

CAPACITY



WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS

COMMUNITY
MATTERS

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WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS

When you face challenges as a family, you can feel like you are missing out on many of the enjoyable experiences that are part of being a parent. I want my children to have amazing memories of growing up, and yet there have been times in my life when I've needed help and support but didn't know where best to look for fear of being judged. The definition of Early Help in this report is incredibly helpful, because many people don't know that it is primarily about support and not just a potential pathway to social services.

As a parent, sometimes you think you're the only person who is going through a particular challenge, so having networks and people who are going through similar experiences is just so valuable. Local communities, face to face or online; indeed, any kind of supportive relationship all play a massive role in equipping families with the necessary skills to keep going when life is tough. My three children are each so different in terms of their individual strengths, and the challenges which they face, but what they all have in common is a network of people around them who are willing to love and support them, whether it be teachers, neighbours or their peers. It really does take a village to raise a child!

Communities aren't just the physical environment where you live. They are more about the people around you who make you feel like you belong, who ground you and with whom you share a common understanding and experience of daily life. The connection I have with my own local community is my greatest source of strength when life is challenging. I am surrounded by love and support from people of all ages and backgrounds. Although we live some distance from our family, our local community is our family in the widest sense; full of joy, shared experience and love. This is why community matters to me.

There is so much good work going on already across the Wirral and my hope is that this report will raise the profile of existing support and ensure that the right help is readily available for individual families. I want to see an Early Help system which can bring people together before they reach crisis point. It can take so much courage to attend a support group, so even an opportunity to text someone who has been through a similar situation would be a huge help for some families.

I want to see a focus on our shared strengths as families and communities, building one another up and supporting one another through challenging times. Together we are stronger!



Lucy
Local Parent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The future of Early Help: what do Wirral communities want?

In 2019, over 450 children, young people, parents, carers, guardians and professionals told us what a more effective and sustainable Early Help model should be like. **Wirral residents were unanimous in their feedback: they don't want traditional "services".** Children and families shared hundreds of examples of wonderful support that they'd received in Wirral; when they spoke, they rarely described programmes or pathways, **they described people.**

From teachers and GPs to staff and volunteers in third sector organisations or next-door neighbours, **human beings are creating lifesaving networks across the borough, and families want more of this.** They ask, "could volunteer and other peer-based experiences that can give me more time and organic support that changes as I change, play a bigger role?"

Challenge

Mental Health
Children and families across Wirral identified a wide range of unmet mental health needs, from anxiety and low mood to severe mental illness that they felt **current services didn't have capacity to support.**

Social Isolation
Many families described times where a **lack of meaningful connection to others** meant their problems had quickly escalated or opportunities for more informal support were missed.

Managing Change
Adults and children described personal experiences where **additional support during times of significant change could have helped** address problems before they escalated.

Supporting Children with Additional Needs
Many of the families we spoke to raising children with additional needs **described the need for more inclusive, whole-family experiences.**

What needs to be done

From primary school age children to grandparents, **people across the life course need more accessible, low-cost mental health support,** from cultural activities and peer-based wellbeing groups to respite and therapeutic care.

Create the conditions which **help build meaningful relationships between people** and create experiences that whole families can take part in.

From becoming a new parent, starting a new school or coping with the loss of a loved one, many **families want extra help when life suddenly changes;** clearer information, peer-support groups and trusted people who can offer both practical and emotional support.

Offer opportunities for families to have fun together, to get **support from others in a similar life-situations and to gather knowledge and information, particularly before a formal diagnosis** has been made by professionals.

Why traditional services aren't the answer

Families spoke candidly about the barriers that prevented them from accessing help, or seeking additional help, in the past.

Fear and Shame

Families described the shame and **embarrassment that came with "needing Early Help"** and instances where support felt to be highlighting failures rather than building on strengths.

Services at Breaking Point

Despite the best intentions of many services, residents told us that **professionals are often pulled towards need and reacting to crisis,** not preventing problems before they escalate. Many families wanted support but couldn't get it because their issues weren't "bad enough" and **services can rush to address surface issues** rather than listening, reflecting and understanding underlying problems.

Wrong Time, Wrong Place

Many families we spoke to want Early Help support that is **closer to home,** preventing the need for costly travel and transport.

Communicating Too Late, or Not at All

Families emphasised how important it is that services are **well promoted and well connected** so that they do not have to keep **repeating their story** to different organisations or finding support opportunities when its already too late.

Children and young people told us:



"Help our parents look after themselves, so that they can look after us."

"Give us second chances and room to make mistakes."

"We need places to come together, to meet new people and learn new skills."

Over the next 12 months, Capacity will work with partners across the community to:

1. Co-design the new model with communities, funders and the Local Authority
2. Test what works before rolling out larger scale pilots
3. Develop a collective funding model that increases the investment available to Early Help and powers a more collaborative, responsive way of working across communities
4. Explore how technology can maximise the impact of Early Help

We recognise that Wirral residents are asking for a radical departure from the current Early Help service. This is not a straightforward shift. **Innovation on this scale will rely on funders, commissioners, providers and communities working together differently to bring this vision to life.**

Adults told us:



"Take on board the reality of my situation without being over-whelmed or referring me on."

"Don't give me time-restrictions, tick boxes or waiting lists."

EARLY HELP AND COMMUNITY MATTERS IN WIRRAL

What is Early Help?

Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person or family as soon they encounter a challenge that they are struggling to tackle on their own. Fundamentally, this support should improve outcomes for children; if communities can collectively prevent problems from escalating or becoming overwhelming, children and families can thrive.

Early Help might be required at any stage in a child's life, from pre-birth to adulthood, and can support families to address a wide range of difficult circumstances, such as poor mental health, parental drug or alcohol dependency and domestic abuse. In Wirral, Early Help¹ includes a range of interventions which are offered at Level 1, 2 and 3 on the Continuum of Need, a tool that helps identify a child's degree of need and vulnerability to ensure support is offered by the right agencies, at the right time, to prevent problems escalating.

What is Community Matters?

Community Matters is a strand of Early Help (Level 2) designed to support families who would benefit from extra help to thrive.

