



Because growing
up can be hard

Children North East Impact Report 2025/26



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



Our annual Impact Report provides an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved together over the past year. From supporting babies, children, and families to empowering young people, strengthening networks, and building new partnerships, we have continued to expand our reach and enhance the support we provide across the North East.

It is also a sobering reminder of the challenges that many babies, children, young people, and families continue to face across our region. Poverty remains widespread, with 30% of children living in poverty. 1 million young people are out of work, education or full-time training. Increasing numbers of young people are struggling with their mental health, with one in five experiencing a mental health disorder. Rates of domestic abuse in the North remain among the highest in the country, with more than 87,000 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes recorded. The North East also has the highest rate of looked-after children, with more than 6,000 children currently in care. At the same time, many parents are finding family life more challenging than ever before.

In response to these growing needs, we launched our Five-Year Strategy, shaped by listening to individuals and communities and understanding what matters most to the people we serve. The strategy focuses on five key priorities concentrating our efforts to address the issues that have the greatest impact on the lives of babies, children, young people, and families across our region.

Despite these challenges, we remain steadfast in our mission. Every day, our teams work alongside babies, children, young people, and their families, often providing support when there is nowhere else to turn. While this year has brought many challenges, it has also given us much to celebrate. We welcomed 70 children and their families on our Annual Beach Trip, giving them the opportunity to enjoy a special day at the coast and create lasting memories.

We expanded our presence by opening a new site in Gateshead, home to our Young People's Mental Health Safe Haven with Everyturn. We launched our first-ever charity shop on Morpeth high street and hosted a joint conference with Centre for Population Health, gathering professionals across healthcare to create equity and opportunity. We also established and strengthened partnerships with organisations including StreetGames, Everyturn, Changing Lives, Resolve Poverty and The King's Fund, enabling us to increase our impact through collaboration and shared expertise.

Our work to tackle poverty has also continued to grow. We partnered with the Welsh Government and the North East Mayoral Combined Authority and worked alongside national campaigns such as End Child Poverty and the Child Poverty Action Group to advocate for meaningful policy change, including the end of the two-child benefit limit. These partnerships have strengthened our ability to influence decision-makers and drive change for children and families experiencing hardship. We look forward to building on these relationships in the years ahead and reaching even more people who need our support.

None of this would be possible without the incredible people who work with us and stand beside us. To our staff, volunteers, supporters, partners, commissioners and funders, thank you. Your belief in our mission enables us to continue making a lasting difference in the lives of those who need us most.

Together, we are helping to build a stronger, safer, and more hopeful future for babies, children, young people, and their families across the North East.

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

Our Supporters

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



292

Community Supporters

109

Corporate Supporters

543

Public Supporters

**Over
£260k**

Raised by
communities,
corporates and
individuals



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 babies, children, young people and families with the support, opportunities and tools they need to thrive and 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

3,699

individuals
supported

60+

programmes and
services delivered

49,240

individuals
consulted

7,749

professionals
trained



Our Flagship Shop

Children North East Est 1891

In October 2025, Children North East opened the doors to our flagship retail space - the first in over 130 years.

Our new Morpeth shop is an exciting new way to raise money for our life-changing services for babies, children, young people and families across the region. It will also help us become a more visible part of the community, giving people a welcoming place to find out about our work and how they can get involved, showing supporters first-hand how their donations make a real difference to local lives.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of our staff and supporters, the first six months have already delivered fantastic results. We have hosted CSR connection days for corporate partners, giving businesses the opportunity to contribute to our mission in hands-on, meaningful ways. We have created volunteering opportunities for young people, offering them valuable experience and confidence-building roles. We have seen staff from across the organisation get involved - from supporting events to helping shape the shop's identity - strengthening internal pride and connection to our mission.

4,445 Transactions

287 Volunteer hours

178 Gift Aid Donors

6 CSR Volunteer Days

Over £27k raised in unrestricted income





Mental Health

Supporting babies, children and young people's mental health is a core part of our mission. Through our therapeutic services, counselling, youth work, family support and community-based programmes, we provide safe spaces where babies, children and young people can explore their feelings, build coping strategies, develop confidence and strengthen their emotional wellbeing.

We work alongside families and trusted adults, recognising that positive mental health outcomes are strengthened when children are supported by the people around them.

As we continue to see a rise in poor mental health, estimated to affect one in six children and young people, we have adapted our practices to ensure we provide the highest support across a range of therapeutic approaches.

Through person-centred, tailored support, we ensure that every child and young person is treated as an individual, with their mental health and wellbeing remaining the priority for both them and us.

From art therapy to specialisms such as eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), our diverse range of therapies enable children and young people to receive support that is best suited to their needs.

These approaches ensure they are treated with the utmost care, compassion, and understanding, while also reflecting our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of professional training and service delivery.

"I will always be thankful for the compassion and professionalism you've shown. Your help has made a lasting difference, and I will carry the lessons I've learned from you with me moving forward and will be forever grateful."

Parent

1,482
Counselling
sessions

11
Counselling
modalities



Ways to Wellbeing

The Ways to Wellbeing programme supports parents, carers and other supporting adults to better understand children and young people's emotional development and to explore subjects related to mental health and wellbeing such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and eating disorders.

Delivered in schools and community settings, the sessions are free to attend and open to anybody supporting a child or young person.

This year, we partnered with the National Literacy Trust to deliver joint sessions exploring the link between reading, mental health and family wellbeing. By embedding wellbeing conversations within a literacy-focused approach, we created a more accessible and relatable entry point for families who may feel less comfortable engaging with traditional wellbeing services. This helped to normalise discussions around mental health through everyday family activities and routines.

The programme provides a safe and supportive environment for open discussions around children's mental health and emotional wellbeing, promoting peer connection and shared learning.

"This has been a thoroughly helpful class for me to help support my granddaughter."

Grandparent

"I found the workshop very helpful and interesting and I like how it values parents' wellbeing. It is a workshop I would recommend parents to attend."

Parent

Case Study

Alice, a mother of three, attended a Ways to Wellbeing session at her local primary school to access support and resources for her children's emotional wellbeing.

Her 14-year-old daughter had recently been diagnosed with autism and had experienced mental health challenges for several years. Alice was also concerned about her 10-year-old daughter, who was showing signs of emotional distress, including daily meltdowns and refusal to attend school.

