



Young lives
demand better.
Young lives
deserve better.



Children North East

5 Year Strategy 2026 - 2031

Why we exist

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 bear the brunt.

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.

Inclusion & Partnership

While rooted in the North East, our influence and impact are increasingly reaching beyond the region.

To create meaningful and lasting change, we cannot work alone. That's why inclusion and partnership is at the heart of our strategy - working with families, professionals, schools, local authorities, the NHS, other VCSE organisations, communities and young people themselves to design and deliver solutions that work.

Our commitment to equity, equality, diversity and inclusion runs through everything we do. We actively challenge injustice and discrimination, listen to lived experience, and strive to ensure every child and young person has the support, respect, and opportunity they deserve to thrive.

Collective Commitment

We are also driven by a collective commitment to do better for children, aligning our strategy with the shared goals of other organisations and agencies who are equally passionate about positive change. Through focused collaboration and a shared vision, we aim to build a future where every child is given the opportunity to thrive.

We are committed to a whole-system, early-intervention approach, aligning with national reforms across health, education, and children's social care.

This means working in partnership with Family Hubs, schools, Neighbourhood Health services, and community organisations to deliver upstream support that strengthens families and prevents crises.

Both North East Combined Authority and the government's Child Poverty Strategies give us hope for collective changes in the future, and we will continue to work with and contribute to these strategies as we have done to drive change and influence.

Safeguarding & Equity

We are committed to safeguarding and delivering the highest quality of care for every child we support. Our values are woven into every part of our work, ensuring we act with integrity and uphold children's rights at all times, treating every individual with dignity and respect, embracing their uniqueness, and empowering them to reach their full potential.

By staying true to these values, we ensure that the voices of children and families are central in everything we do, and that safeguarding remains at the forefront of our practice. We are committed to creating a stigma-free, strengths-based organisation. This means intentionally using languages and practices that empower families and avoid framing challenges as deficits or failures.

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 & influence policy, & shape service delivery.

2

Extend Our Reach

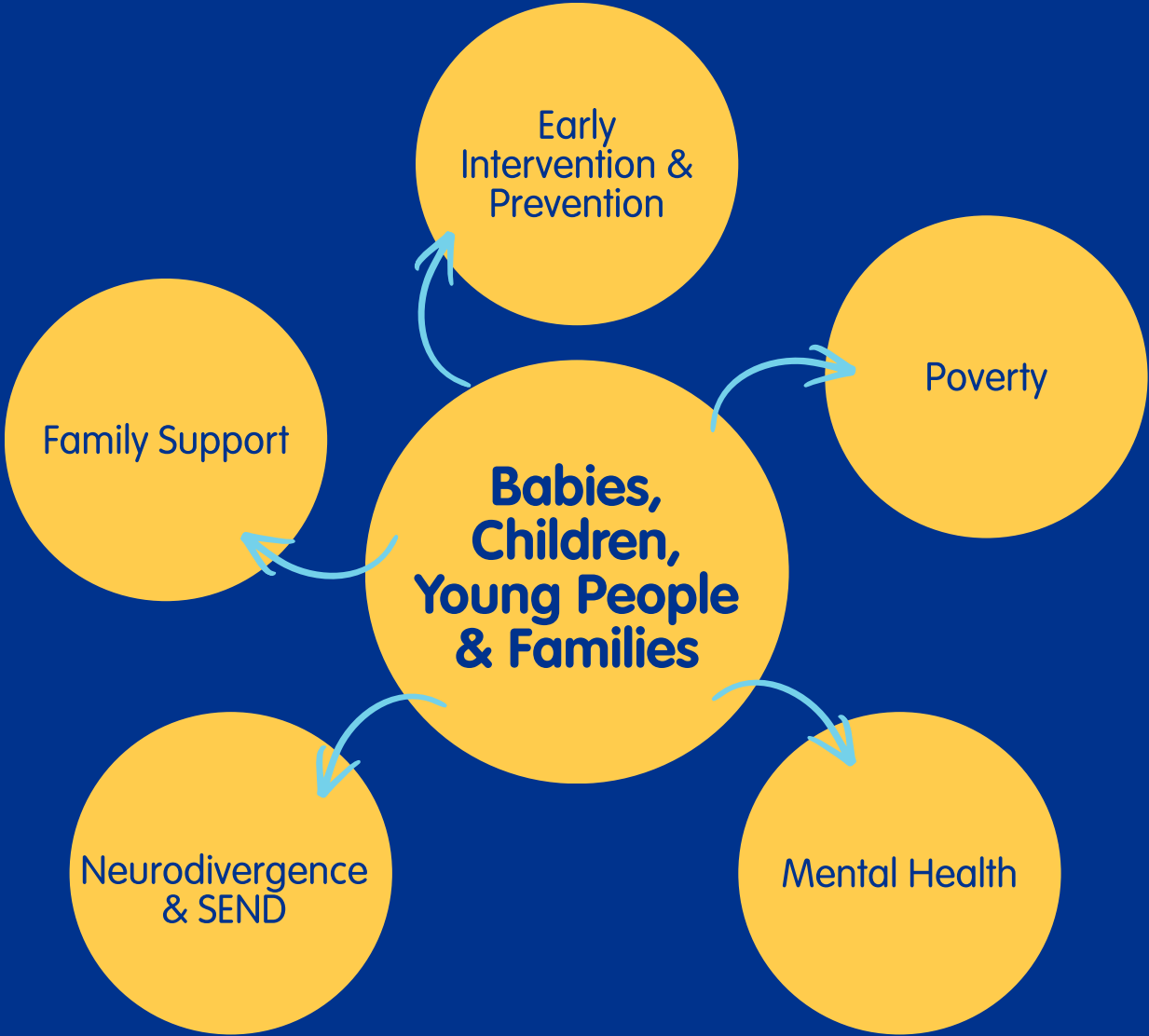
Reach more babies, children, young people and families.

