



What matters to me?

Children and young people's art project

February 2024

healthwatch
Sheffield

Background

Children's access to health services is a priority area for us in the coming year, based on feedback from people in Sheffield¹. This art project is part of our early work on this topic, with the following aims:

- To find out what matters to children and young people living in Sheffield, and support them to have their say
- To share insights from children and young people with system leaders
- To help us shape our own next steps in this priority work area
- To raise awareness of Healthwatch Sheffield among children and families living in the city, and how we can support them

The art project itself is inspired by Children's Mental Health Week² (5th – 11th February 2024). The theme for this year's Children's Mental Health Week was 'My Voice Matters', and their suggested art activities and resources were designed to empower children and young people to express the things that are important to them, and open up conversations with families, schools and youth workers.

What we did and who we heard from

We ran a children and young people's art project where people aged 18 and under could submit drawings, paintings, collages or other creative activities that show what's important to them.



¹ Find out more about how we select our priority topics here:

<https://www.healthwatchsheffield.co.uk/news/2023-08-04/your-priorities-health-and-social-care-sheffield>

² <https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/families/>

There were three strands to this project:

- An online campaign running from 2nd-26th February, encouraging children and families to complete the activity at home.
- A family arts and crafts session at The Circle on Thursday 15th February for families who were refugees or seeking asylum. We worked with New Beginnings³ to invite their clients to this event and make it a welcoming space for them. 55 people attended this event (including adults and children).
- A drop in arts and crafts session at Manor Library on Friday 16th February, open to all. 16 people took part (including both adults and children).



We received really positive feedback from attendees at both of the events we hosted. They were fun and interactive, with snacks and other toys and games for the children to play with alongside lots of art and craft materials. We were also able to give out dental care packs to younger children attending, provided by Sheffield Teaching Hospitals.

Children who completed a picture were also entered into raffles to win a £20 Love2Shop voucher; one each for the online campaign, the event with New Beginnings, and the event at Manor Library.

³ New Beginnings (hosted by Voluntary Action Sheffield) supports asylum seekers and refugees to access opportunities in volunteering, employment, education, and participation in social activities in Sheffield. <https://www.vas.org.uk/the-new-beginnings-project-2/>

What we found out

We asked children to tell us about their drawings when they handed them in, and some older children went into more detail by writing on their pictures to explain what they had included.

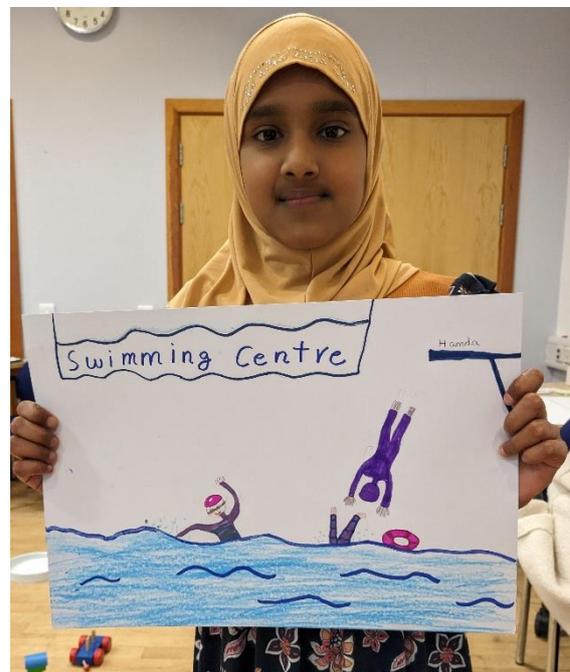
We've looked at all the drawings and collages that the children and young people created to represent what mattered to them, and have compared them to see what people drew or wrote about the most. We've written about these below, in order of how often they appeared.

Hobbies

Nearly all the drawings contained activities that the children or young people liked to do. Active hobbies like sports were the most commonly represented – with a huge range included. Football, tennis, cricket and swimming were really popular. Lots of people chose to draw scooters and bicycles, and swings and slides at the park too.

People told us about their other hobbies as well: reading books, music, and art were all popular, as were indoor toys and games like their favourite teddy bears.

We also saw more technology-based hobbies, so we saw lots of drawings of TVs, phones, and games consoles. Others drew their favourite games like Roblox and Fortnite, TV shows like Paw Patrol and PJ Masks, or favourite characters like Spiderman and Pikachu.



Nature and the outdoors

Getting outside was really important to children of all ages. Over half of the pictures contained references to the outdoors – they drew their local parks, their gardens, seaside holidays, trees and flowers.

