Healthy
KNOWSLEY

OUR FUTURE, OUR HEALTH

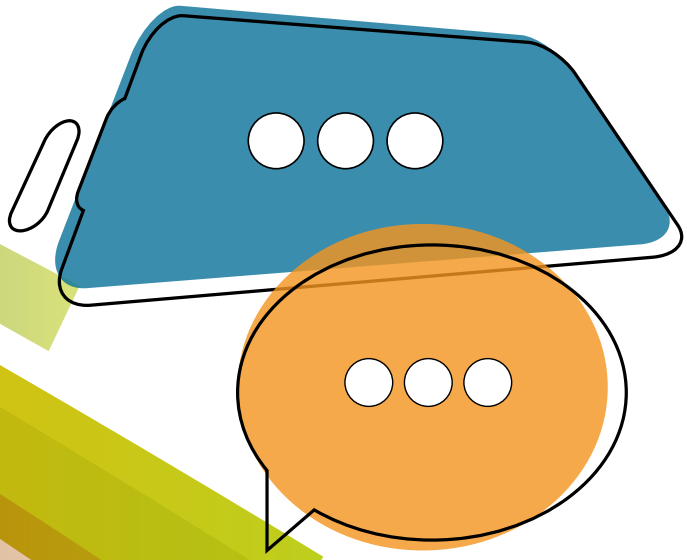
Young people's experiences of growing up in Knowsley



Public Health Annual Report 2025-2026



Knowsley Council



Acknowledgements

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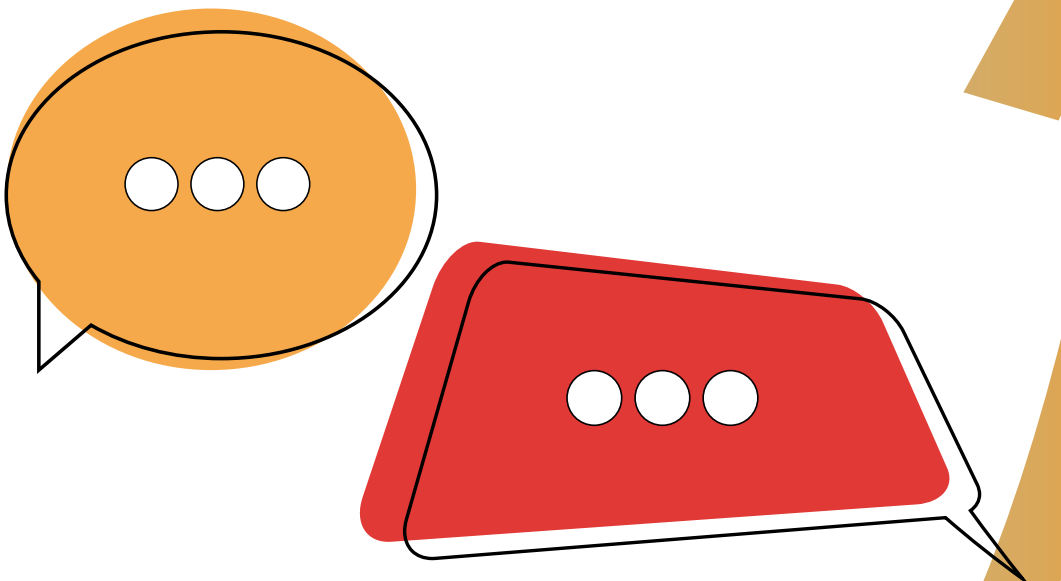
We would like to thank the young people, colleagues, schools, community organisations and partner agencies who shared their time, experiences, insights and expertise throughout its development. Their contributions have been invaluable in shaping the themes, findings and recommendations presented in this report.

For comments or further information, contact the Public Health Team at **publichealth@knowsley.gov.uk**

For trusted information and details of local support services, **visit the Healthy Knowsley website**.

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A glossary of key terms and acronyms is included at the end of this report.

Foreword

The report provides a powerful insight into what it is like to grow up in Knowsley today.



Dr Sarah McNulty
Director of Public Health

This year's Public Health Annual Report focuses on the health of adolescents in Knowsley and, importantly, has been shaped by young people themselves. The Knowsley Better Together Partnership has 'putting children first' as its priority for working together. This report supports this priority.

From the outset, one of our key ambitions was to ensure this report reflected the realities of growing up in Knowsley today. Through our partnership with the Merseyside Youth Association Health Steering Group and wider engagement activities, young people have helped identify the issues that matter most to them, challenged our assumptions and influenced the content and development of the recommendations within this report. Their honesty, insight and passion have been invaluable.

The report highlights the strengths and challenges facing young people in our borough. We know that young people in Knowsley are ambitious, resilient and committed to improving their communities. However, too many face significant barriers to good health. Poverty, inequalities, concerns about the future, pressures from social media and commercial influences, and increasing demands on mental wellbeing all shape their experiences and opportunities.

The findings remind us that improving young people's health requires action across education, housing, employment, transport, health services and the communities in which young people live, learn and socialise. Listening to young people's voices and involving them in decisions that affect their lives must remain central.

I would like to thank every young person who contributed to this report. Your willingness to share your experiences and perspectives has helped create a richer understanding of adolescent health in Knowsley. The report is not short for a reason, I really wanted to explore how your lives are affected by the things we describe and give our partners, and the public this insight.

I also want to thank our partners, schools, community organisations and colleagues who continue to work alongside young people to improve outcomes across the borough. This report presents both a challenge and an opportunity. By working together, listening to young people and investing in their health and wellbeing today, we can help ensure that every young person in Knowsley has the opportunity to thrive, achieve their potential and enjoy a healthy future.

Adolescence is a critical period of development, during which young people experience significant physical, emotional and social change. The foundations for future health and wellbeing are established during these years, making adolescence an important opportunity to influence lifelong outcomes.



Councillor Christine Bannon
Cabinet Member for Health

As an elected member, I am pleased to support this year's Public Health Annual Report, which places the voices of young people at its heart. Too often, decisions are made about young people rather than with them. This report is different. It has been informed and shaped by young people from across Knowsley, who have shared their experiences, concerns and aspirations for the future. Their contributions have been thoughtful, honest and inspiring.

As a Council, we have a responsibility to create the conditions that allow young people to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. This means ensuring they have access to opportunities, supportive services and environments that promote and encourage health and wellbeing. It also means tackling the inequalities that continue to affect too many families and communities across our borough.

What stands out most from this report is the optimism and determination of Knowsley's young people. They want to be involved in shaping decisions. They want healthier communities, better opportunities and a brighter future. We should be encouraged by their ambition and commit to working alongside them to make that vision a reality.

I would also like to thank all the young people who contributed to the report, as well as partner organisations who supported this to happen. Their collaboration demonstrates the value of genuine engagement.

I hope this report stimulates discussion, inspires action and helps strengthen our shared commitment to making Knowsley the best possible place for young people to grow, thrive and succeed.

Message from Merseyside Youth Association Health Steering Group

As members of the Merseyside Youth Association Health Steering Group, we are proud to contribute to this year's Public Health Annual Report and keep working in partnership with our friends in Public Health Knowsley.

Getting to know the team and be part of the conversation around what can be done to support young people's health and wellbeing in Knowsley has been really important to us as a group.

It is important for us to share the views and experiences of young people and be listened to when decisions are being made about us and our health and wellbeing. We are pleased that our voices, and the voices of other young people in Knowsley, have helped to shape services and identify priorities, which you will be able to read in the recommendations within this report.

We hope this report encourages organisations to continue listening to young people, acting on our ideas and involving us as equal partners in improving health and wellbeing across Knowsley.

Together, we can create a borough where every child and young person has the opportunity to be healthy, happy and achieve their full potential.

Leo:

I like attending the Health and Wellbeing Board because we get to share our opinions on health in Knowsley and how it affects the residents. I enjoy the developmental sessions also because you are able to network and discuss things in a more relaxed environment.

Tilly:

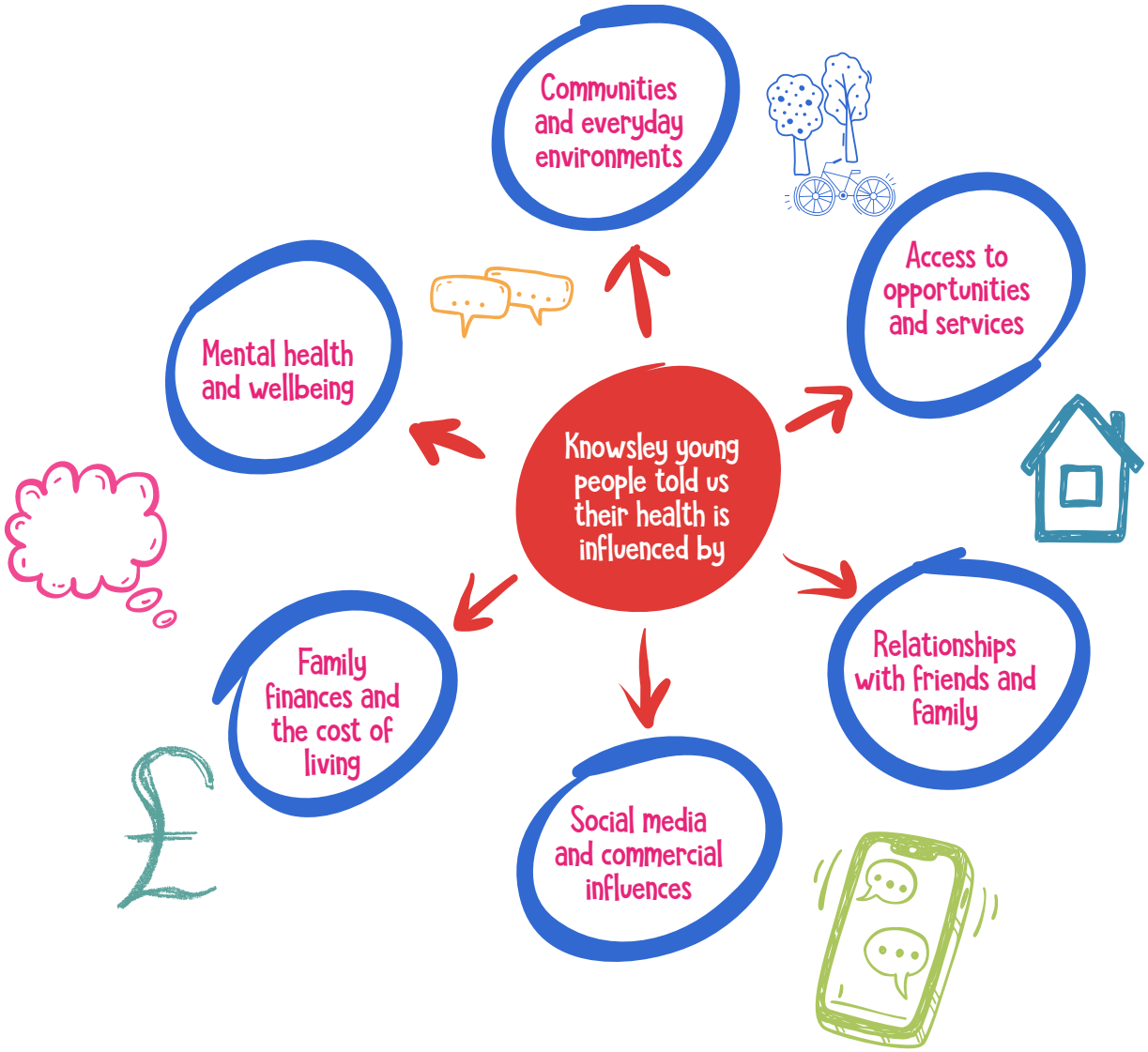
I am on the Health and Wellbeing Board because I want young people to have a voice in decisions that impact them and also for adults to see that we can help make decisions. I enjoy being able to talk about things that impact me and other young people. I have also felt that mine and Leo's friendship has grown and I think that the Health and Wellbeing Board has had a huge part to play in that. I think it's helped me with my confidence in myself.

Working with young people to inform this report

Ensuring this report was informed by young people was really important. Their perspectives have helped us move beyond assumptions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues that matter most in their lives, from the pressures they face to the strengths and opportunities within their communities. By reflecting authentic voices and lived experiences, this report is more relevant, meaningful, and firmly grounded in the realities of growing up in Knowsley today.

Importantly, this approach has built trust, confidence and a sense of ownership among the young people involved. When people feel listened to and see their contributions shape real outputs, it strengthens engagement and empowers them to be part of shaping the future of their communities.

The themes set out in this report were co-designed with young people from the Merseyside Youth Association (MYA) Health Steering Group, with support from the Public Health team. It also responds directly to feedback provided by the MYA Health Steering Group to the Knowsley Health and Wellbeing Board, where young people highlighted that they do not always have enough opportunities to speak directly with decision-makers or health services, and expressed a clear desire to have a greater say in decisions that affect their lives and wellbeing.



For the purpose of this report, the themes have been grouped under the following four section headings:

- Supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing
- Commercial influences shaping young people's choices
- Helping young people thrive in their communities
- Making healthcare work for young people

These themes reflect the many factors that shape young people's health and wellbeing and underline the importance of taking a holistic, place-based approach.

Alongside shaping the overall themes, the MYA Health Steering Group played an important role in developing the narrative of the report through a series of workshops. Ongoing engagement and involvement will also shape the delivery of the recommendations outlined later in this report.

Further insights from Knowsley young people used in this report were gathered from:

Youth Voice events held at **Our Place Youth Hub** were attended by young people aged 11 to 15 years and provided an opportunity for them to share their views, experiences and ideas.

A **'Myth or Fact?'** activity session was delivered with Year 6 pupils (aged 10 and 11 years) from **St Aloysius Catholic Primary School** and **Park View Primary School** encouraging them to explore common perceptions and share their thoughts in a fun and interactive way.

A **consultation session** was held with Year 7 pupils (aged 11 and 12 years) from **The Prescot School** to better understand the health issues that matter most to them and how they would like to access support when they need it.

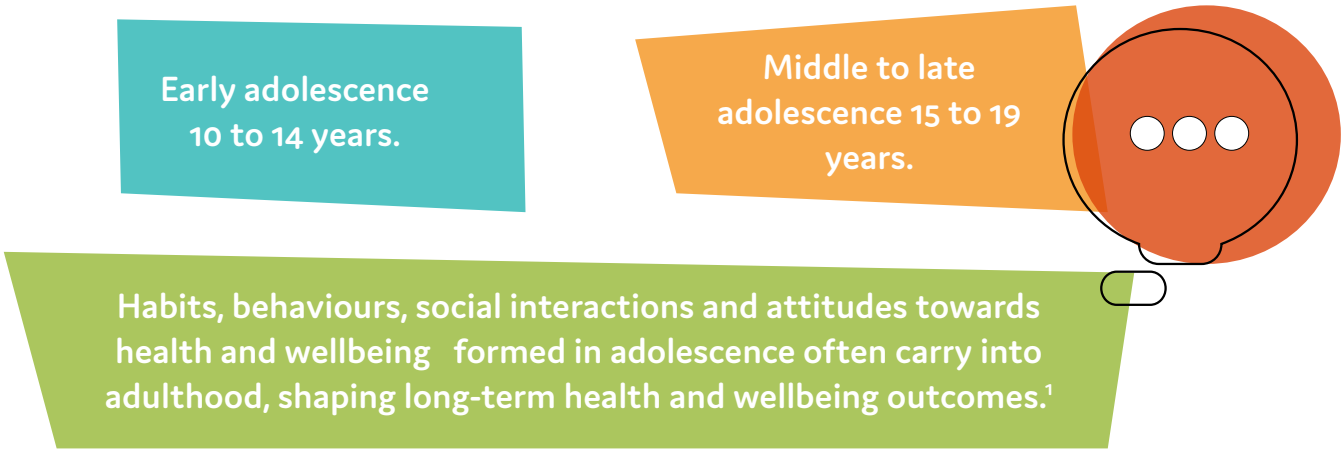
Through a **youth recovery creative arts project**, young people aged 12 to 17 years from youth groups across Knowsley shared their experiences, perspectives, and ideas about the issues that affect them. The project was delivered in partnership with Youth Focus North West, Merseyside Youth Association and Shakespeare North Playhouse.

