The UKCRC Centre of Excellence for Public Health (NI) led a multidisciplinary team to win a prestigious Medical Research Council award to evaluate the Connswater Community Greenway (CCG) and its impacts on physical activity and the health of the local population in East Belfast.

What was unique about our bid to the National Prevention Research Initiative was that it brought together a partnership of at least four government departments (including Department for Social Development, Department for Regional Development, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure, and Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety NI), the Public Health Agency and academics from a range of disciplines to produce a proposal to evaluate the £32M CCG project which will improve the built environment and quality of life in East Belfast.

This natural experiment will contribute significantly to the evidence base and has created much excitement internationally in the public health research community.

The CCG has been developed by East Belfast Partnership and is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Belfast City Council and the Department for Social Development. The CCG is a major environmental improvement project in East Belfast, connecting 379 acres of public open space, building 40 new and improved bridges and 16km of cycle and walkways.

Approximately 40,000 people living along the CCG will have improved opportunities for physical activity and therefore support for a healthier lifestyle. Residents include some of those living in the highest areas of social deprivation in Northern Ireland.

The contract to develop the CCG has been awarded to joint venture SIAC (NI) Ltd and Galliford Try Infrastructure (Connswater JV). The works contract with an estimated £21m, will involve the construction of new bridges, riverside walkways and cycle paths, flood defences, public realm, park improvements and river enhancement works.

Story continued on page 2.

www.communitygreenway.co.uk
The Connswater Community Greenway

The vision is to develop a safe, accessible, sustainable greenway which is an inspirational living landmark that improves the quality of life for the people of East Belfast, now and for future generations.

The physical changes to the living environment will include:

- 9 km linear park
- Wildlife corridor
- Connecting open space
- New bridges
- 5km of clean rivers
- 6 tourism and heritage trails
- A civic square

A huge number of people will benefit from this exciting Greenway, including 40,835 residents who live along the route, pupils attending the 23 schools and colleges in the area, visitors and tourists to East Belfast/Belfast, and future generations in East Belfast.

The PARC Study: Who’s Involved

Queen’s University Belfast has teamed up with a number of other agencies from the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary/community sector in order to deliver this innovative study.

The PARC Study has successfully pulled together a research team comprising of academics from public health, environmental economics, sociology, psychology, and spatial planning.

We continually seek to engage with the community, practitioners and policy makers, with representatives from various statutory, non-statutory and community/voluntary agencies sitting on our working groups. Belfast City Council, Belfast Healthy Cities, the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, the Public Health Agency, the Department of the Environment, the Department for Regional Development, Sustrans, Sport Northern Ireland and the East Belfast Community Development Agency are all collaborators on this research project and have been involved from the planning stage of the PARC Study.
Meet the Team

Professor Frank Kee, Director of the UKCRC Centre of Excellence for Public Health (NI) is the Principal Investigator of the PARC Study. Professor Kee led the successful bid to the UKCRC for a Centre of Excellence in Public Health (NI), one of five centres in the UK. Professor Kee was appointed to the Medical School in 1998. He has been the primary grant holder of the ECTIM Study Extension in Belfast (Etude Cas Temoin de l'Infarctus Myocarde), the Belfast EARS II study (European Atherosclerosis Study) and of the Belfast PRIME Study Extension.

Mrs Debbie Donaldson is the Clerical Officer on the PARC Study. She started working in the Centre for Public Health at Queen’s University Belfast in January 2010. Previously she worked for 15 years at Bombardier and as an Administrator at ClearCo Services from 2002-2009. Debbie performs a wide range of administrative duties on the PARC Study and keeps the rest of us on our toes!

Dr Mark Tully is the Study Director on the PARC Study. Mark graduated in Biomedical Science from QUB in 2000. He then went on to complete his Ph.D looking at the effects of home based walking programmes on cardiovascular risk factors. Mark also works on a number of projects looking at the effects of the environment on physical activity and using pedometers to help people change their activity level.

Dr Ruth Hunter is the Project Manager on the PARC Study. Ruth graduated in Physiotherapy in 2005 and went on to complete her Ph.D investigating the effects of physical activity for people with low back pain. She started working in the Centre for Public Health in January 2010. She also has a particular interest in East Belfast given her role as the physiotherapist with Glentoran Football Club.

Prof Frank Kee, Director of the centre of excellence for public health said, “This is a ground breaking study looking at the effects of the built environment on the physical activity levels of people in east Belfast. Increased physical activity can help reduce the risk of many diseases including obesity, heart disease and cancer”.

