



Because growing
up can be hard

Children North East Impact Report 2024/25



children-ne.org.uk

Charity number: 222041

Supporting babies,
children, young people
and their families to
have the happy, healthy
start in life they deserve
since 1891.



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Message from the Chief Executive

Since 1891, our mission has remained unwavering: to ensure every baby, child, young person and their families can grow up happy and healthy.

As I reflect on this commitment, both in today's climate and for the future, I'm reminded of the importance of continuing to fight for the world we want for the next generation. This past year has brought rising poverty, a struggling education system, inaccessible healthcare, and ineffective policymaking. It has been a year of deep uncertainty and challenge for babies, children and young people and their families, both nationally and here in the North East.

In response, I'm proud to say we have stepped up to the difficult circumstances. We've amplified our advocacy for real systemic change - calling on government to scrap the two-child limit, improve SEND provision, and make healthcare accessible when it's needed most. We've worked alongside partners to strengthen our collective voice and mission, and delivered our work to Westminster to inform government.



Pictured: Leigh, age 6

As demand grows, so does our resolve. We've delivered new projects across the North East, co-designed with communities to meet their needs, and provided essential services with creativity, compassion and care in uncertain times.

I'm incredibly proud of the team within Children North East, our trustees, staff, volunteers, patrons, funders, and partners. Their dedication is at the heart of our work and the generosity and commitment provides real change to people's lives. To our sponsors, donors, and fundraisers – a deep heartfelt thank you, your support makes everything possible.

With your help, we won't stop until every child has the happy, healthy start in life they deserve.

**Leigh Elliott, Chief Executive
Children North East**

We Are Children North East

Our Vision

All babies, children and young people are given the chance to grow up happy and healthy.

Our Ambition

We want all babies, children and young people to grow up feeling:

- Safe and loved
- Resilient to the challenges they may face
- Valued and confident

What We Do

Children North East delivers services, support and initiatives that provide a platform for babies, children, young people and families to work through issues, take action and which gives them the tools to reach their full potential.

We campaign on issues and challenge those in positions of influence who make decisions affecting the lives of babies, children and young people.

Our Year in Numbers

4,042

individuals provided with support

1,042

families provided with support

54,386

participated in consultations

3,409

professionals trained

1,002

additional individuals provided with guidance

We provided services to...

2,126

unique North East postcodes

97

unique postcodes across the rest of the UK

*Unique postcodes indicate a 5 - 7 digit level, EG NE6 1XS

Stages of Childhood

Everyone gets just one chance at childhood, making it essential to ensure they have the right support to thrive here and now. At Children North East, we believe that happy, healthy childhoods lay the foundation for a brighter future for all, which is why our services work from pre-natal to young adults.

Pre-Birth

We work with expectant mothers and their families to help them provide strong starts in life. Our Little Minds in Mind programme provides Parent-Infant Therapy to hundreds of pregnant women and new parents annually, helping to develop and strengthen the bond between the parent and their baby when trauma, distress or mental health is impacting their relationship.



“My mental health was poor throughout my pregnancy but with Little Minds in Minds help and support I was better able to cope.”

Little Minds in Mind Mother



The First 1,001 Days

We provide support focused on the first 1,001 days of life, which lay the foundation for lifelong wellbeing, learning and health. For example, our Newcastle Community Family Hub (Inner West) acts as a thriving hub for new families to access healthcare professionals, learn parenting skills, participate in baby groups, such as massage or sensory sessions, and grow their support networks.



Younger Years

We work with children across areas that impact their lives, including in families, schools and communities. One of our programmes is run during the school holidays, which can be a particularly difficult time for families facing challenges. The programme delivers a wide range of activities through HAF (Holiday, Activities & Food) to ensure no child misses out on food, friendship or formative experiences.

“I spend a lot of time in my room normally, it’s nice to get some sun.”

HAF North Tyneside participant

Life at School

School often has the most significant impact on young lives outside of family. We work with schools to reach and support pupils through services, providing enriching activities, advice and guidance. For example, Worrit Warriors, delivered with Mortal Fools, works with pupils at risk of suicide and other high-risk mental health challenges, to grow their resilience and learn coping techniques for dealing with challenging emotions.

