

Making a Difference: Children and Young People's Mental Health in Cheshire and Merseyside (2024-2026)

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**SUPPORTING THE
DELIVERY OF THE
CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE
MH PLAN 2024 - 2026**

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Just a small selection
showcasing the work
across our system!

Inclusive



Developing the Plan

Children and young people from across Cheshire and Merseyside have played a central role to shape the priorities for the 2024–26 Children and Young People's Mental Health Plan. Through workshops, discussions and co-production activities, they shared their experiences, ideas and ambitions for how mental health support can be improved for. Their contributions have also supported the development of young person-friendly resources, including an animation of the 2024–26 Plan, helping to make mental health priorities more accessible and engaging for young people and families across the region. Their ongoing involvement demonstrates the value of co-production and our commitment to designing services with children and young people, ensuring their voices remain at the heart of decision-making.

Seen, Heard, Supported

The voices of over 1000 Children and Young People were captured across Cheshire and Merseyside to inform the 'Seen, Heard, Supported Report.'

Sharing their voices has helped to shape a review into the current Emotional Wellbeing and Early Mental Health support services available. It has also helped us to better understand what is important to young people to keep them supported and well in their communities, informing future commissioning opportunities.

Over 160 colleague's have been trained in "The Lundy Model"

Led by the Beyond Programme this programme of work provides a standard framework for engaging young people across Cheshire and Merseyside

This means Children and Young People now have the

- SPACE
- VOICE
- AUDIENCE
- INFULNCE

to enable them to share their experiences effectively and help us to build better services for the future.

Patient Participation teams

Across Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS FT, a dedicated Participation and Engagement Team has been established. This has led to a number of new initiatives including 'Listen up' groups, coproduced recruitment processes and opportunities for Children and Young People to be actively involved in co-designing services.

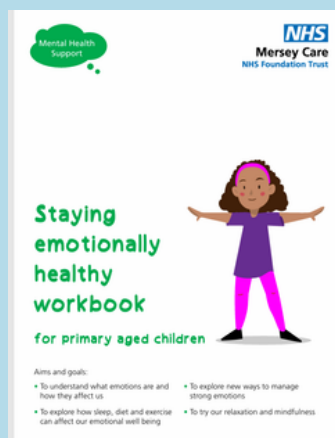
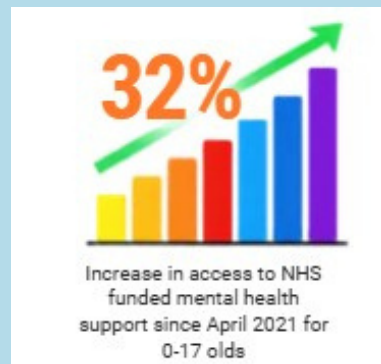


Young People aged between 13–18 years old who have experience of specialist mental health inpatient services, can volunteer to be an 'expert by experience' working with Level Up lead provider collaborative. To date, young people have contributed to service redesign, improving online materials and literature resources as well as shaping future services through their inspiring contributions and digital patient stories!

Timely Access

38,260

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 0-17 YEARS OF AGE HAVE ACCESSED MH SERVICES (ROLLING 12 MONTHS)



Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs)

60% of schools in Cheshire and Merseyside now have access to an MHST. This supports increased access, prevention and early intervention for our children in their local communities.

C&M MHSTs have also been pioneers in developing:

- Digital led workbooks to support children and families in understanding their needs and how to manage them better at home and at school (Mersey Care NHS FT)
- Pupils from a specialist provision school co-designed a new “5 Ways to Wellbeing” group which now being rolled out across Sefton (Alder Hey NHS FT)
- Supporting the development of parental led interventions for mild to moderate anxiety (Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust MHST)
- In Liverpool, the annual performance NOW fest showcases CYP experiences and informs future service developments (Liverpool Learning Partnership)

My Happy Mind

Is a digital intervention that helps young people better understand their emotional wellbeing and their feelings giving them the skills and tools to support their own wellbeing.

Delivered to 244 primary schools in Cheshire and Merseyside it has seen:

- 2409 pupil attendance improvement
- 1555 prevented CAMHS referrals
- 2530 MHST referrals



Developed in collaboration with young people, their families, and wider partners, BRANCH is a digital, one stop online digital platform that provides access, advice, triage, signposting and referral into a range of services including the voluntary sector and CAMHS pathways based on need.