Dr Ruth Hunter
Chaired by **Prof Frank Kee and Dr Mark Tully**, the main aspect of the PARC Study is a before and after construction Household Survey of 1200 local residents along the Greenway route. This survey collects information on people’s physical activity levels, health, mental health and factors that might encourage people to walk more in their local area. The first phase of this survey was completed in January 2011. This survey will be compared with results from a Northern Ireland wide survey conducted by Sport Northern Ireland. A subsample of 100 people will be asked to wear accelerometers around their waist which objectively measures their amount of physical activity. The Survey Group is also responsible for collecting data on the number of people using the parks and open spaces along the Greenway route. We have completed the first phase of this work in August 2010 and February 2011 with the help of 17 volunteers from the local area.

**Claire Cleland** is a PhD student working on the PARC Study. Claire graduated with a degree in Human Nutrition and is currently in the 2nd year of her Ph.D. Using data from the Household Survey and accelerometer study, Claire aims to gain a better understanding of the reasons why some people who reside in the Connswater area participate in physical activity.

**Economics Working Group**

**Professor George Hutchinson** is an economist from the Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use, QUB and chairs the PARC Economics Working Group. This group is primarily responsible for an economic analysis on the cost-effectiveness of the CCG, particularly in terms of health benefits. The group is also interested in looking at the impact the change in level of crime, availability of paths and green space, and the availability of facilities and amenities has on the amount of walking people do in their local area. In addition, the group is involved in the Physical Activity Loyalty Card Scheme, helping produce an economic evaluation framework.
Dr Geraint Ellis is a senior lecturer in the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering and chairs the Built Environment Working Group. Using Geographic Information System (GIS) data, this group has developed a walkability index for areas along the CCG route. This is created using elements such as residential density, land use mix, intersection density and retail floor area ratio. This group has also worked on improving the walkability index by developing a Real Walkable Network based on a detailed pedestrian network leading to better understanding as to why people use certain footpaths and walkways. The study will assess how walkability will change due to the CCG. In addition, the model will be validated using information on physical activity levels from the Household Survey.

Mick Donnelly is a Research Assistant working on the PARC Study. Mick graduated with a degree in Geography in 2004 and in Environmental Planning 2007. He has previously worked as a town planner/surveyor in a consultancy environment. His main area of work has been in developing the GIS based model to measure and monitor changes in the built environment as a result of the CCG.

Dr Michael Donnelly, Centre for Public Health and Professor Lindsay Prior, School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, chair the Health Improvement Working Group. The Health Improvement Working Group engages with the local community and stakeholders in a bid to develop health improvement initiatives to promote physical activity in the CCG area.

Researchers in the group have already spoken to a number of key community representatives in regards to physical activity in the area and their thoughts on schemes that have been used to promote physical activity. This was followed up with focus group discussions involving 14 community groups in East Belfast, investigating their opinion of physical activity, their thoughts about the CCG and how they envisage using it to be more active.

Dr Helen McAneney has led a piece of research analysing key CCG stakeholders, assessing their strength of engagement and role in the CCG.

In addition, the group will carry out interviews with 50 households along the CCG who have completed the Household Survey. The purpose is to try and provide further investigation and explanation to results and trends highlighted in the Survey.

Wendy Scott is a Ph.D student on the PARC Study. She is a graduate from the University of Ulster having attained a degree in Sport and Leisure Studies; Post Graduate Certificate in Education and a MSc. in Sport, Exercise and Leisure. Since then Wendy has gained a broad spectrum of experience in health working with individuals, sports teams and corporate businesses delivering health programmes. She has also ran her own business and tackled the world of journalism. She will be carrying out the qualitative interviews to ascertain the impact of urban renewal on engagement in physical activity in the Connswater area.

Dr David Scott is a Research Assistant on the PARC Study, recently completing his Ph.D. He has worked on a range of projects relating to mental health and ageing and has been working on the PARC Study since April 2010.

David has been conducting focus groups with community groups in East Belfast to discuss their thoughts on the Greenway and how to improve physical activity levels among the population.
Professor David Bell from the School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science is Chair of the E-Resources Working Group. The main piece of work this group is responsible for is an innovative physical activity loyalty card scheme. Using mobile phone technology, sensors will be placed along the Greenway route. Working similar to other popular loyalty cards, such as Boots Advantage card and Sainsbury’s Nectar Card, local residents will be given a ‘loyalty card’ containing a microchip. Residents can track their physical activity by swiping their ‘loyalty card’ along sensors when they go for a walk, run or cycle along the Greenway. Every minute of physical activity completed earns “points”. These “points” can then be reimbursed for rewards, redeemable at local businesses and retailers. We have teamed up with Intelligent Health and Club Marketing Services Ltd to deliver this scheme.

