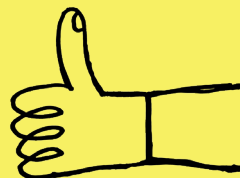


# 'IT'S ROTHERHAM, IT'S OURS'

Rotherham's Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025



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Through this report, you will see summaries of each section in a yellow box which have been developed with young people.



# OUR ROTHERHAM



*"The river Don flows and oozes through the beating heart of this northern town running past our ancient Minster, the ghost of all cultures and forges spilling into canals, skirting through the lush parks and green fields its parishes, homesteads, little villages our towns within a town.*

*Come over, come down, and see our treasures... New York Stadium where fathers carry their kids above the crowds like the trophies on their shoulders and Pukka pies and mushy peas waft on the breeze to the Chapel on the Bridge.*

*Clifton Park brims with sun-burnt Memories the slush of water in tribal longboats squeezing into hessian sacks to shoot down the old helter-skelter...*

**it's Rotherham, it's ours..."**

Paintings of 'Rotherham Minster and The Don viewed from Forge Island' and 'The Bridge Inn' and sketch of 'The Chapel on the Bridge' – by Alex Hawley, Interim Director of Public Health.



# FOREWORD



What an extraordinary year 2025 is for Rotherham: the Children's Capital of Culture is a unique and brilliant idea, conceived by Rotherham's children – an entire year of creativity. It has also been quite a different year for me, having the privilege of being Rotherham's Interim Director of Public Health for six months, and how fortunate for me that that included the opportunity to present this year's Director

of Public Health's annual report. And in such a year, what else could it consider other than creative health? And, having an amateur interest in painting and sketching, I couldn't resist the opportunity to contribute a few Rotherham-based pieces of art to the report.

A cherished childhood memory I have from around age ten is when my Dad announced that our whole family (I was the youngest of six) would paint a giant underwater mural directly onto the living room wall. Though the mural is long gone, I vividly recall the octopus, sea urchin, crab, starfish, seaweed, and especially the blue-lipped fish I painted. This felt like a wonderfully spontaneous and permissive act for something that was normally forbidden. Looking back, I deeply value that moment – not just for sparking creativity, but for lifting judgment, encouraging collaboration, and fostering a shared sense of achievement, and I am certain that that was a formative moment in my creative journey. I wonder how many such moments are being experienced every day this year by Rotherham's children.

We know from a lot of research that it is never too early to begin engaging with children in ways that will stimulate their creative imaginations and help foster and accelerate their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. All babies will benefit from interacting with their parents

*Above Photo: Alex Hawley, Interim Director of Public Health, engrossed in painting The Bridge Inn.*



through singing, reading and play, but it doesn't necessarily come naturally to new parents. This is one of the reasons that Public Health provides some help through our Health Visiting service, and also through supportive places like our Family Hubs, and (also new this year) through some of the things we include in our Baby Packs (given to every new parent who wants one), such as a sensory book and a play mat. The box itself is intended to be visual stimulating, with high contrast images apparently inspired by Yorkshire weaving, and at a later stage would provide an excellent opportunity for colouring-in.



Making stuff is fundamental to being human, and making expressive marks on surfaces is something homo sapiens has been doing for tens of thousands of years. As soon as a child has the skill to hold a pen, pencil, crayon or paintbrush they will freely deploy it with obvious pleasure. I envy the fearlessness that children have when being creative – I am all too familiar with the fear of failure, especially when making the first mark on a blank sheet of paper. Despite that feeling, I know just how good for my mental health it is when I am making a picture, and (when it does go well) the fantastic feeling of achievement it imparts when the picture is complete. Visual creativity definitely fits well with a couple of the five ways to wellbeing – taking notice and learning, and if you make a picture as a gift, or as a unique birthday or Christmas card you can also add giving to the list. I guess I cover off the other two, being active and connecting through my other main creative hobby, which is singing in a choir, which I have done most of my adult life. For me, the joy of making music as part of a group of whatever standard is unparalleled. I love the fact that choral singing is such a strong tradition within British culture – in 2017 the Voices Now Big Choral Census estimated that there are 40,000 choirs in the UK, with 2.14 million people regularly singing in them! If I got my visual art passion from my Dad, then singing definitely comes from my Mum, who

has taught piano and singing and run a village choir for longer than I've been alive, and she's still doing it – perhaps the best personal testament I can think of for the health and wellbeing benefits of musical creativity.

Those are some of my personal reflections about creativity and health and I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to share them, and indeed to present this year's DPH annual report, which will explore the topic in much greater depth through the data, the evidence and some of the lovely activities that have taken place during this special year (with more still to come).

I also have the additional privilege of being able to introduce our incoming Director of Public Health, Emily Parry-Harries, who will be starting with us very soon.

### **Alex Hawley**



Creativity is so important for our health and wellbeing – it can reduce stress, improve mood, boost self esteem and keep the brain active. It strengthens social bonds, impacts on social isolation and loneliness and lowers blood pressure. Much of my personal satisfaction comes from being creative and I know that craft activities

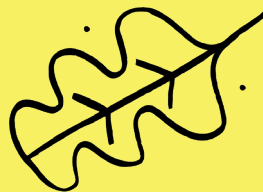
make me feel better (although I am no where near as talented as Alex – you wouldn't want my illustrations as part of the DPH report). Arts, culture and creativity are not a luxury, they are a vital part of what makes us human and we need to find a way to maximise the opportunity to take part in these things for all the people of Rotherham.

I would like to thank the team for all of their work on this report and look forward, as the incoming DPH to working alongside them and the wider system to implement the recommendations.

### **Emily Parry-Harries**

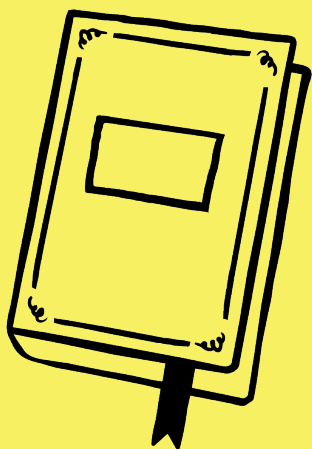
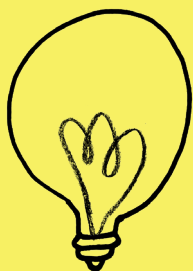


# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



A special thank you, first and foremost, goes to the children and young people of Rotherham who have inspired this report.

I would also like to thank the following people for their input and contributions: Lorna Quinn, Becky Woolley, Jaimee Wylam, Carys Williams, Sue Turner, Gilly Brenner, Polly Hamilton, Sarah Christie, Kaylynn Nogowczyk, Bev Pepperdine, Sarah Spink, Zoe Cartwright Harrison at Voluntary Action Rotherham, and Kym Gleeson and the team at Rotherham Healthwatch.



# BACKGROUND

## 2025 – a year of celebration.



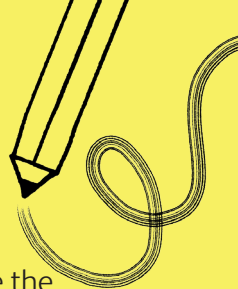
In 2025, Rotherham has become the world's first Children's Capital of Culture, holding a year-long festival of celebration through a programme devised, designed and delivered by children and young people.

The journey to this celebration year started in 2017, with the Embassy for Reimagining Rotherham. Over three weeks of intensive workshops in summer 2017, a group of young people created their own manifesto for the town's future. This

vision of Rotherham captured the imaginations of leaders and decision-makers and was the foundation for the Children's Capital of Culture programme. With ongoing co-production with children and young people at the centre, this is truly a partnership initiative, with hundreds of organisations working together to make Rotherham a better place to grow up.