“He is typically so hard to engage [...] so seeing him be so supportive and open to talking about his anger and emotions is wonderful.”

Head Teacher of Worrit Warriors participant



Young Adults

We work with young adults (18 to 25) who face additional barriers, such as SEND or neurodiversity, to aid their transition to independence. For example, our CAN mentoring project supports young people to pursue goals to improve their life skills or circumstances. The young people are paired with volunteer mentors, who help them achieve outcomes such as employment, accessing services or socialising.

“He's now very confident out in the community and can use public transport without anxiety.”

Staff member on a CAN mentee



Teenage Life

As teenagers head towards adulthood providing the right support is essential to ensuring they are given the best opportunity to realise their unique potential. We work with teenagers during this period, offering services such as mental health support and youth work. Our Berwick Social Action Group, as an example, gives rural teens the opportunity to design and deliver projects that embed them with the local community and gives them access to developmental experiences.

Tackling Health Inequalities

Health outcomes for young lives remain deeply unequal, with factors like poverty, discrimination and postcode still determining access to care and long-term wellbeing. We challenge these injustices by addressing the root causes and outcomes of health inequality.

Our Impact

Our work to tackle health inequalities spans a wide range of services that support babies, children, young people, and families in every aspect of their lives, including supporting access to services, wellbeing, food, fitness and family life. We take a holistic approach that meets people's needs where they are. Whether it's through schools, community settings or direct one-to-one help, our teams are there to help children grow up healthy and thrive. Here are just some of the ways we are making an impact tackling health inequalities.

Policy Work

Children North East is committed to tackling health inequalities through evidence-based policy influence and campaigning. We use insight from our frontline work and consultations with those with lived-experience to advocate for systems change that puts health first.

Our leadership and staff regularly contribute to regional strategies, government consultations and national forums to influence child health policy and challenge the social determinants of poor health.

This year, we contributed to The King's Fund's advocacy into tackling health inequalities for children and young people in the North East, helping shape national understanding of the region's challenges and solutions. As active partners in the Tackling Inequalities for Children (TIC) programme, we campaign for improved access to mental health support, early intervention and integrated family services. CEO Leigh Elliott, continues to be a key voice in regional and national health policy discussions.

"Poverty Proofing is an integral part of the Public Health agenda."

Clare Morton, Deputy Public Health Midwife, South Warwickshire University NHS Foundation Trust

Breaking Down Barriers to Healthcare

Minimising the impact of poverty on healthcare provision is essential to breaking the link between an individual's income and their opportunity to live a long, healthy life. Our Poverty Proofing® experts provide healthcare teams with training, workshops, audits and consultation support improvement in areas such as access, participation, experience and long-term engagement.

This year, the team consulted 1,500 patients, staff and stakeholders on their lived experience of poverty, provided 1,930 professionals with poverty awareness training and "Poverty Proofed" 18 settings and services.

Rotherham Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust engaged Poverty Proofing to audit 120 settings and has provided 726 staff with Poverty Awareness Training to date, whilst the North East North Cumbria IBC has trained 656 staff and audited 21 settings this year.

Data collected from the Poverty Proofing team focused on common causes of inequity of access to healthcare was submitted as part of the expert consultation shaping the NHS 10 Year Plan.

"We'd not really considered those families reporting that they'd actually had to give up work because their child's mental health needs are so significant and the impact of that on the families lifestyle."

Theresa Maddison, North Tyneside CAMHS Specialist Nurse Consultant

Sexual Health

Children North East delivers non-clinical sexual health services across Newcastle on behalf of Newcastle City Council, playing an integral part locally in helping young people understand healthy relationships and staying safe.

This year, the team provided community, schools based and outreach access to thousands of young people with help and advice, including contraception, STI checks, education sessions and confidential advice on subjects such as respect and consent, pregnancy decision making and period poverty.