Physical Activity Loyalty Card Scheme

The first phase of this exciting scheme is due to get underway in April 2011. Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association (NICSSA) have teamed up with Queen’s University Belfast to offer Civil Servants the chance to take part. This will be the first scheme of its kind! For more information visit our website:

www.PALcard.co.uk

If any local businesses or retailers are interested in getting involved, please contact:

Dr Ruth Hunter,
Tel: 028 90 633078/07530370171 or
Email: ruth.hunter@qub.ac.uk
Community Engagement

The PARC Study has a strong community engagement ethos and has published articles in local newbriefs, newsletters and e-bulletins in East Belfast. Copies of these can be found on the Connswater Community Greenway website: www.communitygreenway.co.uk

In addition, researchers from the PARC Study team have presented work on a regular basis at the CCG Stakeholders Forum, Community Workers’ Forum and the CCG Outreach Centre meetings.

The PARC Study recruited 17 volunteers from East Belfast to help collect observational data of the usage of the proposed Greenway area.

PARC Quality Assurance

We have set up a Scientific Policy and Advisory Panel to ensure the scientific rigour of our work. The role of this panel is also to champion the project and raise the profile of the study in scientific and policy communities.

Members of this panel include:
Professor Mike Kelly, NICE Public Health; Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer; Dr David Ogilvie, MRC Epidemiology Unit, Cambridge University, and Dr William Bird, Natural England and Intelligent Health.

The PARC Steering Committee involves a number of representatives from statutory and non-statutory bodies. Their role is to oversee the completion and implementation of the study.

This committee is chaired by Dr Leslie Boydell, Medical Director (Public Health), Belfast Trust.

Other members include:
Dr Andy Cope, Research and Monitoring Director, Sustrans; Joan Devlin, Director, Belfast Healthy Cities; Dr Carolyn Harper, Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency; Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure, Belfast City Council; Gerry McAreavey, Department of Social Development; and Robb Phipps, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety NI.
The PARC Project Team undertake a hands on assurance role in relation to management of the PARC Study evaluation. This group meets every quarter and includes the chair of the individual PARC working groups alongside other academics from QUB, including Dr Margaret Cupples and Mr Mike Stevenson. In addition, a number of key representatives from statutory and non-statutory bodies in East Belfast sit on this group. These include Linda Armitage, Health Strategy Manager, East Belfast Partnership; Jonny Currie, Community Support Manager, East Belfast Community Development Agency and Wendy Langham who provides regular updates on the progress of the Connswater Community Greenway.

... and not forgetting....

We also have a number of other representatives who sit on the various PARC working groups. This includes: Paul Donnelly, Policy, Planning and Research Manager, SportNI; Sean Brannigan, CCG Community Engagement Officer; Margaret Devlin-Hania, Health Promotion Officer, Belfast Trust; Dr Gillian Gilmore, Health Intelligence Manager, Public Health Agency; Kim Kensett, Physical Activity Co-ordinator, Public Health Agency; Dr Christine McMaster, Specialist Registrar, Public Health Agency; Maurice Meehan, Investing for Health Manager, Public Health Agency; Dr Alberto Longo, QUB; Dr Danny Campbell, QUB, Mary Dallat, QUB; Dr Karen Keaveney, QUB; Maire Brolly, NISRA; Brian Galloway, Land and Property Services; Martin Mayock, Department of Regional Development; Gary McNeill and Chris Murphy, Belfast City Council and Simon Wheeler, Department of Environment.

The PARC Study team would like to thank everyone involved in the study for their invaluable support.

The Connswater Community Greenway

The CCG is delivered by three key individuals. They are (L-R) Wendy Langham, Project Manager; Sean Brannigan, Community Engagement Officer and Heather Chesney, Communication and Administration Officer.

The Connswater Community Greenway Project Management Team includes Maurice Kinkead, East Belfast Partnership; Kyle Alexander, Strategic Investment Board; Barry Donaldson, Castlereagh Borough Council; Sammy Douglas, Project Champion; Gerry Millar, Belfast City Council (chair); Elaine Wilkinson, Department for Social Development; and Pat Aldridge, Rivers Agency.

For more information contact:

Dr Ruth Hunter
PARC Project Manager, Centre for Public Health, Queen’s University Belfast
Tel: 028 90 633078
Mob: 07530370171
Email: ruth.hunter@qub.ac.uk

Or

Dr Mark Tully
PARC Study Director, Centre for Public Health, Queen’s University Belfast
Tel: 028 90 65049
Mob: 07530370168
Email: m.tully@qub.ac.uk