An **engagement session** with Year 10 pupils (aged 14 and 15 years) from **Kirkby High School** provided an opportunity for young people to share their views and experiences of school food provision.

These insights, experiences and aspirations are shared throughout this report.

Understanding adolescent health

The experiences, opportunities and environments that young people experience have a significant influence on their health and wellbeing throughout life. Adolescence is a period of rapid physical, emotional and social development, during which lifelong habits, behaviours and attitudes are formed. This section explores what adolescence is, why this stage of life matters, and provides an overview of the health and wellbeing of young people in Knowsley.



Adolescence bridges childhood and adulthood, typically spanning the ages of 10 to 19 years. During this time, young people go through puberty, experience rapid brain development, and begin to form their identity and sense of independence. It is a key opportunity to build the foundations for good health.[1]

Brain development

While 90% of the brain is developed by around five to six years old, the brain does not fully mature until around age 25.[2] For example, during this stage, areas of the brain linked to decision making are still maturing. Adults typically make decisions using the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for rational thinking and considering consequences.

However, adolescents rely more on the amygdala, the emotional centre of the brain, which can lead to more impulsive or emotionally driven reactions. As brain development is shaped by experiences, as they grow, their ability to think logically and make balanced decisions gradually increases.

Ongoing changes in the brain, alongside physical, emotional, and social changes, can make young people more likely to experience mental health problems such as anxiety or depression, with most mental health conditions starting before age 14.[3] This is discussed in more detail later in this report.

Research has found that because adolescent brains are still developing, substance use escalates from experimentation to addiction much faster in adolescents than it does in adults.[4]

GROWING UP IN KNOWSLEY – AT A GLANCE**

163,723
people live in Knowsley

19,365
young people aged 10 to 19 years

9,932
males (51%)

9,333
females (49%)

9 in 10
are from white ethnic groups

Population projections indicate that the number of 10 to 19 year olds will remain at approximately **20,000** over the next 20 years.*

INEQUALITIES

Knowsley is 11th most deprived local authority in England.

40% of neighbourhoods are in the most deprived 10% nationally.

10-19 YEAR OLDS

4 in 10
live in lone-parent households

3 in 10
live in low-income households

1 in 25
are a young carer

1 in 10
have a diagnosed mental health condition

4 in 10
Year 6 pupils live with overweight or obesity

1 in 10
have a long-term medical condition

1 in 10
are disabled (under the Equalities Act)

- **1 in 10** 11 to 15 year-olds in the North West have smoked
- **1 in 10** 11 to 15 year-olds in the North West have taken drugs
- **1 in 10** 11 to 17 year-olds in Great Britain currently vape

- **1 in 10** young people aged 10 to 17 years are receiving support from Children's Social Care
- **3 in 10** pupils aged 10 to 18 years have an education, health or care plan or special educational needs plan
- **4 in 10** pupils achieved a pass and **2 in 10** pupils achieved a high pass in their Maths and English GCSE's (2024/25)
- **1 in 10** young people aged 16 to 17 years are not in education, employment or training
- **1 in 10** young people aged 16 to 19 years who are in education, employment or training have an education, health or care plan

Most young people in Knowsley are healthy, resilient and full of potential. However, many are growing up with challenges linked to poverty, poor health, caring responsibilities and unequal opportunities.

These factors influence health, wellbeing and life chances throughout adolescence and into adulthood.[5, 6, 7, 8, 9]

*Population projection largely does not take into account Knowsley's recent population growth and housing developments of the last few years.

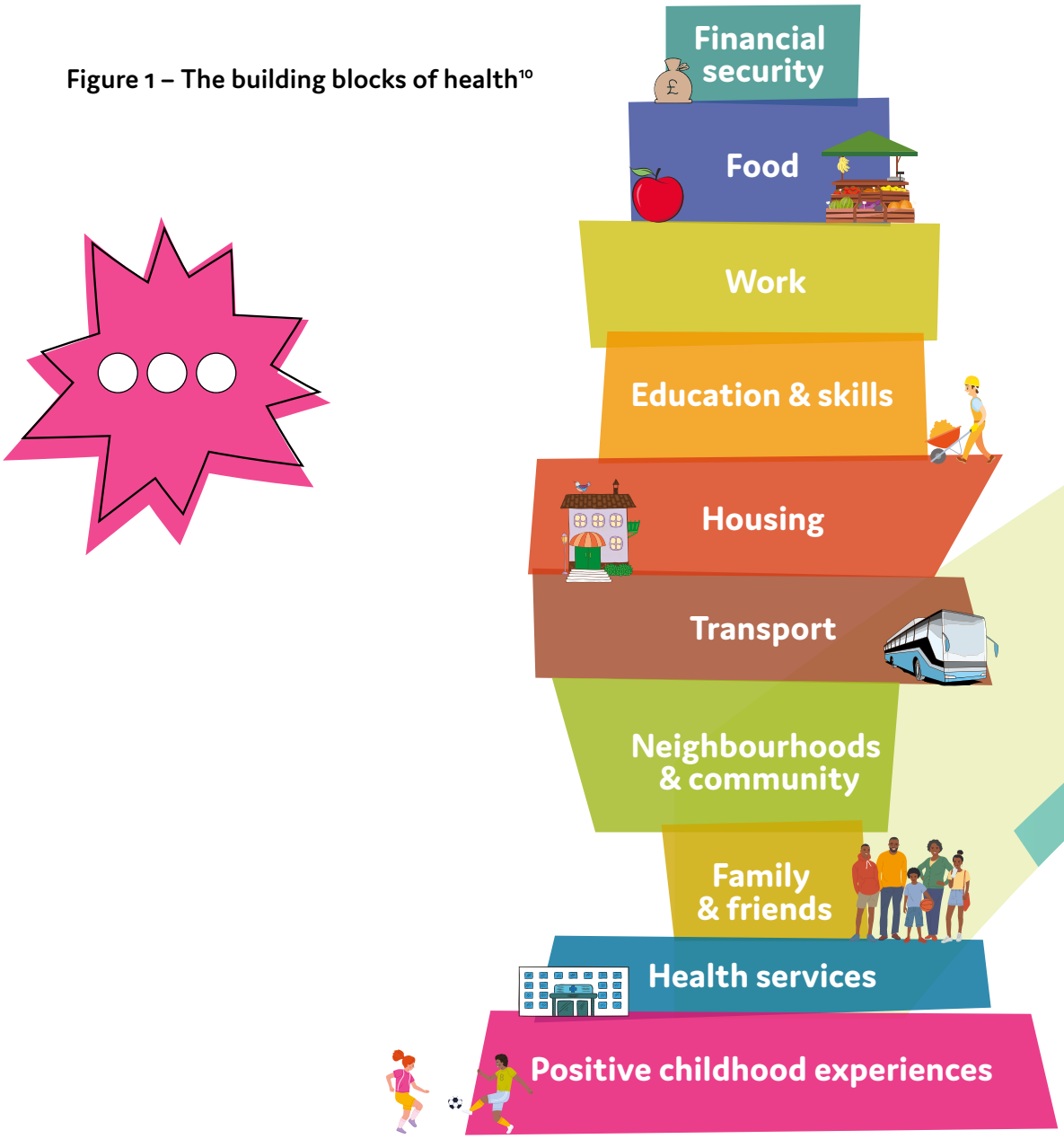
**Figures are rounded

Building the foundations for good health

Factors such as poverty, education, housing, environments, relationships and community connections can influence health and wellbeing outcomes throughout life. This section explores these wider determinants of health and their impact on young people in Knowsley.

The infographic below represents the building blocks of health (sometimes called the wider determinants of health). It highlights how health is influenced not only by healthcare services but also by a range of factors which are interconnected. These factors are discussed throughout this report.

Figure 1 – The building blocks of health[10]



Not everyone has the same opportunities to build good foundations for health. Some young people face additional challenges that can increase the risk of poorer health, wellbeing and life outcomes.

We heard from Knowsley young people:

The cost of activities, transport and food can make it difficult to take part in activities.

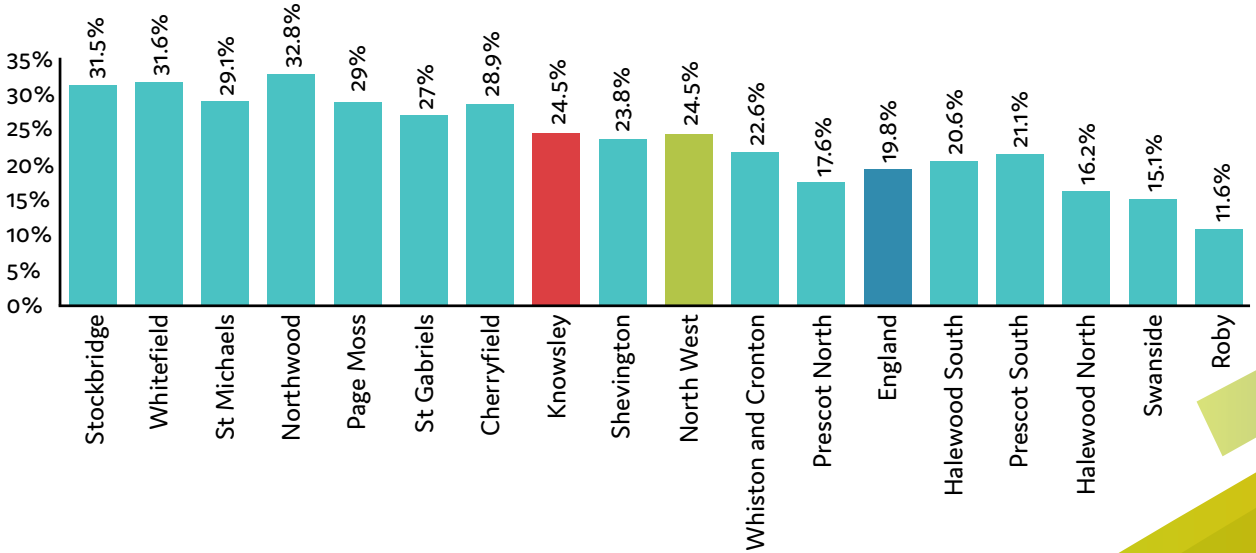
Growing up in poverty or a low-income household

Living in a deprived area remains a significant driver for poor health and targeted support for people in such areas is important to reduce health inequalities and improve outcomes.[10]

A 2024 Cheshire and Merseyside report on child and family poverty found that young people from lower-income families are more likely to live in poorer quality housing, not have enough or nutritious food to eat, less likely to access health care, have limited access to transport and leisure activities, and have increased levels of stress and anxiety. These factors are associated with poorer long-term health outcomes and widening health inequalities as well as affecting educational grades, future employment opportunities and life chances.[11]

In 2024/25, Knowsley had a high rate (24.5%) of children aged under 16 living in relative low-income households (before housing costs were taken out). This was the same as the North West average and higher than the England average (19.8%).[12]

Figure 2 – Percentage of children living in relative low-income households (before housing costs taken out) across different wards in the borough.[12]



The cost of essentials like food, housing, energy, and transport has risen sharply in recent years due to the cost-of-living crisis.[13] Research carried out by Citizens Advice Knowsley in 2022 found that of the 118 people surveyed, 74% felt financially worse off than the year before.[14] Responses show that 42.5% had either cut back or were considering cutting back on heating and 31.8% had reduced or were considering reducing spending on food.

These rising costs directly affect young people's health as this may mean that they go to school or college hungry, have less food to eat overall, and may find it difficult to concentrate at home due to feeling cold.

Living in a cold home increases the risk of respiratory illnesses such as coughs, colds and other breathing related conditions such as asthma, as well as having emotional wellbeing effects. Keeping windows and doors closed to stay warm during the colder months can lead to poor ventilation, causing damp and mould, which are linked to asthma. In 2024/25, Knowsley had higher-than-average hospital admissions for asthma in under-19s (145.2 per 100,000) compared to the national average (138.8 per 100,000).[15]

Young people may also experience poverty related stigma through bullying or isolation caused by; not being able to go on school trips or other social activities, being in receipt of free school meals, not wearing clothes that fit them properly or not having the popular clothing brands can also make poverty more visible.[16] They may not have what they need for learning and therefore are not able to fully participate in lessons, struggle with homework and experience bullying and stigma. Young people may pick up on parental/carer financial difficulties and start to worry about it themselves.[17]

National measures due to be introduced in late 2026 to reduce school-related costs for families, including limits on branded school uniform requirements and the expansion of free breakfast clubs, have the potential to benefit many Knowsley families by reducing financial pressures and supporting children's readiness to learn.[18]

Figure 3 – Secondary school costs

It costs on average £2,300 a year to send a young person to state secondary school.[16]



Food during the school day



Uniform and PE kit



Transport



Learning materials



Enrichment eg trips, charity days, celebrations

The cost does not include additional school trips, music lessons or after-school clubs.

18.7% of children and young people aged 8 to 16 years with a mental health problem lived in households that had fallen behind on rent, bills or mortgage payments, compared with 6.8% of those without a mental health problem.[19] This highlights a strong relationship between financial insecurity and poor mental health.