North East North Cumbria IBC

Empowering Neurodivergent Young People

Young neurodivergent people face many health inequalities, from delays in diagnosis, limited support, and barriers to inclusion in schools and communities. Children North East works to fill the unmet needs of these young people through a range of interventions, including open-to-all peer support youth groups, specialist counselling (Masquer-Aid), mentoring (Youth Link) and employability support (Journey to Employment).

Masquer-Aid is a 12-week programme offering one-to-one counselling and peer support groups to learn about what it means to be neurodivergent, talk about experiences and overcome mental health challenges.

One 15 year old girl joined Masquer-Aid to work through the trauma of bullying relating to her autism, which had left her with low mood and anxiety and unable able to attend school or social activities. She reported it was "nice to be able to share all of my hundreds of fast-moving thoughts with someone who can listen and get it". After Masquer-Aid, her school attendance improved and she reported she felt more comfortable in her friendships and looked forward to pursuing her ambitions.

"I can come out from behind my mask now. It is lovely, it is really nice to hear good things about myself and talk about all my interests."

Young person accessing Masquer-Aid



Providing sexual health outreach access

"The [job] interview was a really good experience and [he] feels more confident in attending interviews in the future."

Mentor for Journey to Employment

A Holistic Approach to Health

We strongly believe that access to healthcare should not be a postcode lottery, yet sadly this is often the case. We have dedicated spaces in areas of high deprivation where families and young people can access a range of health related services under one roof. For example, our Newcastle Community Family Hub (Inner West) is a vibrant, bustling space centred around our community cafe, Cafe Hope.

Here, families can access baby services, food, fitness, play, support groups, mental health services and guidance, employability programmes and much more. What makes this approach poignant is the relationships staff build with families, getting to understand and support the unique barriers they face to healthy childhoods.

Access to Nature

Nature is a theme that runs through much of our work, from getting young people involved in looking after our green spaces to providing opportunities for outdoor activities that promote wellbeing and connection. We also have projects that focus on environmental awareness, social action, and creating safe, inclusive spaces for children and families to enjoy nature together.

Our Allotment Youth Group, Berwick Social Action Group, and regular trips - like our annual beach trip for over 150 young people and families - offer opportunities for young people to explore the outdoors, learn new skills and build friendships, encouraging positive mental and physical health.



Fighting Food Inequality

Food is a theme that runs through so much of our work, from proving healthy meals at youth groups to getting children involved in growing food at the allotment. We also have projects which specifically focus on healthy eating, cooking skills and using meal times as a way to strengthen family and community connections.

Our Cooking on a Budget, Cook, Chop, Bake and Cooking Across the Ages projects, all delivered from our Cafe Hope kitchen, provides an opportunity for parents to pick up cooking, nutrition and budgeting skills, whilst building a connection with their children and building their support networks.

“He saw his child grow with confidence and an interest in cooking. He discussed what we did in group with his wife and implemented our preparing, cooking, recipes and techniques which kept cost down within his home.”

A staff member on a Dad participating in Cooking Across the Ages



Challenging Poverty

Rates of poverty in the UK are shameful, affecting over four million children. In the North East, child poverty rates can be as high as 50% in some areas. The experience of poverty has wide reaching impact for children and young people, including lack of access to opportunities, stigma and exclusion.

Our Impact

'We challenge poverty' is woven through all of our work. We support action that make a real difference, from projects promoting system and policy change to long-term support that builds confidence, skills and opportunities. We work across homes, schools and communities to break down barriers and create lasting change. Here are just some of the ways we are making an impact challenging poverty.



Challenging Changemakers

Children North East is a vocal campaigner against the root causes of poverty, using its platform to advocate for change and sharing community voices and its data to inform research and motivate action. Key policies we fight for include ending the two-child limit, universal schools meals and the real living wage.

Our staff regularly attend Westminster and national party conferences to push for these policy changes and we have hosted most regional MPs to give our communities a voice on lived experience.

This year, we have been part of the Guarantee our Essentials and Free School Meals campaigns challenging poverty.

"We really need a safe space like this (Wideopen drop in) to discuss issues like LGBTQ+. We just don't have anywhere like that at school that we can explore these things!"