To date the service has supported a number of children to access more appropriate care, quickly, whilst also identifying a number of gaps to support linked to domestic abuse, eating concerns and sleep which will inform future commissioning.

“THE BRANCH SERVICE HAS BEEN A GREAT WAY TO ASSESS MY NEEDS AND TO SEE WHAT SERVICES ARE OUT THERE WHAT COULD BE THE BEST FIT... WITHOUT IT, IT WOULD BE HARDER TO FIND THE RIGHT CARE

96% OF USERS STATED THEY WERE HAPPY WITH THE SERVICE OR WOULD RECOMMEND TO A FRIEND

Timely Access

Inner Spark!



Vision for You in St Helens run a range of Inner Spark Programmes. These programmes help to support children in our communities who are the hardest to reach but also the most at risk.

Sessions in mindfulness, sensory grounding, coping skills, making friends and weekly pop up support sessions for those who are at risk of homelessness provide a dedicated support for young people who have faced trauma and /or are in the care of a social worker.

Primary Care Mental Health roles

Are now being piloted in Mid Mersey, Liverpool/ Sefton and Wirral, supporting children and young people with low level mental health needs such as anxiety and low mood.

These roles are being tested and will be evaluated to inform future neighbourhood working.

Young Hearts Strong Minds

Youth Fed & Cheshire Young Carers jointly deliver the Young Hearts and Strong Minds project across Cheshire West.

The project aims to

- reduce barriers to accessing mental health support
- improve mental health and emotional wellbeing
- provide psychoeducation for parents/carers and school staff
- increase school attendance and engagement.

To date, 72% of participants demonstrated a clinically meaningful reduction in distress, including anxiety, stress, and emotional dysregulation – supporting increased access to meaningful help.

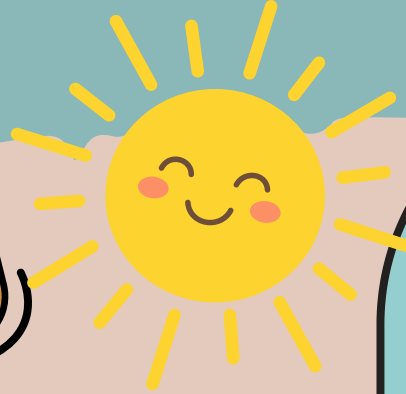
Active Sefton

Is a programme open to all young people aged 11–19 years that offers tailored 6–12 week mentoring sessions to help young people use physical activity to support them managing low-level mental health needs.

During the last 12 months 203 young people have engaged, with 104 fully completing the programme, 89 of these have reported an improvement in wellbeing. This helps to provide more support in local communities and keep children physically fit and mentally healthy.



TIMELY ACCESS



Lotus group (Venus Charity)

A weekly group developed in Sefton for young women aged between 11-16 who are at risk of county lines activity. Each week the group provides a space to come together in a safe space, share with peers and be supported with their mental health and wellbeing.

Drop in sessions are offered but the programme has also been immensely supportive to those already assessed by CAMHS and who are awaiting for their next appointment. The service provides immediate support within 7 days and helps young women to 'wait well' with peers, increasing their self esteem and sense of belonging.

Parenting 2000 (Sefton)

Parenting 2000 in Sefton, support young people's wider wellbeing and mental health, by providing increased access and early help interventions that focus on the whole family.

Services offered include:

- Therapeutic counselling for 6-25 years old.
- 'Alchemy' youth provision, offering open access to 11-18 years, running youth clubs, activities and mentoring.
- Whole family support - commissioned by Sefton Council to deliver Early Help Family Support including parenting programme
- Mental health and overall wellbeing activities.

This project shows what can be achieved by health and social care working in partnership to support those hardest to reach communities.

Alderhey - 'Was Not Brought Project'

Alder Hey NHS FT Innovation is working with CAMHS colleagues to adapt the 'Was Not Brought' (WNB) approach for children and young people's mental health.

Addressing inequalities to access, the project will deliver a greater understanding of why some people are more likely to miss appointments. It aims to generate a better understanding of who these young people are likely to be and offer increased engagement opportunities, more suited to them. This will help to increase attendance and contact with care services.

Knowsley Open Gateway Service (KOGS)

Aims to provide the right care at the right time and operates under the THRIVE principles of care.

Made up of a number of partners across Mid Mersey, including Listening Ear, Zuntold, the 0-19 service, Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust (MCFT), Mental Health Support teams and MCFT Core Children and Young People's Mental Health Service, and many more .. partners meet every 2 weeks to discuss potential challenges for young people known to services and offer increased support and communication to improve existing pathways.