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 services 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.

Our Priorities

Early Intervention & Prevention

Poverty

Mental Health

Neurodivergence & SEND

Family Support

Our five priorities have been chosen by listening to the voices of children, young people and families and deep-dive analysis of a wide range of data and expertise providing insight into the key challenges facing children, young people and families in our region.

Early Intervention & Prevention

In England, too many children face disadvantage before they are even born, with poor maternal health, limited access to early support, and widening inequalities and exclusion in early childhood development. The North East has the highest prevalence of perinatal mental health in England.

Children North East wants to focus on the first 1,001 days because this period lays the foundation for lifelong wellbeing, attachment, learning, and health. We want to ensure every child gets the best possible start in life, with families receiving timely, effective support to prevent problems before they escalate.

We will focus on prevention throughout our areas of work and projects.

Mental Health

The mental health of children and young people is in crisis, with rising levels of anxiety, depression, and unmet need - especially among the most vulnerable.

Children North East is committed to supporting young people’s emotional wellbeing by improving access to help at an earlier stage and challenging the stigma that still surrounds mental health. We want all children to feel safe, heard, and supported to flourish mentally and emotionally.



Up to 24% of 8-16 year olds in the North East had a mental disorder, compared to 20.3% nationally

Poverty

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

"Many of the key factors influencing child poverty are rooted in place." (Our Children, Our Future: Tackling Child Poverty).

Poverty has a wide reaching impact for children and young people, including stigma, lack of access to opportunities and digital exclusion. At Children North East, 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.

We use an anti-poverty lens across all our work, focusing on families in deep poverty, work constrained households, and those facing structural barriers.

Over the next five years, we will scale this work to influence whole systems, not just individual settings.

32.3% of children are eligible for free school meals, vs the 25.7% average across England

In the North East, 31% of children are living in poverty...

this rises to 51% in some areas



The North East has a higher prevalence of SEN than England's national average...

Higher rates of SEN support (14.3%, compared to 13.4%) and EHCPs (5.4%, compared to 4.8%).

Neurodivergence & SEND

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including those who are neurodivergent, often face delays in diagnosis, limited support, and barriers to inclusion in schools and communities.

Children North East believes every child should be celebrated for who they are and supported to reach their full potential. We want to create a society that embraces neurodivergence, removes systemic barriers, and ensures SEND children and families receive the right support, at the right time.

We will embed neuro-affirmative practice across the whole organisation; including workforce training, accessible policies, and inclusive recruitment and supervision.

Family Support

Family Support sits at the heart of Children North East's mission because strong, stable families are the foundation of children's wellbeing, development and long-term outcomes. National policy is increasingly focused on prevention, early help and whole-family approaches, recognising that supporting parents and caregivers early reduces the need for more intensive statutory intervention later.

By prioritising Family Support, Children North East aligns with this national direction and responds directly to the realities facing families in the North East, high levels of poverty, rising demand for early help, pressure on mental health, and widening developmental inequalities in the early years.

