

'IT'S ROTHERHAM, IT'S OURS'

Rotherham's Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025

Alex Hawley, Interim Director of Public Health



Rotherham
Metropolitan
Borough Council

CHILDREN'S
CAPITAL OF
CULTURE.

FESTIVAL
YEAR
2025

BACKGROUND

- In 2025, Rotherham has become the world's first Children's Capital of Culture (CCoC), holding a year-long festival of celebration.
- The journey to this celebration year started in 2017, with the Embassy for Reimagining Rotherham where young people created a vision for Rotherham's future.
- CCoC 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.
- Building on the momentum of this celebration year, this year's Director of Public Health Annual Report has explored the role that culture and creativity can play in the health and wellbeing of children and young people.



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.

Why is art, culture and creativity important for children and young people's health?

- Children and young people aged 19 and under making up 23.5% of Rotherham's population.
- 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.
- 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.



Having fun at Rotherham Show, 2023.



What matters to young people in Rotherham?

Children and young people have said:

- 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 DPH report is therefore split into the four CCoC themes which encompass the above.



You're Not From New York City You're From Rov'rum

- Feeling like you belong helps you to feel happier and can make you healthier.
- 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.

"You don't have to leave to chase your dreams!"





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

Who We Are, Where We Come From

- 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.
- Arts and culture could help reduce negativity, lift mood, calm and increase proactivity providing a positive impact on mental health.

Plug In & Play

- 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.
- Creative activities like drama clubs, music groups, writing circles or book clubs help to bring children and young people together and feel less lonely.

'Young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate.'





The World Beneath Our Feet

- 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.
- Some young people in Rotherham are worried about the impact of climate change, but opportunities to spend time in nature and look after the environment can help.

Recommendations (1)

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.



Recommendations (2)

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.



What next?

- 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.
- An evaluation of the Children's Capital of Culture will be undertaken and presented at the CCoC conference in March 2026.
- The Director of Public Health will be published [here](#)



Children's Capital of Culture team and volunteers at Rotherham Show, 2023.