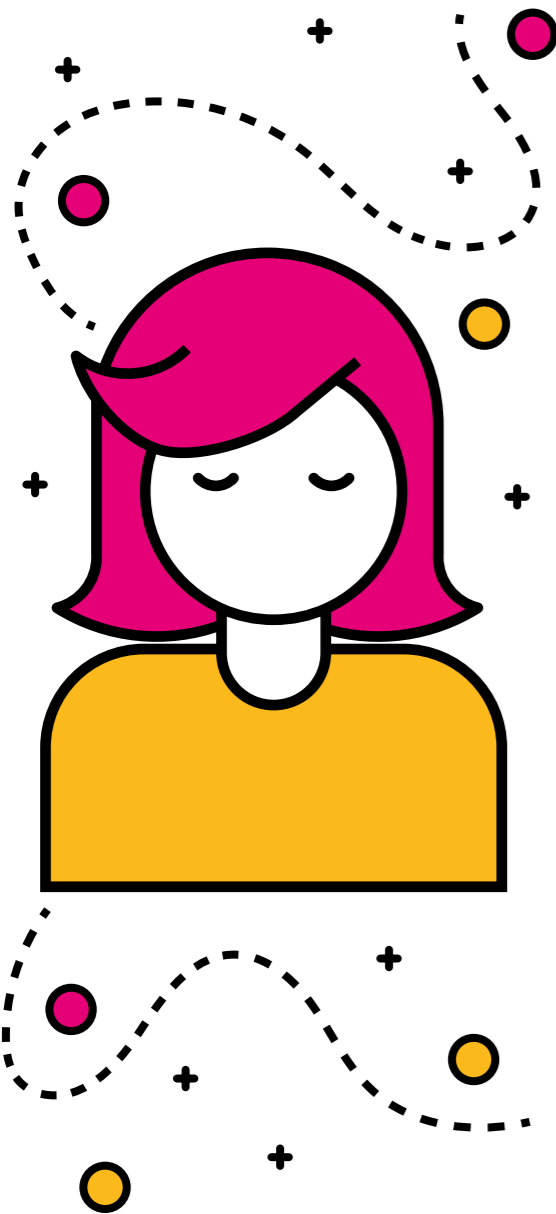
Community Matters was set up in January 2019 with the awareness that a knock at the door from a Social Worker is not what many parents want or need when family circumstances are becoming difficult. A group of local voluntary, community, faith and educational organisations were commissioned to test a more community-based support model, where families are referred to a local organisation to develop a family plan that can address their needs. Simultaneously, Capacity were commissioned to redesign and implement a longer-term Community Matters (Early Help) service to meet the needs of children and families living in Wirral. This report is a key stage in the redesign. The new approach will be built around the insights that families have shared throughout this community engagement process.



¹ <https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk/professionals/what-is-early-help/>

WHAT EARLY HELP CAN DO

In this diagram, Sarah describes how Early Help could have supported her family through some challenging times.



What happened?
Sudden Loss
 At 20, my best friend died suddenly in a road traffic accident

What effective Early Help for me would have been
 Someone to talk to about losing my friend

What happened?
Family Bereavement
 My mum was diagnosed with terminal cancer and passed away shortly after. Nothing prepared me for losing my mum so young; I thought she would be coming home

What effective Early Help for me would have been
 Someone to support me through my grief

What happened?
Housing Challenges
 When Mum died, I didn't know whether I would be able to take over her tenancy and stay in our family home. I didn't know anything about running a house, I'd only been working part time and paying my mum a little board each month

What effective Early Help for me would have been
 Someone to help me understand my housing situation and to explain what support I was entitled to

What happened?
Pregnancy
 I got pregnant with my daughter and moved back to the area I grew up in. I didn't have my mum or anyone to ask for advice about being a Mum; I just had to get on with it

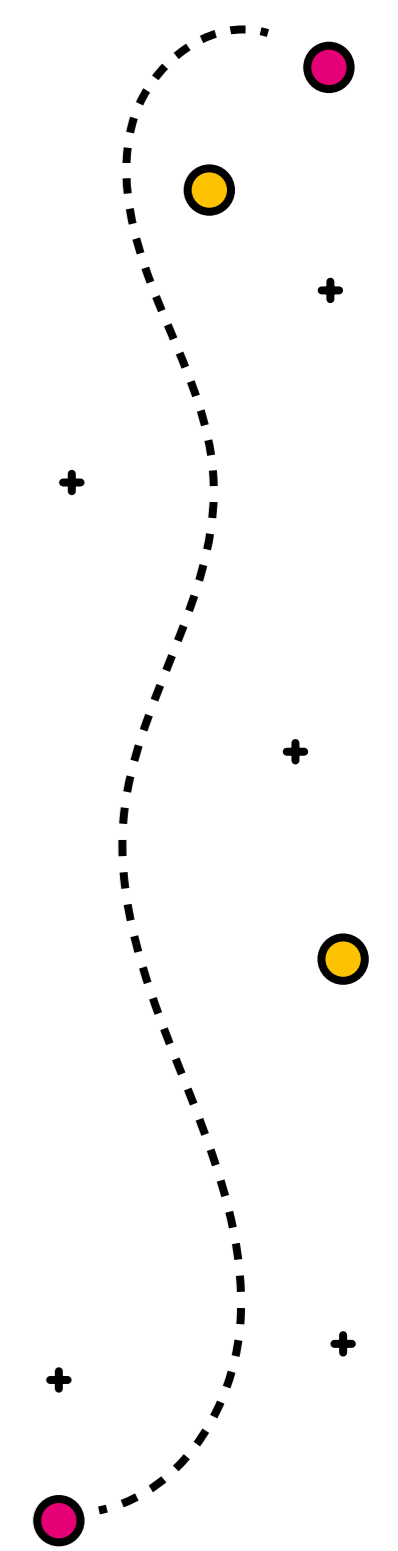
What effective Early Help for me would have been
 Someone who could give me some emotional support and practical advice about what it would be like when the baby came

What happened?
Childhood Illness
 My daughter was very poorly when she was born and had to stay in Alder Hey Hospital for the first few months of her life. I would be at hospital for days on end, sometime a week would go by without going home. I got into rent arrears as I couldn't leave hospital to go and pay it. I also had to give up work and start claiming benefits

What effective Early Help for me would have been
 Someone to help with practical tasks like sorting out my bills or sitting with my daughter whilst I went home to shower and get clean clothes

What happened?
Employment
 I work part-time now on a zero hours contract but I have to stay on benefits because the hours aren't consistent. I still have nothing left each week; changes to Universal Credit mean I am always behind. To constantly say 'no' to your child is heart-breaking. My daughter sees me working and doesn't understand why there is nothing to spare

What effective Early Help for me would have been
 An employer who gives me more consistent hours and a permanent contract. The opportunity to have great and affordable days out as a family



METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this community engagement project were to understand:

- The experience of being a parent, carer, young person or member of the community in Wirral. What's brilliant, what's challenging, and where might extra support be needed?
- What do families do when they face challenges and how effective do they feel existing support is?
- What additional experiences or opportunities may help families to feel happier and healthier in their communities?
- What helps or prevents families accessing support?

According to Wirral Children's Safeguarding Board¹, Wirral has approximately 71,400 children and young people aged 0-18. We were keen to speak to families from a range of life situations:

7% of the parents we spoke to had children who had been under Level 4 Statutory Social Care.

5% had experienced an intervention at Level 3-4 Social Care.

22% had accessed support from Early Help at Level 2-3

65% had only accessed support from universally accessible services such as, GPs, Children's Centres, VCSE organisations and Schools.