Through Ways to Wellbeing, Alice found a safe and supportive space to share her concerns and discuss the impact these challenges were having on her own wellbeing. During a follow-up one-to-one session, she explored strategies to support her mental health, manage feelings of overwhelm and prioritise self-care, helping to create a calmer and more supportive home environment.

As a result, Alice felt listened to and supported, gained a better understanding of the causes of her daughter's behaviour, and developed practical strategies to support emotional regulation and school attendance. She also reported feeling more confident in her ability to support both her children and her own wellbeing.

829

individuals supported by Ways to Wellbeing

260

families supported by Ways to Wellbeing

67

sessions delivered

Early Intervention & Prevention

Early support for babies and families is essential. The first 1,001 days of life are critical for brain development, mental wellbeing and forming healthy relationships. With the North East having the highest prevalence of perinatal poor mental health, now more than ever, it is vital we support families to have the best start in life.

Prevention and early intervention must continue throughout childhood, adolescence, and into early adulthood. Young people today face significant challenges and we are committed to helping children and young people develop the confidence, resilience, and skills needed for adulthood by providing early support, trusted relationships, safe spaces, and opportunities to get help before challenges reach crisis point.

Baby & Toddler Groups

Our free, accessible group sessions for babies, toddlers and their families within the community, offer safe and welcoming spaces where parents and carers can socialise, access support and receive signposting to additional services when needed.

This ensures families can access early support at the right time, from newborn baby massage to early language development programmes. It also enables us to identify challenges at an early stage and provide timely support, including safeguarding interventions where needed.

Early parenthood can often be an isolating experience, particularly for those without established support networks. These sessions help families build connections with others facing similar challenges, reduce isolation, and provide access to professional guidance and reassurance, supporting both parental wellbeing and positive outcomes for children.

"As well as enriching my knowledge on my baby's brain development, these sessions have been beneficial for my mental health. Being a new parent in a foreign country and raising a child in a bilingual and multicultural family is challenging. Little Minds in Mind drop-in sessions offer a non-judgmental space to express my feelings, and explore both the joys and difficulties of parenthood. My mental health, emotional wellbeing, and relationships with my baby and husband significantly improved since I started attending.

In our busy weekly schedule, my baby and I have found an oasis of calm in these sessions. I would encourage every parent with an infant to come to these sessions and experience first hand their positive effects. It's a place where your relationship with your baby will grow even closer, where you can bond further and share special loving moments and you will feel empowered to stop surviving and coping, and start thriving and flourishing."

Parent who attended Little Minds in Mind Drop-In Group

908

Individuals attended baby & toddler groups

216

Sessions delivered



Little Minds in Mind

Little Minds in Mind is a parent-infant therapeutic service offering support to pregnant women and their partners, and anyone caring for an infant up to 2 years old, to help with bonding and attachment.

We work with families who may be experiencing a range of difficulties which could impact the developing relationship and bond with their baby. Our focus is on the infant's mental health, and we provide a safe, non-judgemental and supportive space for parents and carers to really observe and understand their baby while processing any difficult feelings they may be experiencing. We also provide education and advice on how to promote healthy brain development and understand how babies communicate and experience the world around them.

By offering this support early, even before birth, we're able to help every family to thrive and support children during the most critical 1,001 days of life.

Children North East also offers professional training, enabling practitioners to maintain an infant health frame of mind in all aspects of their work. We give colleagues working with infants and their families the skills and resources to identify, manage and promote secure parent-infant relationships and ensure the emotional wellbeing of infants and their families.

524

Individuals supported
by Little Minds in Mind

56

Professionals trained

Case Study

He's Real, He's Perfect

J accessed our Little Minds in Mind service after a referral from her Health Visitor. Having lost her first pregnancy to miscarriage, J was feeling overwhelming anxiety and stress and felt she had nowhere else to turn.

"I've always been a firm believer in the bravest thing you can ever do is ask for help, that was never more true for me than when I was navigating pregnancy after loss.

Within minutes of meeting Sarah from Little Minds in Mind I knew I'd made the right decision in speaking out and seeking support. There was no topic that was 'too much' or taboo, I could talk openly and brutally honestly about the guilt, shame and fear I was experiencing, knowing that Sarah would listen and not judge.

She made me feel heard, she understood, and respected my grief and why I was feeling the way that I was. Through our visits and regular phone check ins, she made me think of things from a completely different perspective – the fact that I was so scared to lose my baby was in itself my own way of bonding and protecting them.

She made me realise that I had maternal instincts and was doing all I could to look after my baby by being brave enough to ask for help. Sarah celebrated each win with me and comforted me during the lows. She also offered advice and signposting to both me and my husband about support available postnatally should we need it. Knowing there was a safety net and how to access it was a great comfort.

There was no magic wand or quick fix, my mental health was poor throughout my whole pregnancy but with Little Minds in Mind's help and support I was better able to cope. When my son was born safely, the first time I looked at him I said to my husband "he's real, he's perfect." I was so excited to introduce Sarah to him as she played such a huge role in his safe arrival and my journey to motherhood.

My husband and I are forever thankful to Sarah and Little Minds in Mind."

Neurodivergence & SEND

Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including those who are neurodivergent, continue to face barriers to inclusion, wellbeing and achievement. Many experience delays in assessment and diagnosis, inconsistent support, and environments that do not fully recognise or value difference. These challenges can affect education, relationships, mental health and future opportunities, highlighting the need for earlier intervention, more inclusive practice and better coordinated support for children and families.

We believe every child is unique, capable and deserving of the opportunity to thrive. We champion a strengths-based, neuro-affirmative approach that recognises neurodiversity as a valuable part of human diversity.

Case Study

Betty Ross, a non-binary young person with autism and ADHD, was referred for counselling due to anxiety, and also joined the Masquer-Aid programme to get a better understanding of their neurodivergence.

Betty was experiencing significant anxiety, particularly in school, where sensory overload was affecting their wellbeing and contributing to meltdowns at home. Gradually, with support and encouragement, they began to recognise and talk about challenges they were facing. For the first time, Betty felt able to share their experiences in a safe environment where they felt heard, understood and validated.

