pipeline’ that provides continuous support and reinforcement from a child’s birth

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\(^1\) Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland: 2015/16, Scottish Government, March 2017
until graduation from college, with an underlying system of community services supporting the educational pipeline” (Hanson, 2013).

HCZ developed its approach over a 20-year period, and being a charitable organisation, it is able to draw on high levels of private donations as well as being subsidised by Wall Street (Dyson et al., 2012). This highlights the importance of context when learning from other countries’ experiences: the United States has a stronger philanthropic tradition than exists in the United Kingdom (Lankelly Chase, 2017), and less of a tradition of strong state intervention and leadership in social issues. The political context surrounding initiatives will always be crucial. Having ‘buy-in’ from local and national governments will positively shape the potential for children’s zones, communities or neighbourhoods to be most effective.

In 2014, eight Children and Youth Area Partnerships were established across Victoria, Australia, involving collaboration between state and local governments, community service organisations, health, education and justice sectors and the broader community (Children and Youth Area Partnerships website). The principles of collective impact drive this collaborative approach, which is still in its relatively early stages so it is difficult to assess its impact. Similar to the HCZ scheme, however, a ‘cradle to career’ approach underpins work to support children and young people living in disadvantaged areas. Targeted initiatives include improving outcomes for children leaving care, and Early Start Kindergartens for vulnerable children and families, including Aboriginal children who consistently experience higher levels of poverty and lower attainment.

English Children’s zones or communities have been more recently established in different parts of the country through partnership between Save the Children, academic partners, and key local agencies such as schools and housing associations. These initiatives are developing in a very different context from HCZ, not least that there is far less dedicated funding in comparison, but also because ‘communities’ are being set up within existing networks of provision, as opposed to a standalone provider of support services (Dyson et al. 2012, p.24). These existing networks can draw on existing services and previous initiatives such as Sure Start, which have helped to lay the foundations for a more joined-up, holistic approach. So although UK initiatives can and do draw on some of the key principles underpinning HCZ, such differences require a customised, localised approach. A Save the
Children policy brief in 2012 summed up the differences between the US and UK contexts, stating that English Children’s Zones must:

- be about contributing something extra to existing service provision
- have a connective role – they cannot control partners but will need to find ways to secure their commitment to zone strategy
- be able to bend existing resources to support their area focus, as well as attract funds
- have multi-layered accountability – within the zone and beyond.

Children’s Communities was first launched in 2016 in Wallsend in North Tyneside and Pembury in Hackney, London, and in 2017 Smallhow-Hurst in Tameside became the third Children’s Community. Lankelly Chase states that Children’s Community shares the following features (Lankelly Chase website):

- A neighbourhood: Children’s Communities are located in disadvantaged places with a history of partnership working for children and a collective commitment to take this to the next level.
- A shared vision: Local services develop and implement a co-ordinated plan for helping children thrive, based on a shared vision for children and a shared analysis of children’s needs.
- Integrated and holistic: Children’s Communities support children in the round and across the different stages of childhood, helping them to transition between family, school and community.
- Generational: Children’s Communities work over the long term. They tackle presenting symptoms and underlying causes simultaneously.
- Powered by local voices: Children’s Communities are locally led. They identify their strengths, harness the power of local networks and relationships, and support people to find their own solutions.
Key lessons

The previous section briefly described the types of existing children-focused approaches to tackling poverty and disadvantage in different international contexts. This section outlines some of the key lessons from the literature, which will help to inform the CNS model as it develops.

Reconceptualising the role of schools

The literature on existing area- or place-based efforts to improving outcomes for children and young people suggests that schools are very much at the heart of these interventions. This is largely because schools are “where children and their families are most likely to be known and in disadvantaged areas especially, are where children and their families will often seek help” (Dyson et al., 2012, p. 26). In some cases, schools now operate as community ‘hubs’ or ‘social enterprises’ (Kerr and Dyson, 2016). This represents a shift from traditional understandings and expectations of schools as institutions which provide formal education to children and young people of school age, to expectations that schools will offer additional extra-curricular activities for children and young people, their families, and often the wider communities. Some examples are outlined in the next section, however the underpinning rationale is that focusing support on attainment is insufficient.Muijs (2010) explains that even very well-performing schools are limited in their ability to shape educational outcomes for children and young people who are disadvantaged by their socio-economic positions. However, it is more complex than simply ‘adding’ services or activities onto the traditional school day (see Cummings et al., 2011). A crucial aspect of ‘community schools’ (Kerr and Dyson, 2016) is that they are a “learning resource for the whole community”, with provision for adult learning and community activities.

