



Welcome to the seventh newsletter from the [Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative](#) (CHEC), which brings together children's charity Barnardo's, UCL's Institute of Health Equity (IHE) and Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) from Birmingham and Solihull, South Yorkshire and Cheshire and Merseyside. This first-of-its-kind programme aims to tackle physical and mental health inequalities facing children and young people today.

For this edition of the CHEC newsletter, we are **shining a spotlight on the work of Birmingham and Solihull ICS** as part of the Collaborative.

Prof. Doug Simkiss, the lead for CHEC in Birmingham and Solihull ICS, shares his reflections:

Birmingham & Solihull (BSol) ICS covers a diverse area with over 100 different languages spoken and represents a unique demographic landscape. In some wards of Birmingham, up to 80% of residents belong to Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups, giving the city a rich cultural tapestry. Furthermore, Birmingham has the youngest average age among the core cities of Europe, with half of its population under the age of 30. However, neighbouring Solihull has a different demographic profile, characterised by an older population and substantial material deprivation in the northern part of the borough. Notably, BSol ICS grapples with the most significant material deprivation issue in England. This context was key in our applying to be part of the CHEC.

We were delighted to see the [Conceptual Framework from World Health Organization Commission on the Social Determinants of Health](#) used as the basis for the development of the [Child Health Equity Framework](#) using the insights of young people from the three ICS areas. The Child Health Equity Framework, designed to underpin action for achieving greater equity in children and young people's health and wellbeing, was key to our vision in BSol; it informed the data work and our intervention.

As part of the CHEC programme, ICS data leads, who have been developing or updating data dashboards, collaborated with local partners to review a set of priority child health equity data indicators, identify gaps and source local data to address these gaps. In BSoL, a data dashboard which brings together existing health data on child health equity has been created. The data can be analysed by ethnicity, deprivation and geography, and the dashboard will facilitate a deeper understanding of local child health equity in each of the ICSs.

Children and young people's involvement in Birmingham and Solihull

Notable achievements to date include the recruitment of 10 Health Equity Champions, who have been instrumental in influencing and co-designing interventions. Their involvement has ensured that initiatives are responsive to the real priorities of local young people and are better positioned to achieve sustainable outcomes. Our Health Equity Champions continue to lead from the front, co-producing targeted interventions on key issues such as obesity, mental health, and domestic violence. Their voice is also shaping procurement practices to ensure young people's priorities are embedded in future commissioning.

Zainab says 'Being a Health Equity Champion has been incredibly rewarding. It has given me a platform to share my perspective as a young person and make a meaningful impact. I've learned so much from healthcare professionals about the challenges facing our community. Discussing these topics and ways to tackle them with other champions has been very valuable. Even when I didn't agree, those differing viewpoints encouraged me to think more critically. This role has strengthened my leadership and communication skills, preparing me to take on future challenges with confidence'.

Mahisa says 'Being a health equity champion has provided me with a perspective of healthcare I may otherwise not have appreciated. Representing the youth voice, we collaborated with many different sectors in healthcare, which helped me appreciate the multi-faceted approach that keeps our ICS running. Also, the opportunity to collaborate with my community to bring awareness to issues such as obesity and domestic violence has shaped my understanding of what holistic care should look like. I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity and thank all the organisers of the programme for making this such an engaging experience for us'.

Embedding Social Value and Corporate Social Responsibility within ICS procurement

BSoL continues to embed our Social Value and Corporate Social Responsibility intervention within our ICS procurement processes. Using the Child Health Equity Framework, drawing on the lived experiences and insights of young people and with the expertise of the community and voluntary sector, the initiative is delivering meaningful improvements in health equity across our system.

Match My Project (MMP) is an online portal connecting suppliers with local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations to deliver social impact. By aligning business resources with community expertise, it enables collaboration on local priorities.

Successes so far include:

- Adoption of MMP by the ICB, with changes to contracting and tender scoring to encourage use.
- Sharp rise in engagement after our September 2024 procurement conference, with projects listed on MMP doubling to over 100.
- An increase in supported projects from 9 to 20.
- Early evidence of direct benefits for children and young people, with further qualitative analysis planned.

The programme has also secured strategic commitment from the ICS Board, fostered closer collaboration with procurement leads in the local authorities, and successfully increased the weighting of social value within procurement bids to 20%, strengthening the impact of commissioning decisions. Current efforts are additionally focused on connecting local businesses with project leads through dedicated events and digital platforms, thereby ensuring interventions receive the resources and support required to succeed.

The closing months of the collaboration are focussed on completing the evaluation, finalising the dashboard and ensuring the programme's legacy continues to support children and young people across the system.

Updates from the rest of the Collaborative

South Yorkshire

The South Yorkshire Child Health Equity Collaborative intervention, delivered through the Friday Fun Club, demonstrated significant positive outcomes for children facing emotional, behavioural, and social challenges. Targeting Year 5 pupils in Rotherham, the intervention provided a safe, inclusive space led by trusted youth workers, fostering emotional wellbeing, resilience, and social skills.

Children with complex needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and those experiencing trauma, benefitted from consistent, relationship-based support. Case studies highlight improvements in emotional regulation, school attendance, sibling relationships, and engagement in structured activities. For example, children grieving the loss of a parent, developed coping strategies and improved sleep and school participation. Another child, initially showing signs of dysregulation, learned to self-regulate and took on leadership roles. A child, previously socially withdrawn, gained confidence, formed friendships, and began participating in community activities.

The intervention's flexible, child-led approach, combined with culturally sensitive evaluation methods, enabled sustained engagement and meaningful change. Feedback from families and youth workers suggests the programme helped reduce behavioural incidents, improved family dynamics, and supported transitions into other positive community settings. The legacy of this work is influencing future commissioning conversations highlighting the importance of embedding youth voice and equity at the heart of service design.

Cheshire and Merseyside

Cheshire and Merseyside recently presented the progress of the CHEC programme to the Children and Young People's Committee in October, sharing progress in tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for children and families across the region.

Drawing on the Child Health Equity Framework, the Cheshire and Merseyside team has identified priority indicators to measure child health equity across our nine Place areas. This analysis has enabled partners to identify inequalities and target interventions more effectively.

The presentation to the Committee featured a young parent who has benefitted from our intervention, "Tell me a Story, Liverpool", which focusses on the importance of storytelling in early childhood to support school-readiness. Nadine joined with her 2-year-old son, Spencer, to share her experience of receiving the monthly storybooks alongside her Family Nurse, Danielle. Nadine's insights, alongside feedback from the Family Nurse, highlighted how the programme has positively impacted so many parents, children, and families.

"Spencer gets so excited when the book arrives each month. As soon as the postie's been, we cuddle up on the sofa to open the package together and see which book we've got. It's such a special moment - more than just reading, it's about being close and sharing something meaningful."

Early evaluation of "Tell me a Story, Liverpool" shows:

- **44% increase** in parental confidence reading to their child
- **61% increase** in children's enjoyment and emotional engagement
- **52% increase** in parents feeling storytelling strengthens bonds
- **Increased library visits**, especially among parents aged 20–21

These outcomes reflect the strength of partnership, data insight, and community engagement across Cheshire and Merseyside, driving progress towards fairer, healthier futures for all children.

The CHEC programme is coming to a close at the end of this month. In our next, and last, edition of this newsletter, we will share the CHEC evaluation findings and links to our outputs developed using our learning from this programme.

If you, or one of your stakeholders, would like to sign up to receive the Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative newsletter, please email childhealthequity@barnardos.org.uk with the required details.

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