Using person-first approaches and building trust, Betty identified sensory challenges at school as key contributors to their anxiety. They also began discussing friendship difficulties and fears of being judged by others. Their tendency towards black-and-white thinking initially made it difficult to consider alternative perspectives, but through gentle challenge and reflection, Betty was able to develop a more balanced understanding of situations and improve their confidence in managing school-related worries.

Over time, Betty felt comfortable discussing challenges at home, including feeling that one parent did not fully understand their neurodiversity or non-binary identity.

They felt judged for behaviours linked to their neurodivergence, such as food preferences, and experienced pressure to attend social events despite feeling overwhelmed. Betty also shared that their meltdowns were often met with consequences rather than understanding, leading them to continue masking their feelings and needs at home.

Through psychoeducation, Betty and their family explored concepts including neurodiversity, autistic burnout and social energy levels. This helped reduce expectations around social commitments and increased family understanding of Betty's needs. Betty reported feeling less pressure and more comfortable discussing other aspects of their neurodivergence with their parents.

By the end, Betty felt more confident advocating for their needs and better equipped to manage the challenges they faced. The intervention provided a safe space for Betty to explore their identity, feel validated, and develop practical tools for everyday life.

260

Young people supported through Neuro & SEND projects

Our neurodivergent support extends beyond children and young people. We recognise that neurodivergent parents also need understanding, guidance and tailored support to help them thrive, strengthening family relationships and promoting positive outcomes for the whole family.

The transition to parenthood can be challenging for anyone, but neurodivergent parents often face additional barriers. Too often, parenting advice, services and support are designed with neurotypical experiences in mind, leaving neurodivergent parents feeling misunderstood, isolated and unsure where to turn for help. Feelings of anxiety, overwhelm and loneliness can be common, particularly when navigating systems that do not fully recognise or accommodate their needs.

Case Study

Bethany is a first-time mum to a son, Jake, who was seven months old when she began accessing our support. Bethany received a diagnosis of autism much later in life, and was navigating a new understanding of herself and the transition to parenthood.

Bethany shared that her autism affected her experiences within larger groups, her interpretation of micro-expressions, and her confidence in reading social cues. These challenges became more pronounced as she cared for her baby, particularly during times of crying, big emotions, and night-time distress.

The support focused on recognising and understanding Jake's cues and crying, responding to night-time distress, building confidence in reading facial expressions, and psychoeducation around infant mental health, early brain development, attunement, reciprocity, and maternal mental health.

All sessions were delivered in a neuro affirming, strengths-based manner, working at Bethany's pace to reduce her anxiety and ensure that she felt safe, understood, and respected throughout the process.

The team also ensured that the "voice of the infant" was captured and centered within the work to build on Bethany and Jake's engagement and bonding.

Once a trusting relationship had been established, Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) was introduced. VIG is a strengths-based intervention that uses video recordings of everyday interactions to help parents recognise and build on positive moments of connection, communication and attunement with their child. Rather than focusing on difficulties or deficits, VIG highlights existing strengths and successful interactions.

Short clips of everyday interactions with Jake were viewed together, highlighting moments of connection, responsiveness, and attunement.

Bethany found watching the videos both surprising and reassuring. She was able to see her own warmth, responsiveness, and positive interactions with Jake, recognising how clearly he responded to her. This was especially meaningful given her longstanding concerns about communication and emotional expression linked to her autism.

Through VIG, Bethany reported increased confidence as a parent and reduced anxiety. She felt more able to understand Jake's emotions, trust her instincts, and meet his social and emotional needs with greater confidence and enjoyment, describing the experience as transformative.

"Little Minds in Mind has been the most beneficial and impactful service I have used since my baby was born... Seeing moments of connection between me and my baby through video has given me so much confidence and reassurance that I am doing well as a parent."

Family Support

Strong, nurturing relationships are the foundation of every child's wellbeing, development and life chances. We know that when families are supported early, children are more likely to thrive, communities are stronger, and the need for crisis intervention is reduced. National policy increasingly recognises the importance of prevention, early help and whole-family approaches, but for many families across the North East, access to timely and effective support remains a challenge.

Our approach is rooted in trust, compassion and partnership, recognising that families are experts in their own lives and that sustainable solutions are achieved by working with them, not doing things to them.

Case Study

Kara, her partner, John, and their baby son Tom, were referred to Children North East's parent-infant therapeutic programme Little Minds in Mind.

Kara was facing mental health difficulties, feeling like a single parent to Tom and their other children, and feeling overwhelmed. John was also struggling with depression as well as feelings of inadequacy as a father. However, these were below the threshold for perinatal support and so the family were referred to Children North East.

The children were showing signs of anxiety and the parents wondered if their older daughter (5) was neurodivergent as she had sensory difficulties and was acting out. To support the family, the therapist offered a programme of 16 weekly parent-infant psychotherapy sessions.

Through therapy, John explored his own childhood experiences. He had grown up with domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, and emotional neglect, learning to suppress his feelings and become highly self-reliant.

As a result of his own childhood experiences, John found the needs of his children overwhelming and expected them to become independent more quickly than was appropriate for their age.

Through the sessions, John became much more attuned to the children's emotions, learning to identify with his own vulnerable self and relate this to his children instead of the uncaring and unsafe adults of his childhood and the therapist saw more joy and playfulness in the children and John when they were together.

The parents began to think together about the children's needs and be more child-centred in their approach to family life. The children began to eat and sleep better, explore more at home and in nursery, and to play and engage happily with their father. The therapist saw the family's bonds had become significantly better and John now feels much more confident in his ability to be a father.

Now, Kara feels more supported by John, and they understand their eldest's challenging behaviour came from anxiety and are no longer concerned about neurodivergence. The parents shared that the reflective, therapeutic parenting sessions had saved both their marriage and relationships with their children.

"Thank you for all your support during a challenging time. Your kindness, care and understanding have made a real difference to our family, and we are deeply grateful. We truly appreciate everything you have done for us."

Case Study

One family accessed our Family Support service after mum, Angie*, had suffered a stroke and was struggling to manage home life with vision loss and cognitive impairment.

Angie was feeling isolated and overwhelmed, struggling financially due to losing income and worried for her children as she was no longer able to maintain their previous routines and help with schoolwork.

Children North East met Angie and her family through the Winter at Cowgate initiative, providing free hot meals, household essentials and toiletries as well as Christmas gifts for children to help reduce financial pressures.