The Children's Capital of Culture programme is not only about increasing engagement with the arts, culture and creativity – but about harnessing this engagement to improve the life chances of Rotherham's children and young people. One of the four headline aims of the programme is 'to support children and young people in developing responses to complex social, health and wellbeing challenges through increased participation in cultural and leisure activities' – meaning health is at the centre of this programme.

*Above Photo: Rotherham Minster during Rotherham Roots Street Carnival 2025.*



Building on the momentum of this celebration year, this year's Director of Public Health Annual Report will explore the role that culture and creativity can play in the health and wellbeing of children and young people. The report will synthesise national research, local data and evidence around the levers of change available locally, to inform the evaluation of the programme and to make the case that culture has an essential role to play in giving Rotherham's children and young people the best start in life.

It should be noted that this report references some of the activity that is being delivered through the Children's Capital of Culture programme – but there are so many fantastic things happening in Rotherham to engage children and young people in the arts, culture and creativity and this report only covers a very small portion of this.

### **Section summary**

In 2025, Rotherham became the world's first Children's Capital of Culture. This is a year-long festival, designed with children and young people for children and young people. It has involved lots of organisations working together to make Rotherham a better place to grow up. It is not just about helping people to do more arts, culture and creative activities, it is also about supporting people with social, health and wellbeing challenges.

This year's Director of Public Health report thinks about how culture and creativity can play a part in the health and wellbeing of children and young people.



## ROTHERHAM CONTEXT

Rotherham is one of four metropolitan boroughs within South Yorkshire with a population of approximately 271,195 (2023 mid-year population estimate). Around half of the borough's population lives in urban areas in the central part of the borough. Others live in outlying small towns, villages and rural areas, with 70 % of the borough being open countryside.

Children and young people aged 19 and under make up 23.5 % of Rotherham's population. (2023 mid-year population estimate). Rotherham has a below average percentage of people aged 18 to 29 as a result of students leaving to study elsewhere and young adults leaving the area for work. The inner area of Rotherham has a notably younger population than the outer areas, particularly in the south of the borough, where there are higher proportions of older and middle-aged people.

Rotherham is a relatively deprived local authority, with 36 % of the population living in the 20 % most deprived communities in England. Deprivation is linked to a wide variety of poor health outcomes. As such, Rotherham often fares significantly worse than the national average when considering markers of 'good health' including life expectancy at birth and the number of years that people live in poor health.

### Section summary

Rotherham is a place in South Yorkshire. It is home to 271,195 people. Lots of Rotherham is small towns, villages and green, rural areas. Around half of the people living in Rotherham live in these areas, and the other half live in or near the town centre. Nearly 1 in every 4 people in Rotherham is under 19 years of age. Rotherham is considered a relatively deprived area. This means that there are people in Rotherham living without the things they might need to live a healthy and happy life.

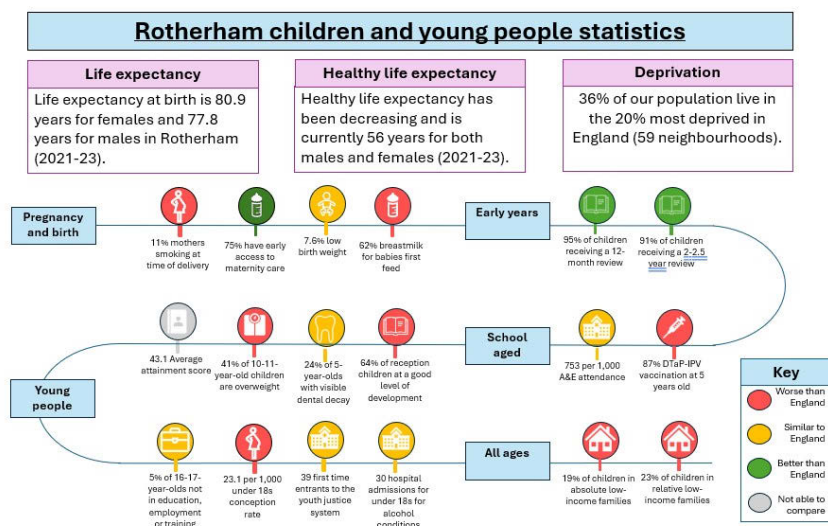




# THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROTHERHAM

Childhood lays the foundation for health, meaning that poor health in childhood can have long-standing impacts throughout an individual's life. An overview of what we know about the health and wellbeing of children and young people in Rotherham is outlined below. Data for this infographic and further information is available on Fingertips, Department of Health & Social Care<sup>1</sup>.

## Rotherham children and young people statistics



## Section summary

How a person grows up, including where they live, play and learn, can make a difference to how healthy they are when they are an adult.

## WHY IS ART, CULTURE AND CREATIVITY IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH?



Creative Health is the term used to describe work with creativity, arts and/or culture that supports health and wellbeing. Approaches may involve embedding creative activities in health and care services, communities, schools, or supporting co-production,

education and workforce development. Activities can include visual and performing arts, film, literature, writing and creative activities in nature. Creative Health can contribute to the prevention of ill health, promotion of healthy behaviours, management of long-term conditions and treatment and recovery of people of all ages.

For children and young people, engagement in culture and arts can play a significant role in fostering creativity, developing social skills, supporting physical health, and overall emotional and mental health. Engagement in the arts and cultural activities can also foster a sense of belonging and identity and build confidence and self-esteem in children and young people. It can also play a key role in improving wellbeing and prevent the onset of conditions such as anxiety and depression. The Social Behavioural Research Group highlights that adolescents engaging in extracurricular arts activities are less likely to demonstrate risk taking behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and substance use, and engage in fewer anti-social behaviours. These outcomes are generally consistent across different demographics such as gender and ethnicity.

Evidence demonstrates that when embedded as part of care pathways, creative health can be an effective and cost-effective intervention for

*Above Photo: Having fun at Rotherham Show 2023.*

children and young people. It can also play a valuable role in addressing the increasing mental health support needs and therefore, when developed and delivered effectively, creative health programmes can support the sustainability of mental health services in the long-term<sup>ii</sup>.

### **Section summary**

Creative Health means working with creativity, arts and/or culture to support health and wellbeing. This can include lots of activities, like drama, art, film or writing. These activities can happen in lots of different places, for example, at school, at a hospital, at home or in a park.

For children and young people, doing cultural and creative things can help with social skills, physical health and mental health. Teenagers who do arts activities outside of school are less likely to do things which could harm their health, such as smoke, drink alcohol or use drugs.

Lots of children and young people struggle with their mental health, and creative health can help if included as part of mental health support.



# WHAT MATTERS TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROTHERHAM?



This section outlines insights from engagement work that took place to inform the Children's Capital of Culture programme, as well as findings from wider engagement with Rotherham's children and young people from the last couple of years. This includes the 2024 School Survey, which was completed by 4,641 students in years 7 and 10 and research from Healthwatch conducted in 2024-2025 which reached 445 young people.

Common themes are outlined below.