Children North East brings over 100 years of experience delivering practical, relational, community-based support to families, from perinatal programmes and early years interventions to mental-health support, family hubs, parenting programmes and multi-agency work around the edge of care. Our strength lies in working with families as partners, building trust, addressing the root causes of difficulty, and improving outcomes for children from birth to young adulthood.

Our Goals

Goal 1: Empower Voices

Goal 2: Extend Our Reach

Mental Health

Neurodivergence & SEND

Family Support

Goal 1: Empower Voices

Babies, children and young people's voices influence, amplify policy and inform service delivery.

Our strategy is grounded in the belief that babies, children and young people must be at the heart of everything we do. Their voices are not only powerful - they are essential.

In line with our commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UK legislation, we recognise that children have the right to be heard in all decisions that affect them. When we actively listen and respond to what babies, children and young people tell us, we create services and policies that are more relevant, effective, and inclusive. Meaningful participation also builds confidence, skills, and trust, empowering children to shape their own lives and futures.

This strategy sets out how we will ensure babies, children and young people's voices influence our direction, services, and advocacy, so that we remain truly accountable to those we exist to support.

What we will do:

- Ensure babies, children and young people's voices are heard and included in all national, regional and local policy and practice that affects them and in system change.

- Ensure babies, children and young people are involved in the development and delivery of all of our services.
- Develop and implement Participation Strategy to embed participation principles into all aspects of our service design, delivery, communications and influence.
- Empower and create space and opportunity for young people and families to influence decision-making.
- Support other organisations to gather voice and help them to interpret and utilise it to affect change and shape delivery.
- Ensure services, research and our training is trauma informed, poverty informed and neuro-inclusive.

"I felt heard, I felt helped and more able to discuss my thoughts and feelings."

Young person who accessed counselling



Goal 2: Extend Our Reach

Grow our services to reach more babies, children, young people and families.

It has never been more urgent to increase the reach of our services. With 1 in 3 children in the North East and 4.5m children nationally living in poverty, ward data as high as 50% of children living in poverty and the significant increase in poor mental health among our children and young people, they need our support now.

Our services respond to immediate and ongoing need for individuals, communities and organisations and by increasing our reach now, we can deliver hope, early intervention, and support to those who need it most, helping to break cycles of disadvantage and safeguard the futures of children.

What we will do:

- Grow our existing services, including geographically and to new audiences such as housing, community health, physical activity and homelessness
- Work with the care system to enhance our reach to children, young people and families that are engaged with the care system; such as those in care, leaving care, foster care and kinship care.
- Work with more education settings to improve inclusion, attendance, wellbeing, and anti-poverty interventions.
- Increase the number of organisations and systems that have adopted Poverty Proofing.
- Continue to expand our Poverty Proofing work nationally.
- Increase our youth work offer, including developing a specific offer for boys and young men.
- Involve more individuals, supporters, partners and stakeholders in our work, to increase our income, influence, autonomy and flexibility .
- Leverage our local knowledge and place-based roots to support partners to effectively implement national reforms and explore co-location in family hubs, neighbourhood health services and schools.
- We will expand community-embedded and outreach models, ensuring services meet families where they are – in neighbourhoods, homes, schools and community hubs.
- We will strengthen our financial resilience through income diversification, partnerships and sustainable growth.

Goal 3: Increase Our Impact

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

To truly make a difference in children’s lives, we must go beyond good intentions, we must understand, evidence, and enhance our impact, as well as understanding and using data and evidence from elsewhere.

This strategy commits us to strengthening how we use data, define success, measure outcomes, and use learning to continuously improve. By embedding a culture of evidence-based practice, reflection and learning, we will not only demonstrate the value of our work, but also ensure we are influencing and creating lasting change for the children and young people who need us most.

What we will do

- Data and evidence is central to our campaigning and service development.
- We will support organisations to embed Poverty Proofing® and monitor the longer term impact of interventions.
- Continue to foster and strengthen our ambassadorship through our service-users to help tell and share our work in a unique voice.
- Strengthen and lead research collaborations to effect systemic change.
- Translate data into impact through visuals, dashboards, consumer and funder friendly materials.
- Integrate insights into our communications to showcase value and drive engagement.
- Create and implement robust communications strategies that amplify and celebrate the powerful work we do, and difference we make; understanding and reflecting the different audiences through tone of voice, language and messaging.
- Amplify babies, children and young people’s voices across all platforms through ethical, impactful storytelling.
- Develop theories of change across our services to fully understand the difference and impact our work is having on the lives of children, young people & families at a person and system level.

“The information presented was so powerful and gave an excellent background to some of the core issues for us to be aware of as professionals.”

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

Contacts

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