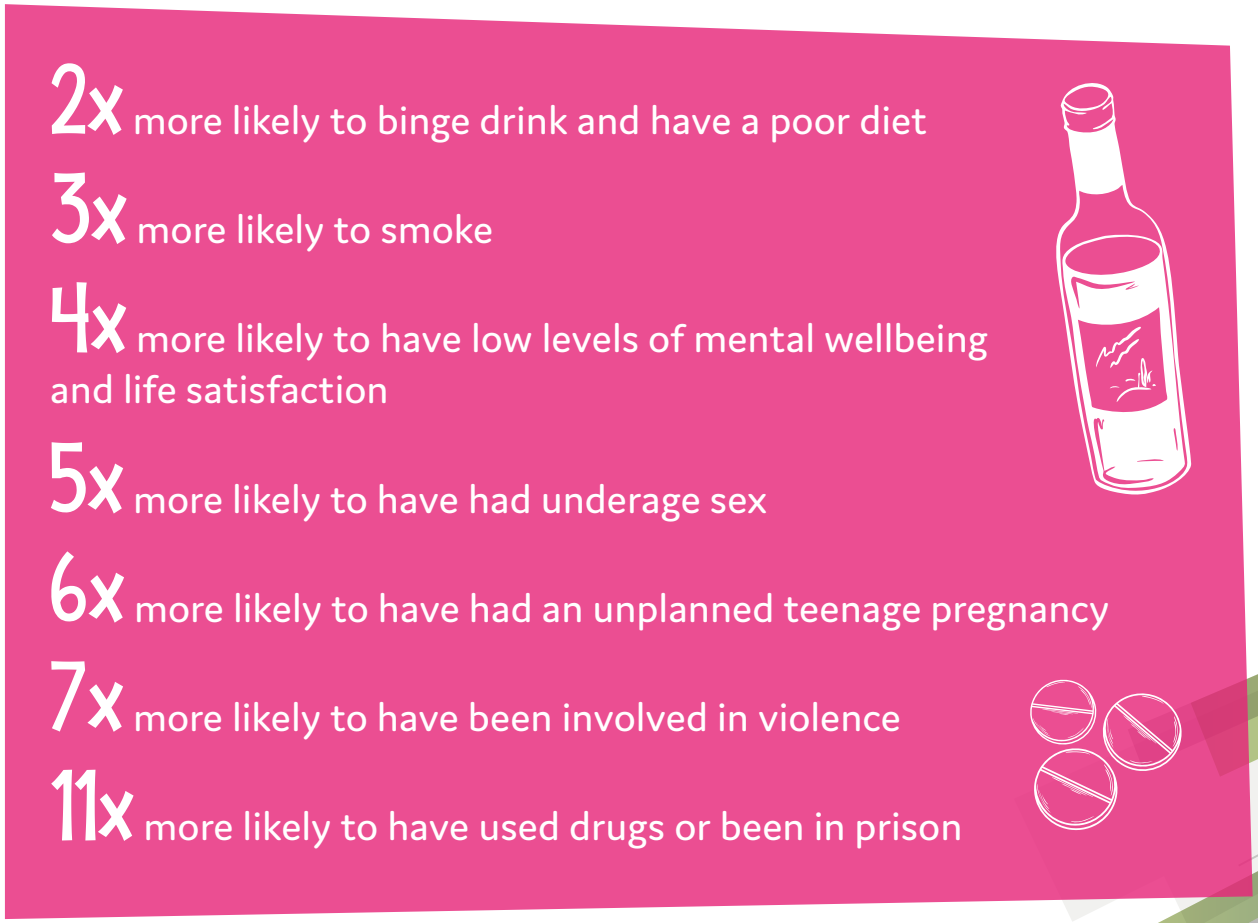
Young people and adverse childhood experiences

Experiences in childhood such as; abuse, neglect, loss or bereavement or living in a household where domestic abuse, drug or alcohol misuse, gambling harm, criminality or poor mental health are present can lead to children and young people experiencing long-term damaging impact on their health. They may struggle with managing emotions, forming and maintaining healthy relationships, and controlling their behaviour. Young people may also face more than one of these experiences at the same time.[20]

The effects from these adverse childhood experiences can extend into adulthood and influence family relationships and wellbeing. In Merseyside, almost 50% of adults reported one adverse childhood experience before the age of 18, with 12% of those said they had experienced four or more.[21]

Trauma-informed support, early intervention and family-centred services can help build resilience, strengthen parenting confidence and support healthier outcomes across generations.

Figure 4 – Compared with people with no adverse childhood experiences, those with four or more are:[20]



Young people at risk of exploitation

Young people who have experienced adversity, trauma or disruption in their lives may be at increased risk of child criminal exploitation or child sexual exploitation. During adolescence, a desire for belonging, acceptance, status or emotional connection can make some young people more vulnerable to grooming by perpetrators. Perpetrators often use manipulation and grooming tactics to gain a young person's trust. This may involve offering gifts, money, friendship, attention, affection or a sense of belonging.

Over time, and once trust has been established, young people may be coerced, manipulated or pressured into activities they would not otherwise participate in. Control is often maintained through intimidation, threats, humiliation, violence, or fear of losing a valued relationship, making it difficult for young people to recognise the abuse or seek help. Early identification, trusted relationships and access to appropriate support are important protective factors in reducing the risk of exploitation.

MYTH OR FACT?

If my friends or family tell me it's healthy then it must be true.

Young people said:

FACT

Answer:

MYTH

Friends and family can be a useful source of advice, but they may not always have accurate or up-to-date information.

Young people who receive support from Children's Social Care

Cared for children, care-experienced young people and those supported through child protection or child in need plans often face additional challenges. Many may have experienced adversity, trauma or disruption during childhood, increasing their risk of poorer physical health, emotional wellbeing difficulties and mental health problems. Changes in placements, schools and support networks can also affect stability and make it more difficult to access consistent healthcare, education and other services.

The Children in Care Team, delivered by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, co-ordinate and complete health assessments and care plans. The Cared for Children's Emotional Wellbeing Service, delivered by Barnardo's provides specialist emotional wellbeing and mental health support.

Through early intervention, preventative and responsive therapeutic support tailored to individual need. The service uses trauma-informed approaches and a range of evidence-based interventions such as play therapy, art therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and complex trauma therapy. Support is provided both to children and young people and, where appropriate, to those caring for them, helping to build resilience, improve emotional wellbeing and prevent difficulties from escalating to more specialist mental health services.

Young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can face additional barriers that affect their health, wellbeing and life opportunities. Some may be more likely to experience long-term health conditions, developmental delays, or mental health difficulties, while others may face challenges accessing education, physical activity and social opportunities. However, with the right support and accessible environments and opportunities, young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities can thrive.

Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) is delivered by Barnardo's. This local service provides parents with the knowledge and guidance they need to secure the best possible outcomes for their child with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Find out more information on the **barnardossendiass.org.uk** website.

Young carers

Young carers provide unpaid care for a family member with illness, disability, substance misuse or mental health needs. As a result of these responsibilities, they have an increased risk of emotional stress, anxiety, and fatigue. As this occurs at an important stage in their development, they may not receive the emotional, social or educational support they need to thrive.

Caring responsibilities can limit the young person's ability to attend school regularly, access healthcare, and take part in social activities, affecting both their immediate wellbeing and future outcomes.

Vibe UK provides support to young carers, peer support, one-to-one sessions with trained workers or offer trips of activities to take a break from their caring role through the Me Time programme.

Find out more information about Vibe on **vibe** website.

Young people living with long-term conditions

Young people living with long-term conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy or more complex health needs often require ongoing healthcare and support to manage their condition. This can affect many aspects of daily life, including school attendance, participation in physical activity, social opportunities and growing independence. Managing a long-term condition can also place an emotional burden on young people and their families, increasing the risk of anxiety, low mood and social isolation. During adolescence, these challenges can affect confidence, wellbeing and the transition into adulthood.



Looking ahead – education, employment and independence

Adolescence is a time when young people begin to think about their future and make important decisions about education, employment and independent living. Having access to opportunities, support and positive experiences during these years can help young people build the confidence, skills and resilience needed to thrive in adulthood.

Many young people are ambitious about their future and aspire to continue their education, secure meaningful employment and live independently. However, concerns about the rising cost of higher education, transport costs, employment opportunities and the affordability of housing can create uncertainty.

Education, employment and independent living

Education plays a key role in shaping future opportunities, health and life chances. Young people who achieve good education grades are more likely to progress into further education, employment or training and experience better long-term health outcomes.

Young people who are not in education, employment or training are more likely to experience social isolation, reduced confidence and poorer mental wellbeing. Knowsley has 5.2% of young people aged 16 to 17 years not in education, employment or training, this is the fourth highest in the North West.[22]

National research has also highlighted changes in the labour market.[23] Entry-level jobs traditionally taken by young people, particularly in retail and customer service sectors, are becoming less common due to technological advances and changing employment patterns. This can make the transition into work more challenging for some young people.

For many young people, moving into their own home represents an important milestone. However, rising housing costs and limited affordable housing options can make this more difficult to achieve. Research shows that concerns about future housing and financial security can have a negative impact on young adults' mental wellbeing.



Supporting young people to succeed

While these challenges are significant, there are many local initiatives helping young people develop the skills, confidence and experience needed for adulthood.

Through apprenticeships, graduate programmes and partnerships with local employers, young people in Knowsley are supported to explore career opportunities, gain practical experience and progress into employment. These programmes help young people build aspirations, develop skills and achieve their potential.

Knowsley apprenticeship programme

Since 2008, Knowsley has welcomed thousands of young adults into the workforce across the borough. Apprenticeships offer a range of benefits for school leavers, providing them with on-the-job training, earning a wage, learning and gaining a qualification and often can secure employment once their apprenticeship finishes.

Supporting graduates

At Knowsley Council we are keen to support graduates to find employment through the two-year graduate programme. This offers a range of opportunities to learn, gain service specific training and invaluable work experience in a variety of different services across the Council. Although, there is no upper age-limit, most graduates are young adults, and many have gone on to secure permanent employment within Knowsley Council.

Find out more information about graduate or apprenticeship roles on **Knowsley Council** website.

Knowsley youth chamber

Knowsley Chamber deliver an initiative to raise awareness of the wide range of career opportunities available in Knowsley, helping young people make informed choices and aspire to future employment pathways. Since its launch, it has successfully delivered events in local secondary schools, bringing together students and business representatives to explore different sectors and professions.

The initiative is now being expanded, strengthening engagement with post-16 learners through further and higher education settings, as well as working directly with young people to gather their views, understand their needs, and ensure future activities are shaped by their aspirations and experiences.

Find out more information about Knowsley youth chamber on **Knowsley Chamber** website.





Ruby O'Brien, Apprentice Insight Officer, Knowsley Council

My journey to working at Knowsley Council hasn't been through the most traditional route but it is one that I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of.

I started my journey as a young carer dropping my brothers off at Merseyside Youth Association's holiday activity clubs. I got involved in the sessions and was encouraged to join the youth cabinet and was elected as Knowsley's Member of Youth Parliament. During that time, I was lucky enough to represent young people on many different board meetings, scrutiny committees and even at the House of Commons. I have sat on many interview panels for roles at Knowsley Council including the role of the current Chief Executive. I have also attended events locally, regionally, and nationally to ensure the voices of our young people are actively listened to.

After I finished my role as Knowsley's Member of Youth Parliament, I then joined the Council as an Apprentice Insight Officer in the Policy and Performance team. Through this role, I get to continue my passion in enhancing and empowering the voices of young people in our community.

I left school not being the most academic and didn't go to college. I was not in education, employment or training for two years; however, I spent time volunteering and finding freelance placements to explore what I was passionate about. I thoroughly believe that this has led me to where I'm meant to be, making a difference locally and if a young person from my community believes they can achieve something because 'that girl from Kirkby has', my job is fulfilled.

I'm only at the beginning of my two-year apprenticeship at the council but I am really excited to see where it takes me.

Although many young people face challenges linked to poverty, adversity and unequal opportunities, adolescence also presents significant opportunities to improve health and wellbeing. By continuing to invest in early support, education, employment opportunities and supportive communities, we can help all young people build strong foundations for a healthy future.

Supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing

Financial security, educational experiences, housing, relationships and life events amongst other factors, affect how young people think, feel and cope with everyday challenges. This section explores both the evidence and what young people have told us about their experiences.

Mental health was the topic raised most consistently by young people during the development of this report. They spoke openly about the pressures they face, the support that helps them cope and the challenges of growing up in an increasingly complex world. While conversations about mental health are more common than ever, many young people felt there is a need to better balance awareness of mental health problems with the promotion of resilience, coping skills and positive wellbeing.

While some young people may continue to struggle to access diagnosis and support, mental health language is also being used more broadly. A balanced approach supports access to care while recognising the wider social and emotional context behind how young people experience distress.[24]

We heard from Knowsley young people:

Everyday emotions can quickly be given clinical labels. For example, having a "bad day" may be described as "you've got anxiety".

Conversations about mental health can feel focused on what is wrong, rather than practical ways to manage feelings or how to stay well.

Feelings such as stress, anxiety, and low mood are often seen as "just part of life," particularly during high-pressure periods like exams.

They recognised wider issues such as politics or global events but felt these were largely outside their control.

Coping well could be viewed as unusual. One young person explained that if they did not feel anxious, others assumed they "didn't care enough".

They felt overwhelmed when expected to worry about things they could not influence.

Young people told us about how they think about worry and responsibility. Helping young people to focus on what they can control, while offering appropriate opportunities to engage in wider issues, can reduce unnecessary stress and support healthier emotional development.

When asked to write down things that made them feel worried, the common theme was school-related, for example, deadlines, mock-exams, and social aspects such as having friends, and their appearance to others.



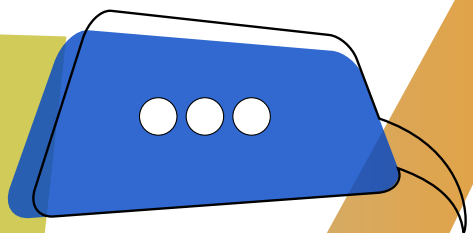
When asked to write things that made them feel less worried, the main responses were 'friends', 'music', 'support' and 'talking'.

'I feel comfortable talking about my mental health'

31% said they always felt comfortable

57% said they sometimes felt comfortable

11% said they never felt comfortable





'I feel comfortable asking for help regarding my mental health"

22% said always

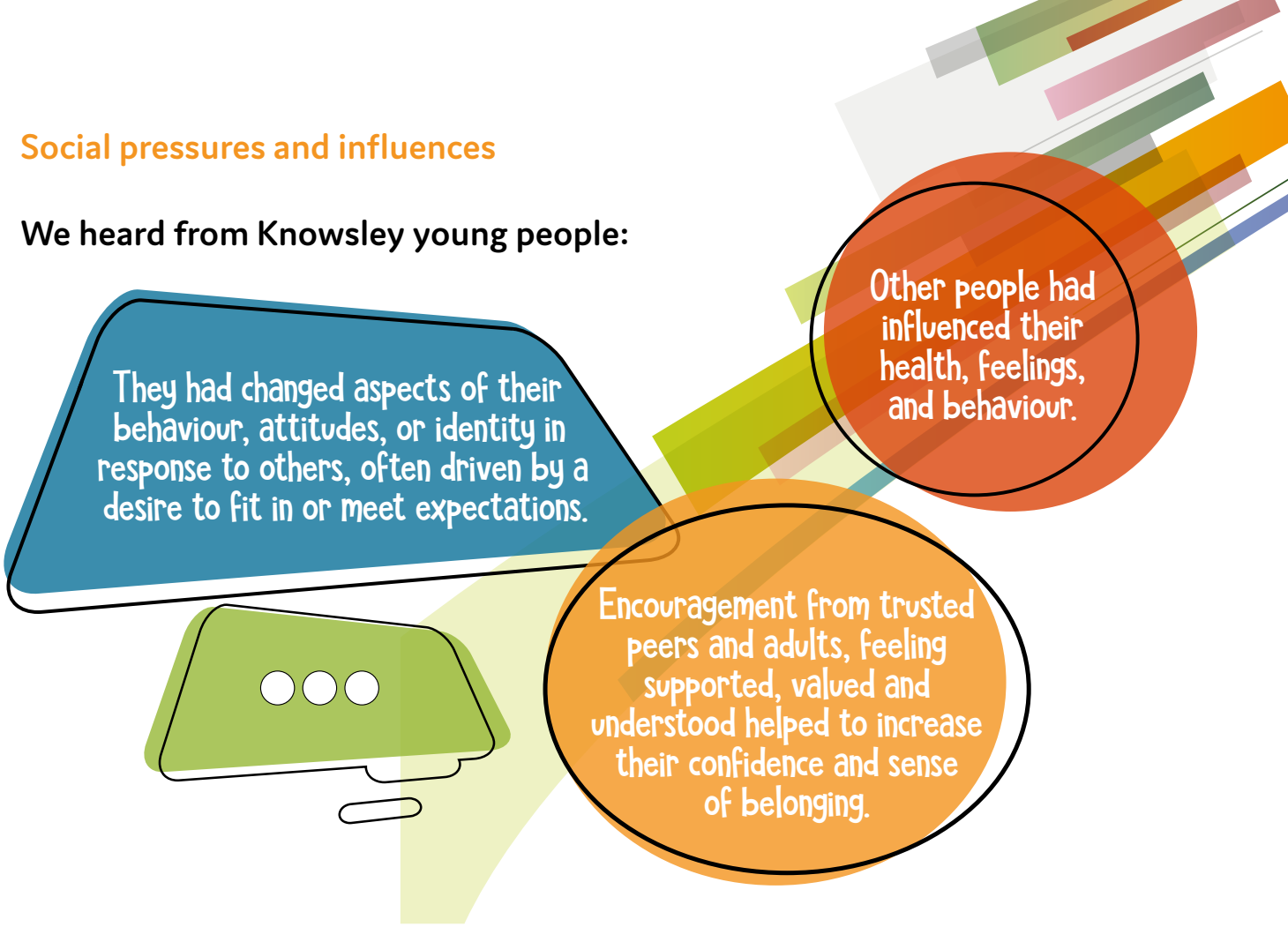
47% said sometimes

31% said never

Feedback from Youth Voice Events

Social pressures and influences

We heard from Knowsley young people:



Young people highlighted the significant impact and influence that others have on how they feel, behave, and make decisions in everyday life. In addition, young people are also influenced by the commercial determinants of health, and this is discussed in the next section of this report.