*Above Photo: Young people involved in the Bronze Arts Award at Rotherham United.*

## **Children and young people want to feel proud of where they live – and many already do**

At Rotherham Show in 2021, 80 % of children and young people surveyed stated that they felt positive about the borough (with younger participants more likely to be positive than older participants). The things that children and young people loved the most about Rotherham were:

- Green spaces, such as Clifton Park
- Sports, including Rotherham United
- Entertainment and activities, such as rides and fairs

## **Many children and young people want more fun things to do in Rotherham**

When asked for ideas about how to make Rotherham better through the Children's Capital of Culture programme, having more things to do emerged as a key theme. Specific ideas included:

- Free events
- More green spaces and activities that celebrate existing green spaces
- More live music events and venues
- Greater access to a wider range of different sports
- A cinema
- Activities and spaces aimed specifically at children and young people

The School Survey results from 2024 indicate that there is an age divide in perceptions around things to do in Rotherham. Whilst 66 % of Year 7s surveyed agreed that there are good places to spend their free time, fewer than half of Year 10s (47 %) agreed with this statement.





## **Young people face a wide variety of pressures and anxieties**

As part of engagement sessions that took place with 16- and 17-year-olds in 2021, young people were asked about their anxieties. The things they were worried about were wide-ranging, with the top 10 being:

1. Education
2. Mental health
3. The future
4. Family
5. Future careers (including not accomplishing dream jobs and no jobs in the things young people are interested in)
6. Global events
7. Sport
8. Friends
9. The environment
10. Money



Similarly, in 2025, Healthwatch asked young people about the biggest pressures they were facing (see figure 2 below). Body image and social media were highlighted as the two biggest sources of pressure, but again, the topics were wide-ranging, including social factors, like problems with friends and family, pressures around identity, such as gender and sexual orientation, and engagement with health risk behaviours, such as alcohol, vaping, smoking, drugs and gambling.

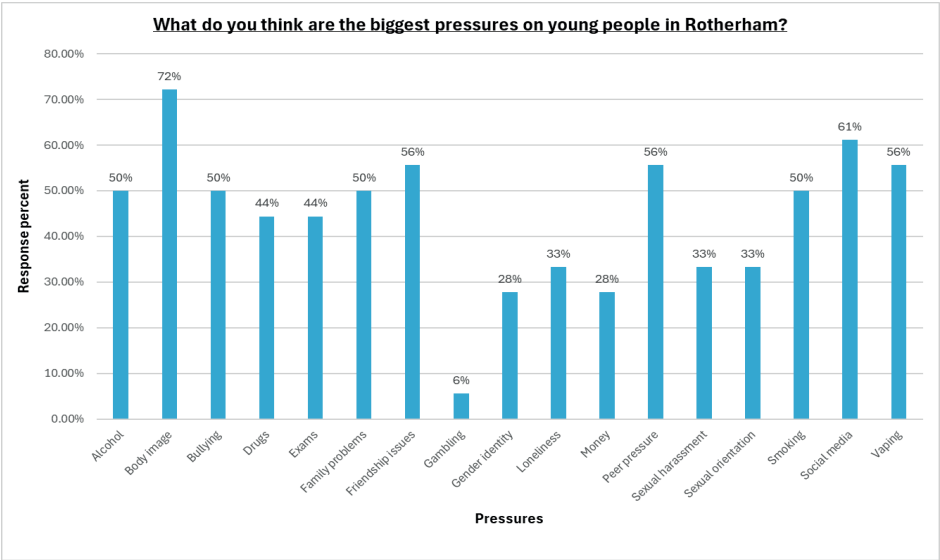


Figure 2: Responses to ‘What pressures do you and your peers face?’ taken from ‘What young people told us about their wellbeing in 2025’ by Healthwatch Rotherham

**‘I believe if my mental wellbeing is not good, my physical wellbeing will deteriorate’**

## WELLBEING IS IMPORTANT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

As above, mental health was in the top two concerns that young people reported feeling anxious about in 2021. Similarly, in a 2025 study conducted by Healthwatch, 88 % of participants agreed that wellbeing is important to them. All the young people engaged with stated they had someone or something to turn to when they were unhappy (with parents and guardians being the people young people were most likely to turn to). However, over 53 % said they did not know where to turn for extra help, and the majority had not accessed local or national services or resources to support their mental health.

Furthermore, in the 2024 School Survey, 38 % of Year 7 students and 43 % of Year 10 students rated their mental health as fair or poor. It is noteworthy that in comparable surveys, there was a significant increase in Year 10 students reporting fair and poor mental health between 2019 and 2022, which was during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whilst significant proportions of young people reported only fair or poor mental health, 79 % of respondents to the School Survey in 2024 described their physical health as 'good' or 'excellent.'



*Plug in and Play test at a local school, 2024.*

## SPENDING TIME WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS WHAT MATTERS THE MOST

A strong theme which emerged from all of the engagement work that this report has drawn from was the importance of friends and family and spending time with the people that matter most. Young people were most likely to reach out to their friends and family for help and support and saw connecting with them as a big priority.

**“My friendships and family are what is most important in my heart.”**



## Section summary

This section is about some of the things that children and young people from Rotherham have said matter to them. Some of the things they said include:

- They want to feel proud of where they live.
- They want more fun things to do in Rotherham.
- There are quite a few different things that young people worry about, including education, mental health, social media and body image.
- Some young people don't feel happy, with more Year 10s than Year 7s saying their mental health is fair or poor.
- Spending time with friends and family is very important to children and young people, with many saying this is the most important thing to them.



## THE CHILDREN'S CAPITAL OF CULTURE: PROGRAMME THEMES

In collaboration with children and young people, including some of the engagement work referenced in the previous section, the Children's Capital of Culture programme was designed around four headline themes. These are:

- You're Not From New York City, You're From Rov'rum: supporting young people to have agency and create change, building pride in Rotherham as their home.
- Who We Are, Where We Come From: enabling children and young people to develop a sense of community and belonging through the arts and culture, enhancing their mental health and critical thinking.
- Plug In & Play: increasing opportunities for play in digital and physical spaces, as well as fostering physical activity and participation in sport.
- The World Beneath Our Feet: enabling children and young people to engage with nature and their local environment and take action to combat climate change.

The analysis in this report is structured around these four themes.



## Section summary

The people who work on the Children's Capital of Culture programme asked children and young people what they thought the activities should focus on. Together, they came up with four key themes:

- You're Not From New York City, You're From Rov'rum which is about young people feeling proud of Rotherham and feeling part of making changes to make Rotherham a better place.
- Who We Are, Where We Come From which is about the arts and culture helping children and young people to understand more about their own feelings and the world.
- Plug In & Play which is about giving children and young people more opportunities to play – both online and in their community. It also includes encouraging young people to be more active.
- The World Beneath Our Feet which is about children and young people being outside in nature and taking action linked to climate change.

The report looks at each of these four themes.





# YOU'RE NOT FROM NEW YORK CITY YOU'RE FROM ROV'RUM



This theme is about supporting young people to have agency and create change, building pride in Rotherham as their home.

*Land art overlooking Rother Valley Country Park that reads 'You're Not From New York City, You're From Rov'rum', 2025.*



## SENSE OF BELONGING AND COMMUNITY

Feeling part of a community is a vital determinant of health and wellbeing, with this being a protective factor against disease and poor mental health<sup>iii</sup>.

There are several measures in the School Survey which in combination, seek to assess the extent to which Rotherham's young people feel a sense of belonging in their area. The findings in 2024 reflect a mixed picture, with Year 7 students generally having a more positive view of their neighbourhood than Year 10 students (see figures 3 and 4). The biggest disparity across age cohorts was the percentage of respondents who agree that there are good places to spend their free time. This indicates that there is a need to do more to foster a sense of belonging for

adolescents in particular, which is a key focus of the Children’s Capital of Culture programme.

Additionally, across both age cohorts, the statement that the lowest percentage of respondents agreed with was ‘I can trust people in the area where I live’ with only 50 % of Year 7s and 39 % of Year 10s agreeing with this statement. This again, points to the need to bring communities together, to support increased trust and social cohesion.