Children and young people made up 51% of our participants, ranging in age from 8-25 years old. We spoke to young people in mainstream, special and alternative education settings, as well as youth groups, children who are looked after and care leavers.

The project ran for six months between June and November 2019 and engaged 447 individual children, young people, parents, carers and professionals across all nine neighbourhoods of Wirral.

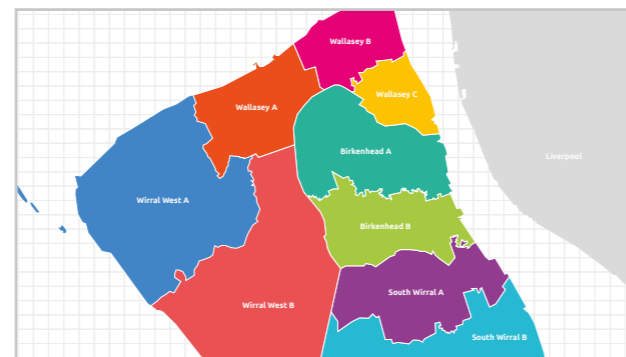
According to the most recent figures from the Wirral Intelligence Service, Wirral has a total population of 323,235. This means that our sample size of 447 gives us a 95% confidence level. Alongside the individuals who make up this sample, Capacity has regularly engaged local professionals and organisations from the statutory, public, private and voluntary sectors to understand more about the current Early Help services, the local context, wider needs and opportunities, ensuring wider viewpoints are built into this analysis.

Where participants lived



Neighbourhoods

The team ensured people from all neighbourhoods were represented in the engagement. Local schools were used as hubs and partnerships were formed with NHS 0-19 teams and community stakeholders to recruit participants from across the borough. Early Help providers and local family hotspots, such as children's centres and libraries were also encouraged to participate, ensuring we reached as many families, from a range of life circumstances, as possible. We also spent time in community cafés, community centres, social supermarkets, and with Community Connectors doing door-knocks to ensure members of the community who would not usually access external support services or statutory services could participate.



10 11

Lower super output areas

The team also conducted "deep dive" engagement with families living in specific Lower Super Output Areas, or LSOAs, based on information from Wirral Council's Intelligence Service². LSOAs are small areas within a local ward, which have a population of approximately 1500-1700 people. The LSOAs (below) were chosen as they have the same rates of deprivation, yet half have high children's social care usage, while half have comparatively low rates of children's social care usage.

How residents took part

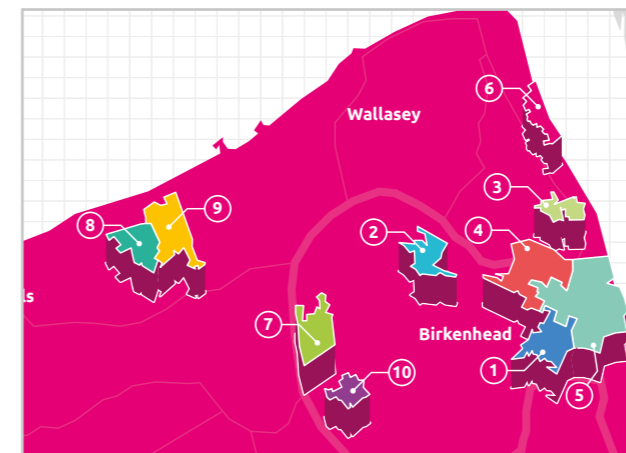
Wirral residents primarily shared their views via:

- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews
- Focus group interviews
- Online questionnaires

Interviews and focus groups were designed to give participants space to share their honest views and experiences in ways unbiased by the interviewer's objectives. Open-ended questions such as "What is it like to be a parent in Wirral?", with uninterrupted time to answer, were consistently used and participants were given space to naturally lead the conversation, with insights from one participant often sparking responses from others.

How insights were explored

Interviews were coded using a *a posteriori* approach. Topics were not chosen in advance and were assembled after careful examination of the data, first coding fine-grained themes, then grouping similar or superordinate themes. Statements given directly by the participant, as well as implied or evident information highlighted by the researchers, were noted. The POINTS methodology³ and a Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC approach⁴) were used to explore language used in context, a tried and tested method for service design-focused community engagement.



Problems refer to the challenges people are facing.

Opportunities relate to aspects of the current system or community that are either working brilliantly or would be brilliant with some extra development.

Insights are remarkable comments, unique to that individual, which need to be held in our minds when thinking about the new model.

Needs develop in response to gaps in support during a challenging time or experience.

Themes are recurrent thoughts and comments repeated across the community.

System challenges are barriers affecting how families access support, stemming from wider systems such as Health or Education, generally outside of the control of the individual.

As there were more participants from the Birkenhead area per head in our sample when compared with the Wirral population, we have weighted the data by locality, constraining weights between 2.00 (i.e. double) and 0.5 (i.e. half).

This statistical data combined with the case studies and personal stories of our participants were used to inform the results of this report.

Two researchers were involved in the coding of data. Both have received training in qualitative research methods and the importance of reflexivity in analysing qualitative data.

Highest rates of Social Care Usage

- 1 Birkenhead Central
- 2 Bidston St. James East
- 3 Seacombe St. Pauls
- 4 Birkenhead East Float
- 5 Hamilton Square

Lower rates of Social Care Usage

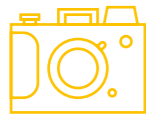
- 6 Egremont Promenade South
- 7 Beechwood South
- 8 Lingham Park West
- 9 Lingham Park East
- 10 Noctorum Central



WHAT COMMUNITIES TOLD US

An effective Early Help model needs to be ready to meet the needs of a huge range of families and their individual circumstances, from parents accessing support for one short term challenge to families facing multiple and complex challenges ahead.

Therefore, to understand what families in specific areas in Wirral need and want from Early Help, as well as the borough as a whole, we have split our results into three sections to ensure the diversity and commonality of needs, strengths and opportunities can be explored:



The Wirral wide picture



Local area perspectives



LSOA Deep Dives

THE WIRRAL WIDE PICTURE

The Challenges We Face

Poor Mental Health

Children and families across Wirral identified a broad range of unmet mental health needs, from anxiety and low mood to severe mental illness that they felt current services didn't have capacity to support. Children and adults across the life course are struggling with their own wellbeing and are concerned about the mental health of their family members and friends.

Alongside the joy and love that parents shared about their experience of being a parent, they also spoke of the demands and challenges that parenthood brings. The knock-on effect of poor mental health was often discussed. When there are other issues such as housing problems or difficulties at school faced by a family, **poor mental health creates a barrier to them accessing support** for these challenges too. One parent told us,

"If someone had knocked on my door to offer me help, I wouldn't have opened it because of my anxiety. I thought it would be housing coming to kick me out. It was only when I overheard someone else from my area talking to a worker at the community centre and I realised that they were able to help other people that I thought, so why not me as well?"

