



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.

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"Cheshire and Merseyside is home to more than 2.5 million people, 27% of whom are children and young people (CYP). A third of our population lives in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in England, with significant negative implications for health. Many of our children and young people experience significant social deprivation, leading to poor outcomes across all areas of development.

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside has a strong commitment to improving outcomes for our children and young people and is focused on "giving every child the best start in life" in line with the Marmot Principles in the report "All Together Fairer: Health Equity and the Social Determinants of Health in Cheshire and Merseyside".

Our system is convening around the population health needs of children and young people through partnership working across Health, Social Care, the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) and young people and families. It has invested in Beyond, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Children and Young People's Transformation Programme where system partners collaborate to support system transformation that improves outcomes for children, young people and their families and it has embedded a Children's Committee to oversee the collective effort to improve outcomes.

Being part of the Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative has been complimentary to this system focus and provided a strong framework for the collective approaches to improving outcomes and delivering meaningful, measurable change.

We are proud of what we've achieved so far. Every child in Cheshire and Merseyside deserves a strong, healthy start in life, regardless of their background or circumstances and together we are laying the foundations to make that a reality.

Children and young people's involvement in Cheshire and Merseyside

From the beginning of the Collaborative, we have worked with four inspiring young people as Child Health Equity Champions. They each bring their own perspective and passion, ensuring that we focus on the lived experience of children and young people and are guided by what matters to them. Since joining the CHEC programme, these young people have helped shape our work: speaking at major events, influencing decision-makers, and sharing lived experiences to enable change.

As Child Health Equity Champions, Bella, Nel, Emily, and Erin, have actively contributed to Children's Committee meetings, development days, and strategic discussions - helping embed youth voice into our ICS. Their involvement has been a springboard for youth engagement across the system, reminding us of the need to design services with young people, not just for them.

Watch the Champions in Action



In [this video](#), Bella, Nel, Emily, and Erin reflect on their journey so far - what they've learned, how it's shaped their personal and professional growth, and whether they'd recommend the experience to others.

Champion Voices: Shaping a Healthier, Fairer Future for Children and Young People in Cheshire and Merseyside

At a local, regional and national level, our young people have shared their perspectives with decision-makers and influenced how children and young people are represented in policy and practice. They have contributed to conferences, regional events, committee and board meetings and system learning:

Contributing to National Conversations:

Bella and Nel contributed to ***The King's Fund Conference on Tackling Health Inequalities for Children and Young People***. They shared the issues that matter most to them and other young people and contributed to workshops and discussions aimed at developing practical solutions to long-standing inequalities.

"Brilliant event in London bringing together professionals to hear how the health and care system can adapt, to deliver meaningful change for children and young people. I'm inspired and motivated to go and make change. It was insightful and eye-opening in relation to the challenges CYP face. It was an adventure, and great to spend time with peers." Bella

Contributing to Regional Delivery:

Beyond Conference 2023: Emily opened the day, sharing what matters most to young people and Nel provided a powerful account of his experience growing up in the region. Both facilitated workshops aligned to these themes.

"I loved being part of the conference and getting to know health professionals on different levels. It was a great chance to network with those that can influence and tell my story. I felt my voice was heard - and it was a great opportunity to inspire change." Emily

"My experience at the conference is definitely one to remember! It was great being able to speak to so many different people from different backgrounds and see them wanting to learn about my experiences and perspectives as a young person. It's so great to have such a brilliant opportunity to be a voice on behalf of others, and be in a space where I'm valued, not just as a token. I love how everyone at the conference got me involved and don't talk down to me, they respect me and my views as a young person 😊." - Nel

Beyond Conference 2024: Nel had been clear that personally welcoming delegates was important, and he took the lead in coordinating the welcome table alongside other young people which set the tone for the day: warm, inclusive, and led by youth. He also facilitated two workshops, holding space for discussion with confidence.

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's Children and Young People Committee: Emily and Erin shared findings from the CHEC regional consultation. They shared what CYP had said in relation to home, community, and education, and facilitated an activity focused on how to better support children and young people with connection, emotional wellbeing, community safety, fear of violence, and life transitions.

Contributing to System Change:

Our Champions contributed to CHEC development days which brought together young people, Barnardo's, the Institute of Health Equity, and ICS leaders. Their contributions helped shape the development of the Child Health Equity Framework and how this was communicated and embedded.