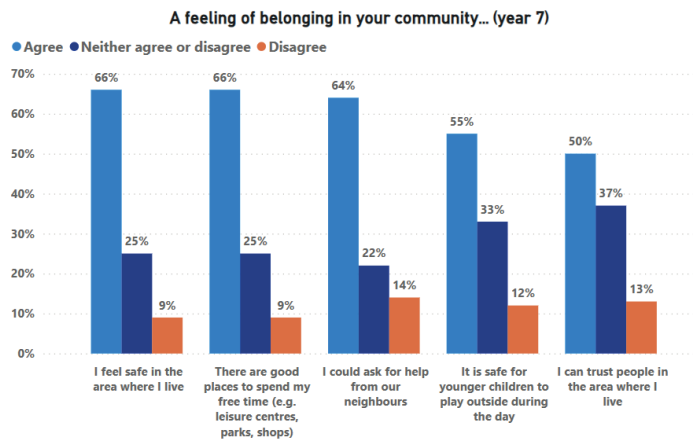


Figure 3: Year 7 responses to questions in the School Survey 2024 around feeling a sense of belonging in their community

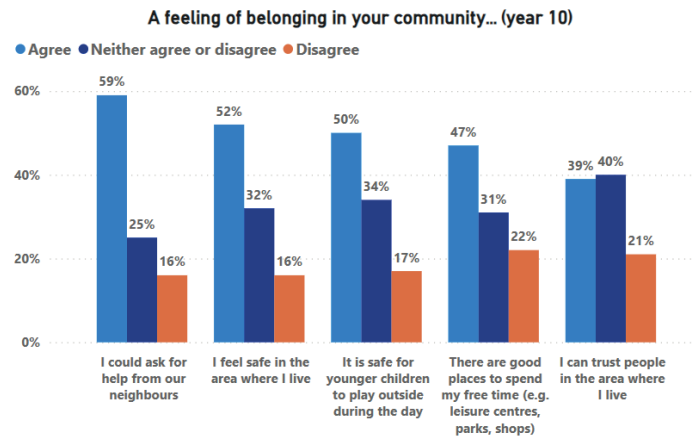


Figure 4: Year 10 responses to questions in the School Survey 2024 around feeling a sense of belonging in their community

As well as providing an impetus and a forum to bring communities together, research shows that culture and the arts have specific benefits in promoting a sense of belonging and individual wellbeing. Using music as one example, research into group singing has found that participants across multiple studies had higher levels of social bonding than prior to singing and that the process of social bonding through group singing is faster than through other social activities. Additionally, research has shown that engagement with music in childhood is associated with better social skills, reduced bullying and a reduced risk of behavioural issues in adolescence – all of which are likely to support an increased sense of belonging<sup>i</sup>.

Moreover, participation in the arts may translate into more active citizenship, with children who participate in arts and creative outlets being more likely to volunteer. This suggests that engaging Rotherham's children and young people with creative pursuits has the potential to have a long-term impact on community culture.

### **Section summary**

This section is about whether children and young people feel they belong in their local community. It shows that:

- Feeling like you belong helps you to feel happier and can make you healthier.
- Some children and young people in Rotherham don't feel like they belong.
- Creative activities, like group singing can help young people to bond with other people they are doing the activity with and feel a sense of togetherness.
- Young people who are involved in art or other creative activities are more likely to volunteer and vote in elections as adults, which could be a sign that they are connected to their local community.



## EDUCATION

Education is strongly linked to health outcomes, with those with higher levels of education being more likely to live in good health for longer.

In Rotherham, educational outcomes are generally below the national average. This inequality starts early, with the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of reception being 64.3 %, compared with an England average of 67.7 % (2023/24). This continues through school, with 59 % of Rotherham children reaching the expected standard for Key Stage 2 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) compared with an England average of 61 % (2024). Moreover, the average Attainment 8 score at Key Stage 4 in Rotherham is 43.1 compared with an England average of 46.2 (2022/23).

There are also inequalities within Rotherham in terms of educational attainment. For instance, while 64.3 % of all children in Rotherham achieve a good level of development by the end of reception, this drops to 47.6 % of children who receive free school meals (2023/24). Similarly, educational attainment differs between areas within Rotherham, for example 75.2 % of children in Wickersley North achieved the expected standard+ at KS2 compared with 46.2 % in Maltby East (2024.)

There is ample evidence to show that engagement in arts, creativity and culture during childhood has a positive influence on educational outcomes. For instance, research demonstrates the impact of reading out loud in childhood on literacy and comprehension skills.<sup>iii</sup> Engaging with music in childhood has also been found to have an influence on cognitive development and educational attainment. For instance, one study found that playing an instrument was associated with higher attainment scores at Key Stage 4 in Mathematics, English and across all other subject areas, with those who had been playing the instrument for four years or more scoring more highly still. Researchers explain the positive influence of engagement in the arts on educational outcomes through the concept of 'transfer' of cognitive training from one skill to another, but also through



*Young people at the Festival of Stories, 2025.*



the development of individual motivation and behavioural benefits. This indicates that this may also have wider social benefits aside from improved educational outcomes.

There is also evidence that supports the role of engagement in the arts with reducing inequality. One systematic review found evidence that young people from low-income households were three times more likely to get a degree if they participated in arts activities at school. Additionally, the evaluation of a project in Scotland aimed at engaging low-income children in orchestra found that participation was associated with improved concentration, language development, school attendance and educational outcomes. Research has shown that embedding arts and creative activities into the school day is effective at developing emotional regulation, boosting self-esteem and improving social connection. Schools often being the first point of contact for children showing signs of emotional distress and research has shown that schools that integrate arts into pastoral care have seen improvements in attendance, pupil wellbeing and behaviour.

However, although engaging young people with creativity and the arts has the potential to have a positive influence on health inequalities, there has been a decline in the percentage of schools providing arts education; in England 42 % of schools are no longer entering pupils for GCSE music, 41 % of schools are no longer entering pupils for Drama and 84 % of schools are no longer entering pupils for Dance. This is likely to widen inequalities, as young people from more affluent backgrounds are more likely to have the opportunity to pursue creative learning outside of school, which is likely to enrich their learning in other areas and improve their overall academic performance<sup>viii</sup>.

### **Section summary**

This section is about education. It shows that:

- Children and young people in Rotherham generally get worse grades than the average for England.
- Being involved in arts and creative pursuits can help young people to get better grades, even in subjects that are not related to arts or culture.
- Fewer schools in England are offering classes like music, drama or dance, which may mean that some children and young people are not able to learn about these things.