According to an insight report from Wirral Public Health, mental health problems account for 51% of ESA claims in the borough. Therefore, understanding and supporting mental health and wellbeing in the earliest stages of difficulty could massively improve the trajectory of families who may otherwise reach crisis point, enabling them to cope with the demands of everyday life.

The Toxic Trio

In 22% of instances where mental health was mentioned as a challenge, abusive relationships were also mentioned. Serious case reviews have highlighted that cases involving the Toxic Trio of domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance misuse **cannot be worked effectively by any single agency**. Wirral Council has policies and procedures in place to support professionals who are working with families who may be experiencing one or more of the Toxic Trio and it will be imperative that joint working across agencies is part of a new model of Early Help.

Challenging Behaviour: A Symptom or A Cause?

Across Wirral, our results showed that **families rarely identified children's behaviour as a common problem**, despite professionals repeatedly telling us that it was one of the main reasons families need help. What does this tell us? Families are focused on addressing the underlying factors which contribute to their child's challenging behaviours and their own ability to manage it, be that due to stress, relationship breakdowns or additional needs, rather than looking at the surface issue.

Other challenges faced by families across Wirral included:

- Coping after the loss of a loved one
- Social isolation following the birth of a child
- Real difficulty in knowing who or where to go to get help
- Accessing specialist/clinical services when they needed them

Mary, Wallasey

I am a Grandma to three girls who are 17, 14 and 9. The eldest and the youngest have lived with me since they were quite little. My daughter, Vicky has mental health problems, substance addictions and she has also been the victim of domestic abuse; she has been unable to look after the children since they were young.

People rallied round when I first took the children in. I found out about the children's centre at Seacombe and the lady who ran it was very, very good; she sent clothes down to us and cribs and things. Now it's very difficult. The girls are older and they have a lot of issues of their own; the eldest has ADHD, depression and PTSD and she self-harms. The youngest is really struggling and I can't cope; I don't know how to help them to understand their experiences or how they're feeling; I think it's trauma. We need someone who understands mental health who can talk to me and the girls, as they don't know how to handle their feelings. The youngest has a violent temper, I've been asking for a long time for some help to explain things to her; she used to see a specialist at the children's centre which was great, but they've stopped that now and we have to go to St. Catherine's.

It's really hard because I don't drive, and the children have appointments at all different places on all different days. I can't really take buses because the children can't cope with them, so we have to get taxis everywhere and it's so expensive.

I go to church; my faith helps me and you can go there and not be judged. That is what gives me the strength to cope with it all, but we need somewhere we can go which is nice and calm and relaxed where we could talk together with a professional.

"...we need somewhere we can go which is nice and calm and relaxed where we could talk together with a professional.

What children and young people told us

Managing unexpected change tied together many of the challenges identified by young people across Wirral.

Changes at School

Four of the top ten problems described by young people related to school. The transition period between primary and high school was particularly anxiety provoking and the young people we spoke to did not feel informed or equipped to cope with this change. This “school transition” worry often appeared alongside worries about losing contact with friends.

Young people told us that **they worry about what their opportunities will look like if they do not fit into the standard mould of mainstream school or college**. They shared that they would like more activities based around careers, life skills, volunteering, and work experience across Wirral.

Changes at Home

Family was the second largest theme of challenges identified by young people. The divorce or separation of parents were the primary challenge faced by young people. Bereavement and parental illness were also recurring items with young people saying **they feel helpless when parents are ill and unprepared and unsupported when faced with close personal loss**. Mental health concerns, particularly anxiety, depression and low mood, underpinned many of the responses around these tough times for young people. In a small number of instances, young people had been bereaved by suicide and had struggled to find the right support.

What will my future look like?

Young people perceived that there was a **lack of meaningful employment opportunities** in Wirral and those who felt otherwise often reported a **lack of confidence in being able to attain those positions**. Financial worries relating to poorly paid jobs were a concern for many of our young people and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) young people highlighted additional challenges relating to gaining paid employment and aspirations for the future as a young person with additional needs.

“**There’s no end game. We get a qualification at a low level and it doesn’t go anywhere. People are happy for us to be volunteers but they don’t want to pay us. We deserve to be paid for the work we do like anyone else does.**”

- Young person with SEND

Olivia, 15, Rock Ferry

I live in Rock Ferry with my Mum and three little sisters and my big brother who is 16. Mum is also expecting another baby. Last year we lost our baby sister at only six days old to a physical health condition that she was born with. It has been a really hard year. Mum has had lots of cards and teddies, from friends and family and neighbours. We have a big family (three aunts, uncle and nan) who are very helpful.

After my sister died, my aunts would come and take the younger kids out for day trips and do stuff together, which I think was helpful for my Mum. I had a good relationship with one of my teachers, and Mum rang the school and told this teacher what had happened. I was given a school counsellor, but she wasn’t any good. I would have preferred to have the support at home; you’re meant to feel comfortable aren’t you? I really just wanted to talk to Mum, not a stranger. Mum had lots of support, and we went to *Claire House* which was good because they had a separate bit for the younger kids to go in while me and Mum went in to see my baby sister. At the moment, I would like to have more 1:1 time with Mum so that we can do normal things together.

Key Points

- 1 Olivia wants to spend more time with her Mum, not professionals who she doesn’t have a relationship with.
- 2 Olivia liked that *Claire House* offered space for the whole family to come along so that she and Mum could access support.
- 3 Olivia’s teacher has supported her throughout.



MY STORY

LUCY AGED 15

Current situation

I live with my mum, stepdad and younger sister in South Wirral.

Primary School

Primary school was fine, I had no problems at all. I did well in my school work, and I had some good friends.

Transition to high school

I had wanted to go to the grammar school with my best friend, but I didn't get in. I ended up at a high school which wasn't even a feeder school from my primary, so I didn't know anyone. I knew as soon as I got there that it wasn't the right place for me.

Intervention

School put a TAF in place because they assumed something more must be going on at home for me to be acting this way. They didn't ever ask me what I needed. It's like they put a persona of someone with anxiety on to me and that wasn't me. It's not what I or my family needed.

I have a really supportive mum and boyfriend and my stepdad is very understanding; they have kept me going.

Year 9

Due to my health I had low attendance and poor punctuality. Some days I would get dressed and ready for school but not be able to leave the house. On the days where I could make it into school, I was always getting in trouble for being late which made me even more anxious about going the next day.