Initially, Angie was reluctant to ask for help and found her loss of independence difficult to accept. However, since engaging with Children North East, she has experienced a significant improvement in her outlook on life. She felt able to speak openly about the challenges she faced and the support her family needed to thrive. Weekly contact with her Family Practitioner helped reduce loneliness and gave her the opportunity to talk honestly with someone outside her immediate family, which had a positive impact on her mental health.

Thanks to the support Angie received, her financial pressures were reduced and she felt less isolated. She gained a professional support network, and the improvements in her mental health and emotional wellbeing aided her physical recovery.

"I'm so pleased I asked for help. I didn't realise how much I needed it and I can't believe the difference the support has made to mine and my children's lives".

1,528

Free meals and drinks provided by Cafe Hope

Domestic Abuse Support

The North East has the highest rates of domestic abuse in the UK, and the impact on individuals and families can be devastating, leaving many unsure how to rebuild their lives.

By providing a safe space to heal, connect with others who have shared experiences, and develop the skills and confidence to move forward, we can help families recover and thrive.

Our programmes are more than just support groups. They empower people to better understand themselves, navigate their healing journey, access impartial, non-judgemental advice, and build meaningful friendships with others who truly understand what they are going through. By expanding our services to directly support children as well, we can equip them with the confidence, resilience, and tools they need to feel safe, empowered, and in control of their future, knowing they have people they can turn to for support.

ROSES

ROSES (Recovery of Survivors Emotional Support) is a regular drop-in for survivors of domestic abuse and a safe space to share experiences of the recovery journey. In the group, people share the successes or challenges they are facing and can access advice from our experienced family support team.

"I found it really hard to come as I knew there would be loads of new women going. I was quiet at first, but I now feel comfortable to be myself. I'm excited to come to each session as I feel heard and valued, like I have a purpose there."

ROSES participant

18

Families supported by ROSES

Poverty

Child poverty in the UK remains stubbornly high, affecting over four million children and shaping every aspect of their lives - from education to health to opportunity.

Poverty has a wide reaching impact for children and young people, including stigma, lack of access to opportunities and digital exclusion. We see the daily impact of poverty on children's wellbeing and believe it is both preventable and unacceptable. We aim to drive systemic changes so that fewer children grow up in hardship, and families have the resources they need to thrive, not just survive.

Poverty Proofing®

Children North East's Poverty Proofing® methodology works to address and uncover the hidden barriers that reduce inclusion and belonging for children and young people experiencing poverty.

Working across healthcare settings, arts & culture venues and primary and secondary school settings; we have delivered awareness training, workshops and listening exercises to identify the often hidden experiences those living in poverty face. By understanding common themes and developing action plans; settings have been emboldened and supported to make impactful and meaningful change. As a result there is greater access and inclusion to their services and settings for those living in poverty.

Our work has been recognised nationally, cited multiple times as good practice in the UK Government's Child Poverty Strategy, and continues to influence how organisations understand and respond to the impact of poverty on children's lives.

With 30% of children living in poverty - rising to 51% in some areas of the North East - it is vital that we continue this work and strive to make systemic changes, not just at setting level.

In 2025/2026...

49,240 Individuals consulted

7,693 Professionals trained

326 Training sessions

103 Education Settings

70 Healthcare Settings

11 Culture Settings

Case Study

Co-op Academies Trust

For Co-op Academies Trust, what began as a pilot in a single academy has evolved into a trust-wide commitment to fairness, belonging and inclusion, shaping how leaders think about disadvantage across more than 40 schools.

The work emerged from a wider journey the Trust was already on. As pupil premium and social inclusion became strategic priorities, the Trust introduced reviews and self-evaluation tools to help schools tackle disadvantage. However, there was a growing sense that more could be done.

A Poverty Proofing pilot audit was commissioned in one academy, gathering feedback directly from children, families and staff. While leaders knew obvious signs of financial hardship, the audit revealed less visible barriers affecting participation, belonging and access.

Encouraged by the pilot, additional academies volunteered to take part. Alongside detailed reports for individual academies, Children North East produced a trust-wide common themes report, helping leaders understand where the strongest messages were coming from. The combination of strategic themes and school-level insight provided a powerful picture of the barriers affecting pupils and families. Now, the schools are increasingly considering decisions through the lens of dignity, accessibility and belonging, while the Trust continues to monitor participation in enrichment activities, attendance and wider indicators of inclusion.

For Co-op Academies Trust, Poverty Proofing has become a catalyst for wider organisational change. What started as a way of understanding disadvantage more deeply has evolved into a trust-wide commitment to fairness, dignity, belonging and inclusion, helping to ensure every pupil has the opportunity to thrive.

"It's not about lowering expectations. It's about understanding the root causes and supporting rather than punishing."

Case Study

Salisbury Paediatric Diabetes Service

The Salisbury Paediatric Diabetes Service undertook a Poverty Proofing® audit to better understand and address the financial, digital and practical barriers affecting families living with diabetes.

Initially prompted by concerns about unequal access to diabetes technology, the process revealed wider challenges including transport costs, missed school meals, childcare responsibilities, digital exclusion and difficulties attending appointments.

The audit helped staff move away from assumptions about non-attendance and recognise the impact of poverty on families' ability to manage diabetes. Training increased their awareness of poverty-related issues and built staff confidence in having sensitive conversations about financial hardship.

As a result, the service introduced a range of changes, including after-school clinics, routine financial screening, improved access to welfare and benefits support, digital inclusion initiatives and stronger feedback mechanisms. The team also worked to provide mobile phones and secured funding for travel and parking costs.

The most significant impact has been a cultural shift in how non-attendance and engagement are understood. Poverty is now considered as a first explanation for barriers to care. Improved recording systems help capture social reasons for missed appointments, including affordability and childcare responsibilities, enabling more responsive support.

The Salisbury team views equitable access to diabetes care as central to improving long-term health outcomes and sees Poverty Proofing as a transformative approach that has reshaped both clinical practice and service delivery.

"Having equitable access to healthcare is going to change diabetes patients' long-term outcomes... it is basically the role of the healthcare system."

Our ethos is rooted in ensuring that the children, young people and families we support are at the centre of our work. We believe those with lived experience are best placed to shape the changes they need, and we are committed to creating opportunities for them to influence decisions, inform services and drive meaningful change in their own lives and communities.