Experiences such as stigma, discrimination, or bullying related social pressures and expectations may contribute to risk-taking behaviours such as drug or alcohol use, sleep disruption, affect educational grades, and have a wider impact on both physical and mental health.

Social environments, particularly peer groups, schools, and online spaces, play a crucial role in shaping young people's wellbeing. Interventions should both reduce harmful influences (such as bullying and stigma) and strengthen positive, supportive relationships that build a young person's resilience.

Understanding mental health and wellbeing

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It shapes how people think, feel, and behave, and influences how they cope with challenges, build relationships, and manage everyday life.[25] Mental health can change over time and is shaped by factors, including relationships, physical health, significant life events, sleep quality, and the food we eat.

During adolescence young people are developing their identity and sense of self. Social influences become especially important, friendships, peer acceptance, and a sense of belonging play a central role in shaping wellbeing. Experiences such as support, rejection, or bullying can therefore have a strong and lasting impact.

Over half of all mental health problems begin by age 14, and 75% by age 24, making adolescence a critical period for prevention and early support.[25]

More than 1 in 10 primary school-aged children (aged 5 to 10 years) has an identifiable mental health condition.[26] This reinforces the role of early intervention within primary schools being key to supporting children and teaching them the skills they need to recognise their emotions and how to deal with them.

What increases the risk of poor mental health in young people

The issues raised by young people reflect what research tells us about mental health. Factors such as poverty, adverse childhood experiences, bullying, poor physical health and social isolation can all increase the risk of emotional wellbeing difficulties during adolescence with lasting implications throughout life.

Children and young people living in the poorest households are four times more likely to experience mental health problems by the age of 11 than children in higher-income households.[27]

National research shows that around 24% of children and young people experience frequent bullying; this increases to 31% among pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and 30% among those eligible for free school meals, contributing to higher levels of anxiety, depression and loneliness.[28] Young people who are living with overweight or obesity may also experience bullying, stigma, have anxiety or depression or develop an eating disorder linked to poor body image.

LGBTQ+ young people may face additional challenges that affect their mental health and wellbeing, including bullying, discrimination, social exclusion and concerns about acceptance. National research shows that 43% of LGBTQ+ young people aged 11 to 18 years had been bullied compared to 21% of their non-LGBTQ+ peers.[29]

Cared for children are more likely to have experienced adversity or trauma and are at greater risk of emotional wellbeing and mental health difficulties than their peers. In Knowsley, the proportion of cared for children whose emotional wellbeing is a cause for concern has risen from 26% in 2018/19 to 39% in 2024/25. This is below the England average of 42%, however the gap has been closing in recent years.[30]

Sleep plays an important role in supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing. Adequate, good quality sleep can improve mood, concentration and resilience to stress.

Sleep difficulties are particularly common among young people who experience a mental health problem. Research from NHS England found that 91% of 11 to 16 year olds with a probable mental problem reported frequent sleep problems, compared with 53% of those unlikely to have a mental health problem.[31] This highlights the strong link between poor sleep and poor mental health and the importance of promoting good sleep habits.

Poor mental health can make it harder for young people to attend school or achieve their best and low educational grades can negatively affect confidence and future opportunities. Knowsley had the highest overall and persistent school absence rates in England in both 2023/24 and 2024/25, Knowsley's persistent absence rate has remained within the three highest ranking local authorities in England since 2016/17.[32] Additionally, Knowsley has had the lowest Key Stage 4 attainment score since 2016/17 to the most recent data in 2024/25.[33]

As discussed in the previous section, being a young carer can be stressful and worrying, leaving not a lot of time to focus on their own mental health and wellbeing. It is important that young carers are given the opportunity to access appropriate support.



Supporting a young carer - Vibe UK

A 14 year old female young carer was referred to Vibe by the Young Carers Assessment Team. The young carer provided regular support to her younger brother whose additional needs sometimes resulted in challenging behaviour at home. As a result, she often experienced anxiety, worried about her brother's future and found it difficult to maintain friendships as she felt unable to invite friends round due to her brother's behaviour. As a family it was also difficult to enjoy time together outside the home.

At school, she would often avoid lessons and would spend time in quiet spaces or with mentors, because she was worried that others were talking about her and felt vulnerable to bullying. Following her parents' separation, she was also finding it difficult to adjust to changes in family life and missed spending time with her father.

Having previously attended the Me Time programme, she was invited to join the new Senior Cohort, which proved to be a much better fit. Although initially quiet, she soon became more relaxed and engaged, developing friendships with other young people that continued outside of sessions.

As trust developed, she began to speak more openly with staff about her experiences at home and school. Staff provided one-to-one support when needed, offering a safe space to discuss her worries and build coping strategies. Activities focused on improving mental and emotional wellbeing, including creating positivity jars, using affirmations to encourage her to focus on the good around her, and mindfulness sessions to help develop self-regulation skills.

The team also provided reassurance during difficult school days through regular check-ins via phone calls or messages, offering encouragement and reassurance before returning to lessons. Although she does not enjoy attending school, these check-ins have helped her maintain her attendance.

Over time, staff saw significant improvements in her confidence, wellbeing and social connections. She formed meaningful friendships, became more involved in group discussions and began to express her views more confidently. During her time on the programme, she also achieved the Lord Derby Award, designed to improve practical abilities, encourage trying new things and learning new skills. Activities included ice skating, baking, outdoor learning and social action projects.

She was later signposted to Vibe's MAST Youth Council, enabling her to maintain existing friendships, meet new people and continue developing her confidence. After completing two Senior Cohort programmes, she returned as a peer mentor, which is a credit to her development and commitment to supporting others.

Young Person Voice

"I really like Me Time because I get to meet other young people my age and with similar interests to me. The people have been really nice, and the staff are helpful and welcoming to everyone. The activities we got to do were focused on what we all liked, and everyone enjoyed them. I am excited to stay and help in my new role and feel like my confidence has improved and now I can help others."

Preventing self-harm and suicide

Self-harm is often a response or coping mechanism to emotional pain and/or traumatic experiences rather than a desire to end life. The term 'self-harm' usually refers to someone causing themselves physical harm. However, it can also include self-neglect and engaging in risk taking behaviour. Self-harm is associated with depression, anxiety, and is also a risk factor for suicide. Research suggests more than half of people who have died by suicide have had a history of self-harm.[34]

In 2023/24 the number of Knowsley young people aged 10 to 24 years admitted to hospital because of self-harm related injuries was 115.[35] Research has found that self-harm is particularly common among females aged 15 to 24 years.[36] However, it is important to recognise that this is likely to be under reported, with males often using risk taking behaviours or other methods that may not be recorded as self-harm. Understanding why young people self-harm is important to ensuring they receive the right support.

A self-harm resource hub for professionals working with children and young people in Cheshire and Merseyside is due to be launched late September 2026.

MYTH OR FACT?

Strong people don't feel sad.

Young people said:

FACT

Answer:

MYTH

Everyone experiences a range of emotions, including sadness, regardless of how strong they are. Feeling sad is a normal part of life and does not mean someone is weak.

Ketamine use and young people

Ketamine use has increased significantly in recent years, particularly among young people, and is now recognised as an emerging public health challenge across England.[37] In Knowsley, ketamine use has risen to the second most common used substance (behind cannabis), with 30% of those aged under 18 in treatment reporting ketamine use.[38]

Often perceived as a relatively low-risk recreational drug, ketamine can have serious and lasting consequences for both physical and mental health. Regular ketamine use has been linked to memory and concentration difficulties, anxiety, low mood, emotional instability, and episodes of dissociation where individuals feel detached from themselves or their surroundings.

Repeated use is associated with significant damage to the bladder and urinary tract, causing symptoms such as pain, urgency, frequent urination and incontinence. In severe cases, bladder damage can become irreversible and may lead to kidney complications, major surgery, or lifelong disability. As with other substances, repeated use can lead to tolerance, dependence and addiction, increasing the likelihood of ongoing health and social harms.

The rise in ketamine use presents concerns for young people, as its impacts can affect education, employment prospects, relationships and long-term health outcomes. Preventing harm requires a coordinated approach involving schools, families, health services, treatment providers and wider community partners to improve awareness of the risks and ensure early access to support. Work is ongoing, following a scrutiny review and as part of the Knowsley Combating Drugs Partnership's programme plan to improve pathways between services and increase awareness of the harms associated with drug use.

Supporting young people

Demand for mental health support is increasing in scale and complexity. This is reflected locally in rising demand for services, including increased referrals to specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and ongoing pressure on waiting times. There is also variability in access to support, particularly across different settings and communities.

Levels of need are linked to increasing levels of emotionally based school avoidance, often linked to anxiety and wider emotional wellbeing challenges. Peer relationships, identity development, and social pressures also play a significant role in shaping young people's wellbeing, experiences, and decision-making. Cost-of-living pressures are also placing increasing strain on families, contributing to stress and heightened emotional wellbeing needs on young people.

Knowsley has a well-established, multi-agency approach to supporting children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health, with a focus on early intervention. Strong partnership working, a clear and integrated access pathway through the Knowsley Open Gateway Service (KOGS), ensures young people and their families are directed to the right support at the right time.

Healthy Child Programme is to improve the current and future health and wellbeing of all children, young people and their families. Support begins during pregnancy and continues until the child reaches the age of 19 or up to age 25 with special educational needs or disabilities. This service is delivered by Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust.

Zuntold is an online and face-to-face counselling service providing one-to-one therapy to children and young people aged 11 to 19 years, up to age 25 for those with special educational needs. Zuntold uses bibliotherapy which includes the use of books, story cards, creative writing or drawing to support young people with their mental health and wellbeing. Between April 2024 and March 2026, over 500 young people had been supported.

Listening Ear offers online and face-to-face counselling or group therapy sessions for anyone requiring support. In addition, Butterflies project offers bereavement counselling, and DiAmond project offers support to those who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse.

Mental health support teams in schools play a critical role in early identification and support, with increasing adoption of whole-school approaches to mental health through Mental Health Support Teams, senior mental health leads, and pastoral systems.

Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services support children and young people up to age 18 with their emotional and mental health and wellbeing. This service is delivered by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.

Find out more information about the services on Knowsley Open Gateway Service website.



Supporting a young person experiencing bullying and low mood - ZunTold

A 15-year-old male student had been referred to the service by his Head of Year following concerns that he was been bullied, had low mood and reduced attendance at lessons.

At the initial session, the student was very quiet and withdrawn. To build up trust and rapport, the bibliotherapist offered a choice of creative activities including drawing, fidget toys and soft dough to help the young person feel comfortable. Through drawing a picture of his family, the young person began to talk about his experiences at school and the challenges with his peers. The bibliotherapist offered a safe space to work through his feelings and explore strategies for coping with the impact of bullying.

Over time, the young person began to engage and share more and would smile as he entered the counselling room. The bibliotherapist encouraged the young person to write down words that identified both his strengths and the things that concerned him. Together, they used a feelings wheel and mood cards to help the young person identify and name the feelings. This gave him a better understanding of his emotions and helped to build confidence to express them and recognise things he would like to change. The sessions also encouraged the young person to share some of the activities at home, which would help strengthen support received from his family.

Through regular attendance at the sessions, the young person reported feeling happier and more positive about school. His attendance had improved, and he had made new friends and was no longer being bullied.

Knowsley has strong foundations in place through established services, partnership working and meaningful engagement with young people. Continued focus should be placed on prevention, early intervention, improving access to support and addressing the wider influences on wellbeing, whilst ensuring young people's voices continue to shape service development and delivery.

Commercial influences shaping young people's choices

Young people told us that other people, social media and wider influences shape how they think, feel and behave. Alongside family, friends and communities, commercial organisations also play an important role in shaping young people's choices. They spoke about how advertising, social media, fast food, vaping, gaming and online content affect their everyday lives and choices they make.

This section explores how commercial organisations shape the environments in which young people live, learn and socialise, and what can be done to create healthier alternatives.

Commercial determinants of health describe the ways businesses influence health through the products they sell, the environments they create and the methods they use to market their products and services.[39]

We heard from Knowsley young people:

Fast food is often chosen because it is cheap, convenient and readily available.

Peer pressure plays a part in the choices they make, therefore, what foods a friend eats or what is seen as a treat becomes more attractive and normal.

What they see online is often unrealistic and harmful.

Healthy food is more expensive and there is a lack of healthy options in schools.

Gambling, gaming and vaping are increasingly normalised.

Influencers and social media shape opinions, behaviours and expectations.

How commercial influences impact health and shape behaviour

There is growing evidence that some commercial influences are driving avoidable ill health, health inequalities and environmental harm, through the promotion of harmful products. As discussed earlier, young people's brains are still developing, especially the part linked to decision making, therefore risk and reward and harmful products that give instant gratification can be more appealing and addictive.

While all young people are exposed to commercial influences, the negative impacts are unequally distributed and contribute to widening health inequalities and poorer health outcomes. Young people living in deprived communities experience greater exposure to unhealthy products and services such as fast-food environments and their associated targeted marketing. This increases the likelihood of engaging in unhealthy or harmful behaviours reinforcing poorer health outcomes and longer periods of ill health, compared to their peers living in more affluent areas.

Young people who already face disadvantage such as children who are cared for, young people in the youth justice system, or those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are also more likely to experience poorer health outcomes linked to the commercial determinants of health.[40, 41, 42]

The activities of commercial companies influence health outcomes, positively and negatively. How products are produced, marketed, packaged, priced and distributed, as well as how commercial companies influence policy, research and public perception can have an impact on health.[39]

The health halo effect occurs when food and drink products are labelled in a way that makes the customer believe the products are healthier than they are, or better than the non-processed version, such as 'low-fat', 'high fibre', 'high in protein', or 'organic'. These statements can be misleading. Focusing on these 'health promises' rather than the high levels of sugar, salt or saturated fats that the product may contain masks the negative aspects. This has a significant influence not just on what people buy but how much of that product they will consume.