Some older children talked about climate change and the importance of protecting the environment.



Family, friends and pets

Lots of children drew or wrote about their family – especially their parents, and some siblings. Some older children went into more detail, so we saw that important family members also included grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. Friends also featured for children of all ages.

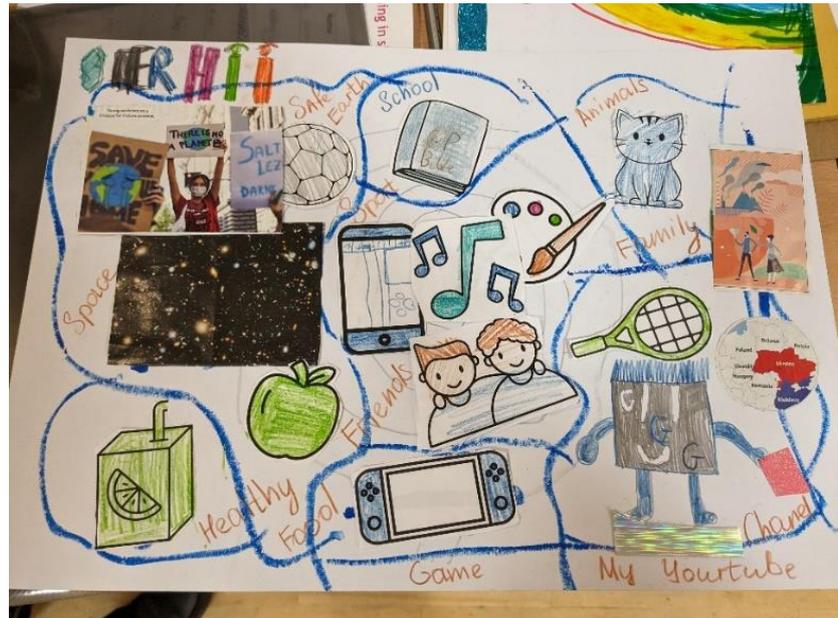


We learned a lot about children's pets too, which featured nearly as often as human family members. One girl's drawing of her pets (below right) says "I feel calm when I'm around my pets" in the top corner.



Food and drink

Lots of people included pictures of their favourite food and drink, such as fruit, pizzas and ice cream. Some said that “healthy food” was important to them, while others drew their favourite chains like McDonalds or Subway.



Cultural identity

At our session with New Beginnings families, there were lots of children who saw language, religion, or nationality/ethnicity as being important parts of themselves.

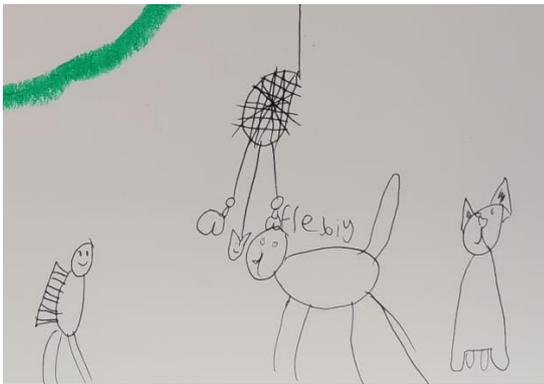
Lots of children drew flags – we saw a range including flags from India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Palestine, and Ukraine. Others drew Bibles, talked about Islam, or mentioned the languages that they speak.



Home

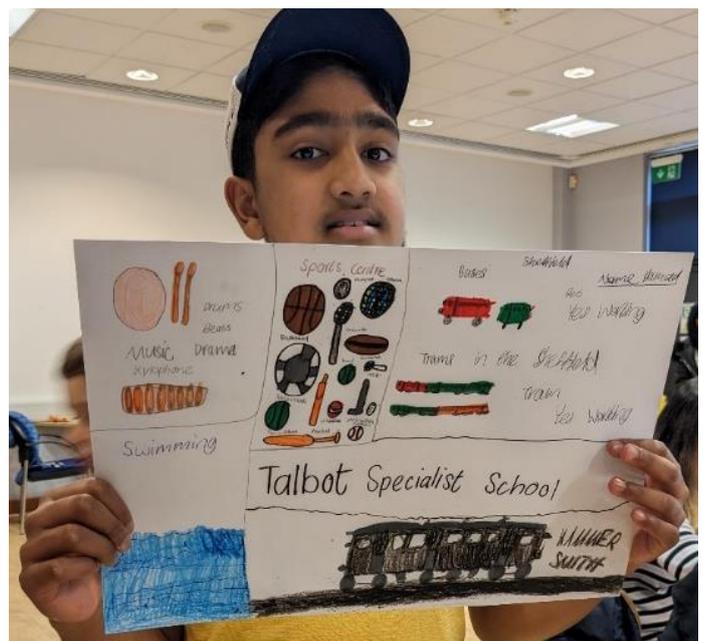
Some children drew houses, and other things that signified home, like their beds. Several people said sleep was important to them.