Young Advisors

Created in October 2025, our Young Advisors programme offers 13- to 19-year-olds the opportunity to inform how we deliver activities, our strategies and the work we do. These seven young people have met with our Funding and Communications teams, helped shape our 5-Year Strategy, made plans to produce their own podcast on mental health and told us what matters most to them.

Case Study Young Advisors

Brie, 12, first became involved with Children North East through her local youth group, where she shared her views and experiences to help shape the organisation's future strategy.

Although nervous about joining a group where she did not know anyone, Brie applied to become a Young Advisor and has since taken part in a range of opportunities. She has contributed to discussions that informed our next 5-Year Strategy, and shared issues important to her and the other Advisors, resulting in a successful application to create a mental health podcast.

Brie particularly valued the opportunity to connect with others, explaining that she enjoyed "getting to know people you wouldn't normally speak to" and sharing and listening to a range of perspectives.

Looking ahead, Brie is excited about future opportunities within the programme and is passionate about helping adults and organisations better understand the experiences and needs of children and young people.

North East Hub of Young Health Trainers

Working in partnership with AYPH (Association of Young People's Health) we recruited ten young people from across the North East to develop a training package to co-deliver to professionals and health leaders.

The Young Health Trainers wanted to strengthen understanding of the needs and experiences of young people, particularly those facing inequalities, and improve health services to ensure they are youth-friendly.

The Young Health Trainers used their lived experiences of both mental and physical health conditions to develop the training; including receiving a new diagnoses during adolescence, managing their health while in the care system, growing up with long-term health conditions, and navigating the impact of poverty on wellbeing.

"Lots of practical tools to take back to my own service, a fantastic opportunity to take a reflective look at my own practice."

Healthcare professional

"Children North East is open to receiving my ideas and making changes. Being a Young Advisor has helped me develop confidence and learn how to say what you are thinking".

Young Advisor

Policy

We place children's rights at the heart of our work, recognising that lasting systemic change happens when the voices of those with lived experience are heard by decision-makers and used to drive meaningful change.

We have worked alongside key partners across the sector to support change by contributing our expertise, amplifying the voices of others, and raising awareness of the challenges faced by babies, children, young people and families.

While our work is rooted in the North East, our influence and impact increasingly extend beyond the region. Creating meaningful and lasting change requires collaboration, and we recognise that we cannot achieve this alone.

Our commitment to inclusion and partnership has enabled us to grow our reach nationally, working with a wider range of organisations to raise awareness of our work and embed our principles within their practice and delivery.

A significant milestone this year was the recognition of Poverty Proofing® as an example of good practice, with the approach cited multiple times in the Government's National Child Poverty Strategy.



Our Children, Our Future

Tackling Child Poverty







What We Did in 2025/2026

Baby & Toddler Groups

Baby Massage and Sensory Play

A five-week infant massage course and sensory play session for families to learn more about their babies and build development.

Boogie Bairns

A weekly drop-in sessions for 0 – 5 year olds and their families with singing, dancing, music, instruments and move-to-music exploration.

Early Words Together

A six-week course for children and families to support early language development and school-readiness, with tailored sessions for 2 year olds and 3 - 4 year olds.

Little Connections for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

A weekly session for 0 - 5 year olds with special educational needs and disabilities (no diagnosis needed) and their families to connect, play and socialise.

Pause and Play

A weekly drop-in youth group for 5 - 11 year olds at Cowgate Hub with outdoor play, crafts, snacks and socialisation.

Stay and Play Together

A weekly drop-in sessions for 0 - 5 year olds and their families, including sensory play, a snack and a singalong with a baby play area too.

Men in Mind

A drop-in session for fathers and male carers to play and connect with children aged under 5 years, providing an opportunity to socialise with other families and male parents and carers.

Community

Café Hope

Based at Cowgate Hub, Cafe Hope provides a welcoming and accessible space for families, offering a child-friendly menu and affordable prices. Open five days a week, it serves as a safe and informal first point of contact, helping families connect with support, services and their local community.

Domestic Abuse Support

Blooming Strong

A group-based recovery programme for families who have experienced domestic abuse, with complementary sessions for parents and children to overcome the experience.

ROSES

A regular drop-in group where survivors of domestic abuse offer peer support and share their experiences of moving forward.

Be More Dad

A programme designed to help create a positive family life by helping dads to understand how domestic abuse and relationship issues can impact children.

Family Support

Cooking on a Budget

Weekly sessions where families and children prepare and enjoy a meal together, with low-cost recipes to suit the whole family.

Inner West Family Support

Providing hot meals and drinks to families in need via Café Hope, support with household essentials like toiletries and household goods, and Christmas gifts for children to alleviate financial pressures.

Ways to Wellbeing

A space for adults to learn more about children's and adolescent's emotional wellbeing and mental health, delivered through drop-in sessions in the community.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Youth Support

Sexual Health

Drop-in sessions for 11 – 25 year olds delivered in schools, colleges, universities and communities, offering free contraception and confidential, impartial advice around sexual health and relationships.

HAF (Holiday Activities & Food)

Free and fun activity days during the school holidays for children receiving free school meals, including trips, sports, games, crafts and lunch.

Tailored Sexual Health Sessions

Sexual health support tailored to the needs of particular groups, such as LGBTQ+ young people, young people with disabilities, or young people with specific cultural backgrounds.

CAN Mentoring Project

A mentoring programme for 14 – 25 year olds who require support to transition into adulthood or make steps towards improving confidence.

Seaton Delaval Youth Drop-In

A weekly drop-in group for young people age 11 - 18 with sports, arts & crafts, cooking, games, food and more in Seaton Delaval.

Allotment

Weekly sessions for young people to enjoy our Benwell Allotment site, providing an opportunity to be outdoors and learn how to grow vegetables and look after nature.

New Hartley Youth Action

A six-month project where young people designed and delivered family events within their communities, improving confidence, developing peer support and building community relationships.

Seaton Sluice Youth Action

A six-month project where young people designed and delivered family events within their communities, improving confidence, developing peer support and building community relationships.

Key Transitions

The KEY+ challenge for young people moving to secondary school who need support during the transition. In small groups, they develop peer relationships, confidence, resilience and key skills through Think, Plan, Pitch, Do & Review activities for a chosen project.