Greenwashing tactics are used by large corporate organisations as marketing tactics to promote their products, services or healthy activities. For example, supporting grassroots sports and using biodegradable packaging to portray a green or ethical ethos. However, the main aim of this tactic is to divert attention away from the unhealthy aspects of their organisation such as the highly processed and high fat, sugar, salt and saturated fat products they produce.

Commercial companies use a range of interconnected tactics to shape behaviours, influence preferences and policy, increase consumption and encourage habit formation from an early age.[43]



Marketing and advertising[44, 45]

- Greater exposure to advertising in public spaces, particularly in more deprived communities where unhealthy products are often more heavily promoted.
- Targeted advertising through digital platforms including social media.
- Use of bright colours, sounds and features designed to appeal to young people.
- Use of celebrity endorsements, influencers and branding to increase product appeal and normalise consumption.
- Sponsorship and advertising through sport, particularly noticeable with gambling sponsorship through football.



Product design and accessibility[46]

- Development of products that are designed to be highly appealing, encourage repeated use and habit formation.
- Price promotions and prominent product placement, such as at checkouts or aisle ends to increase visibility.
- Limited-edition collectible items or product ranges, where new versions are released periodically to encourage repeated purchase and ongoing engagement.



Policy and regulatory influence[47, 48, 49]

- Lobbying and political engagement may be used to weaken or delay regulation.
- Framing health harms as individual responsibility rather than linked to wider commercial and environmental influences.
- Using corporate social responsibility activities to creative a 'health halo' effect to greenwash or healthwash the role they play in encouraging unhealthy behaviours.



Misinformation and mixed messages[50]

- Funding or promoting research that downplays health harms.
- Marketing products such as vapes, as safe or socially acceptable.
- Creating confusion or doubt about evidence relating to health impacts.

Knowsley Council adopted a local policy to restrict advertising of food and non-alcoholic drinks that are high in fat, salt or sugar, as well as gambling, alcohol, tobacco and vaping on all Council owned advertising sites. Other areas across Liverpool City Region and beyond are now adopting or exploring similar policies.

Despite recent tightening of advertising legislation there is growing pressure on national government to do more to restrict advertising of harmful products such as gambling and unhealthy foods.

Young people are increasingly recognising their ability to influence industry practices and challenge harmful commercial influences. Initiatives such as Bite Back demonstrate how youth-led advocacy can empower young people to campaign for change, raise awareness of industry tactics and promote healthier environments.



Youth-led advocacy - Bite Back

Bite Back 2030 is a UK youth-led movement challenging the influence of the food industry on young people's health. Research by Bite Back highlights how the environments where young people frequently spend their time, including high streets, schools and online spaces have become saturated with unhealthy products and marketing, making healthier choices more difficult.

Bite Back have explicitly called out unhealthy advertising for directly targeting young people. Through their recent #CommercialBreak campaign, young people took ownership of advertising spaces to challenge the normalisation of unhealthy food marketing. The campaign had great success, winning the 2025 Sheila McKechnie Award for best consumer campaign.[51] However, despite the adverts not breaching any advertising standards, two of the UKs biggest advertising companies have decided they will not run the campaign adverts again.[52]

This demonstrates a power imbalance against public advocacy and industry influence. However, when supported to participate in decision-making processes, young people can play a critical role in shaping policy and public discourse.

MYTH OR FACT?

Colourful packaging of unhealthy products is targeted at young people.

Young people said:
FACT

Answer:
FACT

Bright colours, cartoon characters, fun shapes an eye-catching designs are often used to appeal to children and young people.

Emerging products harmful to health

Young people are increasingly exposed to a range of commercial products and behaviours that can negatively affect their health and wellbeing. Products such as; ultra processed food, alcohol, vapes, gambling and gaming are heavily marketed, digitally promoted and designed to encourage repeated use. These products are discussed below.

Ultra processed foods

Knowsley has higher levels of deprivation and food insecurity than the national average with more than half of residents affected.
The number of children living with overweight or obesity are also well above the national average. In 2024/25, 30% of Year 6 children (aged 10 to 11 years) were living with obesity and 43% were living with overweight or obesity. Compared to national averages of 22% and 37% respectively.[53]

Ultra processed foods like crisps, burgers, pizzas, ready-meals and sweets are often widely available, cheap, and designed for convenience.[54] Evidence shows adolescent diets are currently high in sugar, low in fruit and vegetables and highlights the need for improved provision.[55]

Unfortunately, for many families, ultra processed foods may appear to be the most practical option, especially when time and money are limited. Healthier foods can cost more than twice as much per calorie as less healthy foods. This means some families living in the most deprived areas would need to spend 45% of their disposable income on food to afford the government recommended healthy diet, rising to 70% for households with children.[56]



Fast food and takeaway options are often cheap and easy to find in many communities, especially in more deprived areas with almost 1 in 3 food outlets in England being a fast food or takeaway shop.[56] When these food products, takeaway and delivery options are all around the environment in which we live, play and socialise, they can become the standard choice and are strongly linked to poor diet and long-term health outcomes.

To limit young people's exposure to unhealthy food environments, Knowsley Council has introduced limits on hot food takeaway outlets allowed in our town centres and on district shopping parades. This also covers most of our schools. Applications for new units within 400m of schools are subject to additional assessment and may be required to adjust their opening hours so they are not open at lunchtimes or times when young people are walking past on their way to and from school.

Supporting young people to eat well at school

School food plays an important role in shaping young people's health as it influences their diet and lifelong eating habits. Access to nutritious food supports healthy growth, maintaining a healthy weight, cognitive function and positive educational outcomes. School food also plays an important role in reducing health inequalities, by improving access to healthy, balanced meals, schools can help support young people from lower-income households who may otherwise face barriers to accessing healthier food.[57]

52% of Knowsley secondary school aged children receive a free high quality, nutritious meal whilst at school.[58]

The Knowsley School Meals Service provides school food and ensures menus in Knowsley secondary schools are compliant with the current School Food Standards.[59] The service also works collaboratively with Public Health through the successful Healthy Schools Programme. Having Council owned school food provision allows priority to be given to health outcomes over profit and there is limited reliance on branded foods.

The grab-and-go option is the popular choice for secondary school pupils in England and makes-up a substantial and routine part of the school food on offer. This option tends to be the least healthy option, and predominantly carbohydrate-based items such as pizzas, rolls, and pastries. Insight gathered with pupils show that these options are popular as lunchtimes are too short and queues for hot meals tends to be longer, and there is not enough seating. Research has shown that 56% of pupils who receive free school meals, are more likely to purchase a grab-and-go option at least three to four times a week.[60]

The upcoming review of the School Food Standards is welcomed, as they are outdated and do not reflect the latest guidance. Knowsley Council will work together with schools and pupils to implement the new standards when they are introduced in 2027.



Healthy schools – packed lunches

Knowsley schools provide lots of tasty, healthy balanced meals on their menus, however, for those who prefer a packed lunch, a website has been created to help parents and carers when buying items and preparing a healthier packed lunch. Although aimed at primary school aged children, the content is still relevant for young people.

Find out more information on Healthy schools - packed lunch Knowsley Council website.

Understanding young people's views on school food - Kirkby High School



Knowsley School Meals Service and Public Health worked collaboratively with the Deputy Headteacher and Year 10 pupils from Kirkby High School, to better understand pupils' views on the food available at lunchtimes, identify opportunities to improve the healthy food selections on the menu and the dining experience.

Pupils were passionate about their school food and had lots of ideas and feedback to provide about the current menu and ideas for improvement.

Pupils told us they wanted to see:	The changes made:
• A greater variety and more fruit pots available at lunchtime as they often run out. • Fruit pots should be displayed in prominent location, rather than out of view.	A wider variety of fruit pots are now available with new items including; pineapple, watermelon, grapes and melon. The pots are placed nearer the tills and on the new salad bar to encourage pupils to purchase them.
• More opportunities to view the menu before reaching the front of the queue. This would help reduce waiting times.	The menu is now promoted on screens around the school and posters have been placed around the canteen so pupils can choose in advance. The school will also be looking into the option of adding menus into school planners.
• Fresher and colourful salad options and vegetables on the menu.	A new salad/deli bar is now available. Pupils can create salads, healthy wraps or baguettes from the selection.

A jacket potato stand with different options and side salads has also been made available and healthier options for grab and go such as vegetable sticks and dips. Healthier cookies made with reduced sugar are also on the new menu.

Initial follow-up feedback showed that pupils valued being consulted and that many pupils across the school are enjoying the new options available.

Engagement with the school meals service and pupils to collect feedback will be ongoing as the pupils begin to develop a new healthy school award scheme, which will include continuous monitoring and feedback on the menus.

Rewards in schools

Research found that food and drink companies continue to target and influence schools. This could be through hosting or funding school trips or fundraising events, donating unhealthy food products such as pizzas or donuts and encouraging schools to offer these as rewards or treats. Funding and resource pressures can make it difficult for schools to turn-down these offers.[61] However, using unhealthy food as a reward increases young people's preference for these food types, undermines healthy eating messages schools try to provide, and can contribute to long-term poor dietary habits and emotional relationship with food.

To address this and provide ideas and guidance to schools on alternative healthier rewards, Knowsley School Sports Partnership, Volair and Public Health worked together to secure a 50% discount for schools to purchase leisure day passes to be used as rewards for pupils. In addition, a strong partnership has also been developed with Liverpool entertainment centre Gravity Max. To-date, more than 40 Knowsley schools have accessed the Star Student Golden Ticket programme which provides access to over £500 worth of rewards annually.

Supporting young people and their families

Healthy Futures Knowsley, delivered by City Health Care Partnership, offers friendly, non-judgemental support for children and young people aged 5 to 17 years and their families to build healthier habits in relation to food, activity, sleep, screen time and wellbeing.

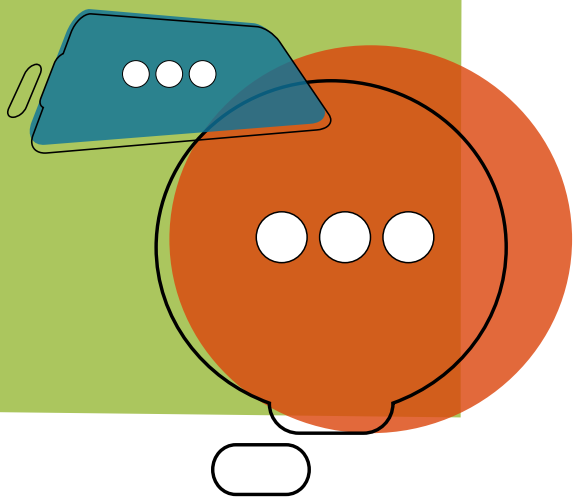
- **Happy Healthy Me – children aged 5 to 12 years:** 8 to 12 week family programme on healthy eating, physical activity, sleep and screen time, with face-to-face sessions and digital check-ins. (This is for children and young people with a BMI above the 91st centile.)
- **Vital Vibes – young people aged 13 to 17 years:** 8 to 12 week teen support covering healthy eating, activity, mental health and sleep, with face-to-face sessions and digital check-ins. (This is for children and young people with a BMI above the 91st centile.)
- **Family Foodies – Cooking programme:** 4 to 6 week practical programme to build confidence preparing healthier meals, adaptable for parents/carers and families.

The service also works with primary, secondary and special educational needs schools to deliver interactive, classroom-based sessions that integrate healthy lifestyles education into the school curriculum and encourage a healthy school culture. The four to six week programme encourages the involvement of parents, carers, and wider family members wherever possible. It aims to support children and young people to develop healthy eating habits, understand the importance of regular physical activity, and adopt lifelong behaviour changes that contribute to improved health outcomes.

Session topics include:

- Healthy, balanced diets
- Understanding food labels and nutritional information
- The importance of physical activity and reducing screen time
- The role of sleep and daily routines in maintaining good health
- Making healthier choices for snacks and drinks
- Planning and preparing healthy meals and packed lunches

Find out more on the **Healthy Futures Knowsley** website.



Alcohol

Research shows that exposure to alcohol marketing is associated with earlier initiation of drinking, increased alcohol consumption and higher rates of binge drinking among young people.[62] This relationship has been shown across traditional advertising, sponsorship, and increasingly through digital and social media platforms, where alcohol promotion can be include into lifestyle content, influencer marketing, and user-generated material. Evidence suggests that alcohol marketing contributes to the normalisation of drinking and can influence attitudes, expectations and behaviours relating to alcohol among children and young people.

More recently, concern has focused on the growing popularity of alcohol products promoted through social media. While there is no direct clear evidence that these products have independently increased underage drinking, there are ongoing concerns that brightly coloured packaging, sweet flavours, novelty design, and strong social media promotion may increase their appeal to younger audiences. These features reflect marketing approaches identified in the wider evidence base as contributing to youth engagement with alcohol brands and the further normalisation of alcohol consumption among young people.[63]

The ENGAGE programme, delivered by Change Grow Live Knowsley offers free, confidential and non-judgemental one-to-one, group or family support to young people aged 10 to 25 years.

In 2022, just 46 young people were supported by specialist drug and alcohol services, however, following investment into services for young people, there are now 100 young people (under age 18) being supported in Knowsley (2024/25).[64]

Alcohol was highlighted as the main substance of choice for 10 young people under the age of 18 on the current case load, accounting for 10% of those in treatment. The number of young people receiving treatment for alcohol use has remained stable over the last few years.

Find out more information on Change Grow Live website.

Vaping

Vaping products, also known as e-cigarettes, were introduced in the early 2000s as an alternative to smoking conventional cigarettes. They were designed to deliver nicotine without burning tobacco which creates many of the toxic chemicals found in cigarette smoke and were primarily intended to help adult smokers quit smoking.

Although vaping is considered less harmful than smoking, concerns have grown about increasing use among children and young people. Flavoured products, colourful packaging and social media marketing have contributed to rising experimentation among adolescents.

Vaping delivers highly concentrated nicotine, which alters brain development, impairs memory and concentration, and causes addiction. Evidence suggests that young people who vape may be more likely to initiate cigarette smoking and are more likely to report the use of other substances.[65]

Young people who smoke and/or vape can access support face-to-face, by telephone, online or via text, through Smokefree Knowsley, delivered by City Healthcare Partnership. The service provides education and advice to schools, parents and carers, and offers tailored one-to-one support for young people. Support focuses on raising awareness of nicotine dependence, helping young people to reduce or quit vaping and/or smoking, and enabling them to make informed choices about their health and wellbeing.

Find out more information on Smokefree Knowsley website.

Gambling

Young people are exposed to gambling through online platforms, sports sponsorship, favourite social media influencers and gambling-like features in video games, this can make gambling appear normal and accessible. Gambling is highly addictive and can lead to problems such as anxiety, low mood, debt, poor educational performance and family conflict.

Young people can gamble in a variety of ways, both online and offline. Traditional forms include betting with friends, buying scratch cards through adults, betting on sports, playing cards for money, and using gaming or amusement machines. Recent UK data shows that activities such as arcade machines, informal betting with friends and family, and online gambling are common forms of gambling exposure.[66]

Preventing early exposure, raising awareness of risks and providing support for those experiencing gambling-related harms is important.

Figure 5 – Gambling Commission report in 2025 – 3,666 young people aged 11 to 17 years:[66]

59% had ever experienced gambling.