Wideopen Group participant

A Clean Start in Life

Sharing toothbrushes with siblings, skipping school and avoiding socialising, are the realities for 1.1 million UK children living in hygiene poverty; found by InKind Direct's *A Clean Start in Life* report, for which we delivered consultations which explored the effect of hygiene poverty on children and young people on aspects of their life, including education, play, friendships, and mental health. The report provided a list of recommendations to Government and led to the distribution of hygiene packs to families across InKind's network of 6,000 charity partners.

Supporting Rural Youth

Children North East runs youth groups in Burradon and Wideopen, funded by Gateshead Council as part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda. The groups are designed to overcome the barriers faced by young people in semi-rural communities with high deprivation, by providing transport, engaging local partnerships, giving the young people control over activities and connecting them to employers and educators.

Systemic Change Through Poverty Proofing®

Poverty Proofing® is a nationally recognised tool for removing barriers faced by people living in poverty. Grounded in the voice of lived experience, this year the team consulted with 52,110 individuals on their experience and understanding of poverty. Through a range of training, workshops, audits and consultations, they worked with 109 settings across education, health, culture and early years nationwide to “Poverty Proof” activities and policies. To mark a decade since the pilot, a 10 Years of Poverty Proofing conference was held sharing expert voices and case studies to more than 200 decision-makers.

Working with 80 education settings, including Multi-Academy Trusts and schools the team have been supporting settings to remove barriers from the school day for pupils living in poverty and their families, including with the Welsh Government* in support of its Child Poverty Strategy 2024, the North East Combined Authority as part of its Child Poverty Prevention Programme, and the international Kavli Foundation. This year has seen the delivery of at-scale projects with a two-tier approach to promote setting level and system transformation simultaneously.

A landmark study by Newcastle University on the impact of Poverty Proofing in schools demonstrated how reducing stigma of poverty in schools improves attainment of all children. The study showed that over a two-year period from initial action to remove barriers for those living in poverty, scores improved by around 5%.



“What makes this research exciting is that by supporting children most impacted by poverty, the school environment can be made better for every child.”

Morgan Beeson, Research Associate at Newcastle University



In the arts and culture sector, our work continued to build across the UK, with flagship projects delivering poverty awareness sessions for the National Trust and partnering with a number of their venues to “Poverty Proof” their activities. The team are also partnered with Culture Start, a £1m programme to transform arts for 8,000 children and young people living in poverty in Sunderland. Our partnership also continues with the national arts education accreditors Artsmark, who work with over 4,000 schools annually, to ensure its approaches and recommendations are inclusive for all financial backgrounds.

Learn more about the impact of our Poverty Proofing Healthcare work in the Tackling Health Inequalities, page 6.



Pictured: Anne Longfield CBE, former Children’s Commissioner for England and the 10 Years BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts, which has been on a Poverty Proofing journey.

Supporting Mental Health

The mental health of children and young people is in crisis, with rising levels of anxiety, depression and unmet need. Children North East is committed to supporting young people's emotional wellbeing by improving access to early help and challenging the stigma that still surrounds mental health.

Our Impact

Supporting mental health is at the heart of everything we do. Our services are shaped around the real experiences of children, young people, and families by offering practical, emotional, and therapeutic support when it's needed most. From school-based programmes to one-to-one counselling, peer support and family work, we're there to listen, guide and empower. Here are just some of the ways we are making an impact supporting mental health.

Counselling and Therapy

This year, we have delivered a wide range of projects offering specialist therapeutic support to children and young people, including counselling for those experiencing mental health crisis and challenges, specialist services such as support for young victims of crime (Ways to Happiness), for young victims of sexual abuse and their families (SAFE) and for neurodivergent young people (Masquer-Aid).

This year we introduced Clay Field Therapy® into our expert practice, which is a body-focused, trauma informed art therapy that supports awareness of body memories. One child, whose counselling goal was to cope better with her worries to reduce the intensity of meltdowns, found with Clay Therapy sessions, they felt less anxious, trusted more and used coping mechanisms effectively, reported no meltdowns and managed challenging situations.