LGBTQ+ Enrichment Group

A group for young people to explore LGBTQ+ identity, history, their feelings and personal identities, while taking part in activities that matter most to them.

Berwick Social Action

A fortnightly group for young people who may be isolated, experiencing poverty or have special educational needs and disabilities, supporting community engagement and building life skills. Self-chosen projects included caring for the local environment, cooking classes and anti-bullying campaigns.

Participation & Voice

Young Advisors

Young people aged 13 - 19 who have accessed Children North East services meet monthly to share their views, advise and identify ways that we can improve or develop our ways of working.

Professional Training

Using our extensive experience, Children North East deliver training to professionals including Ways to Wellbeing, Introduction to Neurodivergence, Poverty Awareness and Promoting Pupil Voice.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Therapeutic Services

Support for Victims of Crime

A counselling service for young victims of crime aged 5 – 18, supporting recovery from experiences such as domestic abuse, physical assault or hate crime.

One-to-One Counselling

Our one-to-one counselling service works with 9 - 18 year olds, providing support with a range of mental health challenges.

SAFE (Sexual Abuse Family Engagement)

Support for 0 – 18 year old victims of sexual abuse to help process trauma and encourage recovery, with one-to-one sessions delivered by specialist counsellors and wraparound support for families.

School Counselling Service

In-school counselling gives students struggling with their mental health the opportunity to access professional, expert therapeutic care onsite.

Neurodivergent & SEND Therapeutic Support

FAB (Fantastic and Brilliant) Group

A monthly group where 11 - 25 year olds who have special educational needs and disabilities can receive peer support, share their experiences and exchange insights, with meetings alternating between in-person and online.

Masquer-Aid

A 12-week psychoeducational programme for neurodivergent 11- to 25 year olds (with or without a formal diagnosis) to learn about neurodivergence and get support.

Neuro Focus Groups

Groups for neurodivergent young people (with or without a diagnosis) aged 13 – 17 and 18 – 25, to create and test programmes of activities and support, meet new people and explore personal interests.

Neuro Peer Support Groups

Weekly groups for neurodivergent 11 - 25 year olds (with or without a diagnosis), offering space to relax, meet other young people and explore interests. Each group has an 'older' or 'younger' focus for different ages.

Table Top Role Playing Game Group

A weekly group for people aged 13 - 19 (or up to age 24 with SEND) to learn to play table top role playing games, embarking on an adventure limited only by their own imaginations.

Little Minds in Mind

Little Minds in Mind

Support for expectant parents, families, and carers of babies up to age two, helping to strengthen bonding, attachment, and early child development. Support is tailored for challenges that affect relationships between babies and caregivers.

Bonding and Early Communication

One-to-one support to help parents/carers understand their developing baby, how they communicate and how to understand their cues.

Drop-In Sessions

Weekly drop-in sessions delivered across Newcastle offering a relaxed space for families to spend time with their babies, share support with other parents and caregivers and get non-judgemental, professional advice.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Being a Baby

Interactive workshops for 0 - 2 year olds and their families to learn about bonding, brain development, early communication, and to play and socialise.

One-to-One Bespoke Therapeutic Support

One-to-one support for the parent-infant relationship and promoting the infant emotional wellbeing. This can involve working alongside other services such as Early Help, Perinatal Mental Health and Children's Social Care.

Parent Infant Therapy

Psychological support focussing on the relationship between the infant and the parent. The therapy aims to promote the parent-infant relationship in order to support healthy child development.

Preparing for Baby

A four-session course for pregnant people and their partners, covering healthy pregnancy, early bonding, labour and birth, practical advice and preparing mentally and physically for a new baby.

Little Minds in Mind Professional Training

Offered over three levels, this training helps practitioners understand infant mental health, why it matters, and how it relates to their role. It equips those working with infants and families to support secure parent-infant relationships, promote emotional wellbeing, and identify and respond to early mental health needs.

VIG (Video Interaction Guidance)

A strength-based video intervention to support parents/carers to understand their baby and improve communication. It involves recording interactions between the baby and caregiver, micro-analysing footage, and playing this back using a therapeutic approach, highlighting areas of bonding and connection.

Counselling Modalities

Person-Centred Therapy

A non-directive approach that focuses on empathy, acceptance and understanding, helping individuals explore their feelings and find their own solutions.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

A structured, goal-focused therapy that helps individuals identify and change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT)

A specialised form of CBT designed to help children and young people process and recover from traumatic experiences.

Psychodynamic Therapy

This explores how past experiences and unconscious thoughts influence current emotions, behaviours and relationships.

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR)

A therapy that helps people process and reduce the distress associated with traumatic memories using guided eye movements or other bilateral stimulation.

Art & Play Therapy

These therapeutic approaches use creative activities, play and expression to help children communicate thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to put into words.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Integrative Methods (Sand Tray, Story & Metaphor Narrative Therapy)

These flexible approaches combine different therapeutic techniques, using storytelling, symbols and creative tools to support emotional exploration and healing.

Minecraft Therapy

A therapeutic intervention using the Minecraft game environment to develop communication, social skills, emotional regulation, problem-solving and confidence.

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)

A relationship-based therapy that supports children who have experienced trauma, attachment difficulties or loss by strengthening connections with their caregivers.

Integrative Counselling

An approach that combines elements from multiple therapeutic models to create a personalised intervention tailored to an individual's needs and circumstances.

Clay Field Therapy

A sensory-based therapeutic approach using clay to support emotional expression, self-awareness, regulation and psychological development.

Poverty Proofing®

Level 1: Poverty Awareness Training

This training helps staff understand the realities of poverty, build empathy for affected families, recognise barriers to participation, challenge bias, and explore how to make services more accessible and inclusive.

Level 1: Poverty Awareness Plus Training

This series of three workshops helped organisations to become more poverty aware, learn how to gather feedback on poverty-related barriers, and use lived experiences to develop practical action plans for positive change.

Level 2: Initiating Change

Through training and guidance from the Poverty Proofing team, these workshops enable staff from partner organisations to share their views and create a bespoke plan to address poverty-related barriers affecting children, young people and families. The longer term commitment allows for action plans to be created, updated and monitored before finally reviewing changes and identifying impact.

Level 3: Poverty Proofing Delivered by Children North East

Following our proven six-stage methodology, Children North East work closely with the setting, staff and stakeholders to deliver the work and measure impact. This can also include bespoke consultation work at a community level.