Year 10

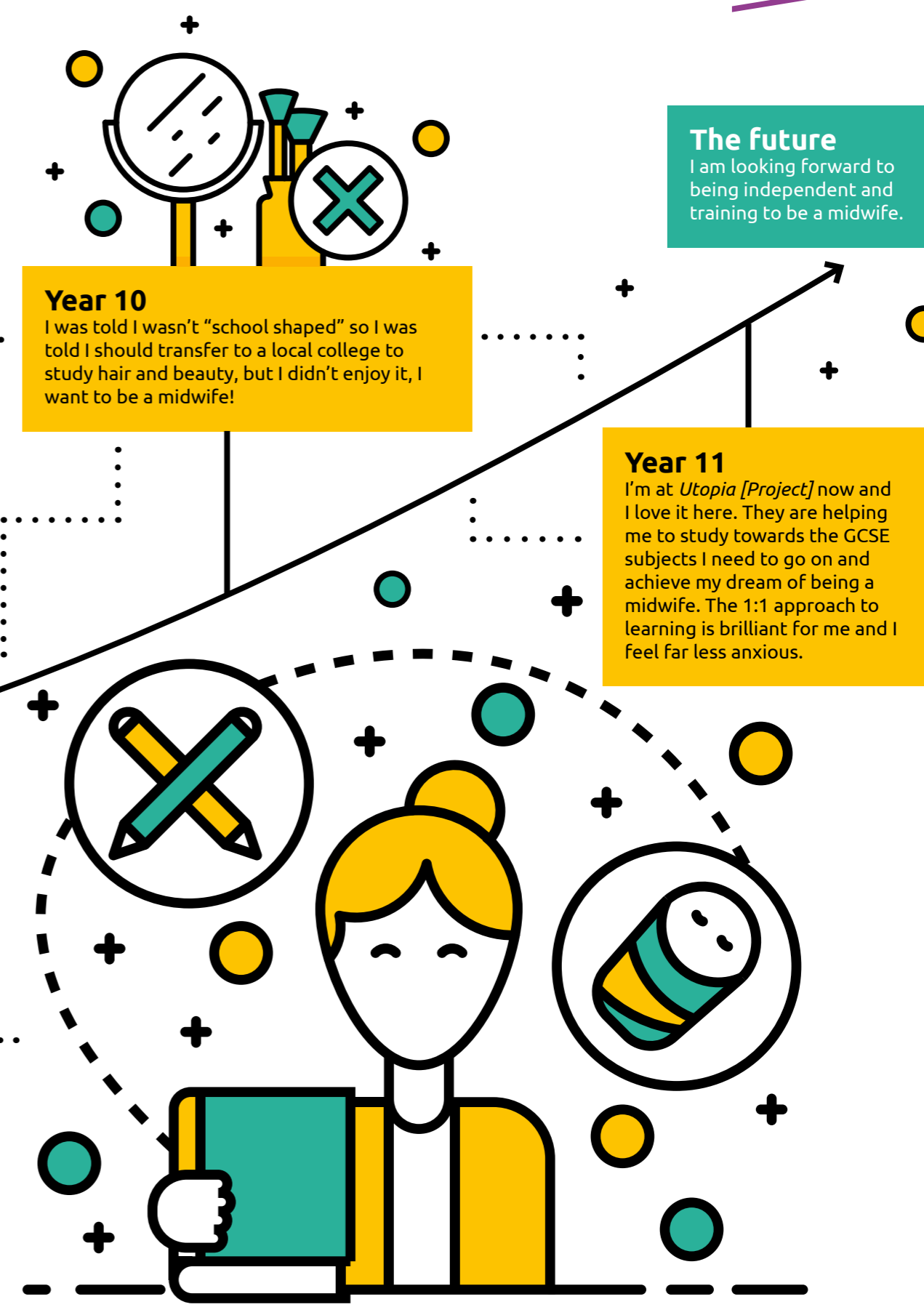
I was told I wasn't "school shaped" so I was told I should transfer to a local college to study hair and beauty, but I didn't enjoy it, I want to be a midwife!

Year 11

I'm at *Utopia [Project]* now and I love it here. They are helping me to study towards the GCSE subjects I need to go on and achieve my dream of being a midwife. The 1:1 approach to learning is brilliant for me and I feel far less anxious.

The future

I am looking forward to being independent and training to be a midwife.





WHAT GREAT SUPPORT CURRENTLY LOOKS LIKE

This section outlines the support mechanisms that families and communities feel are having the biggest impact across Wirral.

Children and adults told us

People Matter Most

The main source of support for residents across the borough is other people. 53% of adults we spoke to named other parents, their own family and friends and staff in local assets or services as their main source of support. **For families who needed support outside of what their own network could provide, schools and GPs were the first ports of call.** 60% of all young participants mentioned a supportive person. 43% of young people said that their mum was their main source of support, the highest percentage of responses, telling us,

“My mum, for being a mum and a dad to me.”

19% of young people mentioned their friends as a source of support, alongside professionals including sports coaches, counsellors and even their parent’s managers. One young person explained, “my dad’s manager for helping us financially”.

“My closest friend is always there for me when I’m sad or just too much is going on. She can just always be there to help or to just listen and I’m really glad she is still my best friend.”

19% of young people mentioned times where they had been of service to others. 48% of those in this category mentioned offering a non-judgemental space to talk, for example, “if people need help what I do is talk to people and try to make them feel a bit better,” while another 48% mentioned offering a positive, uplifting attitude, for example, “when someone is struggling, I cheer them up by making them smile or laugh.”

The key ingredient to trusted relationships across the borough? An open and non-judgemental approach, where experiences are shared, and people feel listened to and empowered.

Third Sector Organisations

Across Wirral, families reported that local voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations are playing a key role in supporting them to thrive. The **skill and commitment of staff in local organisations** across the borough was reported by many, whilst the voluntary sector’s ability to offer **fast and immediate support**, be that through the provision of direct services or signposting to others, is offering a lifeline to many.

Of note in our engagement was that when third sector support was as its best, the person engaged didn’t see the experience as support or help; it was a place where they belonged.



Cath & Joseph, Birkenhead

We live in Birkenhead with our four children. Our eldest daughter Marley is 12 years old and has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social Communication Disorder.

time, so we did a lot of research ourselves through the internet and through speaking to family and friends.

The first time we knew anything was different was when Marley’s primary school raised some concerns about her mannerisms. They were so good, really supportive and helped me to understand what they were seeing. I made notes and took her to the GP, who referred her to a paediatrician. During the process I found it most helpful to talk to my auntie, as my cousin has Asperger’s [Syndrome] and understood what I was going through. We were referred to CAMHS but I was concerned about the waiting

Marley’s primary school were really helpful with practical things too. They would allow Marley to complete her work outside of the classroom as she struggled in class, but then when she needed to be in class and the transition to high school was looming it was quite difficult to get her back in. Marley now goes to a mainstream high school and is doing brilliantly. The transition went well as the school had an extended transition programme where Marley could spend a lot more time in the school in the lead up to make sure she felt comfortable with the changes coming.

Key Points

- 1** School staff were well trained and able to recognise potential signs of difficulties. They had a relationship with Marley’s family which enabled them to help Cath and Joseph to understand their concerns.
- 2** Cath found it most helpful to speak to someone she was close to about the experience and felt empowered to do her own research around the subject.
- 3** Marley’s high school had the infrastructure to be able to support an extended transition period which would meet her individual needs and allow her to remain in mainstream education.