To date 10 young people have been supported which has resulted in more timely access to support from crisis teams, parental support and supported admission avoidance.



Timely Access

Halton RESOLVE

Is an emotional health and wellbeing service for young people aged 5 to 18 who have witnessed or been subjected to domestic abuse.. Supporting children with Adverse Childhood Experiences, the service provides early intervention and family support, trauma informed practice and reduces barriers for older boys.



Youth Federation Positive Pathways

Positive pathways aims to reduce risk of reoffending in young people, stabilise home /life circumstances & support reintegration into the community by delivering support for anxiety and anger issues. To date, 30 young people aged 18-21 who were Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) have been supported, providing prevention support towards ongoing mental health

Voices of our Children and Young People

"This is the first time I've had someone actually listen and not judge me."

"I didn't think I could change, but now I can see a future for myself."

"It helped me calm down and think before I react. I don't just explode anymore."

"Meeting someone who's been through it made me realise I'm not stuck like this forever."

"The sessions were amazing...[worker] has changed my life completely. She makes me feel safe and relaxed, I can tell her anything. I'm in such a better place mentally and I finally feel positive about my life."

"It has really helped me to be less angry having someone to talk to"

"I enjoyed getting everything off my chest and getting it all out to you. The hardest bit was having to think about my dad to do that. I really loved the sessions and wish you could always come see me."

"I liked learning about how I feel and what I can do to help myself"

Timely Access

Support materials for Children with Neurodiversity

In Cheshire East, the National Charity Contact, in partnership with Genuine Partnerships and the Cheshire East Parent Carers Forum, came together to develop resources for young people with neurodiversity who also experience mental health concerns.

This led to the development of:

- A new web platform featuring a searchable directory of local and national resources.
- Information on personal passports, current referral pathways, and social stories.
- Redesigned practitioner guidance and operational communications, co-produced with families to inform better knowledge of reasonable adjustments.

Improving Access to Mental Health Services for Young People with a Neurodiversity

84 partners from across the region including, health, social care, education and young people with a lived experience attended a mental health (MH) and neurodiversity event to plot key priorities for making MH care more inclusive to those with a neurodiversity.

This has led to the development of a system wide roadmap and the creation of a working group to inform future service improvement actions.



Enhanced Formulation lab (EFL) (Complex Case MDT)

The 0-18 CYPMHS team in Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust have piloted an (EFL).

This is a structured, accessible space for clinicians to discuss complex cases and strengthen trauma-informed practice for our most complex children. Delivered weekly the EFL brings together multidisciplinary staff to collaboratively reflect, share expertise and develop psychological formulations at an early stage, ensuring those with the most complex needs, have the most effective treatment and timely support to reduce risk.



18-25 years Offer

Cheshire and Merseyside Transitions Policy

Across Cheshire and Merseyside a system wide Transitions Policy has been drafted for young people aged 14 plus. Ensuring young people experience smooth transitions is a key priority for all our services, whether this be a transition into adult services, to alternative care providers or back into the community.

Developed for young people across both mental health and learning disability services, the policy provides a set of consistent principles for services to apply, encouraging seamless coordinated care through planned transitions to improve a young person's experience. Key principles include; young person led planning, identified key workers to support transitions, regular communication and early planning and preparation.



Young Adults 18-25yrs Offer

During 2025/26, the Mental Health Programme worked in partnership with Health Innovation North West Coast, young people and system partners to redesign the approach to young adult mental health support across Cheshire and Merseyside. Through a series of co-design workshops, young people directly shaped recommendations to improve support for 16-25-year-olds, focused on strengthening young people's participation, developing a youth-focused workforce, improving access and navigation, creating seamless transitions between services, and establishing integrated community-based support.

During 2026/27, partners will progress implementation of the recommendations, including the Cheshire and Merseyside Learning Disability, Autism and Mental Health Transition Policy, while exploring opportunities to develop coordinated workforce development, improved access routes and neighbourhood-based models of support for young adults

16-25 Review

Merseyside Youth Association (MYA) undertook a review of 16-25 mental health provision in Liverpool.

Carried out in partnership with mental health service providers and underpinned by youth voices, the review highlighted the need to enhance mental health services for this cohort.

An action focused roadmap has been developed, with key actions underway that focus on workforce development, adopting a youth-friendly culture, promoting services, enhancing access, and improving collaborative working and continuity of care for young adults.



