



Welcome to the fourth 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.

Shining a spotlight on South Yorkshire ICS

For this edition of the CHEC newsletter, we are shining a spotlight on the work of South Yorkshire ICS as part of the Collaborative. Nicola Ennis, Programme Director, South Yorkshire Children and Young People's Alliance reflects on the work of CHEC in South Yorkshire:



"In the last 10 years, the scale of the challenge facing South Yorkshire's 450,000 children and young people's health is being evidenced - through the detrimental impact we are seeing in their mental health and wellbeing, their engagement with education and future life ambitions. Our collective and ultimate aim is for children to live happy, healthy lives in order to be able to grow and develop into happy, healthy adults. Being part of the Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative has strengthened our connection with partners across the Integrated Care System to continue to drive forward positive change and enabled the South Yorkshire Children and Young People's Alliance to have a louder voice when calling for greater action in child health services."

Applying the Child Health Equity Framework, in triangulation with data and young people's insights, has been a revelation. This approach has provided us with the right information to consider how to develop services that meet need in a way that will work best for children, young people and their families.

The recruitment of Youth Health Champions has and continues to be invaluable. We could not have created anywhere near as much meaningful change without them. I am very grateful to them and every other partner who has jumped on board and joined us in this collaborative journey.

My hope is that we will continue to journey together in the coming years guaranteeing good health and wellbeing for all South Yorkshire children regardless of circumstance."

Children and young people's Health Equity Champions in South Yorkshire

Our Health Equity Champions are a group of children and young people that have been kindly volunteering their time to influence the work of the Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative. Their insight has greatly shaped the work we've done so far.

Zain, Cohen, Darcie, Phinn, Angel, Molly, Cassidy, Isabelle, Erin, Rafaela and Nathaniel are our Health Equity Champions in South Yorkshire, who have participated in various aspects of CHEC and beyond. They are supported by Chilypep, a young people's empowerment project, dedicated to raising the voices of young people and giving them the confidence, influence and platform to shape their world and stay connected.

Former Health Champion Ester, now Assistant Project worker at Chilypep, with Sheffield Health Champion Zaine highlight their work to influence national policy:

"We have participated in a research opportunity focused on the theme of child poverty. The Children's Commissioner listens to children and young people's views and makes sure important decision makers consider those views.

The Government wants to understand the challenges faced by families living on lower incomes. The Child Poverty Taskforce has been set up to develop a strategy to tackle child poverty and improve children's lives.

*The Child Poverty Taskforce want to hear from children and young people to make sure their voices and views are included in this work and **they attended the Health Champion session in Barnsley to speak with us directly.***

They will summarise everything that children and young people tell them and share this with people working on the Child Poverty Strategy. They can read this and learn about young people's experiences; this will help them understand what changes and improvements would help. We received a voucher and certificate for our participation."

Former Health Champion Ester, now Assistant Project Worker at Chilypep, with Sheffield Health Champion Zaine highlight their work to influence child health equity at a local level:

“We also supported the first South Yorkshire Child Poverty Summit, this was held on February 17, 2025, in Sheffield, and was an empowering event aimed at addressing child poverty through sustainable solutions. Supported by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and four local authorities, the summit focused on health equity, education, and housing, shining a light on the lived experiences of children and families facing inequalities.

Chilypep facilitated thematic sessions that empowered young voices, showcasing artwork that reflected their experiences and leading dynamic presentations on health equity.

Key presentations were delivered by Zain, who introduced the CHEC programme and the SY Intervention, and Ester, a former Health Champion who emphasised the importance of youth participation in shaping policies. This summit was a significant step towards creating collaborative, effective approaches to combat child poverty in the region.”



For more information on our Health Equity Champions, and to view some poetry submitted by our Champions in South Yorkshire, [visit our webpage](#).

Improving mental health and wellbeing through facilitating social connections, building greater trust in systems

South Yorkshire is putting the collaborative ambition to the test by implementing an approach to providing interventions that address both health and wellbeing.

The intervention is being delivered in partnership with the South Yorkshire CYP Alliance and Rotherham United Community Trust. The focus is on children, living in an area of high deprivation in Rotherham, aged nine or 10-years-old who are frequently absent from school.

The intervention aims to create a safe physical and psychological space where children can build trusting relationships with trained youth workers through weekly after-school sessions over a six-month period. The intervention is founded on co-production principles, finding innovative ways to enable the children to explore their mental health and wellbeing, which might be impacting on their engagement with school.

Addressing known challenges:

- Increasing mental health difficulties
- Long waiting lists for mental health services
- The pandemic's impact on primary-to-secondary school transition
- Growing concerns over increased school absence
- Existing inequalities exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

The intended impacts:

- Improve mental wellbeing.
- Build children's capacity for positive mental health.
- Facilitate social connections.
- Build trust in people and organisations.
- Create a sense of mattering, agency, and confidence.
- Foster positive experiences with learning and education
- Improve school attendance.

"The consistent attendance from children has exceeded our expectations. Based on our experience with similar programs, we typically observe a drop in attendance, but this group's sustained participation has been remarkable." Emma, Health and Wellbeing Manager at Rotherham United Community Trust.

Our ambition in South Yorkshire is to continue to develop interventions by using the Child Health Equity Framework and data and insights, and to champion partners to adopt this approach across our system.

The next two editions of the newsletter will focus on the work of Cheshire and Merseyside ICS and Birmingham and Solihull ICS.

Further updates

Cheshire and Merseyside

On World Book Day, Liverpool City Council launched their pilot intervention, in partnership with Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust and the Dollywood Foundation.

"Tell me a story, Liverpool" seeks to support young first-time parents with tips, hints, and support to become expert storytellers. The programme will also include the monthly gift of a book courtesy of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

Public health nurses, health visitors and family nurses advise that reading with young children builds self-esteem, supports speech and vocabulary, feeds imagination and can

even help with sleep patterns. The 0 to 5 Teams already work with Book Start to distribute books to families at key stages in a child's development.

Up to 100 families across the city will be engaged, with children on the pilot receiving a new book each month for at least the next 3 years. Parents and carers will also be supported to understand how important books and storytelling are for their infant.

Birmingham and Solihull

The Birmingham and Solihull ICS is making significant strides in embedding Social Value and Corporate Social Responsibility within ICS procurement to drive health equity. By harnessing insights from young people and the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS), the initiative aims to drive improvements in health equity.

The programme has recruited 10 CYP Health Champions, secured increased ICS Board support, strengthened collaboration with procurement leads, and successfully raised the Social Value weighting in procurement bids to 20%.

A major milestone was the in-person co-production and commissioning session on 17th February, where young people provided vital input into health commissioning. Looking ahead, the focus remains on securing the long-term sustainability of youth involvement beyond 2025 to ensure continued influence on policies and interventions that shape their lives.

Upcoming events

NHS Confed Expo 2025

On 11 June, we'll be delivering a session at the NHS Confed Expo Conference in Manchester on the Child Health Equity Collaborative. ICSs will share their vision and aim of the collaborative, the influence of young people in shaping the work programme as well as the interventions put in place in each area to address the social determinants of health with the aim of improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities among children and young people.

We will bring you regular updates on the work of the Health Equity Collaborative over the coming months. If you, or one of your stakeholders, would like to sign up to receive the Health Equity Collaborative newsletter, please email childhealthequity@barnardos.org.uk with the required details.

If you would like to opt out of receiving this newsletter, please email childhealthequity@barnardos.org.uk