Supporting Safer Futures

The SAFE (Sexual Abuse Family Engagement) programme provides therapeutic support to young victims of sexual abuse and their families, helping them process their trauma. An example of the difference it makes comes from a young person who disclosed their abuse and was struggling with anger, sexualised behaviours and difficulty sleeping. Our counsellors worked with her to rebuild her sense of safety and offered an outlet to express her feelings. After 20 sessions, her behaviour shifted to be more respectful of others boundaries, less aggressive and her family reported she no longer tries to run away from home anymore.

2,825

counselling sessions delivered

"The knowledge and insights you've shared with me have empowered me. You've not only helped me understand the awful experiences, but you've also given me the tools to heal and regain control."

Parent/Carer accessing SAFE

"It helped me with past trauma with my brother, my emotions, ways of coping. It was good talking about feelings."

Young person accessing Ways to Happiness

"I do not feel as low as I did when I started and I no longer have thoughts of hurting myself."

Young person accessing counselling

Supporting Parents Navigating Child Mental Health

Ways to Wellbeing is a programme of help for families struggling to support their child's mental health and wellbeing.

Sessions are provided to hundreds of parents and carers across North East community venues and schools, providing information on supporting their child's mental health and wellbeing, as well as helping them to navigate the impact of mental health challenges on family life. The team also provided training to 42 professionals this year to deliver support in their communities

One mother joining sessions reported her six year child has been refusing to attend school, becoming distressed at drop off. Through the sessions she met parents going through similar experiences and reported this helped her own shame at the situation. The team worked through practical responses to the distress to help her manage his behavior and supported her to work with the school, resulting in later drop off times and wellbeing support for her son. She also reported better understanding of her children's mental health and how to recognise triggers.



Recovery from Domestic Abuse

ROSES (Recovery of Survivors Emotional Support) is a volunteer-led regular drop-in session for survivors of partner domestic abuse providing a safe space to share and hear experiences of moving away from the abuse and managing its impact, both practical and on victim wellbeing. It has 15 regular attendees, making a wider impact on 45 children and young people.

"I think she should be given a medal for the work she has done for women. ROSES is a lifeline for women facing all kinds of things, from living in refuges to working through parenting with their abuser."

Feedback on one of ROSES volunteer leaders

Young Mental Health Champions

Mental Health is an issue many of the children and young people connected to the charity are passionate about. This year, our Mental Health Champions in the Voices of Hope Awards were Howling Wolves, a group of young people with SEND taking part our KEY project.

The group took themselves outside their comfort zone to promote awareness of mental and physical health, working with Tyne Tees TV to film and edit interviews sharing their own experiences. The group delivered an assembly to pupils and teachers showcasing their work - even composing a piece of music and playing it live - and the film continues to be played in the reception area of their school. Between them, they each overcame individual fears and challenges to make the project possible, all in support of better mental health for others.



The Howling Wolves

Empowering Young Voices

We believe that children and young people must be at the heart of everything we do. Their voices are not only powerful, they are essential to driving the impact and accountability of not just our work, but all decisions affecting their lives.

Our Impact

We create spaces where young voices are heard, valued, and acted upon, whether that's in schools, communities or national conversations. From youth-led programmes to ambassadorships, creative expression and advocacy; we're there to listen, uplift and amplify. Here are just some of the ways we are making an impact by empowering young voices.

Improving Understanding of SEND Youth Experiences

Based in Newcastle, FAB is a group of young people aged 11 to 25 who have SEND. Every month, they come together to share experiences and exchange insights into support for young people with SEND in their locality. These include consultation visits to venues open to the public, feeding back and providing advice on how to improve inclusivity.

Social Action at Scale

NCS (National Citizen Service) is a national community experience programme which Children North East delivers across the region, offering the opportunity to participate in meaningful social action initiatives. This year, 1,750 young people took part on the programme through the charity and our model was commended by NSC for demonstrating outstanding communication, collaboration and support across the entire consortium of delivery partners.

Amplifying Care Leaver Voices

The NENC ICB commissioned Children North East to complete an independent consultation with young Care Leavers across the region to inform the design and delivery of the Universal Family Offer. The outcome was adjustments to recruitment processes to improve uptake through improved flexibility for participants to accommodate complex circumstances, and the introduction of specialist staff training.