Eating Disorders

Alder Hey Childrens Hospital

- Opened the first Children's Day Service in Cheshire and Merseyside, giving families and young people a safe facilitated environment to receive intense daily meal support alongside their family.
- Continues to operate it's ARFID service aligned to it's community eating disorder team, providing clinical treatment pathways and therapies for children aged 5 and above.
- Provides a Home Intensive support function to offer flexible, enhanced support to children within their local community, working to support those with escalating risk and reducing admissions.

Digital Resources

Best Practice Model

Day Services

Intensive Home Support

ARFID Training

TRIANGLE –Mersey Care Hospital Foundation Trust

Mersey Care's Children's Eating Disorder Service launched a new digital intervention called TRIANGLE, aimed at young people with anorexia nervosa, their parents and carers. The platform offers tailored workbooks, videos, and weekly online forums to help families learn, connect, and support each other through recovery. Fantastic feedback has been received, with young people feeling more comfortable opening up digitally, and carers finding comfort in knowing they're not alone.

Best Practice Model for Community Eating Disorder Services

Aligned to National Guidance for the Commissioning of Children's Community Eating Disorder Services (2026), a Cheshire and Merseyside Best Practice for Eating Disorders has been system approved.

Collaboratively built with system partners and experts by experience, for the first time the model provides:

- a pathway for ARFID
- increased focus on intervention and prevention support .
- asks Community Eating Disorder teams take a lead on integrated care pathways and shared care arrangements.

The model has been shared with the ICB to inform onwards commissioning on eating disorder services

CANDIDD

Led by Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust & in partnership with CANDIDD, a digital platform of ARFID resources has been created. Designed for both families and professionals it brings together practical guidance, videos, screening tools, and links to research, helping to raise ARFID awareness for young people with a learning disability and autism and supporting early identification.

AVOIDANT RESTRICTIVE FOOD INTAKE DISORDER (ARFID)

Merseyside Youth Association (MYA)

has led a number of online ARFID training sessions to families and carers who want to learn more about ARFID and management support.

To date 6 online sessions have been delivered with over 270 sign ups!

Empeiria

Has delivered a number of ARFID training sessions, targeted specifically at health professionals.

With an aim to increase management and knowledge of ARFID in young people with a learning disability or autism, outcomes have shown a 112% confidence gain from professionals who have attended.

Crisis Response



4 functions

In addition to Crisis lines, Crisis assessment services across Cheshire and Merseyside ensure all young people are now assessed and seen within 24 hours. This means a child in crisis can receive immediate help through a brief response intervention and /or have more accessible care given through newly established home treatment teams. This supports reduced a&e attendances.

Access to Crisis Lines

Through the Mental Health Crisis Lines, aligned to NHS 111 Option 2, Children and Young People now have immediate access to crisis support, 7 days a week 24 hours a day.

Operated across Alder Hey, Mersey Care and Cheshire & Wirral Partnership Trust these lines provide immediate assessment for a crisis, helping to ensure the right support is received at the right time, preventing crisis escalation.



Mental Health Vehicles

From May 2024, x3 new Mental Health Vehicles became operational and are available to all Children and Young People who are experiencing an urgent need of Crisis.

These vehicles operate 12 – 12 pm across all x3 MH Trust footprints and have been able to ensure timely and accessible support to young people in crisis that otherwise would have attended A&E; supporting a reduction in A&E attendances and A&E flow.



WISH – YPAS Crisis Alternative

The 'WISH walk in' support hub led by YPAS aims to reduce the need for crisis support by offering an alternative to crisis for 10–25 year olds. Operating a non-clinical model but grounded in a community approach, the service focuses on psychosocial review and support, helping to increase access to those harder to reach communities, and preventing crisis escalation and attendance at hospital.

Self Harm

To support young people and families who are experiencing self harm, a suite of digital support materials have been developed.

Available through the CHAMPS website these resources support a reduction in self harm attendances by increasing understanding of why self harm happens and teaching parents, carers and young people how to reduce self harm tendencies and manage feelings

Mental Health Champions

Are now available in acute hospitals across Cheshire and Merseyside. These roles play a vital role in educating and supporting staff on the front line, increasing understanding of mental health needs in children when in hospital, supporting onward referral and signposting and helping children to identify and manage their own feeling during an inpatient stay.