49% had gambled in the previous year.

30% had spent their own money (pocket money) on at least one gambling activity in the previous year.

35% had played on an arcade gaming machine (penny pusher, claw grab machine). This is the most common form of gambling, followed by placing a bet for money between family and friends (19%).

53% of boys and 31% of girls had seen advertisements related to gambling on live streaming or video sharing platforms.

57% of boys and 37% of girls had seen advertisements related to gambling at sporting events.

MYTH OR FACT?

Free games aren't free.

Young people said:
FACT

Answer:
FACT

Free games can be fun, but it's important to be aware of in-game purchases and understand how companies make money from them.

Gaming

Gaming can provide many benefits for young people when it is balanced and age appropriate. It can help develop problem-solving, decision-making, creativity and digital skills, while also supporting social connections through teamwork and communicating with friends. Most young people who game, experience these positive benefits without significant harm, however, excessive gaming which interferes with sleep, replaces physical activity, impacts education or relationships, becomes difficult to control and involves spending on in-game purchases can be harmful.

1 in 4 young people have paid to open a loot box in a video game.[67]

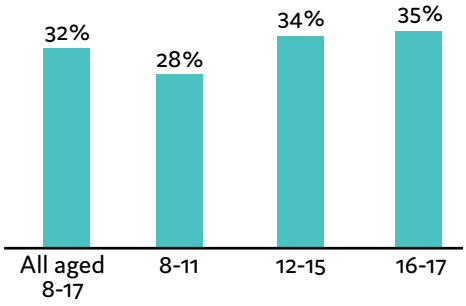
A loot box is a paid or earned in-game function that provides random rewards. Because players spend money without knowing what they will receive, loot boxes are considered by many researchers to have similarities to gambling and may increase risk-taking, repeated spending and playing, and lead to future gambling problems in adulthood.

Living in a digital world

During the teenage years, young people have increasing independent access to digital media and influence whilst at the same time developing and forming their own identity. The digital media landscape has changed rapidly over the years, with 9 in 10 children owning their own mobile phone by age 11, making access to online content easy. Research shows that many young people use platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Instagram to consume online digital content, while Snapchat was the most favoured platform used to message and communicate with friends.

Whilst there are many benefits of being online; ranging from staying connected with friends, using it for learning or creative purposes to accessing information about their health and wellbeing or consuming interesting information to share and discuss with others, there are negative consequences such as misinformation.

Figure 6 – In the past 12 months, have you seen anything online that you found worrying or nasty in some way that you didn't like?[68]



Exposure to harmful content online can be damaging to a young person's emotional wellbeing and influence their behaviour, opinion and beliefs. They may have viewed the harmful content accidently or have been sent it by friends or even strangers.

Figure 7 – Types of harmful online content include, but are not limited to:

- **Content promoting terrorism, extremism or violence.**
- **Content that promotes or glorifies self-harm, suicide or eating disorders.**
- **AI-generated and manipulated content, including deepfakes, misleading or fabricated images and videos, and non-consensual sexually explicit content, Bullying, harassment and online abuse.**
- **Misinformation and disinformation.**
- **Content that is inappropriate for a young person's age, maturity or stage of development.**

A campaign developed by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside is due to be launched later in 2026 and will highlight the often hidden forms of tech-enabled abuse. This includes behaviours such as online stalking, bullying, intimate image sharing and location tracking. The campaign has been co-produced with Merseyside Youth Association and will include the voices of young females aged 14 to 17 years and will aim to reduce violence against women and girls.

There is growing evidence that repeated exposure to idealised online content such as images and videos that have been carefully staged, edited and filtered portray unrealistic expectations of life and how one should look. This is associated with poor body image, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy among young people. This can contribute to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced confidence, particularly during key developmental stages.[69]

Influencer culture has introduced new forms of social and behavioural pressure. Influencers often promote products, lifestyles, and trends that may not be accessible or appropriate for all audiences. This also includes exposure to gambling related content which contributes to normalisation of gambling in everyday life.

This type of commercial content is not always clearly identifiable, meaning young people may not recognise when they are being marketed to. This can influence spending habits, encourage materialistic values, and place financial pressures on families.

MYTH OR FACT?

Social media influencers are always honest.

Young people said:

FACT

Answer:

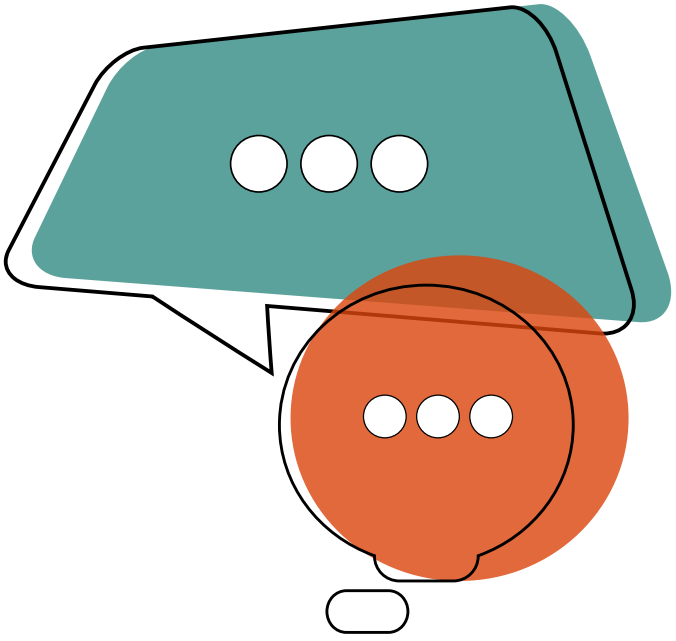
MYTH

Just because someone is popular online doesn't mean everything they share is true or unbiased.

The Online Safety Act 2023

The Online Safety Act 2023[70] was introduced to reduce exposure to harmful content and improve online safety for both children and adults. It placed responsibilities on social media platforms and search services to reduce illegal activity by putting systems in place to prevent misuse, quickly remove illegal content when it appears, blocking access to harmful or age-inappropriate content including, offering simple ways to report issues and support adults by increasing transparency about what content is allowed and giving users more control over what they see.

The UK Government announced plans to introduce a ban on the use of social media for under-16s. Platforms would not be allowed to offer accounts or services to under-16s and must use strong age verification checks to enforce this. Most parents (9 in 10) said they would support a social media ban for children under-16. This policy is in development, and further information is expected later in 2026, early 2027.



MYTH OR FACT?

Social media is addictive.

Young people said:
FACT

Answer:
FACT

Social media platforms are designed to keep users engaged through notifications, likes, comments, and endless scrolling.

Young people told us they want healthier choices to be easier choices. While commercial influences are now embedded within everyday life, stronger regulation, healthier environments and meaningful involvement of young people in decision-making can help ensure that commercial interests do not undermine health and wellbeing.

Helping young people thrive in their communities

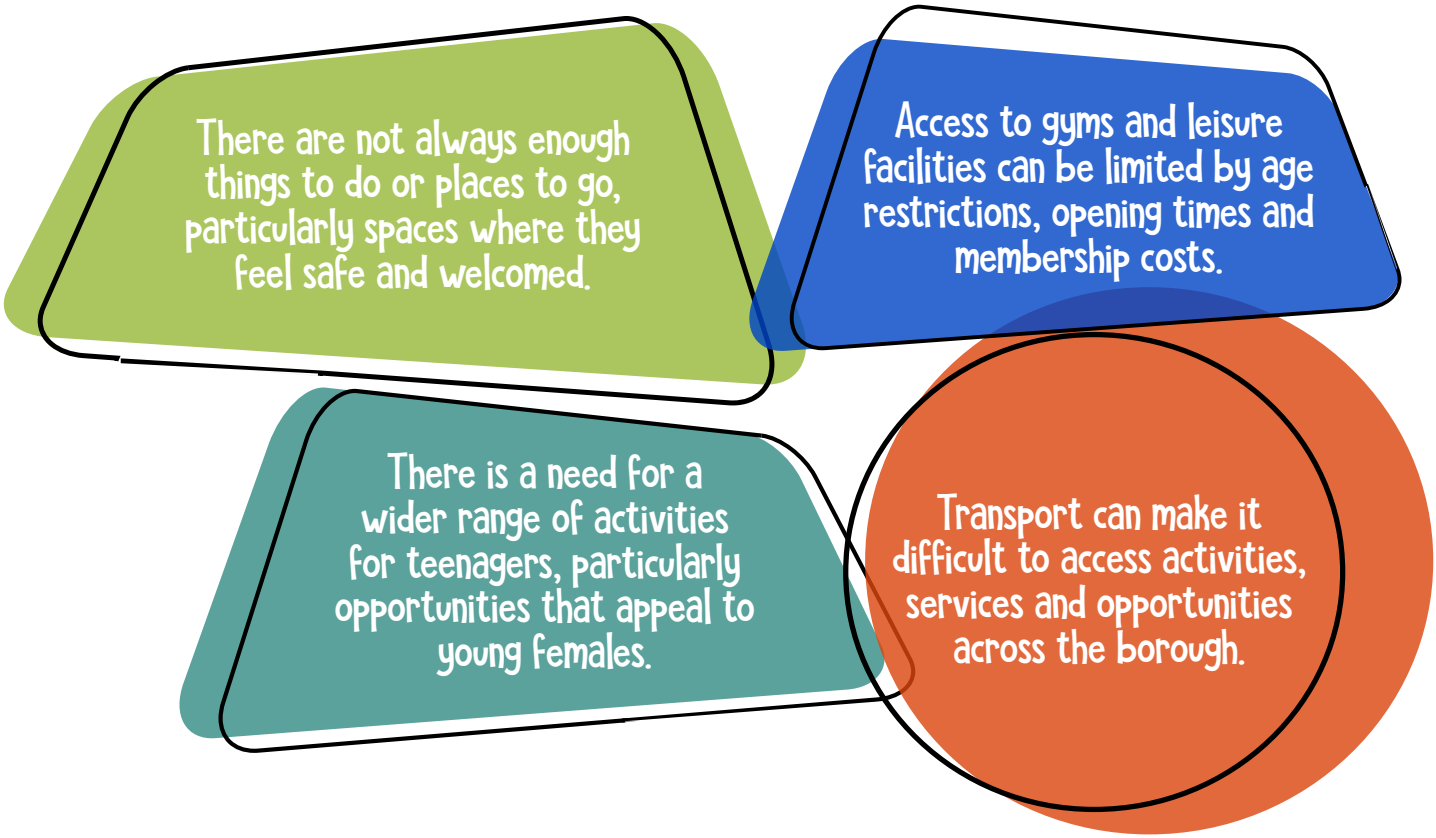
The previous section explored how commercial influences can shape young people's choices, behaviours and health. In contrast, young people also told us about the positive factors that help them thrive, including supportive relationships, safe and accessible places, opportunities to be active and a sense of belonging. This section explores how health-promoting environments and communities shape young people's experiences and highlights the opportunities and barriers that influence their health and wellbeing.

What is a health-promoting environment?[71]

Not all environments influence health in the same way. While some can increase exposure to risk and harm, others support health and wellbeing.

A health-promoting environment is a place that helps people stay healthy, safe, happy, connected and able to reach their full potential.

We heard from Knowsley young people:



Safe neighbourhoods, welcoming and accessible community spaces, opportunities to be active and positive social connections all contribute to better physical and mental wellbeing. These environments can help young people develop confidence, resilience and a sense of belonging, while reducing the risk of poor health outcomes and inequalities.

As young people become more independent during adolescence, the environments around them become increasingly important. Access to places where they feel safe, included and supported can encourage healthy development, strengthen relationships and provide opportunities to develop new skills and interests.

Encouragement from trusted peers and adults, feeling supported, valued and understood helped to increase their confidence and sense of belonging.

Social environments – belonging and relationships

Positive relationships with family, friends, trusted adults and the wider community play an important role in supporting young people's health and wellbeing. Evidence shows strong social connections, emotional support and opportunities to participate in community-based activities help to improve mental wellbeing, increase confidence and greater resilience. These protective factors can help reduce loneliness, anti-social behaviour, exploitation, poor mental health and risk-taking behaviours, leading to better long-term health outcomes.[72]

Opportunities to attend youth clubs or take part in sports, arts and volunteering are not equally available to all young people. Financial pressures, transport costs, caring responsibilities, disability, concerns about safety and a lack of age-appropriate opportunities can all limit participation. These barriers can be particularly significant for young people living in more deprived communities, contributing to widening health inequalities.

Young people consistently highlighted the importance of having safe, welcoming places where they can spend time with friends and take part in meaningful activities. They described wanting more opportunities that are affordable, accessible and designed with young people in mind. Their views reinforced that creating healthier environments is about more than providing facilities. It requires ensuring that opportunities are affordable, accessible, inclusive and shaped by young people's needs and experiences.

GO TILLY - A documentary on accessibility and inclusion



Tilly Vickers from Northwood, Kirkby is a passionate young advocate for disability rights. Her courage and determination to keep challenging preconceptions of disability inspire everyone she meets. GO Tilly, is a film told through the eyes of Tilly and explores how everyday environments can create unexpected challenges.

Watch Tilly's film GO TILLY a A Documentary on Accessibility and Inclusion

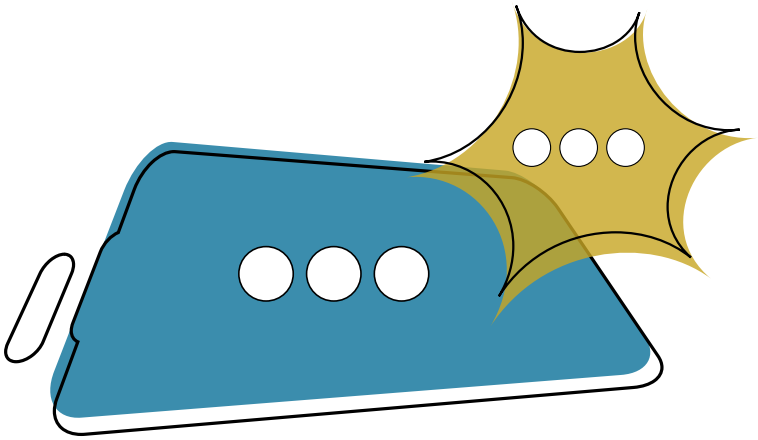
The film was funded by Right to Succeed (Northwood) and supported and directed by Kitchen Sink Live.

Physical environments – safe and accessible places

The quality and safety of local environments in which young people live play a key role in ensuring young people can be physically active and keep in touch with friends and peers. Being able to visit parks and other youth-friendly outdoor spaces which are safe and welcoming and can be accessed via safe travel routes can encourage participation, while heavy traffic, pollution, anti-social behaviour, and safety concerns can discourage use. Cost of organised activities, use of sports or leisure facilities is also a barrier to participation. A lack of appropriate youth-focused activities can increase the risk of young people being drawn into risk taking behaviours such as drug and/or alcohol misuse.

The Commission on Sport and Low-Income Neighbourhoods report found that children and young people growing up in low-income neighbourhoods are less likely to meet the recommended physical activity guidelines of one hour a day of enhanced physical activity, have lower rates of participation in sport and physical activity, compared to their peers living in less deprived areas. [73, 74]

Traditional sports provision is often less accessible to low-income families due to the geographical distribution of opportunities and the costs associated with sports clubs and gym memberships. In addition, young people often prefer sociable forms of sport and physical activity that require organisers, equipment, indoor facilities, or designated outdoor spaces. These activities depend on coordination and resources that are not consistently provided by the current sports system, further contributing to the exclusion of young people from low-income families.