"It's been boss being involved in this work. It's given me a real purpose and a sense of direction in the work I'd like to pursue. I really do feel invested in and appreciated by the team. Friday was amazing, even if our train did get delayed. I think all of us definitely got our points of view across - and I can already see the differences we are going to make." Erin

Tell me a story, Liverpool

"Tell Me a Story, Liverpool" is our intervention, delivered as part of the CHEC, to support young, first-time parents with practical guidance and encouragement to help them become confident storytellers for their children.

Delivered in partnership with Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, Liverpool City Council, and the Dollywood Foundation, the initiative gifts participating families a monthly book through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, creating moments of connection while supporting child development.



Public health nurses, health visitors, and family nurses consistently highlight the benefits of reading with young children. Liverpool's 0 to 5 teams already work closely with [Book Start](#) to share books with families at key developmental stages, and this new project builds on that strong foundation.

The pilot aims to reach up to 100 families across the city, providing books every month for at least the next three years. Alongside the books, parents and carers are offered resources and encouragement to help them understand the powerful impact of storytelling in the early years.

Since its launch in March, 71 families have enrolled in the programme and approximately 350 books have been distributed - 250 from the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and 100 donated by delegates at the Beyond Conference 2025.

Councillor Harry Doyle, Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Culture, said "Reading to your child helps to build a life-long love of reading. I am so pleased that families engaged with the local NHS Family Nurse Partnership programme will receive regular visits and have the opportunity to discuss how they can use books and stories to support the development of their child. A child's first years are when their brains are developing the most, and this amazing opportunity to promote and provide shared reading opportunities will have a positive impact as we help more children to develop and be ready to start school."

Professor Matt Ashton, Director of Public Health at Liverpool City Council, said "I loved reading to my kids when they were little, and I am so proud they have taken their passion for reading into their teenage years. Any opportunity you have to engage with a child using a picture or

story book can open the door to a wonderful world of words, art, and imagination. Teaching them rhymes, songs and repetition can help them to make sense of the world around them and lay foundation skills that will last a lifetime. It's not just about reading, but sharing special time together, building bonds, confidence and giving them the best start in life."

Cheshire and Merseyside Child Poverty work

Cheshire and Merseyside has a strong Child Poverty Agenda, led through CHAMPS Public Health Collaborative, with the ambition that no child in Cheshire and Merseyside lives in poverty. This work involves developing a regional strategy and a Cheshire and Merseyside Child Poverty Resource that will review existing data and insights to support a system-wide approach to understanding and tackling child poverty and sharing knowledge. Undertaking a data-driven review will establish a comprehensive evidence base of existing child and family poverty and the drivers of child poverty to target action and interventions at a regional and local level.

Updates from the rest of the Collaborative

South Yorkshire

At the recent South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board meeting, chaired by the South Yorkshire Mayor, our Youth Health Champions led a dynamic session focused on embedding youth voice in health and care systems. They introduced the South Yorkshire Youth Health Champions Manifesto, highlighting priorities such as mental health, inclusivity, and co-production.

Through interactive discussions, system leaders explored how to meaningfully integrate young people's perspectives into service design and delivery. Key themes included strengthening feedback loops, supporting youth-led leadership, and addressing barriers to participation. Leaders were challenged to take immediate, actionable steps, such as improving communication, enhancing access for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and mental health needs, and aligning education with health pathways. The South Yorkshire Mayor made a commitment for the Board to work with young people over the next year to act on the key points raised in the manifesto. The session marked a shift from consultation to genuine co-production, reinforcing the role of young people as equal partners in shaping health outcomes across South Yorkshire.

Birmingham and Solihull

CHEC in Birmingham and Solihull is entering an exciting final phase. The evaluation framework is now being finalised, incorporating insights from the "Match My Project" tool. This innovative data source is helping us better understand how current interventions align with community needs and where further investment can drive meaningful change.

Our Young Health 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.

Preparations are now underway for a celebration event in the autumn, marking the conclusion of this phase of the programme. The event will showcase the work of our Champions, share impact stories, and highlight how we plan to sustain this momentum going forward.

While we're proud of the progress, we're also focused on sustainability – with efforts ongoing to embed the Champion Programme into ICS structures and secure long-term support. The coming months will focus on completing the evaluation, finalising the dashboard and ensuring the programme's legacy continues to support children and young people across the system.

The next edition of the newsletter will focus on the work of Birmingham and Solihull ICS.

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