

# Unleashing Health Communities

Bromley by Bow Centre

## Wider context

The Marmot Review<sup>1</sup> and the subsequent work of the UCL Institute for Health Equity has provided a comprehensive, robust and widely accepted framework for understanding the causes and consequences of health inequality in England. In short, the report identifies a broad range of social determinants of health and its findings lead to the conclusion that clinical interventions play a lesser role than previously assumed in driving positive health outcomes, particularly for people living in deprived communities.

The broad findings of the Marmot Review have been echoed in a number of subsequent reports by eminent research bodies including most recently the King's Fund<sup>2</sup>, the Health Foundation<sup>3</sup> and Public Health England<sup>4</sup>.

The Marmot Review also spawned a number of research-based practical responses in different parts of the UK which test a range of approaches that attempt to address one or more of the social determinants of health alongside clinical interventions.

However, there are few comprehensive and extensive examples of a holistic approach that works across the full breadth of social determinants. We believe that the Bromley by Bow Centre represents one of the best examples of an approach which tackles the wider determinants of health, through combining quality primary care with over fifty different non-clinical social projects being delivered from one venue. It is additionally interesting as a model because it operates in one of the most deprived communities in the UK.

The Bromley by Bow Centre's response to the Marmot Review and the contention that 70% of health outcomes are attributable to socio-economic factors, has been to create a programme that brings together primary care provision, public health programmes, social care and a comprehensive range of non-clinical services that improve the wider determinants of health.

## Introduction

The Bromley by Bow Centre is a dynamic and innovative charity operating in East London. Over the past 30 years it has transformed the lives of people who come from some of the most deprived estates in the UK. It has achieved this by providing a distinctive, holistic and easily accessible range of integrated services in one place. Since 1997 it has worked jointly with the Bromley by Bow Health Partnership to create a new and unique model of delivery which has a holistic primary care operation at its core and it was the first Healthy Living Centre in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> **Michael Marmot**, Fair Society Healthy Lives – Strategic Review of Health Inequalities Post-2010 (2010, Department of Health)

<sup>2</sup> **Chris Ham & Hannah Brown**, The Future is Now (2015, The King's Fund)

**Hugh Alderwick, Chris Ham & David Buck**, Population health systems - Going beyond integrated care (2015, King's Fund)

<sup>3</sup> **Trevor Hopkins & Simon Rippon**, Head, hands and heart: asset-based approaches in health care (2015, The Health Foundation)

<sup>4</sup> **Jane South**, Health and wellbeing: a guide to community-centred approaches (2015, Public Health England)

This means that the services available stretch from healthcare for local residents to opportunities to set up your own business; from support with tackling your credit card debts to becoming a stained glass artist; from learning to read and write to getting a job for the first time or a helping hand up the career ladder. The Centre is focused on transforming the lives of local residents and the community as a whole. It's based in Tower Hamlets and is in an area of very high deprivation and whilst providing universal services, focuses on those with greatest needs and vulnerabilities, often considered the hardest to reach and engage.

## Service Range

The Centre seeks to provide a seamless provision including: primary care; community health services; social care; public health and community based mental health programmes; together with a wide range of services that build skills and improve the wider determinants of health. Services are designed to meet immediate presenting needs and build longer term resilience.

Services include:

- programmes to build social networks and reduce social isolation
- social welfare and legal advice (particularly welfare benefits, debt and housing)
- financial capability and programmes to tackle fuel poverty
- services that promote healthy lifestyles and behaviours
- community based mental health provision
- skills programmes for young people and adults (including digital inclusion, literacy, numeracy, English and vocational learning)
- careers advice and employability programmes (including traineeships, apprenticeships and work placements with a wide range of employers)
- employment brokerage
- social enterprise incubation support

The Centre is accessed by thousands of people each month who use its facilities and services and contribute to their development and running. The buildings and flowing courtyards are built around a three-acre community park and have been designed to promote access, interaction and empowerment. The award-winning park and growing spaces are managed with local people and form an integral part of the provision. Other facilities include a volunteer staffed café that uses surplus food and a Connection Zone that serves as the hub for a 400-member time bank. Each year the Centre enables the realisation of dozens of resident-led community projects that support healthy living initiatives in local neighbourhoods.

The integration of the health centre saw the development of two key innovations:

- social prescribing with health professionals referring patients to all the Centre's non-clinical services
- and the creation of the intelligent waiting room, which utilises the health centre waiting room as a key space to engage with patients to connect them to the wider service offer

The Bromley by Bow Centre has been at the forefront of social enterprise development in London and has created a model which focuses on unlocking the talents and skills within deprived communities. In the last decade its social enterprise incubation programme has supported the establishment of a network of 57 businesses that provide goods and services to the community, employ over 300 local people and have a combined turnover in excess of £4 million.

## Bromley by Bow Centre approach

The Bromley by Bow Centre's fundamental belief is that local people have the inherent capability to transform their lives and enable the community to be renewed. However, systemic conditions and institutional approaches have historically created social exclusion and acted as a barrier to the realisation of individual and community empowerment.

The Centre's approach is to act as an enabler by developing integrated responses that meet immediate needs, whilst building capability and resilience and harnessing aspiration to create long-term change. The approach fundamentally redefines the role of practitioner and patient/service user; creating collaborative relationships built on common purpose and shared endeavour. It is based on a holistic understanding of individuals, the community and wider environment, including the interrelationship of cause and effect between immediate issues and deep-seated causal factors.

Our services focus on people who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged including those with learning and physical disabilities, mental health issues, long-term conditions, the socially isolated, the elderly, those in poverty, and those with low levels of skills and people with English as a second language.

The Centre works closely with an extensive range of local partners including over 20 social housing providers, GP practices, Children's Centres, schools, faith groups and others, co-developing holistic approaches and integrated service models with them. Many of our services are delivered in their venues as an integral part of their provision and we receive referrals to our services from them.

## Local context

Whilst East London is an area of significant change and regeneration, it also remains one of deep rooted deprivation too. Tower Hamlets is the seventh most deprived local authority area in England and the Bromley by Bow area is amongst the poorest in the borough with over 70% of our community within the 20% most deprived quintile and 50% of children growing up in poverty.

## Contributing to practice and policy

The Bromley by Bow Centre has a significant track record of developing and sharing innovative practice both nationally and internationally. It has also contributed to a number of national policy initiatives, including the development of the national Sure Start and Children's Centre programme, the Health Trainer initiative, Tackling Health Inequalities policies and the Healthy Living Centre programme.

The Centre has contributed to the Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, and is cited as a case study of good practice in the Joseph Rowntree/King's Fund report, *Tackling Poverty, Making More of the NHS in England*. It is also referenced in NHS England and Public Health England's, *A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing* and the King's Fund's case study summary of health innovation, *The Future is Now* and the King's Fund paper on the need for a radical approach to creating health communities that steps out of the narrow confines of the health structures, *Population health systems - Going beyond integrated care*.

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