“60% of our young participants mentioned a supportive person”



CURRENT PERCEIVED GAPS

This section explores the spaces where children and families feel there are gaps in support within their community and discusses needs they feel may be unmet by existing services or the wider community.

What adults told us



Mental Health Support

Parents and guardians across Wirral feel the biggest gaps are in mental health support, for children and young people, as well as themselves. Families want emotional support for the whole family, particularly around transition periods such as puberty and bereavement, and want practical support and resources or strategies that they can take away to try at home. **Parents still worry that asking for help or acknowledging that they are struggling will mean that social services will need to get involved.**

Alison, Mum to Caitlin (4) and Rex (2)

I had post-natal depression after my second baby and despite having been a school professional and knowing that Early Help wasn't about removing children, as soon as someone said to me 'I think it would be worth considering TAF for you and the family', I felt the blood drain from my face. I was scared even though I knew from my professional background that it was supposed to be helpful, I felt like she thought I couldn't cope.



Rigid Services

Families identified a **lack of awareness of the local support offer, alongside inflexible opening times of services and long waiting lists as gaps in support.** This contributes to families not being able to get the right support at the right time, due to work and school commitments, and trying to balance the needs of the whole family. Families turn to local hubs such as schools and the GP as a source of support, however they are not always equipped to support the diverse range of families' needs and are generally difficult to access outside of school or working hours.

Andrea, Mum to Jackson (7) and Amelia (3)

I think there are a lot of universal community services that we don't really know the scope of or don't hear much about until you're in need. For example, I didn't realise that you could still access the health visitor after the two-year check-up and I feel like the school nurse is inaccessible.



Experts by Experience

Some parents also felt as though they do not have enough opportunity to come together and share their parenting experiences with one another in a safe environment. Many adults told us that organised 'parenting courses' do not meet this need, as they do not want to be taught how to be a parent, as it feels judgemental and critical. **They want opportunities to develop and understand their children so that they can better meet their needs.**

Family Illness and Bereavement

56% of young people identified gaps in support **centred around the individual needs of their family.** 35% of these family-related needs were associated with a **lack of support for bereavement and parental/familial illness.** Young people feel that **there is little support or information for young people when their parents or guardians are unwell;** they are experiencing a great amount of hopelessness and helplessness. **When support is there, it is having a real impact.**

Emma, 17, Prenton

I have been a young carer for my mum throughout school and I have had some really good support along the way. There are three things that I think were really helpful for me and my mum. Barnardos were great, they worked with us both; educated me about my mum's health and helped mum to deal with me too. KidsTime offered space and time for me and Mum to be together in an environment that wasn't home which was nice. They even paid for the taxis to make it easy for us to get there and bought pizza for us to share. That gave us the opportunity for me to be a child and meant Mum didn't have to worry that we were on our own. Finally, my school: they were really understanding and helped me with life at home from a young age. They provided a counsellor and gave me time when I needed it.



Financial Worries

Gaps in support exacerbate a similar **lack of confidence or direction when a parent's capacity is overwhelmed,** with young people worrying that parental or siblings' health needs may put the family at financial risk. Young people expressed to us that they would not know who to talk to about it, telling us that they would not talk to a member of staff at school **as it would be embarrassing that their family were struggling.**



Balancing School and Home Life

Young people want help to manage school workloads, particularly around exam time. Young people suggested that they need more ways to step away from the stresses of school and want more opportunities for connecting with family. Young people perceived that there was a lack of meaningful employment opportunities following education. This finding relates strongly to the challenges young people mentioned around their worries about their future aspirations and the impact upon their mental health.



Mental Health

Mental health support was a common gap identified by children and young people and underpins many of the challenges young people and their families face. The young people we spoke to were open about needing emotional support and felt as though lower to mid-level needs were not being addressed or supported because services only support those who have severe mental illness. **Some young people have expressed that they feel as though they need to cause harm to themselves to get the support that they need.** Anxiety and low mood were mentioned in 40% of mental health needs.

Jamie, Aged 18

Schools are the prime place to have someone to talk to about things because we are there 24/7. There needs to be more compassion and empathy for young people, and shorter waiting times for support. I had a school counsellor, but there was one counsellor for close to 2000 pupils and if you don't click with that person then it's tough. There was always a line outside of her door; there needs to be a bigger pastoral team made up of people with different qualities. There's also no transition support from CAMHS to adult services, if you want to access services once you have turned 18, you have to source them yourself.



THE PICTURE OF EARLY HELP AT THE WARD/LOCALITY LEVEL

This section explores the differences and similarities across Wirral's various neighbourhoods to help us understand what more local, place-based Early Help support would need to consider.



BIRKENHEAD

Challenges

43% of people who told us mental health was a challenge were Birkenhead residents, more than any other area.

31% of people who highlighted social isolation as a problem were Birkenhead residents.

Many Birkenhead residents spoke of the additional stress they feel when caring for a child with additional needs.

Assets

Local organisations are playing a key role: the majority of people we spoke to in Birkenhead said that the opportunity to access a local service was of significant benefit to them. 32% of Birkenhead residents had accessed one or more local services that had helped them.

School is key: many people identified how either a lack of trust between themselves and school staff had been a barrier for them getting the right support, or how a good relationship with school staff had been an important facilitator.

10% of our Birkenhead residents had praised the support they had received from a **health visitor as a primary source of support for them.**

Maggie

Mum-of-two (Aged 3 and 4)

Maggie is a single mum and has fibromyalgia, depression and a history of self-harm. Maggie feels as though everything in her TAF meeting is centred around her son's suspected autism, when there are potentially other things that she may need support with. Maggie doesn't leave the house unless it is absolutely necessary as she doesn't feel confident in coping with both children at once.

I had positive experiences with *Safe Families for Children*, who gave us a volunteer to take us for days out or to the park and act as an extra pair of hands. I really liked that they would come round and find out what I needed and I built up good relationships with the volunteer. They would even just give me a call for a chat and to find out how I was doing.

Now that the children are both in school and pre-school, I feel less guilty about not taking them out and to the park a lot as I know they get a lot of chances to play at school. When one

of them was in nursery I could handle the other and vice versa but now that they both finish at the same time I get no time with either of them on their own. It can be so overwhelming. What I'd really like to see is more play centres and family centres as the ones that I know of are too far for me to travel to with the children. The bus would cost around £5 which I can't afford even if I felt confident in taking the children on the bus on my own.

I do go to a church group which I heard about from the *Community Connectors*. They have coffee mornings on and they are very supportive in helping out with the children if I turn up looking harassed. Recently I hadn't been for a week or so and the vicar rang to see how I was as they'd noticed I wasn't there. I explained that I didn't have a pram for the youngest and couldn't get there without one because of his additional needs, next thing I know he was ringing me back to say they had asked around and found a pram to donate to me. Small things like that just make such a huge difference.