## EMPLOYMENT AND ASPIRATIONS

There is evidence that creative engagement can support educational development and subsequently equip children and young people with a range of transferable skills that are not only attractive to employers but can also support building confidence in terms of career aspirations. Of our secondary school children who undertook a survey, 31 % would like to go to college and university, 19 % would like to go to college and then gain employment, 13 % would like to get an apprenticeship, 9 % would like to start their own business, 5 % would like to get a job straight from school and the rest were unaware of what they would like to do. In Rotherham, 5 % of our 16–17-year-olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

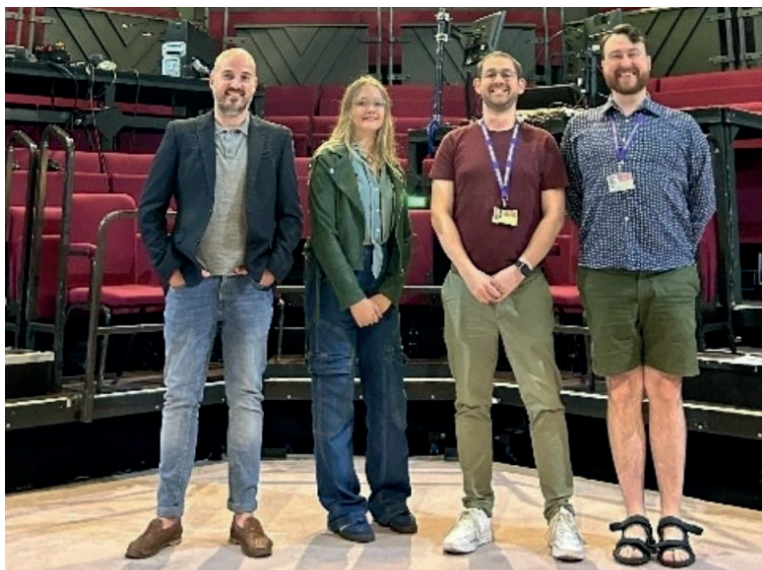
**“You don’t have to leave to chase your dreams!”**



## CASE STUDY: SKILLS STREET - ‘USING CREATIVITY TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE’

Skills Street is an immersive and innovative world-of-work experience developed to widen career aspirations for children, young people, and adults across the region and inspire the next generation to work. It was co-founded by Gulliver’s Valley Resorts and The Work-Wise Foundation.

Below, Mia, who is helping to co-design the ‘Creative and Cultural’ zone of Skills Street, shares her experience and why she is so passionate about supporting other young people to access routes into creative industries.



*Mia backstage at The Crucible in Sheffield..*

“I’m Mia and I’m one of the new Children’s Capital of Culture Trainees at Skills Street!

I’m passionate about the arts, creative industries and education, so I’m thrilled to be co-designing Skills Street’s ‘Creative and Cultural’ zone. This zone will demonstrate the different roles and routes into creative and cultural careers; the skills people need and how these skills develop at

an earlier age alongside the school curriculum. I'm also helping to build marketing strategies and support business development across the wider Skills Street C.I.C.

I never really knew what career I wanted to do when I was at school - I adored writing, languages, acting, art – and maths quite literally made me cry. My dream job at eleven was to write my own books, illustrate them, and get them turned into films I could act in. Leaving school, all I really knew was that I wanted to use my creativity to make a positive difference around me.

I joined Skills Street because I think it's vital that pupils recognise the value of all careers, school subjects and deconstruct the idea that less typically 'academic' subjects are less valuable. When choosing my own GCSE options, I was so frustrated at feeling pushed to sacrifice my favourite subjects for 'more academic' ones – but I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't committed to the subjects I loved. Creating a careers-based learning environment in hand with real businesses and brands will allow young people to fully visualise the vast number of possibilities and pathways in each industry. I am keen to play my part and inspire the next generation to consider jobs they haven't known before – something especially vital for the media, arts, culture and heritage careers where access into the creative subjects and industries are declining.

It's a real privilege that the Skills Street site is being built in my hometown Rotherham. I think lots of people going into their first career job, especially graduates, think the best opportunities are exclusive to the capital, so it's so valuable to showcase organisations local to the region, and to be able to provide careers-based learning to children and young people who need it the most.

No day of my traineeship so far has been the same – I've met new business partners, redesigned a website, and been backstage in The Crucible – and my office is based at Gulliver's Valley theme park! It's so



exciting and rewarding to be an active part of Skills Street's construction, and I can't wait for everyone to see us open next year!"

To read the full case study, please visit the Skills Street website: [Meet Mia - "Using creativity to make a positive difference". — Skills Street.](#)

More than 1600 pupils, children and young people have visited the exciting new Skills Street experience based at Gulliver's Valley.

Skills Street CIC is a groundbreaking education and training environment designed to revolutionise how young people engage with careers and skills development. Among the highlights is the newly launched FlyMe@ Skills Street aviation experience, which offers students a full airport simulation - from check-in to boarding a real Boeing 737 fuselage and flying an industry-standard simulator. Visitors can also explore historic Rolls-Royce and Vulcan aircraft engines and learn about careers in aviation, engineering, travel, and tourism.

Julie Dalton, managing director at Skills Street said: "We're thrilled to have welcomed so many young people through the doors of Skills Street as part of our soft opening".

"It has been fantastic to see them experience the different zones and enjoy a whole range of industry experiences. Skills Street was designed to inspire and educate visitors about future careers and the skills needed. We've created a space to explore real-world careers in a fun and interactive way, and to witness that in action was simply wonderful."





# WHO WE ARE, WHERE WE COME FROM



This theme is about enabling children and young people to develop a sense of community and belonging through the arts and culture, enhancing their mental health and critical thinking.



Art by Wath Youth Group for Roots Rotherham Street Carnival, 2025.

## MENTAL HEALTH



*Face-painting at Eastwood Funfest, 2023.*

Mental ill health is increasingly recognised in children and young people. In Rotherham, 40 % of secondary school children report their mental health as 'fair' or 'poor', and 18% of our secondary school students reported feeling lonely most of the time or always within the last 12 months, with girls being twice as likely to report feeling this way (2023/24).

Research shows that connecting with other people was a common feature of activities perceived as being helpful for mental health. This includes creative activities that were 'connecting' and 'absorbing', and one study showed that the more absorbing an experience, the greater benefit to ill mental health through a shift away from negative thoughts . One study also showed a positive impact of online arts and culture as it offered an alternative to social media that may impact negatively on mental health. Additionally, human connection through arts and culture provided young people the opportunity to reflect on the experiences, thoughts, feelings and behaviours of other people. This allowed them to

reflect on their own personal experiences and understand more about the emotional lives of others.

Research has also showed that arts and culture could help reduce negativity, lift mood, calm and increase proactivity providing a positive impact on mental health, disrupting negative thought patterns, and a feeling of calm when engaging with cultural content. It also demonstrated that young people have a critical level of insight and understanding regarding their mental health and the ways in which creative methods could improve this





## HEALTH BEHAVIOURS

Health in Rotherham is generally poorer than the national average, with people living fewer years than the England average and living a significant proportion of those years in poor health. These outcomes are driven by risk factors that are amenable to prevention, such as smoking, poor diet, low levels of physical activity and excess alcohol consumption. Whilst this section refers to health behaviours, it should be noted that these behaviours are driven by the environment in which people live, and many factors limit the control that individuals have over these behaviours.

The School Survey includes a number of measures around these health behaviours and the findings reflect a mixed picture:

- 2.7 % of respondents stated that they smoked regularly in 2024 (which is a significant decline from 14 % in 2011).
- 5.8 % of students stated that they vape regularly, which has been increasing since 2017.
- 39.1 % reported to having been drunk more than twice.
- 41.6 % of children and young people who responded to the School Survey confirmed that they eat fruits and vegetables at least once per day.

These findings show evidence that these key risk factors that influence long-term health outcomes are, for many people, rooted in childhood and adolescence.

Research suggests that creative pursuits may have a role in mitigating some of these risk factors. For instance, a study that was conducted in deprived communities in London found that engagement with the arts was positively associated with eating healthily and increased physical activity. The study sought to control for mental wellbeing and social capital and found that these factors did not mediate the relationship between arts participation and health behaviours<sup>x</sup>.





There was a lack of research identified through this report around the role of creativity in influencing other health behaviours for young people – including smoking, vaping and alcohol consumption. This may be an area that would benefit from further research at a local level, particularly due to evidence from the Healthwatch report that there is perceived social pressure for young people to engage in these health behaviours.