FAB Group

"It's good to go on trips with the group and I like being able to say how places can be improved for others."

FAB Group Member

"With the stigma of being a foster kid people often say you won't get far, but doing this made me realise despite my background I can do anything if I put my mind to it."

Young Care Leaver consultation participant

"Change has been ongoing. There has been a great deal of responsiveness and we have revised things as a result of the feedback from the young people ."

Senior leader on the Care Leaver consultation



Transforming School Transitions

The KEY and Children North East's partnership project, KEY+ Transitions, seeks to support young people in their move from Key Stage 2 to 3 by empowering them to use their voice, be heard and carry out enriching activities that matter to them. Working with 26 schools and 37 students across Northumberland, North Tyneside and Newcastle, the young people planned days to foster friendships, promote a sense of purpose, and increase their confidence.

The outstanding work of the young people and team was recognised at the NE Youth Impact Awards, receiving the Partnership of the Year Award.

Co-producing Youth Services

Children North East run a youth drop-in from a community venue in Seaton Delaval, one of the third most deprived areas in the UK. The charity began the group when the local council was forced to cease its youth service. Informed by a questionnaire completed by local young people the group sees up to 40 young people attend each session weekly, often by public transport from rural villages.

"It's a testament to partnership working and how close our relationship is with our community and voluntary sector."

Cllr Susan Dungworth

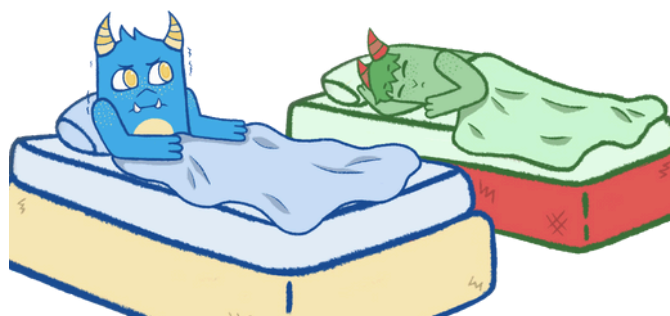
Young Voices Fighting Poverty

Our Poverty Proofing® work is built on the voice, of more than 52,110 individuals on their understanding of poverty. Alongside collating these voices, the team supports groups of young people to lead as Young Ambassadors within schools, who use their voice to help remove barriers faced by students living in poverty.

This year, Marden High School pupils educated younger pupils and used their understanding to write the children's book *Blue's Sad Day*, which explores what living in poverty means for children. They presented this work at the 10 Year Poverty Proofing Conference to an audience of 200 professionals and also won the Voices of Hope School Day Champions Awards in January.

"T was able to reflect with their peers on the activity and acknowledged that their confidence had increased and that they had been able to try out new things."

Transitions case study



Pictured above: Marden High at the Voices of Hope Awards and Blue's Sad Day illustration

No us, without you...

We want to share our deepest gratitude to our funders, partners, donors, volunteers and supporters.

We want to express our sincere and heartfelt thanks to our funders, partners, donors, and supporters. Your ongoing commitment is the driving force behind everything we do. We are incredibly grateful for the trust, belief, and collaboration we've built together.

Your investment, whether through financial contributions, in-kind support, strategic partnerships, or by helping us raise awareness, have created real opportunities for babies, children, young people and families to speak up, lead, and make meaningful change in their lives and communities.

Thanks to your support, we've been able to grow youth-led initiatives, amplify underrepresented voices, and ensure that young people are not only heard but are shaping the conversations and decisions that impact them most. These achievements simply wouldn't be possible without you.

Together, we're building a future where every young person knows their voice matters, and has the tools, platforms and confidence to use it.



A special thanks to Players of the Postcode Lottery, who have played a transformative role for the charity and its communities for over 15 years. To date, Players have provided over £4.7 million in unrestricted funds that promote stability and keep lifeline services running whatever the weather.







With your help, we won't stop until every baby, child and young person has the happy, healthy start in life they deserve.

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