The drawing below contains a dreamcatcher, which one girl told us helps her feel safe at night.



School

School was also important to some children, with some choosing to draw their school or their teachers, while others told us about their favourite subjects.



Values and behaviours

Some of the older children who took part in the sessions didn't just draw the people and things that make them happy, but went into detail about more abstract ideas like their values, or things they like about themselves.

Some referred to charity and supporting people. Others talked about mental health and being happy or smiley. Some talked about qualities they value, like kindness and responsibility.



Conclusions

The children and young people who took part in this creative art project were from a wide range of backgrounds, but highlighted many of the same things as being important to their health and wellbeing.

Many of these are things we already know to be important for mental health – access to nature and the outdoors⁴, exercise and active hobbies⁵, supportive relationships with families and friends⁶, and safe places to live⁷ and learn.

We would like to see children and families supported to access these things that help them to live happier and healthier lives; and for these important elements to be considered when planning public services and spaces that young people will use.

⁴ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/>

⁵ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/physical-activity-exercise-and-mental-health/>

⁶ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/statistics/relationships-community-statistics>

⁷ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/housing-and-mental-health>

Resources

On this page we have gathered information about some of the local activities available for children, young people, and families, most of which are free or low-cost. We've also included the details of some information and support services. These suggestions are based on what children and young people showed us was important to them, and conversations we had with families at event.

Hobbies and activities:

Sheffield Parent Carer Forum have an online information directory, covering education, health and wellbeing, and more. The leisure section gives information about activities and events for young people:

<https://sheffieldparentcarerforum.org.uk/information/> 0300 321 4721



Sheffield Libraries host storytime sessions for young children and families, as well as reading and creative writing activities for school-aged children and teenagers: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/libraries-archives/events-children-families> 0114 273 4712



Sheffield Museums host a range of free creative activities for families:

<https://www.sheffieldmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/#> 0114 278 2600

Sheffield Healthy Holidays helps children and young people in receipt of free school meals to access fun free activities and healthy food through the school holidays: <https://sheffieldhealthyholidays.org/> 0114 203 9303

Pitsmoor Adventure Playground is a place for outdoor play, with staff onsite to run arts and crafts activities too. It's free to attend and all children up to 13 years old are welcome: <https://pitsmooradventure.org/> 0114 273 7121

Highfield Adventure Playground is a free outdoor and indoor play space for children aged up to 14: <https://www.sharrowcf.org.uk/playground> 0114 250 8384

Nature and the outdoors:

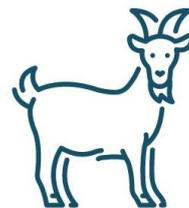
Parks and green spaces lists the local parks and green areas that are open to the public: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/parks-sport-recreation/parks-green-spaces> 0114 250 0500

Welcome to Sheffield has a page listing several local walks, including a variety of lengths and accessibility levels, and how to get there via bus: <https://www.welcometosheffield.co.uk/visit/outdoors-nature/walking/>



Pets and animals:

Animals: There are several local farms/animal parks that are open to the public for free, including Graves Park Animal Farm: 0114 250 0500, Heeley City Farm: <https://www.heeleyfarm.org.uk/> (0114 258 0482) and Whirlow Hall Farm: <https://www.whirlowhallfarm.org/> (0114 262 0986)



Other support:

Sheffield Family Hubs have breastfeeding groups, baby groups and toddler groups, as well as workshops and advice sessions to support families of children and young people aged 0-19:

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/schools-childcare/family-hubs> 0114 273 5665



Sheffield Mental Health Guide provide information about mental health services, resources and activities. A section of the site focuses on provision for children and young people: <https://www.sheffieldmentalhealth.co.uk/> 0114 273 7009

Community Youth Teams run a range of youth clubs in Sheffield for young people aged 10-18: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/schools-childcare/youth-clubs>. The service also supports young people to engage with education, employment and training opportunities and reduce risk taking behaviours. Find out more about them here: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/social-care/children/cyt> 0114 205 7450

Healthwatch Sheffield

We are here to help adults, children and young people influence and improve how services are designed and run. We are completely independent and not part of the NHS or Sheffield City Council.

We collate the feedback you give us so that we can make evidence-based recommendations to the organisations that design, pay for, and run our local services.

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work, or anything in this briefing.

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