Appropriate Places of Care



Change and Integration Programme
Together for Young Lives,
Cheshire and Merseyside



Appropriate Places of Care

Following the North West CAMHS Independent Review, Towards a Better Future (2021), partners across Cheshire and Merseyside identified better provision was needed across both health and social care boundaries to offer improved support to young people in our area with the most complex needs.

Over the duration of the Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Plan 2024 – 2026, the ICB, Local Authorities and the Lead Provider Collaborative, Level Up, have approved a plan for the development of 5 Appropriate Places of Care Homes across the area that will offer enhanced placement support for Looked After Children, combined with providing in reach support from mental health teams to support their needs.

For the first time this will enable enhanced care to be delivered directly to our most vulnerable communities within their local area.

Work is now underway to set up this provision with an aim to:

- reduce the number of young people placed out of area away from their families.
- stop the utilisation of unregulated care placement provision because of a lack of appropriate places of care.
- offer better access to mental health provision for young people with the most complex needs.



Specialist Mental Health Care



Cheshire & Merseyside
Young People and Families
Provider Collaborative

Ancora CARE

An intensive home treatment model has provided an alternative to hospital admission for young people experiencing severe mental health difficulties. At time of reporting, 53 young people received Tier 4 level support within their own homes. For some, this meant an inpatient admission was avoided entirely; for others, it enabled an earlier discharge and a quicker return to family life.

TRANSFORMATION

Specialist Mental Health Care Transformation

Over the last two years there has been significant transformation of specialist mental health care for children and young people with the most complex needs.

Historically, many young people requiring specialist inpatient support faced long admissions, delays in discharge and, in some cases, placements far from home.

Through system-wide collaboration, Cheshire and Merseyside has worked to redesign pathways so that care is organised around the young person, rather than the young person having to fit around services.

This work has been driven through the Level Up Lead Provider Collaborative, experts by experience and partners from across the system to improve quality and ensure young people receive the most appropriate care as close to home as possible.

The impact has been significant.

Average lengths of stay in specialist inpatient services have reduced by 55%, helping young people return home and reconnect with family, education and community life sooner. Out-of-area placements have reduced by 76%, enabling more young people to receive care closer to the people and places that matter most to them. Delayed discharges have fallen by almost 30%, improving patient flow and reducing unnecessary time spent in hospital. CYP with an Eating Disorder can now also receive care through Sapphire Ward, either as an inpatient, or through the Sapphire Day Service.

Complex Needs Escalation Tool (CNEST)

The system has also strengthened how it responds to children and young people with complex and escalating needs through the introduction of CNEST, and place-based Gateway arrangements.

To date, more than 400 professionals have been trained to use the framework, while over 590 multi-agency Gateway meetings have supported timely decision-making and coordinated responses for young people whose needs cross organisational boundaries.

This creates a more responsive, integrated and compassionate system that supports young people to receive the right care, in the least restrictive environment, at the earliest opportunity.



Innovative

Liverpool Fresh CAMHS (Alder Hey Children's Hospital)

Liverpool FRESH CAMHS has delivered a significant, whole-service transformation in how specialist mental health support is provided for CYP aged 0-18 in Liverpool.

At the centre of this shift is the development of an evidence-based group work offer and Group Menu – spanning 14 distinct group interventions across presentations including anxiety, low mood, trauma, LD, early years, and neurodevelopmental complexity.

This has been delivered alongside a structured improvement plan targeting timely access and eliminating long waits for children in Liverpool, with clear trajectories of improvement seen towards access targets.



Supporting Wellbeing through the ARTS

Arts4Us, a £2.5M AHRC-funded initiative led by the Research Centre for Arts and Wellbeing at Edge Hill University, brings together over 50 partners from NHS, Local Authority, Higher Education and VCFSE providers. It is a project that aims to explore evidence that the 'arts' can effectively help to manage mental health and wellbeing support for young people aged 9 to 13

The project to date has:

- Developed a digital platform of evidence-based local arts activities to support MH and emotional wellbeing.
- Aims to enable better coordination between NHS, schools, and community organisations.
- Ensures support is co-designed with young people so services match their needs.

Wirral CYPMH Service – Cheshire and Wirral Partnership Trust

Teams in the Wirral, piloted embedding creative arts therapies (including art, music and drama) into existing care plans for 10 young people. Delivered within one-to-one sessions alongside a 10-week pilot group, children involved demonstrated greater participation with treatment and made better progress towards mental health goals.

This was a great project that aimed to reduce health inequalities, targeting young people who often disengage with traditional therapies and helped to embed creative, non-verbal and trauma-informed approaches into care pathways.