Level 3: Poverty Proofing Delivery Partnerships

This equips organisations to embed Poverty Proofing approaches within their own services. Through training, support, and practical tools, partners build the skills to deliver Poverty Proofing at a local level.

Young Ambassadors

This programme engages young people aged 11 - 18 from schools we have 'poverty proofed' to act as ambassadors in their school and consult with us on resource development.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Level 1: Training & Awareness

Stockport Council

Through a series of three workshops, four local authority teams learned how to capture and analyse family voice, identify poverty-related barriers, and create targeted action plans to improve access and inclusion.

Paediatric Diabetes

The national roll-out of Poverty Proofing work across all 11 children and young people's diabetic networks identified financial pressures faced by families and the development of resources to help diabetes services reduce inequalities and improve access to support.

Level 2: Initiating Change

National Trust

Working with the National Trust to deliver Poverty Proofing® audits and leadership training across the North of England, we supported sites to identify and remove barriers to access.

Level 3: Embedding and sustaining change

Women's Health Services Gatehead

Working with Gateshead Women's Services to improve access to gynaecology appointments, diagnostics and community-based clinics, we helped ensure women can engage with care when they need it.

Dental and Cleft Lip and Palette

Newcastle Hospital Foundation Trust

We worked with the Trust to identify the challenges patients face accessing specialist dental services at the Royal Victoria Infirmary, including travel expenses, repeated appointments and lost income, which could impact treatment completion and outcomes.

Family Hub Newcastle Hospital Foundation Trust

This groundbreaking piece of work supported a new service within the NHFT, ensuring that the Family Hub service can support families to access equitable care across multiple sites.

Emergency Department North Tees

This identified barriers relating to GP appointment availability, parking challenges and navigating urgent care pathways, highlighting factors that can influence patients' decisions to access the Emergency Department.

0-19 Service North Cumbria

This explored why uptake of the 2 - 2½ year olds' health visitor review was below average, identified barriers to participation, and supported improvements to accessibility and family engagement.

Oliver Fisher Neonatal Unit Kent South Tyneside and Sunderland Neonatal Unit James Cook University Hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Unit South Tees

This project supported neonatal services by identifying barriers linked to prolonged hospital admissions, including travel, parking, accommodation and food costs, helping improve families' access, engagement and experience.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Paediatric Urgent Care and Emergency Department Sunderland and South Tyneside

North and South Tees

Through Poverty Proofing®, paediatric emergency departments reviewed communication and processes to ensure systems are consistent, accessible and family-friendly, helping parents and carers feel informed, empowered and supported.

Community Treatment Team Cumbria, Northumberland , Tyne & Wear (CNTW) NHS Foundation Trust

South Tyneside

Poverty Proofing supported the Community Treatment Team in South Tyneside and Sunderland to understand potential barriers within service pathways, helping strengthen accessibility, engagement and family-centred care.

Diabetes Prevention Programmes NDPP and DESMOND Wigan

A Poverty Proofing review of Wigan's DESMOND and NDPP programmes identified barriers to participation, including travel, digital exclusion and appointment accessibility, supporting equitable engagement with prevention services.

Older People's Services North and South Tees

Working across older people's services, Poverty Proofing® enabled understanding of how financial constraints, digital exclusion and complex care pathways can affect patients' experiences of inpatient and outpatient care.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services CAHMS West-CNTW

Poverty Proofing® worked with CAMHS West to identify barriers across a range of services, including ADHD and eating disorder pathways, helping ensure care is accessible, equitable and responsive to need.

Integrated Musculoskeletal (iMSK) and Podiatry North Cumbria

A Poverty Proofing audit of IMSK and Podiatry services explored how rural geography, travel demands, transport availability, employment circumstances and treatment-related costs can affect access, engagement and outcomes.

Adult Social Care and associated mental health services

Redcar and Cleveland Social Care

The Poverty Proofing audit identified how complex mental health service pathways, challenging transport networks and geographical variation can affect access to support, helping shape more accessible and navigable services.

Paediatric Epilepsy Gateshead, South Tees

Through Poverty Proofing®, paediatric epilepsy services strengthened communication and system clarity, evidencing the importance of specialist epilepsy nurses in helping families navigate care, information and support.

Specialist Weight Management Service (SWMS) Complications of Excess Weight (CEW)

South Tees

Poverty Proofing® audits of the SWMS and CEW services highlighted how digital reliance, travel demands, healthy food costs and a large geographical footprint can affect engagement, access and outcomes.

What We Did in 2025/2026

Community Services in respiratory, TB, Cardiovascular and iMSK County Durham and Darlington

This identified how costs associated with transport, medication, equipment, communication and attending appointments can create challenges for people with respiratory, tuberculosis, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal conditions, affecting their health outcomes.

Maternity Gateshead North Tees Sunderland and South Tyneside Newcastle County Durham and Darlington

Poverty Proofing enabled Trusts to identify how they could support people to access equitable care throughout pregnancy, including navigating multiple appointments, access to digital support and ensuring consistency and communication around financial support.

Libraries Connected

We delivered poverty awareness training to library services in Gateshead, Oldham and Cornwall, sharing key learning and case studies from Poverty Proofing work, alongside local audits to identify and remove barriers for low-income families.

Wolverhampton Council

10 Poverty Proofing audits helped to improve access to education within the Wolverhampton Council area.

Mental Health Adult and Older Peoples Services Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust

Working with TEWV, Poverty Proofing explored how poverty impacts older people's mental health journeys, including challenges related to transport, digital access, social isolation and accessing ongoing support.

Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucester Integrated Care Board

Poverty Proofing delivered champion workshops across BNSSG, including abridged audits of paediatric rheumatology and cancer services, and supporting service specification development to strengthen equitable children and young people's commissioning.

We Make Culture

Using the Poverty Proofing® approach to review and strengthen We Make Culture's inclusive approach, we built on their existing efforts to reduce barriers and increase access to opportunities for people in deprived areas of Sunderland.

Wheelchair Services Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

A Poverty Proofing audit of NHCT Wheelchair Services explored patient experience beyond waiting times, identifying barriers to accessing, navigating and engaging with services to support more equitable and responsive care.

Individual Audits

Poverty Proofing audits in three individual schools addressed barriers to education and supported inclusivity.