For example, HCZ established ‘Promise Academy’ Charter Schools, which in addition to support for educational attainment, offer access to other support services such as welfare and counselling, for children and their families. In the UK, Dyson and Kerr’s (2014) review of ‘extended services’ in the English school system points out the longstanding tradition of schools offering extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, or homework clubs, and in some cases adult learning or leisure for local people. However, the authors note that
traditionally, approaches were very *ad hoc*. Participation and staffing was on a voluntary and uneven basis, and there was little or no attempt to evaluate how effective these schemes were in improving outcomes for children and young people. Now, however, such schemes are no longer at the discretion of individual schools: as a result of New Labour’s endeavour to develop a more coherent ‘community school’ ethos, all state-funded schools are now “required to provide access to a substantial level of additional provision” (p. 78).

In some respects, these reforms were broadly in line with the increasing neoliberalisation of UK education (and the neoliberalisation of the state more generally), given the focus on measuring school and individual pupil performances in the context of shrinking resources. However, there is also a genuine desire to tackle social exclusion through a holistic approach, “reconceptualising the role of schools” including as a hub/platform for getting services which support families and communities to work together better (Dyson and Kerr 2014, p. 80).

The rationale is that schools must go beyond educational attainment to ensure that “students have access to similar opportunities to those available to their more advantaged peers elsewhere” (Kerr and Dyson 2016, p.4). This may involve the employment or redeployment of non-school staff such as welfare support workers, social work, or psychologists to be based on school premises to provide support to families. It is worth noting that aside from the financial implications on schools employing or providing additional staff for these purposes, viewing schools as the appropriate forum for such interventions is not universally supported. Milbourne *et al.* (2003) note that “Schools, parents and children, as well as agencies may hold differing views of the roles that project workers entering schools should undertake”. As such, the shifting role of the school should be handled sensitively, with children, parents and the wider community shaping the process.

**Practical activities and supports**

Some of the practical activities that have been put in place in Children’s Zones and Communities are explicitly aimed at improving educational attainment outcomes for children and young people, building on a (more) longstanding tradition of targeted support for pupils in disadvantaged areas to try to narrow the ‘attainment gap’. Interventions and
activities may include homework clubs, study support programmes, or intensified teaching of core subjects, and in many cases take place within schools. MacBeath et al. (2001) evaluated the impact of study support programmes, and found evidence of increased educational attainment for participating students, as well as better attitudes to attendance at school. Dobbie and Fryer (2009), in their review of the effectiveness of the Harlem’s Children’s Zone to close the racial achievement gap, noted significant success in “boosting achievement in math and ELA [English Language Arts] in elementary school and math in middle school” (p. 28). They also noted a positive impact on school attendance. The case study school in Northern England that is subject to evaluation by Kerr and Dyson (2016) identified a distinctive approach to teaching that moves beyond narrow focus on examinations – “developing skills that will be of lifelong use”.

As previously noted, however, the development of more ‘holistic’ approaches involved addressing the various other forms of disadvantage that many children and young people face in addition to educational barriers. The types of initiatives and activities in place in different schools were broad in focus, and included:

- Extracurricular and out-of-hours activities such as arts, sport and leisure sessions.
- Breakfast clubs.
- Providing uniforms and sports kits for pupils.
- Family support sessions.
- Non-teacher specialist staff on site such as counsellors, family support workers, educational psychologists, and welfare and safeguarding workers.
- Childcare provision.
- Classes for children and young people’s parents – for example English for Speakers of Other Languages or further learning.

HCZ’s Promise Academy schools have a longer school day and school year, and are committed to ensuring that pupils experience activities such as field trips to museums, exposure to the arts, and sporting events (HCZ website). Moreover, across the UK recent initiatives have developed to tackle ‘holiday hunger’ (Stewart et al., 2018), the recognition that school holidays pose additional challenges for low-income families and that this impacts on children’s wellbeing. Many charities and community groups now offer free
lunches during holidays for children and families – sometimes in conjunction with fun activities such as sport.

