

Northumbria University's Holiday Activities and Food Plus: Working in Collaboration with Gateshead Council to Provide Health and Wellbeing Activities to Young People and Families at the Metro Centre

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In 2024 Northumbria University worked, in collaboration with Gateshead Council and a number of other organisations, to offer young people living in Gateshead the opportunity to access enriching activities across the school summer holiday. In addition to opening the facilities on Northumbria University's City Campus, academics also developed, with Gateshead Council, a community offer that was open to all people who visited the Metro Centre. This offer consisted of several health education and wellbeing activities, within the Community Hub located at the Metro Centre. These activities were supported by colleagues from the Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing, the Department of Nursing, Midwifery & Health at Northumbria University and colleagues from South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust. All the activities were underpinned by theoretical concepts and empirical research studies. The delivery team comprised of trained professionals who are heavily involved in knowledge exchange: translating theory and research findings into practice. The range of activities built on the extensive experience and knowledge of the whole team to offer age appropriate, accessible materials.

The aim of these Metro Centre based activities was to engage HAF attendees and wider members of the public in a series of health-related activities to facilitate discussions around health and wellbeing and signpost young people and adults to further support and opportunities available to them in their local area.

Activity 1: The Department of Nursing, Midwifery and Health

Staff from Northumbria University's Nursing, Midwifery and Health department, including Dr Alan Platt (Head of Clinical Simulation), Dr Joy Shao (Assistant Professor), and Craig Clark (Technology Enhanced Learning Analyst), together with the Simulation Technician team (Julie Hunter, Ruth Steinberg, Matt Crane, Lorraine Grooby, and Don George Padam), used a range of

state-of-the-art interactive educational tools to deliver this activity entitled “Inside and out: What is happening to the manikin”. The equipment included a computerised manikin that breathes, talks and has pulses that participants could interact with to check the manikin’s heartbeat. To demonstrate the visible physical impact of vaping on the body, the manikin was programmed to represent an individual who was having problems with their breathing. It was then reprogrammed to demonstrate the impact of alcohol misuse. We cycled between these two programmes over the course of day. These were used to demonstrate the external effects, or the “out” of the activity, of engaging in unhealthy activities such as vaping. This was further supported by the University’s virtual reality equipment to demonstrate the “inside” of the activity. This enabled the participants to see inside the human body and explore its anatomy and physiology, and the impact that alcohol and vaping have internally. We cycled between these two programmes over the course of day.

Participants were able to interact with both the manikins and the virtual reality equipment they were also able to ask the Northumbria University staff present any questions on the use of the equipment and the impact of vaping and alcohol misuse has on an individual.





This work was supported by dedicated technicians from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Northumbria University.



Participants were also able to interact with both the patient simulators and the virtual reality simulation activity, as well as ask the Northumbria University staff present any questions on the use of the equipment and the impact of vaping and alcohol misuse has on an individual.





Activity 2: The Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing

Staff from Northumbria University's Children and Young People's Psychological Trainings team, including Dr Kellie Jacques (Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer), Joleen Ross (Lecturer), Dr Markku Wood (Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Assistant Professor), and Helen Dean (CBT Therapist and Lecturer) designed and delivered a range of wellbeing activities for the young people attending HAF Plus at the Metro Centre. These activities provided young people with tools they could use to maintain positive wellbeing, linked into the concept of the "5 Ways to Wellbeing": connect, get active, take notice, learn, and give.

Young people were supported to think about positive factors in their lives and used these ideas to create bracelets and key rings, with each strand representing one of these factors. They were also given the opportunity to design an individualised "self-soothe" box that they could use to ground themselves in times of heightened emotion. There were additional emotion-focused activities such as emotion colouring and emotion conversation dice, as well as signposting resources for further support around wellbeing and mental health. Young people also had the opportunity to listen to a series of short talks recorded by mental health experts and academics, showcasing strategies to support wellbeing.

Finally, they had the opportunity to share their learning with others through interactive tasks focusing on identifying how emotions are experienced in the body and things they could do to support wellbeing within the five domains.

Activity 3 - South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

South Tyneside Mental Health Services played a crucial role in supporting the psychological trainings team with all the delivery of the wellbeing activities. The Trust set up a stand that provided information to young people and their families and the staff signposted young people and families to other local services, ensuring that all had access to the necessary support. Additionally, they advertised a range of local services and highlighted the important work they do in the community, further enhancing the overall impact of the event.





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Reflective Commentary on the overall project:

Delivering the health and wellbeing activities was an excellent experience and one that was very rewarding. Using Northumbria University's educational tools was an innovative approach to using patient simulators and virtual reality. This approach was very successful as it generated a great deal of interest from the HAF Plus participants and their wider family members. Participants were very intrigued by the equipment and this acted as a catalyst for them to engage with the patient simulator and virtual reality sets. This in turn facilitated discussions around health and wellbeing. Using the equipment in an enjoyable and approachable manner fostered this. What was particularly evident was the draw that the equipment had on the public generally and how this facilitated discussions regarding health and wellbeing. Many parents and carers expressed concerns about young people vaping, and a number stated that young people, who had not smoked before, now vaped. In 2025, the delivery team are planning on offering a similar service to three local authorities in the North East, although this service may be at a different location.

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