Co-op Academies Trust

11 Poverty Proofing audits improved access to education within Co-op Academies Trust.

Welsh Government

We delivered training across 10 school clusters and Poverty Proofing Delivery Partnerships across 10 cohorts, with ongoing work for 60 schools to be 'poverty proofed' across Wales by the end of March 2027.

Level 3: Delivery Partners

What We Did in 2025/2026

City of York Council

Through the Poverty Proofing Delivery Partner model, we improved access to education across eight schools in York.

Learn Sheffield

20 schools took part in Poverty Proofing Delivery Partner training, improving access to education across Sheffield.

Ascent Academy Trust

Through the Poverty Proofing Delivery Partner model, we improved access to education across eight schools the Ascent Academy Trust.

Rotherham, Dancaster and South Humber (RDASH)

We supported RDASH across all 128 of its services through a 'train the trainer model', embedding of poverty-aware changes at a Trust level.

Birmingham Education Partnership

We improved access to education in Birmingham through a Poverty Proofing Delivery Partnership across 10 schools.

Sefton Council

Our work across Sefton Council included Poverty Awareness and Poverty Awareness Plus workshops across schools and Early Years settings, Delivery Partner training, Poverty Proofing 23 schools, and developing a local Young Ambassadors group.

Kavli

Through our partnership with Kavli, we ran 17 sessions with our national online Young Ambassadors group, reaching 264 participants across eight schools. One group created an assembly resource that was shared nationally with other schools. Over two years, the programme has created eight guides, six workshops, and two Poverty Proofing the School Day Conferences and Awards events. The initiative also led to the development of the Poverty Proofing the School Day Membership offer, including a Community of Practice, universal training, and supporting resources.

Culture Start

Culture Start helps children and young people in Sunderland access free creative and cultural opportunities. Its legacy includes delivering Poverty Proofing®, and supporting cultural organisations through training, workshops, audits and sector-wide development to remove barriers to participation.



Our 5 Year Strategy

Young lives deserve and demand better. It has never been more urgent to address the challenges facing babies, children, young people and their families.

We want all babies, children and young people to be happy and healthy and to grow up feeling safe and loved, resilient to the challenges they may face, and valued and confident.

Across the UK however, growing inequalities, rising poverty, stretched public services and worsening mental health are putting immense pressure on families; and children are the ones who are often the most impacted.

For over 130 years, Children North East has worked alongside communities to respond to these challenges. Our strategy is about building on that legacy, strengthening what works, and expanding our impact to meet growing need. We believe no child should be disadvantaged by where they are born or the barriers they face.

Our priorities are shaped by what children, families, partners and funders consistently tell us matters most: earlier help, stronger family support, and services that truly understand the realities of poverty and inequality.

Together, we can create real, lasting impact giving every baby, child and young person the happy start in life they deserve.



Our Mission

All babies, children and young people grow up happy and healthy.

Our Values

We have a strong children's rights ethos and believe that real social change is achieved when those who are, or have, experienced issues lead the change.

Equality

- We treat people with dignity and kindness
- We embrace individuality

Empowerment

- We initiate, encourage and motivate
- We give a hand-up, not a hand-out

Building Relationships

- We work together to make a difference
- We are reliable, open and transparent
- We listen

Our Strategic Goals

1

Empower Voice

Our children and young people's voices amplify, advocate and influence policy and shape service delivery.

2

Extend Our Reach

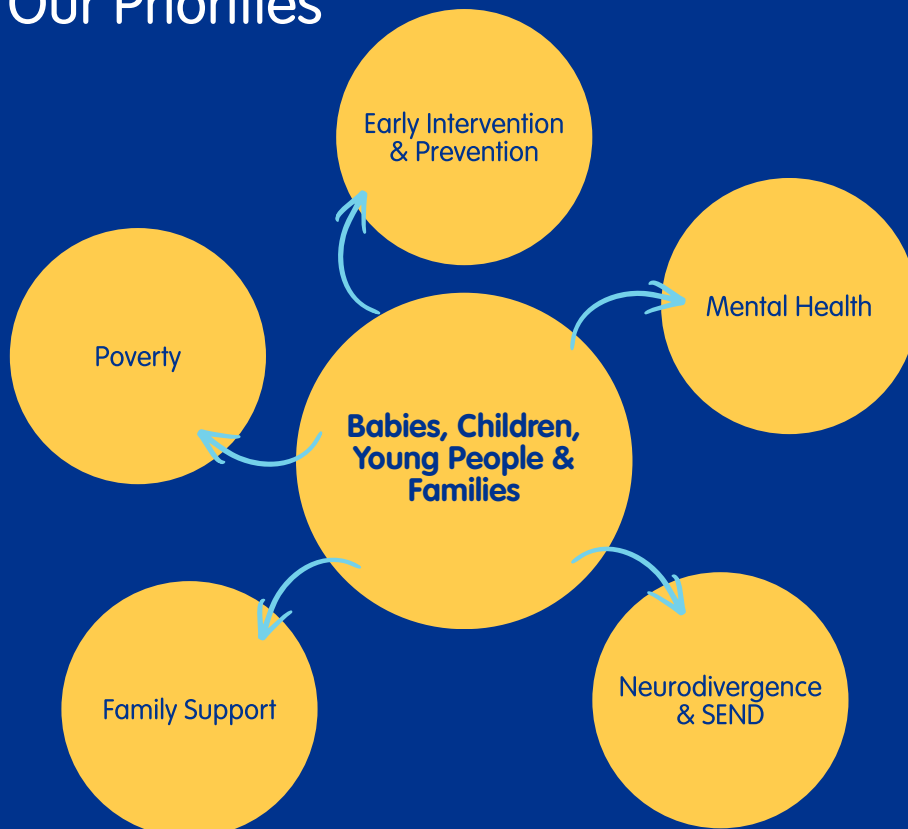
Reach more babies, children, young people and families.

3

Increase Our Impact

Better use of evidence to improve service delivery and influence more widely.

Our Priorities



Our 2031

Expanded reach and influence, helping more children and families to access early support before crisis point.

Recognised as a leader in poverty-informed practice and systems change, shaping service design across the region and beyond.

Most importantly, children and young people's voices will shape our services, and influence the decisions and policies that affect their lives.



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

Get In Touch

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