Current perceived gaps

Whilst a large number of Birkenhead residents felt that accessing a local service had helped them, a larger number of Birkenhead residents said they were unaware of what local offers were available, suggesting that for many, **a major gap in current provision is simply the availability of information.**

39% of Birkenhead participants mentioned some form of **emotional support need that was currently going unmet.** Of those who discussed mental health concerns, **waiting times** for counselling and psychotherapy services were commonly mentioned.

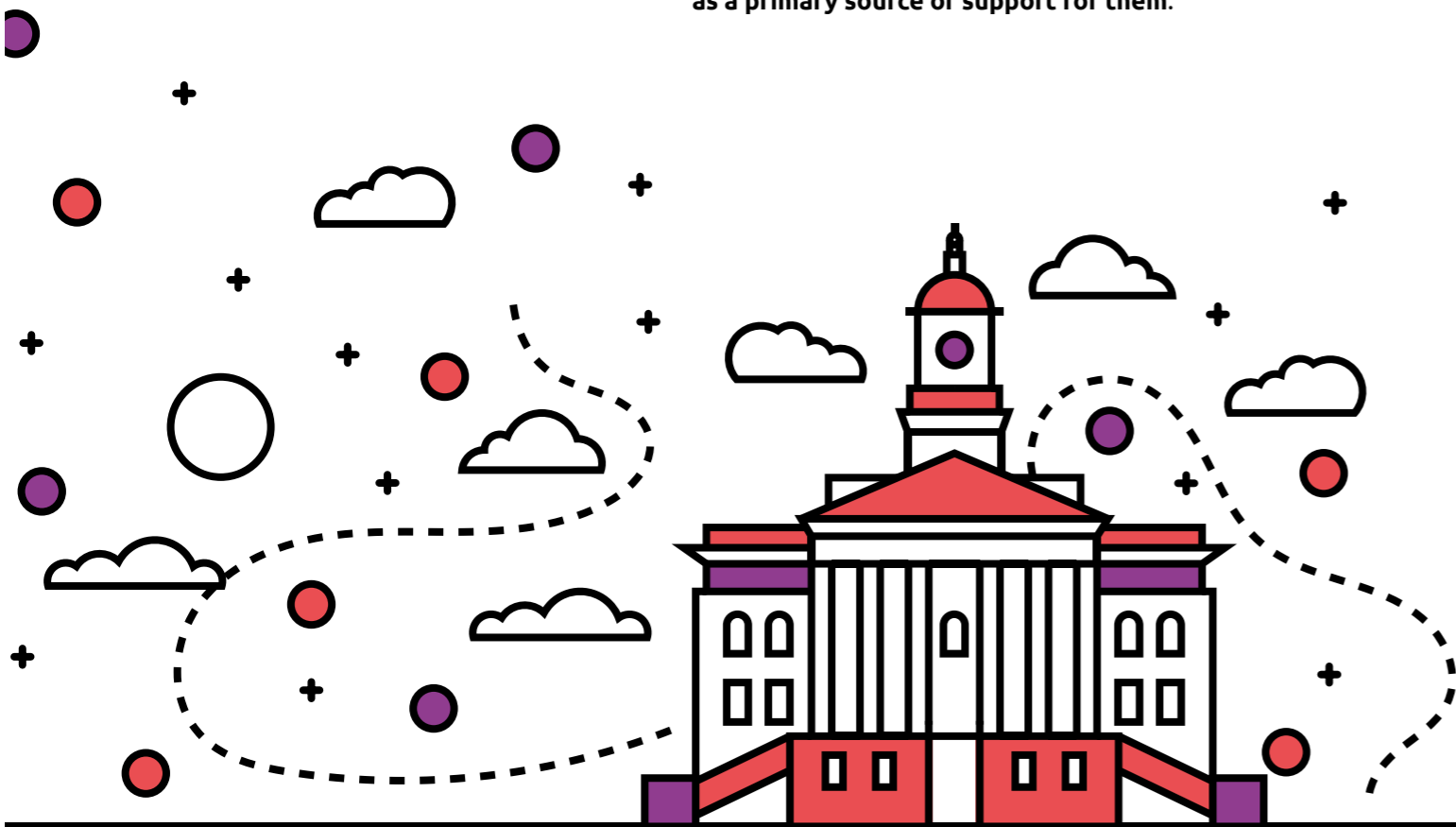
20% of Birkenhead residents mentioned **a lack of practical support, such as crèches or financial advice.** 52% of all Wirral residents who said practical support is lacking came from Birkenhead.

Hopes for Early Help

Young people we spoke to in Birkenhead were unanimously optimistic about the future. Many spoke of hopes for support that would **reduce family stresses** in the coming year, while others hoped for support to **improve their academic attainment.**

The adults we spoke to wanted **local transport improved**, with 18% of residents identifying travel and transport as a barrier.

Adults spoke of wanting Early Help services to be **more person-centred and asset based.** There was a feeling amongst these residents that their **experiences were sometimes devalued in favour of professional opinions** or check-box type exercises. This in turn left some feeling that their real needs had gone unnoticed or unmet.



WALLASEY Challenges

Social Isolation was most frequently mentioned by Wallasey residents. Unlike in Birkenhead, this did not coincide with mentions of mental health concerns. There was a perception amongst Wallasey residents that there is a lack of service or support in the area. 80% of those mentioning a lack of services were Wallasey residents. Unlike Birkenhead residents who mentioned a lack of information about services, Wallasey residents explicitly felt there are a lack of services to know about.

Assets

The majority of residents in Wallasey had accessed a service that had significantly helped them. However, unlike in Birkenhead, Wallasey residents are travelling out of area to access support. GPs are the first port of call; 36% of people in Wirral who named their GP as their primary source of support came from Wallasey.

Lou

Mum to James (10),
Alexia (8) and Max (5)

There isn't a lot on at the children's centres, the same with the libraries. A few years ago that is where people went to meet other new mums but they are closed a lot now and when they are open there isn't anything on that you can just turn up for anyway, you have to have been referred. Public transport is also a huge barrier; they have cancelled some of the routes and it is expensive and time consuming. It's okay if you have a car but otherwise it's a pain; I wanted to teach my kids to use public transport but it's so rubbish [that] it is more hassle than it's worth.

Parents and guardians are turning to schools and GPs for information about local opportunities and experiences for families, thus information needs to be consistent and clearly communicated by professionals working in these environments. The evolution of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) across Wirral could offer an opportunity for the developments of Early Help and PCNs to dovetail in the future.

Current perceived gaps

Local services aren't open at the right time: 16% of people from Wallasey said that a greater range of opening times is needed. This is a factor in Wallasey residents travelling out of area to access support.

A lack of peer-support: Wallasey residents felt that a lack of spaces or opportunities to bring together parents from the area affected the community's ability to support each other. Considering attendance at the GP tends to be higher here, could social prescribing play a key role in connecting people with peers?