Creating a healthy environment – smoke and vape free zones

Knowsley Council introduced a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in September 2026 to create smoke and vape free environments for settings where children and young people attend. The aim is to protect their health and reduce their exposure to smoking and vaping, support adults to quit smoking and help keep public spaces clean and healthy.

Knowsley settings that will be smoke and vape free include:

- Playgrounds and Environment Centres in parks
- School grounds including the immediate vicinity of school gates and entrances
- Youth centres
- Volair centres (including main entrances and forecourts)
- Children's Centres and Family Hubs
- Libraries (external entrances and forecourts open to the public)
- Shakespeare North Playhouse

MYTH OR FACT?

You need to be sporty to be active.

Young people said:

FACT

Answer:

MYTH

You don't need to be sporty to be active. Moving more in ways you enjoy is what matters most.

Authoring Our Own Stories - youth recovery project

'Authoring Our Own Stories' youth recovery project looked at how young people's civic identities impacted on their access to services. The project was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund in collaboration with Youth Focus North West, Shakespeare North Playhouse and Merseyside Youth Association.

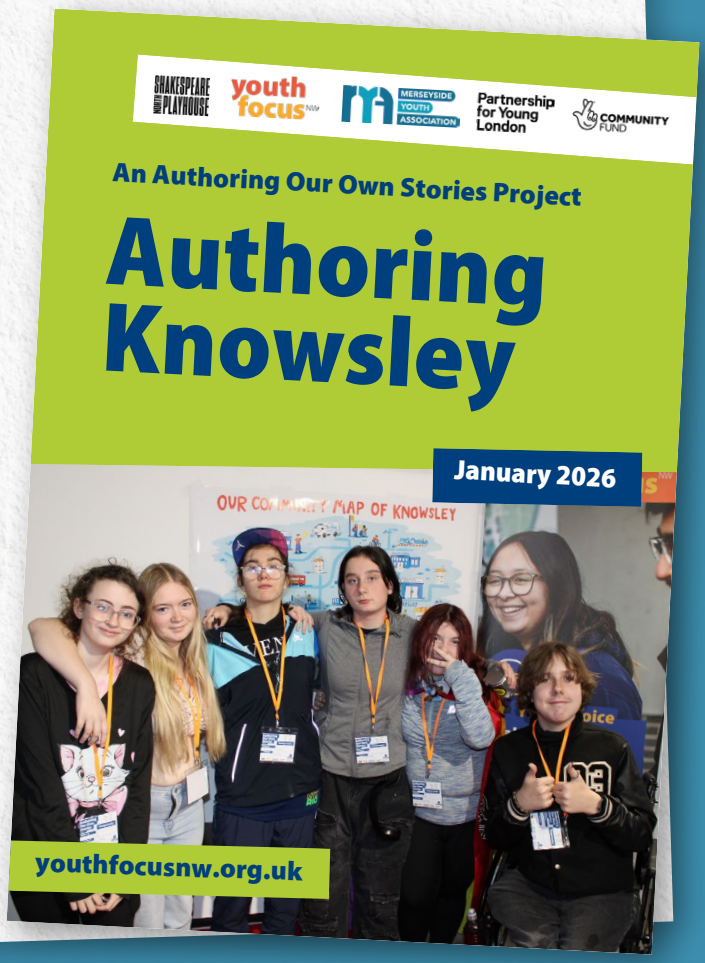
Seven local young leaders aged 12 to 17 were trained in research and facilitation skills which enabled them to design and carry out the research. They delivered four focus groups which involved 36 young people and designed a survey which 58 young people responded to. The research from this project was analysed and a report produced 'Authoring Our Own Stories Project - Authoring Knowsley'.[75]

The key themes arising were in relation to; safety, transportation barriers and costs, having a safe person to talk to, things to do and places to go and a sense of belonging.

The young leaders shared their learning from the project through a variety of different artistic approaches which were showcased at an exhibition at Shakespeare North Playhouse.

One of the recommendations from the research is the creation of an online youth directory to signpost young people to activities and services appropriate to them. At the time of writing this is in development.

You can view the artwork and access the full report on Youth Focus North West website.



Supporting young people

In Knowsley, a wide range of activities are available through schools, community and voluntary sector organisations, sports and dance clubs. A couple of examples are detailed below.

Volair young people's fitness programme

GymX is Volair's dedicated fitness programme for young people aged 11 to 16 years. It offers supervised gym access, young people-friendly GroupX classes and swimming, all designed to help young people build confidence, learn safe exercise habits and enjoy being active.

Find out more on **Volair website** .

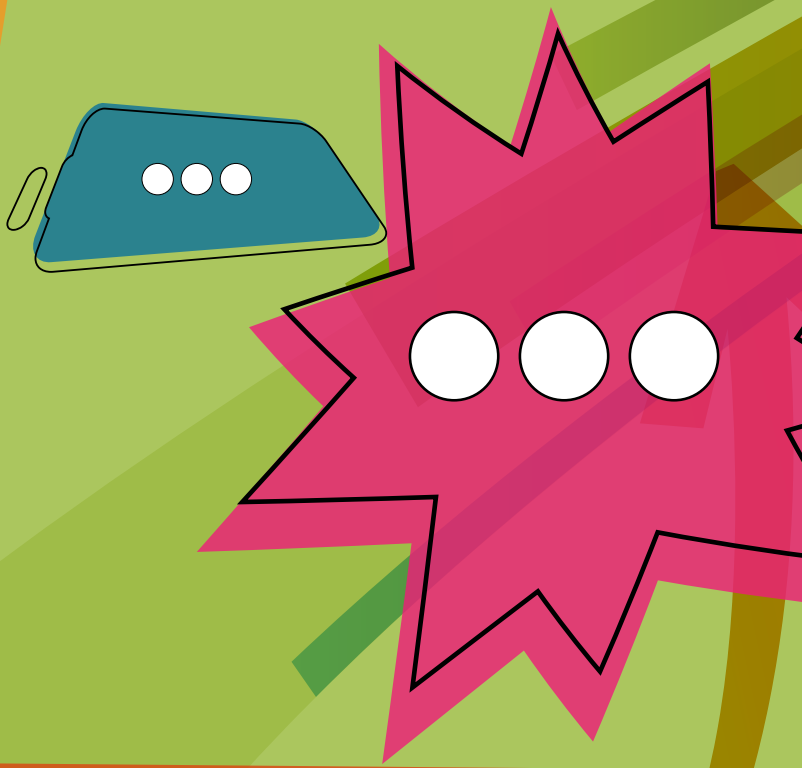


Merseyside Youth Association

Merseyside Youth Association **delivers** Knowsley's integrated youth service for young people aged 11 to 19 years (up to 25 years for those with special educational needs/ disabilities). The offer includes detached youth work, trauma-informed mentoring, health education, outdoor education activities, participation opportunities through the Knowsley Youth Cabinet, and access to the multi-agency youth hub Our Place, based in Huyton. Together, these services help young people build confidence, develop skills, improve wellbeing and have their voices heard in decisions that affect their lives.

The Our Place youth hub brings together a range of services designed to improve wellbeing, build resilience and support positive transitions into adulthood. These opportunities play an important role in helping young people feel connected to their communities, develop new interests and skills, and reach their full potential.

Find out more information **on the Merseyside Youth Association website .**



Creating health-promoting environments requires more than the provision of facilities, it means ensuring young people feel welcome, included and safe. Continued investment in places, activities and positive relationships that are important to young people will help support their development, improve wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

Making healthcare work for young people

Young people told us that having safe places to go, opportunities to take part in activities and a sense of belonging, are important for their wellbeing. They also highlighted that when they need support, healthcare services should be accessible, welcoming and easy to navigate. This next section explores the barriers young people face when accessing healthcare and what can be done to improve their experiences.

Access to healthcare is an important part of supporting young people to stay healthy and well. However, young people may face barriers when trying to access services and support. These include practical challenges such as booking appointments, associated travel costs and transport issues, reliance on parents or carers to arrange or attend appointments, long waiting lists, and difficulties navigating services.

Some groups of young people, including those with disabilities, young carers, LGBTQ+ young people, care experienced young people and those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, may face additional barriers to accessing care. In addition, transition points, such as moving from children's services to adult services, can also create gaps in continuity of care.

We heard from Knowsley young people:

GP appointments can be difficult to access, particularly when parents or carers are unable to take time away from work or other responsibilities.

There is a lack of awareness about available sexual health services and how to access them.

Support relating to menstrual health and wellbeing is not always easy to access or discuss.

Services should be easy to navigate, welcoming, inclusive and free from judgement or stigma.

Young people want services that listen to them, respect their views and involve them in decisions about their care.

Young people may be reluctant to seek support because of concerns about confidentiality, fear of judgement, stigma, or worries that they will not be taken seriously. These concerns may be influenced by previous negative experiences or by services that are not designed with young people's needs and preferences in mind.[76]

Seeking help for sensitive issues, such as sexual health, substance use or mental health difficulties, can feel particularly challenging. Some young people may worry about what others will think, whether their concerns will remain confidential, or how they will be perceived by professionals, family members or peers.

Improving access to young people's healthcare which supports early intervention can have long-term positive impacts for the NHS or social care.[76]

Accessing healthcare or support services within a school setting can create additional barriers for some young people. A lack of privacy, such as services being in busy areas of the school, may make young people feel uncomfortable about seeking help. Others may be reluctant to leave lessons to attend appointments due to concerns about missing learning or drawing attention to themselves.[76]

Young people experiencing mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem may find it harder to ask for help, attend appointments or engage with services or activities due to the way they are feeling. This can lead to delayed diagnosis and treatment with needs becoming more complex.

Digital technology has created new opportunities for young people to access health information and services. However, not all young people and their parents/carers have equal access to reliable internet connections, devices, affordability, or the digital literacy skills needed to use online services effectively and safely. Digital exclusion can widen health inequalities by limiting access to information, support and appointments and other resources needed to maintain health.[77]

As young people become more independent, they increasingly make decisions about their own health. Having access to trusted information and understanding how to use healthcare services are important skills that can help young people stay healthy and seek support when needed.

Young people's feedback highlights the importance of designing healthcare services around their needs and experiences. Ensuring services are youth-friendly, accessible and responsive can encourage earlier help-seeking, improve experiences of care and support better health outcomes throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

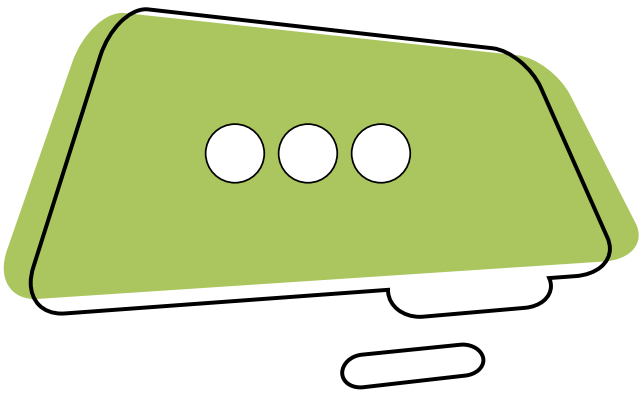
MYTH OR FACT?

Health isn't that important.

Young people said:
MYTH

Answer:
MYTH

Looking after your health helps you feel better, stay active, and enjoy life.

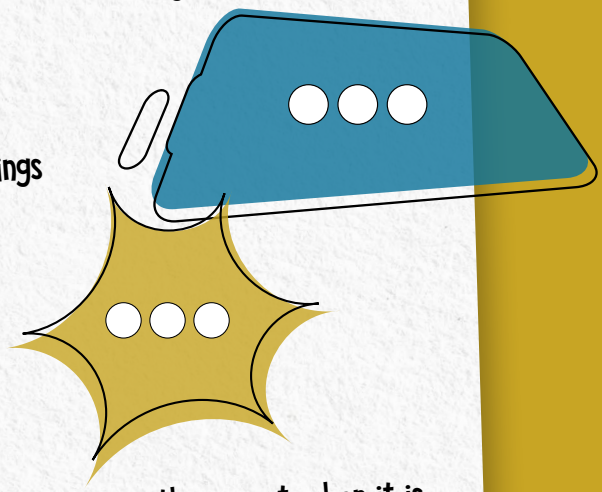


Shaping the future of young people's health services – The Prescot School



As part of the development of future health and wellbeing services for young people in Knowsley, a consultation was conducted with approximately 90 Year 7 pupils (aged 11 to 12 years) at The Prescot School.

The aim was to understand young people's health priorities, preferred ways of accessing support, and views on the design and branding of future wellbeing programmes, including a proposed vaping awareness project. Participants provided valuable insight into what effective services should look like for young people.



They felt services should be:

- Easily accessible within schools and local community settings
- Available through both face-to-face and online
- Inclusive and open to all young people
- Delivered in engaging, non-clinical environments
- Linked to activities, clubs, and opportunities to socialise

These findings suggest that young people are more likely to engage with support when it is delivered in familiar youth-friendly settings where they already spend their time such as at school or within community settings.

Young people were invited to help choose a name for a future wellbeing programme. The most popular option was "Vital Vibes", with other suggestions including "Grow and Glow", "Thrive", and "Fresh." The popularity of these names highlighted a preference for positive, empowering language that promotes growth, confidence, and belonging.

The consultation demonstrated the value of involving young people in service design. Findings indicated that services should prioritise mental health, physical activity, and healthy eating while offering flexible, inclusive, and engaging forms of support.

Their feedback will help ensure future programmes are relevant, accessible, and responsive to the needs of local young people, increasing the likelihood of engagement and positive health outcomes.

Improving access to healthcare for young people requires a whole-system approach. Co-production with young people, targeted outreach for vulnerable groups, and integrated working between health, education, and social care are essential to reducing inequalities and improving outcomes.

This includes addressing cost and transport related barriers, and ensuring services are confidential and designed around young people's needs. Most importantly young people should feel empowered and informed to take an active role in their own health and wellbeing.

Hopes for a healthier future

Throughout this report, young people have shared their experiences of growing up in Knowsley, highlighting both the challenges they face and the factors that help them to thrive. From mental health and wellbeing to healthy environments, access to opportunities and support services, their insights provide a clear picture of what matters most.

Above all, young people want to be listened to and valued in the decisions that affect their lives. It is the responsibility of services, and organisations to listen, act and continue working alongside young people to create a borough where every young person can be healthy, happy and able to fulfil their potential.

Young people are not only current users of services; they are the next generation of adults, parents, workers, advocates and changemakers whose experiences today will shape the future health and prosperity of Knowsley for years to come. Investing in young people's health and wellbeing is one of the most effective ways to improve population health, reduce inequalities and build stronger, healthier communities.

By ensuring young people have access to timely support, positive opportunities and environments that promote good health, we can help them build the foundations for healthy, fulfilling lives.

The word cloud illustrates the overall messages and aspirations expressed by young people throughout the report.