Additionally, body image was highlighted as one of young people's top two pressures in the Healthwatch report. Whilst multiple studies were identified that emphasised the positive impact of engaging in creative pursuits on children and young people's self-esteem, no research evidence was found specifically in relation to weight stigma and body image. This may also be a beneficial avenue for further research, in support of Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board's compassionate approach.

## Section summary

This section is about health behaviours, like eating, smoking, vaping and drinking alcohol. It shows that:

- Health in Rotherham is generally worse than the average for England and this is partly due to some people in Rotherham eating unhealthily, smoking and drinking alcohol. For many people, they start doing these things from childhood or being a teenager.
- There are many reasons why someone would smoke, drink alcohol or eat an unhealthy diet, and they may not be able to fully control their behaviour.
- Being involved in art and creativity may help people to eat more healthily.
- We don't know much about how art and creativity might help with smoking, vaping, drinking alcohol or body image.



## CONFIDENCE, SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTITY



*Young people at the Big History, Bright Futures celebration event, 2024.*

An important part of growing up is the formation of identity – the way we see ourselves and our beliefs and values about the world. This process is key for developing high self-esteem, which is a protective factor for good mental wellbeing.

A key theme which emerged from the Healthwatch report was confidence, with 35 % responding “no” to the question, “Do you feel confident speaking up for yourself?”. As confidence and self-esteem are closely linked, this may be an avenue to explore further through local research and engagement activity, particularly to consider whether a lack of confidence impacts on young people’s mental health.

Evidence suggests that engagement with the arts and culture can help to build confidence in children and young people. Qualitative research into the impact of virtual music groups during the COVID -19 pandemic found

that participation in the group enabled young people to gain confidence that they had lost as a result of multiple lockdowns<sup>xi</sup>.

Additionally, a study into arts engagement and self-esteem in children and young people using the Millenium Cohort Study found that listening to or playing music, drawing, painting or making things and reading for enjoyment were all associated with higher levels of self-esteem. This included when all demographic, socioeconomic and familial confounders had been matched. The association was stronger when children regularly engaged with these activities with their parents, which indicates that this may be a key approach for families to support their children to develop high self-esteem. This highlights the importance of having arts and cultural experiences available locally that are family-friendly and that appeal across different age cohorts – which is part of the approach of the Children’s Capital of Culture programme<sup>xii</sup>.

As well as confidence and self-esteem, local engagement shows that there are many aspects of identity that young people are grappling with. Gender and sexual orientation both emerged as themes within the Healthwatch report. Equality, diversity, tackling discrimination and wanting more cultures to be represented across Rotherham were key messages from the engagement work that shaped the co-creation of the Children’s Capital of Culture programme.

There is evidence to support the role that culture and the arts can play in exploring different identities. For example, one study into online culture and arts found that many participants found the cultural content to be a “safe space” which enabled them to navigate and explore different viewpoints and identities without “the fear of saying the wrong thing.” Hearing diverse stories was important to young people, and this allowed them to reflect on their own identities and experience. However, this study also found that underrepresentation of certain groups by race, gender identity or sexual orientation had the potential to alienate the young people and have a negative impact on their mental health<sup>ix</sup>.



Linked to this, research has found that as well as benefitting from engaging with the arts in terms of exploring identity, young people can also play a fundamental role in ensuring the arts and cultural spaces are inclusive for often marginalised groups. Research into a five-year collaborative programme between young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and a UK university museum found evidence of the transformative potential of young people challenging norms, addressing inequalities and embedding inclusive and anti-racist practices. This emphasises the benefits of working with young people and giving them real agency and power to shape the delivery of creative activity<sup>xiii</sup>.

## Section summary

This section is about confidence, self-esteem and identity. It shows that:

- Some young people in Rotherham don't feel confident. Involvement in creative activities like playing or listening to music, drawing, painting or making things and reading for enjoyment help young people to feel more confident and have higher self-esteem.
- Culture and art help young people to explore different viewpoints and think about their own feelings and experiences.
- Young people can help to make cultural places like museums better and more welcoming for different types of people.





## CASE STUDY: BIG HISTORY, BRIGHT FUTURES



The Big History Bright Futures project was created to encourage young people to learn about and celebrate the histories of their families and communities through creative art forms. This initiative was funded by Historic England in partnership with Imagine Rotherham and Children's Capital of Culture.

These partnerships aim to inspire young people and build a sense of community pride. Overall, the project aims to empower people by connecting them to their roots and community heritage, celebrating diversity, and building a stronger sense of community through art.

Young people attended workshops with the talented mural artist Lucy Oates, who encouraged them to connect with their families and local communities, exploring their own lived experiences and the stories of their families. These stories were transformed by the young people into small art pieces from collages and lino prints. These designs were used to



create the final mural on the Clifton Learning Partnership building, which showcased the young people's family's stories and the cultural diversity in the community.

After the mural had been painted, it was time to celebrate all the hard work! So, a celebration event was hosted at Clifton Community School. This event brought together all those involved in the project, including young participants, their families, local Councillors, and community members.

It was a vital space to share the stories and artworks created throughout the project, where young people involved had the opportunity to share their experiences and what they learnt.

Through this project and by connecting with their heritage, young people gained a deeper understanding of their communities and themselves. Exploring their heritage had the power to give young people a sense of pride and ownership, not only in their school community but also in the wider community.

One young boy noted that he felt more comfortable talking to his classmates because of how the project had encouraged young people to talk about their heritage.

***“I enjoyed it because I love painting and it’s calming. It [mural wall] looks so much better than it used to before the mural. I want more stuff like this to come to Clifton because it makes things brighter and it’s not boring. Having representation for different heritages is important because I’m proud of my heritage and I want to show it off.” – young participant.***

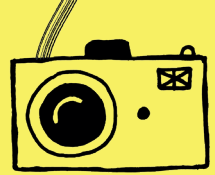
***“I enjoyed doing this mural because it was fun and interesting. I learnt how to paint, and it made me feel confident working with Lucy. I’m also really proud of my heritage and the fact that my flag, the gypsy flag, is being represented on this mural.” – young participant.***





*Close up of the Big History,  
Bright Futures Mural.*

To read the full case study, please visit the Children's Capital of Culture website here: [Big History Bright Futures Brings Bold Mural to Rotherham – Children's Capital of Culture](#)



## PLUG IN & PLAY

This theme is about increasing opportunities for play in digital and physical spaces, as well as fostering physical activity and participation in sport.



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAY

In Rotherham we have seen a decrease in the percentage of children and young people that are physically active, and it is now at 44 % (2023/24). Our Rotherham School Survey showed that of our Year 7 and Year 10 respondents, 67 % exercised at least three times a week; however, 8 % never take part in physical activity or do so less than once a month.

There is a strong evidence base to show how increased physical activity can support with creativity, and incorporating creativity into physical activity can make it more engaging and enjoyable. Physical activity is shown to improve psychological and cognitive outcomes and through

partnership with creative and artistic methods, studies show that artistic aspect may improve psychological wellbeing. There is a correlation between less-sedentary behaviour and more moderate-to-vigorous physical activity and creative activities, and one study found that creative behaviour such as making music would support the positive effects of habitual physical activity<sup>xiv</sup>.

*Young people dancing at a school workshop, 2025.*





## CULTURE AND THE ARTS ONLINE



Children and young people often recognise themselves at the forefront of new technology and popular culture. However, the potential harms of social media and young people spending large portions of their leisure time online are widely discussed, with many parents and adults having concerns. A recent YouGov poll found that 80% of adults surveyed felt that social media has either a fairly or very negative impact on teenagers' health. Research has reinforced this, with evidence that social media can have a negative influence on young people's mental wellbeing and sense of life satisfaction.