Importantly, in many cases the activities outlined above are not simply targeted at ‘disadvantaged’ young people or families experiencing problems, but ‘open to all’. Some services, however when appropriate, provide intensive, targeted support. For example, ‘Baby College’ was established in the Harlem’s Children’s Zone to support parents and expectant parents to learn about child development while also promoting a sense of community among new parents, aiming to tackle isolation and strengthen relationships (HCZ website).

As will be explored later in the paper, in the section on evaluating interventions, measuring the impact of specific activities is extremely difficult. However, the literature points to “promising practice” when these activities take place in schools, evident for example in a change in school ethos, perhaps by giving students a role in decision-making (Dyson and Kerr 2014, p.86), or improving relationships between students and teachers.

**Community empowerment and partnership working**

This section outlines some of the evidence on the importance of partnership working to improve outcomes for children and young people. As previously noted, schools alone cannot overcome the impact of disadvantage, hence the drive for ‘children’s zones’ (Dyson et al., 2012) and the inclusion of the role of the community more broadly. A multi-strand approach is needed because addressing disadvantage in one area of a child’s life, such as education, can be easily undermined by neglecting another (such as poverty, health, or the family). There is existing literature on community development that emphasises the need to empower communities to tackle social inequalities (see Henderson et al., 2018). This is also vital for children’s zones, communities or neighbourhoods: not replacing the role of the school, but considering how the wider community can work in collaboration with schools to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Children’s communities or zones often involve opening up schools to the wider community, including allowing access to catering and sports facilities for local people, or adult learning classes that anyone can access. Dyson and Kerr (2014) found this had the effect of positively
impacting how people in the community saw the school. ‘City Academy’, the case study school in Kerr and Dyson’s (2016) review, “facilitates many projects which promote a positive view of the local area and empower its residents by supporting them to access new experiences and develop the capacity to take their own actions” (p. 5). In their study of community partnerships in Australia, Moore et al. (2014) highlighted the relationship between improving outcomes for children and young people and community development more broadly. They state that:

“building more supportive communities is one of the major ways of improving the conditions under which families are raising young children. This includes ensuring that all families have positive personal support networks, regular opportunities to interact with other parents and young children, easy access to family-friendly settings and services, and urban environments that are easy to navigate and that provide lots of opportunities for encounters between people in the community” (p. 27).

This is best achieved through community development, which aims to empower and build the capacity of local communities. Batty et al. (2018) note that one of the core principles of the Children’s Community programme is identifying local assets and developing these. This is an important lesson, because top-down approaches often drive initiatives where ‘professional’ expertise is what is valued and acted upon. “There is relatively little evidence of community representation in their decision-making, and there is, consequently, a danger that they will only have a partial understanding of the needs, wishes and potentials of the populations they aim to serve” (Dyson et al. 2012, p.25).

The review by Children’s Community Network in England (Batty, 2018) emphasised the importance of partnership working in addressing multiple forms of disadvantage. Partnership working can be effective through bringing and sharing expertise; improving practice; developing new ways of working; and progressing shared visions and objectives. Such measures were considered to be effective across the literature in other international contexts. A study by the Centre for Community Child Health in Australia (Moore et al., 2014) found that place-based community partnerships have a positive impact on the community, for example with service users having quicker, improved access to services.
However, as Moore et al. (2014) note, this is “not always straightforward”, because “creating a common agenda and shared measurement system represent a ‘sharp deviation’ from how most organisations and their funders operate” (p.6). Moreover, effective ‘interagency’ working can actually increase the workload of support staff due to increased demand for services, in the initial stages of partnership work. As such, effective partnership working to improve outcomes for children and young people is reliant on there being a “clear governance structure and division of responsibilities” (p. 24). Initiatives to support children and young people in a holistic sense involves organisations approaching partnership in a different way to traditional working practices. It is crucial for organisations to have a shared set of goals and a shared understanding of how these can be achieved. A Theory of Change (Connell and Kubisch, 1998) can encourage partners to identify and agree upon a shared set of long-, mid- and short-term outcomes or objectives, and agree on the resources required to achieve these.

Some studies of place-based approaches (mainly in the United States) suggest that having a separate ‘backbone’ organisation to help co-ordinate different agencies in a local area is effective (Statham 2011). Much of the literature also stressed the crucial role of frontline professionals, such as head teachers, or local authority leaders, in driving initiatives (Dyson et al., 2012). The link between schools and other services was frequently emphasised. Dyson and Kerr (2014) state:

“By providing targeted children and families with personal support, practical advice, and new opportunities, schools were able to help them overcome immediate crises in their lives, and place them on different trajectories” p. 86).