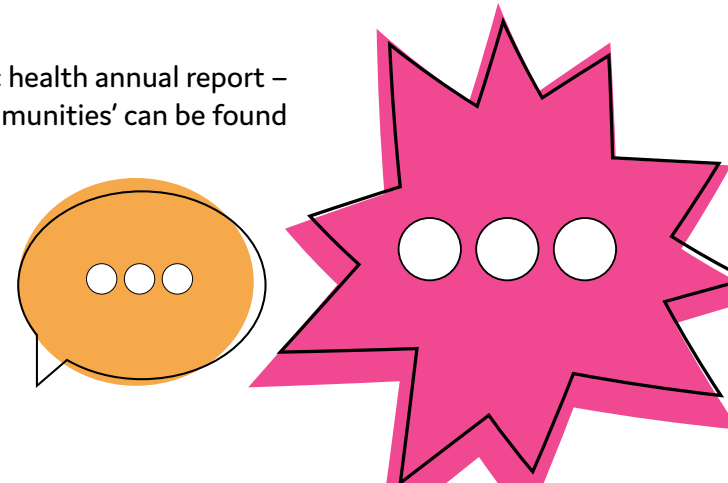


Recommendations

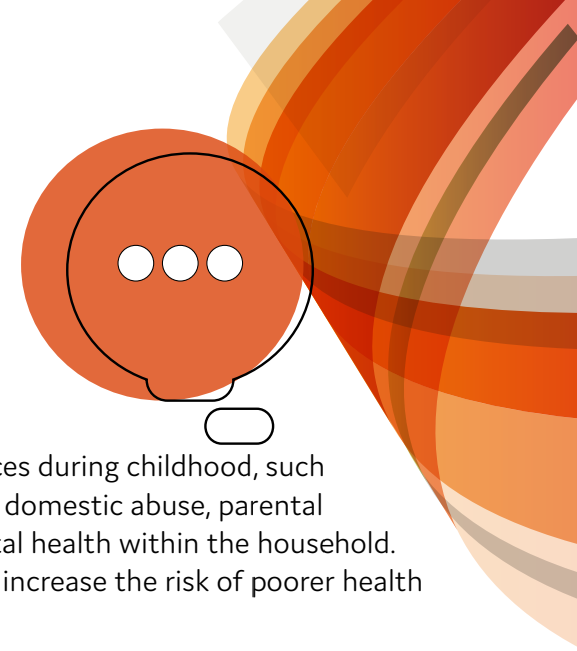
This report provides valuable insight into the experiences of young people and what matters most to them. Ongoing engagement and involvement from young people will help to shape the delivery of the recommendations identified below.

1. Through meaningful engagement, ensure young people are actively involved in shaping the design and delivery of services and programmes specifically for them through the Children and Young People Participation Framework. Encourage partners to use the insight presented within this report to inform service design and delivery of services and interventions for young people.
2. Public Health to explore with schools to understand how poverty related stigma impacts children and young people during the school day and implement evidence informed actions to improve inclusion, attendance and educational outcomes.
3. Together with the new Knowsley Youth Hub, work in partnership with Merseyside Youth Association and children and young people to co-produce an inclusive youth-centred communications approach that promotes wellbeing, tackles stigma and bullying, raises awareness of social media pressures and addresses wider issues that are important to young people.
4. Improve awareness of and access to trusted information, advice and support services through schools, youth hubs, community settings and digital platforms which young people use or visit, ensuring it is accessible, inclusive and is designed to reduce stigma. Specifically addressing issues or challenges raised by young people such as mental health and wellbeing, sexual health and menstrual health.
5. Jointly develop a Knowsley Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing partnership strategy, along with our ICB and other partners, to strengthen the local approach to prevention, early intervention and support, following a review of existing wellbeing promotion and practice and mental health support provision to ensure timely access to appropriate support when needed, especially when in crisis.
6. Develop a partnership approach to protect children and young people from the harmful impacts of the commercial determinants of health. For example, explore the learning from the Bite Back programme, apply evidence and best practice measures to restrict gambling ads and reduce substance related harms.

An update on recommendations from the 2024-25 public health annual report – 'How stigma affects the health and wellbeing of our communities' can be found on the Knowsley Council website.



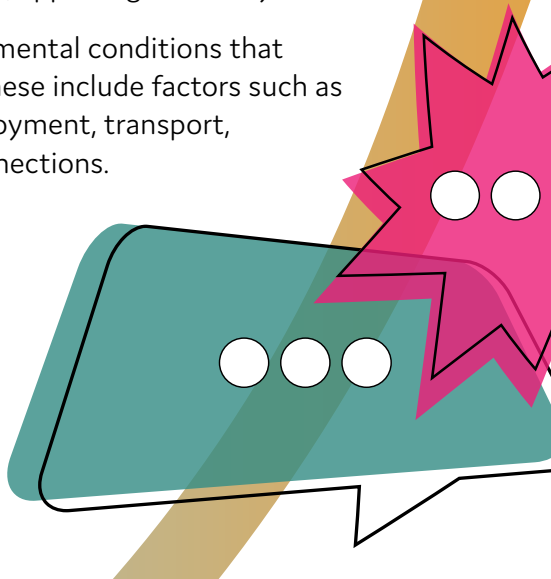
Glossary



TERM	DEFINITION
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)	Stressful or traumatic experiences during childhood, such as abuse, neglect, bereavement, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, or poor mental health within the household. Experiencing multiple ACEs can increase the risk of poorer health and wellbeing later in life.
ADOLESCENCE	The stage of life that bridges childhood and adulthood, typically spanning the ages of 10 to 19.
AI	Artificial intelligence.
AMYGDALA	A part of the brain that plays a key role in processing emotions, particularly fear, anxiety, and threat detection.
ASTHMA	A long-term respiratory condition that affects the airways in the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. Symptoms can include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath.
BEFORE HOUSING COSTS (BHC)	Household income measured before housing costs, such as rent or mortgage payments, are deducted.
BIBLIOTHERAPIST	A professional who uses books, stories and creative activities as therapeutic tools to support mental health and emotional wellbeing.
CARED FOR CHILDREN	A child who has been in the care of a local authority for more than 24 hours.
CIVIC IDENTITY	A person's sense of who they are within their community, shaped by factors such as where they live, their background, experiences, beliefs and values. Civic identity influences how people feel they belong, participate in community life and contribute to society.
COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)	A type of talking therapy that helps people understand how their thoughts, feelings and behaviours are connected.
COMMERCIAL INFLUENCES	The ways businesses influence people's choices and behaviours through advertising, marketing, pricing, product design and the environments in which they live, learn and socialise.
COMMISSIONING	The process of assessing the needs of local communities and deciding how services should be planned, funded and delivered to improve health and wellbeing.
COMPLEX HEALTH NEEDS	Health and care needs that require support from multiple services over a long period of time. These needs may result from illness, disability, mental health conditions, or a combination of factors that affect a person's everyday life.

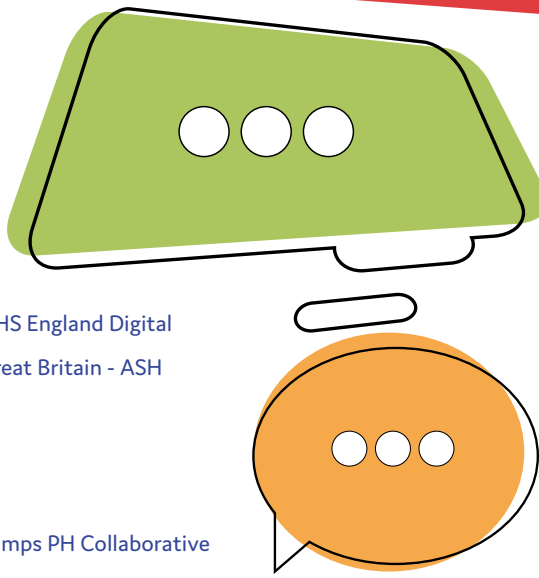
TERM	DEFINITION
COMPLEX TRAUMA THERAPY	A type of therapy that helps people recover from the long-term effects of multiple or ongoing traumatic experiences.
DEPRIVED	Experiencing a lack of resources, opportunities or conditions needed for a healthy and comfortable standard of living.
DISABLED	Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is considered disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	The highest level of education that a person has completed or the qualifications they have achieved.
EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLAN (EHCP)	A legal plan that outlines the education, health and care support needed by a child or young person with special educational needs and disabilities.
GCSE	General certificate of secondary education.
GP	General practice/practitioner (Dr).
HEALTH INEQUALITIES	Unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes between different groups of people or communities.
INEQUITY	Unfair and avoidable differences in opportunities, resources or treatment that can affect people's health, wellbeing and life chances.
KEY STAGE 4	The stage of secondary education in England covering Years 10 and 11 for pupils aged 14 to16, during which students work toward GCSEs and other national qualifications.
KNOWSLEY OPEN GATEWAY SERVICE (KOGS)	A single point of access for children, young people and families seeking emotional wellbeing and mental health support in Knowsley. KOGS helps people find the right service at the right time by providing advice, information, assessment and referrals to appropriate support services.
LGBTQ+	An inclusive term used to describe people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
LOBBYING	Activities carried out by individuals or organisations to influence government decisions, policies or regulations. This may include providing information, raising concerns or advocating for particular interests.

TERM	DEFINITION
LONG-TERM CONDITION	A health problem that lasts a year or longer, cannot currently be cured, and requires ongoing management.
LOWER-LAYER SUPER OUTPUT AREA (LSOA)	A small geographical area used in England and Wales to collect and report statistics about local populations. LSOAs are designed to contain similar numbers of people, allowing comparisons between different neighbourhoods and communities.
MERSEYSIDE YOUTH ASSOCIATION (MYA)	A youth organisation that provides activities, support and opportunities for young people across Merseyside.
NEET	A young person who is not currently in education, employment or training.
NHS	National health service.
PREFRONTAL CORTEX	The part of the brain located behind the forehead that is responsible for planning, decision-making, self-control, problem-solving and managing emotions. This area continues to develop throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.
PSPO	Public spaces protection order.
RELATIVE LOW-INCOME	Relative low income is a measurement used to define poverty. It refers to people who live in households with less than 60% of the average (median) household income for that year.
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities.
SENDIASS	Special educational needs and disability information advice and support service.
ULTRA PROCESSED FOODS	Industrially formulated food and drink products made mostly from substances not commonly used in home cooking. They often contain additives, preservatives, and artificial ingredients and are designed to be convenient, appealing and ready to eat.
WIDER DETERMINENTS OF HEALTH	The social, economic and environmental conditions that influence health and wellbeing. These include factors such as income, education, housing, employment, transport, relationships and community connections.

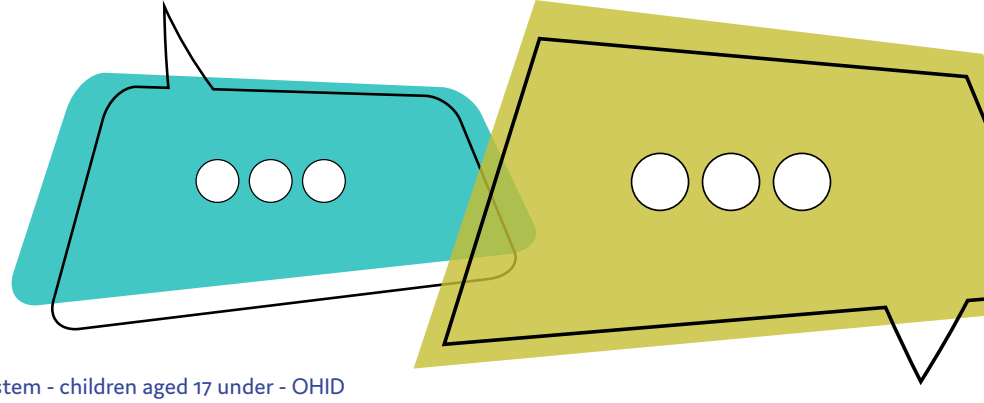


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All references correct as of 1 September 2026

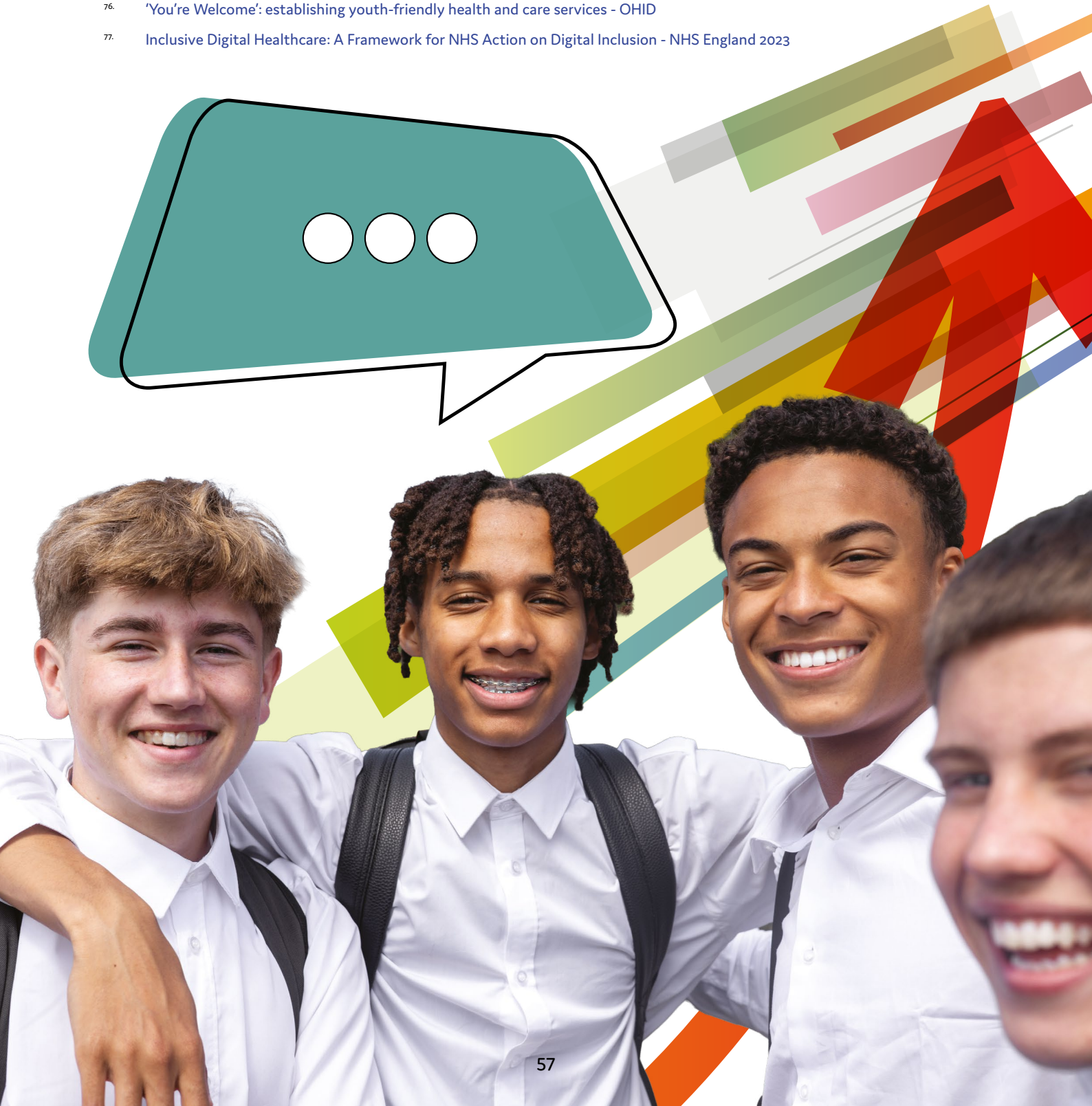


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