This emerged as a theme within the research conducted by Healthwatch locally, with social media being the joint top pressure that young people said they faced, alongside body image. The report indicated that these two pressures were seen as closely linked, with young people noting doctored and altered images online and the influence this had on their feelings about their own appearances.

However, with most young people spending leisure time online, digital spaces offer a critical opportunity for engagement in the arts and cultural pursuits, and this has the potential to provide a healthier alternative to traditional social media. One qualitative study explored the impact of online arts and culture on young people's mental health. In this study, online arts and culture was defined as content provided by cultural institutions such as museums, theatres, art galleries, libraries, archives and natural heritage organisations that is available digitally. Participants reported that they experienced positive outcomes, including lifted mood, feelings of calm and fewer negative thoughts. Human connection also emerged as a theme from the research, with the young people identifying with other people's stories that were communicated through arts and culture<sup>ix</sup>.

Similarly, another study focussed on virtual music groups during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that this supported social connections and improved wellbeing for young people<sup>xi</sup>.

These studies suggest that there may be opportunities to harness online creative experiences to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing and foster a sense of connection.

### **Section summary**

This section is about culture and the arts online. It shows that:

- Some people are concerned about the impact social media is having on young people.
- Creative content online may offer an alternative to social media that is better for young people's mental health.



## LONELINESS

***‘Young or old, loneliness doesn’t discriminate.’*** – Jo Cox

Loneliness is an important public health issue, and can have serious health consequences, including increased risk of depression, coronary heart disease, stroke, cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s. Traditionally, discussions around loneliness have often focussed on older people, but Rotherham’s Loneliness Action Plan makes it clear that loneliness can happen at any age and identifies young people as a group that may be particularly vulnerable to loneliness. A report from the Children, Young People and Families Consortium in 2019, into loneliness and young people aged 10-25 years, found that of the 130 young people interviewed:

- **63%** confirmed that they had felt lonely at one time or another.
- **95%** of young people in one organisation where the children and young people were from BAME communities experienced feeling left out or lonely
- In the supported housing project **20%** of the cohort felt lonely always (**7%**) or a lot of the time (**13%**).



*Smiles at  
Otherham  
Winter Light  
Festival, 2025.*



In line with this, the research conducted by Healthwatch flagged loneliness as one of the key pressures that local children and young people are facing, finding that whilst young people valued connecting with others, many find it challenging. Of the young people who were engaged, 46 % mentioned something that related to the broader theme of connecting with others as being the thing they find most difficult – including socialising, friendships, relationships, speaking to people and confidence. Additionally, the School Survey found that 18 % of students reported feeling lonely most of the time or always within the last 12 months, with girls being more likely to report loneliness than boys, and Year 10s more likely to report loneliness than Year 7s.

Engagement in the arts, creativity and culture may have an important role to play in mitigating the impacts of loneliness for young people. A report that was written in response to the rise of loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the importance of social infrastructure that brings communities together – such as community groups. Investing in community capacity was a key recommendation of the report. Groups that engage young people with the arts and culture – such as drama clubs, music groups, writing circles and book clubs – form part of this social infrastructure and help to bring young people together.

As outlined in the section about sense of belonging, there is evidence that certain activities, such as group singing, have specific benefits in terms of social bonding over and above other social activities, which indicates that creative pursuits may have a specific role to play in tackling loneliness and social isolation<sup>v</sup>.

Additionally, evidence suggests that the arts support self-expression, which may help young people to navigate feelings of loneliness and talk about their feelings, which is important for the establishment of support networks. Engaging with other people's stories, as conveyed through art and other creative mediums, also fosters feelings of connection and has been found to have mental health benefits<sup>ix</sup>.



## Section summary

This section is about loneliness. It shows that:

- Some children and young people in Rotherham feel lonely. Being lonely can make you unhappy and impact your health.
- Creative activities like drama clubs, music groups, writing circles or book clubs help to bring children and young people together and feel less lonely.
- Art and culture can help children and young people to understand and talk about their feelings, which may help them to connect with others.

## CASE STUDY: SCHOOL BATON RELAY

In June 2025, 328 Rotherham school children and staff from 82 schools ran and walked over 9 days, covering over 100 miles and cheered on by 17,500 people as a baton was passed through the borough from school to school, finally arriving at Herringthorpe stadium at the Festival of Sport on 2nd July. The baton passed through the hands of school children, but also via community leaders, councillors, the Mayor of Rotherham, and Miller Bear at Rotherham United before finally reaching Ed Clancy OBE, Olympic Gold medalist cyclist and South Yorkshire Active Travel Commissioner, who talked to the children at the Festival of Sport about his childhood joy - playing on his bike outside with friends.

Pupils submitted designs for the baton itself, with the final design chosen by the Children's Capital of Culture Youth Programming Panel. It was crafted in Rotherham by Cast Innovations using recycled tins and cans collected from Rotherham schools. One side of the baton features a powerful message passed between the children: *"be brave, be kind, help others, laugh!"*

The relay brought together children from different local schools, supporting and cheering each other on, creating a loud togetherness and a celebration of achieving and making memories together.



# THE WORLD BENEATH OUR FEET



This theme is about enabling children and young people to engage with nature and their local environment and take action to combat climate change.



*Bubbles as part of the Playful Anywhere  
Project at Canklow Park, 2024.*

## BLUE AND GREEN SPACES

*An outdoor gallery in Rosehill Park to celebrate the Children's Capital of Culture, 2025.*



Access to green space is one of the many neighbourhood-specific characteristics that affect health, and neighbourhoods with greater access to green space tend to have greater life expectancy. In Rotherham, just 3 % of our population have access to woodland, compared to 15 % nationally (2022), and 14 % of our population use outdoor space for health or physical activity purposes compared to 18 % nationally (2017).

There are noted inequalities in access to green and blue spaces. People who live in more deprived areas are more likely to live in neighbourhoods with less access to green space. People from minority ethnic groups are less likely to live in neighbourhoods with more access to green spaces compared with white people. There is less inequality in access to green space based on age, although younger people are less likely to live in neighbourhoods with the most access to green space.

Research shows that spending time outdoors can increase creativity and stimulate children's senses and imaginations which can lead to participation in further creative activities. Specifically, research shows access to outdoor space can increase attention span, creativity, well-being, and happiness.

[Nature doesn't judge you - how urban nature supports young people's mental health and wellbeing in a diverse UK city - PubMed](#)

## CLIMATE ACTION



*Young people in the Council Chamber, presenting on the Children's Capital of Culture programme, 2024.*

One of the strongest themes that emerged from engagement with young people to inform the Children's Capital of Culture programme was the extent to which they value nature and green spaces. On the flip side of this, climate crisis and action to protect the environment emerged as priorities.

Moreover, climate change can impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. There are direct impacts of climate change, such as increased asthma attacks due to air quality, and indirect impacts, such as mental health impacts.



When children and young people see bad news about the planet and our environment it can cause eco-distress (sometimes also called eco-anxiety or climate anxiety). Eco-distress might cause a person to feel anxious, angry, sad, upset, scared or worried for the future. A lot of young people in England worry about the environment. A survey carried out in England in 2020 showed that over half (57 %) of child and adolescent psychiatrists (mental health doctors for children and young people) were seeing children and young people distressed about the climate and state of the environment.

For children and young people who experience eco-distress a range of approaches can help, including spending time in nature, talking to others about how they feel, connecting with other groups of young people who feel worried about the environment, and taking action to support the environment (e.g. making a bird feeder, using a refillable water bottle).