However, it was also stressed that this entails a different way of working for schools: to be operating for the benefit of the wider community, they can “can no longer work on a competitive and individual basis” (Dyson et al. 2012, p. 27). The recommendation is that schools become involved in such initiatives as groups, as opposed to on an individual basis: “This will be essential if the initiative is to reach all children in a given area, rather than simply the students in an individual school” (ibid, p.24). This lesson is also applicable to other organisations in the private, public and third sectors, as previously noted. A different, more collaborative way of working towards a shared vision is required.
Uneven impact?

The literature reviewed suggests that caution should be taken when establishing children’s zones or communities, and it is important to recognise some of the limitations of current models. In the Australian context, for example, Smyth and McInerney (2014, p.292) note that despite redefining the school to include some of the extracurricular and support activities and services detailed in the previous sections, the focus remained on educational achievement. They stated that: “a major drive (some would say obsession) to transform the culture of the school with a big emphasis on improvement targets”. Consequently, it was felt by some that “policies have led to a better learning environment for the academically engaged kids because the so-called ‘trouble makers’ have left or been excluded. It is important to question whether it is possible, in a culture of measurements and targets, to truly shift away from focusing on qualifications”.

Zelon (2010, p.15), critiquing aspects of the Harlem Children’s Zone, argued that this intervention did not equally benefit all children in the area:

“The HCZ schools serve significantly fewer high-need learners, like special education students or kids who are learning English. For instance, only 6% of the third graders who took the 2007-08 English test at the Promise Academy had disabilities, while disabled kids made up 30, 40, even 60% of the test-taking pool in open-enrolment schools in the district. Only a handful of students at the Promise Academies are English-language learners, compared with 14% in schools citywide”.

It is, therefore, important to examine the evidence of place-based approaches in depth to ascertain whether these are working to benefit all children and young people in education, as well as having a wider community impact.

Another potentially problematic aspect of many place-based approaches is what Batty et al. (2018) term the deficit-based, paternalistic approaches which rely heavily on the viewpoints of schools and services, as opposed to families and the wider community. Dyson and Kerr (2014) similarly state that “disadvantage-focused rationale for extended services is hugely problematic”: focus on the local or individual level means that the importance of structural disadvantage can be underplayed. There is also a risk of constructing those children and families who would most benefit from the support that extended services can bring as
‘deficient’, and responsible for the situations that they are in, and relatedly, imposing a top-down solution, based on professionals’ perspectives as opposed to building capacity of local people themselves (p.90).

Finally, it is important to re-emphasise that political context is always crucial in the establishment of and potential success of place-based initiatives to tackling poverty and improve outcomes for children and young people. If political support at a national level is not present, locally-based initiatives can be compromised. The political will of New Labour in England, for example, was not matched by successive Tory / Tory-Lib Dem Governments. The impact of austerity, including cuts to the public sector and the third sector, will also continue to pose significant challenges. This is particularly pertinent where funding is required, as funding regimes shift alongside changing local and national priorities (Dyson et al., 2012). However, this emphasises the importance of initiatives ‘influencing up’: connecting action at a local level to regional and national policies.

**How do we know what is effective? Lessons for CNS practice and evaluation**

Overall, there is limited evidence on the impact of place-based approaches on children’s and families’ ‘outcomes’. The literature suggests that in many cases it is too early to tell, as meaningful change can take a long time. Moreover, as is the case with evaluation in general, it is often not built in from the beginning of an initiative, perhaps because of cost.

Measuring the effectiveness of place-based approaches is challenging. In their review of place-based working in Scotland for the Scottish Government, EKOS (2018) argued that measurement is “generally limited and lack in a consistent method, or indeed a consistent set of principles” (p. 10).

Dyson and Kerr (2014) concede that there are significant challenges in evaluating the impact of ‘community schools’, challenges which are also shared in wider community initiatives to support children and young people. Certain aspects are easily measurable, such as participation in activities, and attainment levels, however the wider impact on families (such as increased confidence and wellbeing) is less easily measured.
“The problem, of course, is that multi-strand interventions such as extended services necessarily produce multiple effects through complex causal pathways that are difficult, if not impossible to disentangle” (p. 82-82).