Children and young people in Rotherham are taking action to take care of the local environment, including participating in the Schools Climate Education South Yorkshire Conference held in Rotherham in 2025, and creating a track to raise awareness around climate change and let people know that it's not too late to change and not too late to make a difference.

### **Section summary**

This section is about the impact of climate change. It shows that:

- Some young people in Rotherham are worried and anxious about climate change.
- Climate change can impact on children and young people's health – such as making it more likely they'll have asthma and feeling anxious, sad or scared about the future.
- For children and young people who do feel anxious or scared about the future, there are different things that can help, like spending time in nature and taking action to look after the environment.



## CASE STUDY: OUR HABITATS, OUR HOME



There is lots of amazing activity happening in Rotherham to help look after our natural environment. Local children and young people are playing a big part in helping to make these changes.

The ‘*Our Habitats, Our Home*’ exhibition at Clifton Park Museum showcased how local young people are getting involved in protecting nature. Examples of the projects showcased are outlined below.

### **Rewilding at Anston Greenlands School**

Children at Anston Greenlands School have been focussed on rewilding green spaces and in the process have learned about nature, how to look after it and the things they can do to help improve biodiversity. This has included making bird feeders and planting trees. An event was also organised for other local schools to teach them about rewilding, and off the back of this event, other schools developed their own Wildlife Zones.



One child involved in the project said: 'If one school does it, then the next school does it, then all these schools that have done it, hopefully it'll spread around the whole of the UK.'

### **Youth Cabinet brings the ACE awards to Rotherham**

The ACE Awards, which stands for Advocates for the Climate and Environment, is a school accreditation programme, designed to recognise and encourage schools to reduce their carbon footprint and promote positive environmental action. Rotherham Youth Cabinet has brought the awards to Rotherham, judging schools on a tiered basis (bronze-platinum) based on how far they are going to tackle climate change, with the hope that this incentivises further action.

### **Caring for their local environment in Thorpe Hesley**

Students in Thorpe Hesley have been litter-picking and learning about the benefits this has in protecting wildlife in their local area, as well as other actions that can be taken to improve biodiversity.

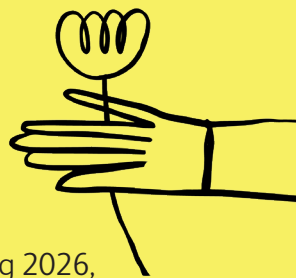
### **Celebrating nature through drama**

Dalton Youth Group produced a piece of drama focussed on the value of nature. The main character, Wisteria Dumont, once loved nature, but has been driven away and now only stays inside her house. The play follows her journey with nature, in the hopes that it encourages more young people to get out and enjoy nature.

To hear more about these projects in the words of children and young people, there is a short film included [here](#).



## WHAT NEXT?



Hundreds of organisations have worked with the children and young people of Rotherham to make 2025 a year to remember. A closing ceremony will be taking place in spring 2026, to round off our year-long festival of celebration.

However, this is not where the Children's Capital of Culture programme ends. Flagship activity in 2025 has been funded through several commissioning pots, and a third of each pot has been reserved for activity beyond 2025, to ensure that the work that has taken place so far is only the beginning. The Children's Capital of Culture programme has forged new and stronger connections with groups and services, and this positive collaborative working will continue post 2025 including through the Cultural Partnership Board.

A comprehensive evaluation of the programme will also be taking place, to consider how successful it has been in achieving the original aims, and the findings of this evaluation will be used to make the case of how the programme is taken forward. These evaluation findings will therefore shape the cultural strategy for years to come!

The Children's Capital of Culture programme has provided an opportunity to celebrate and showcase the talent of Rotherham's children and young people, whilst engaging them in creativity and the arts. Throughout the delivery of the programme, local young people have been placed in positions of power and agency, and consistently, they have risen to the challenge. This report has demonstrated the potential impact this could have on their health and wellbeing, their confidence and their role as active citizens – but to sustain these outcomes at a population level, there is a need for sustainable and long-term funding. Identifying this and ensuring that the programme has an ongoing legacy as part of mainstream activity in Rotherham, is a key priority.



Thank you to the Children's Capital of Culture, many organisations have shifted their approach and are embedding positive pathways and coproduction as a key part of what they will do and will do moving forward.

### **Section summary**

Lots of lovely things have happened in 2025 to celebrate the Children's Capital of Culture and arts and creative activities for children and young people will carry on after the year is over.

We will be looking at information to see if we have done a good job and achieved what we originally set out to do.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



*Saying hello at Rotherham Show, 2024.*

**Based on the findings of this report, the Rotherham Director of Public Health asks our partners working in the borough to consider the following recommendations:**

1. A comprehensive evaluation of the Children's Capital of Culture programme to be completed, including consideration of the role of the programme in supporting the health and wellbeing of Rotherham's children and young people.
2. A legacy programme to be delivered, building on the learning from this year-long festival of celebration, the evidence of the benefits of cultural and creative arts activities to health and wellbeing, and linking up with wider initiatives such as the SYMCA Year of Reading.
3. Cultural and creative activities in Rotherham to strive to be welcoming and inclusive for families and to tackle inequalities in access.

4. Partners and stakeholders across the local education sector to value and champion arts and culture and work to increase access and reduce inequalities to arts education.
5. Long-term and sustainable funding to be identified to support work to engage children and young people in the arts, culture and creativity.
6. Partners and organisations to learn from the success of genuine co-production as a means for children and young people to be empowered to work with us on more of the things that matter most to them.
7. Physical activity to remain embedded when the Rotherham Cultural Strategy is refreshed, acknowledging the role it plays in culture and creative activity and the benefits to health and wellbeing and wider outcomes.
8. Opportunities for local research to be explored that build on some of the gaps identified through this report, including the role of creativity in supporting positive health behaviours and to better understand the impact of school on young people and their mental wellbeing
9. The valuable contribution of the arts, culture and creativity to children and young people's mental health to be harnessed; acknowledging that mental health is an area of increasing need and system-wide partnership working is vital to ensuring enough support for children and young people
10. The preferred communication methods of children and young people to be used to ensure that they are aware of fun things to do and places to go locally





# METHODOLOGY

Rotherham specific data has been used throughout the report where possible. Data from young people was obtained through the Rotherham School Survey conducted annually with Year 7 and Year 10 young people at a Rotherham school. Data for health behaviours are available at a local authority level from OHID Fingertips where data are derived from surveys, NHS Digital, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) and ONS Mid-year Population Estimates. Further information on the demographic and health of children and young people can be found on the Rotherham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, available here, [www.rotherham.gov.uk/data/](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/data/).

To triangulate the local data with national research, PubMed Central and National Library of Medicine were used to search for relevant literature published in English in the last 10-years and where the full free text was available. Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms were used to ensure a more comprehensive and accurate identification of relevant studies for use in this report. Where limited research specifically on children and young people existed, we have incorporated all-age research and/or in some cases, older literature. Relevant research was also identified through reviewing publications by key groups and organisations, such as the WHO Scoping Review into Creative Health, an evidence review by Arts Council England and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report.

The analysis in the report is structured around the four themes of the Children's Capital of Culture programme – which were codeveloped with Rotherham children and young people.

## Section summary

This report has been written using a range of information. This includes local Rotherham information, for example, the Rotherham School Survey, and numbers collected about Rotherham people, for example, how many people have a health condition. This local information is considered alongside national research, where learning about a topic is shared to help us understand it more.



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*Painting of Rotherham  
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