Similar comments can be made regarding the HCZ, as it has been difficult to establish whether improvements were a result of additional services, or more general improvements in the school, for example, improved leadership because of a new head teacher, raising the general standard of teaching (Harlem Children’s Zone, 2009).

A study of the full service extended schools (FSES) initiative identified no differences in analysis of statistical indicators between schools supported by FSESs and those not, and the evidence on attainment was “decidedly ambiguous” (Dyson and Kerr, 2014 p. 87). Even though head teachers could identify children who were achieving better than anticipated had there not been interventions, it is difficult to demonstrate a causal link because of other developments which may have influenced attainment.

It may be the case that it is easier to capture evidence of improved partnership working than it is to evidence improvement in outcomes for children and young people because of improved partnership working. Moore et al. (2014) argue that there is often a failure to “separately evaluate the efficacy of the partnership and the efficacy of the action planning and strategies used by the partnership” (p. 26). This will be a key priority for the evaluation of CNS.

However, Dyson and Kerr argue that we can establish “promising outcomes”, and that the “most convincing evidence tended to come from piecing together case accounts of individuals and families” (p.85). Evaluation should therefore focus on what kinds of activities children and young people, and their families are accessing, and in what ways are they finding these beneficial. Interestingly, Moore et al. (2014) suggest that “given the open and constantly evolving nature of place-based efforts to address wicked problems”, one of the most appropriate forms of evaluation is developmental evaluation. In practice, the process of collecting and reporting the data becomes an intervention (p. 26).

A mixed methods approach, involving quantitative and qualitative research, is also most likely to yield results. For example, the full service extended schools (FSES) initiative, which ran from 2003 to 2006 in approximately 150 schools, had a particularly rigorous evaluation
design. This evaluation used a combination of quantitative (analysis of attainment outcomes and other relevant statistical data) and qualitative (detailed case studies of a smaller number of FSES schools through interviewing children and parents, field visits to schools) evidence.

As discussed earlier in the paper, it is crucial for all organisations involved in initiatives to support children and young people to have a clear set of shared goals. Initiatives should be underpinned by a theory of action or theory of change (Dyson et al., 2012): “how a zone’s outcomes are to be monitored and judged, and what zones might reasonably be expected to achieve, can only be determined if it is clear in advance what they are trying to do, why, and how” (p. 28). Finally, it is important to accept that we can draw on principles of effective interventions elsewhere but the national and local context is important, and local initiatives have to be adapted accordingly.

**Implications for CNS**

This final section offers some implications for the Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland initiative based on the learning from this evidence review. The key points are:

- It is valuable to draw on promising practice and key principles from similar place-based approaches to tackling disadvantage for children and young people, however it is important to develop a customised, localised model which recognises geographical and other contexts, and builds on existing service provision and initiatives.

- Recognising the structural causes of poverty, it is important to think about how place-based initiatives such as CNS can influence upwards and outwards, as well as supporting organisations to ‘mitigate’ the effects of poverty.

- Schools in the local area play a central role in the majority of initiatives to support children and young people, and should be supported as they shift from ‘traditional’ understandings of the role of the school towards a more community-focused role.

- Place-based initiatives could offer more meaningful ways for communities to participate in and influence local decision-making. In relation to this, we must reflect
on how children and young people can be empowered to participate in decision-making and holding services and organisations – including CNS – to account.

- CNS must support organisations to develop an agreed set of long-, mid- and short-term outcomes, and a shared sense of how these are going to be achieved, using a theory of change.
- In evaluating the Children’s Neighbourhoods Scotland model, identifying changes or improvements to partnership working should be separate from evaluating the impact of specific initiatives to support children and young people. These two strands of research have important linkages, but it is important to examine separately if we wish to get a stronger sense of the ‘added value’ of CNS.

In summary, this paper has reviewed the key literature on place-based approaches to supporting and improving outcomes for children and young people. It firstly presented the challenges and opportunities for place-based approaches more broadly, before describing the specific examples of children’s zones or communities that have been established elsewhere. Drawing on evaluations of these interventions as well as supporting literature, the paper identifies some key lessons and evidence of promising practice that can help inform the CNS model as it develops. The paper then reflects on lessons for evaluation, before presenting some key implications for the CNS initiative. While the structural causes of poverty must always be challenged, there is scope for place-based initiatives like CNS to respond to these by ‘influencing up’ and supporting connections between action in the local communities and regional and national structures and policies.
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Reference

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