A lack of affordable child-care: 13% of Wallasey residents relied on support from close friends and families as they couldn't find appropriate childcare.

Hopes for Early Help

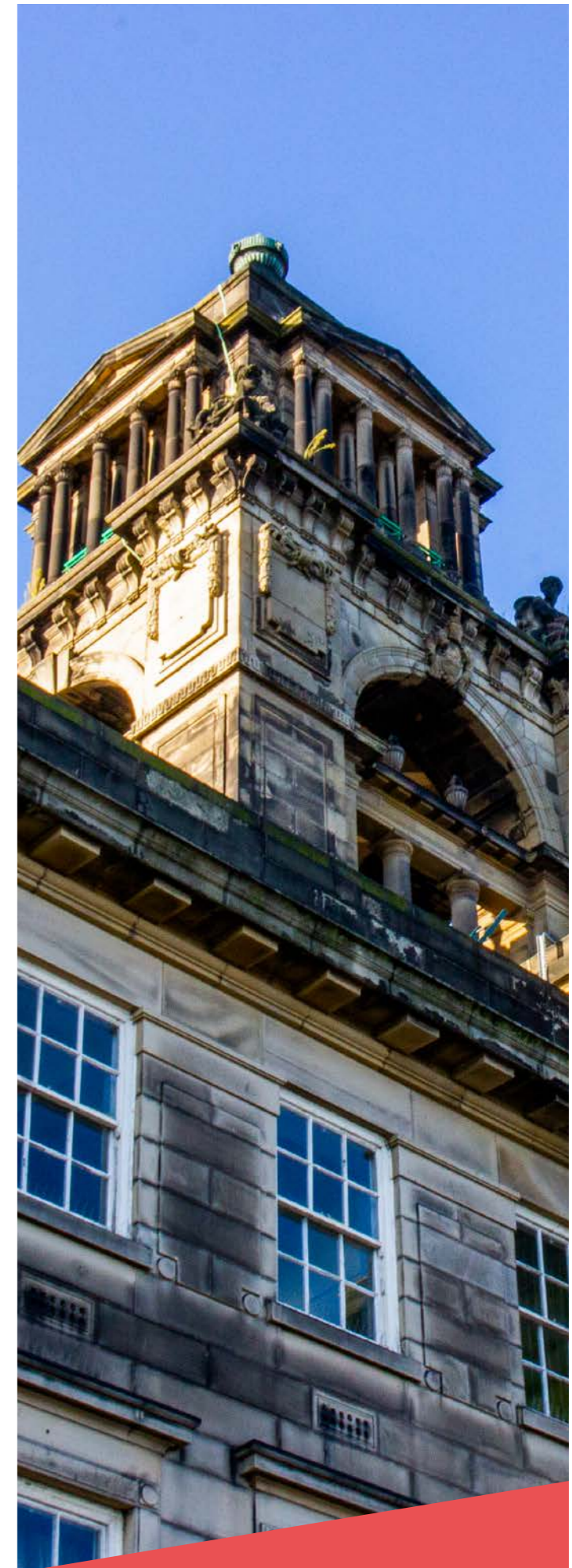
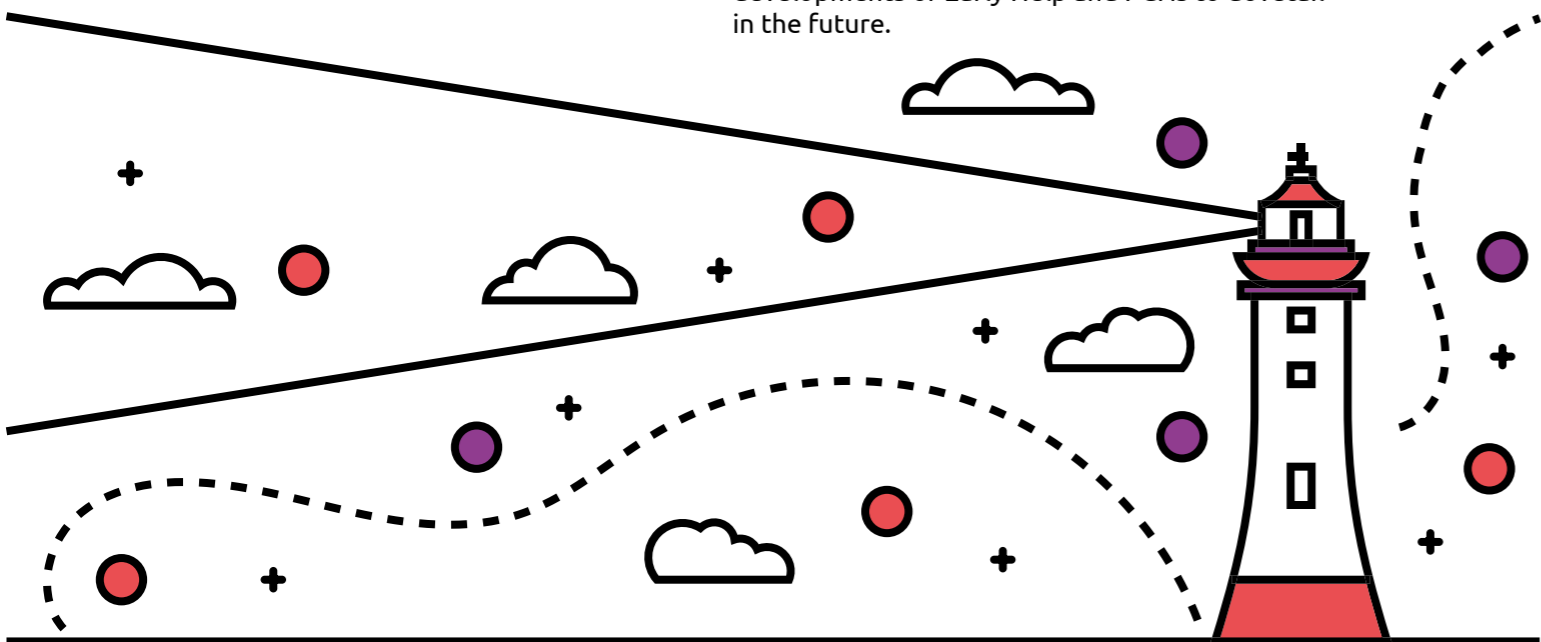
Wallasey residents want a **greater number and wider range of offers locally**. They want **shorter waiting lists** for support and **greater financial support, including financial advice**.

Lee

Dad to Saskia (12) & Joe (7)

We've started a *WhatsApp* group for the kids in our family and close friends to do lifts to Beavers/Scouts/football etc. That's been really helpful as we can all call upon each other.

We have found that there are lots of uniformed organisations that are great for children to take part in like Scouts or Cadets. However, there is a real stigma attached to going as people think that it is expensive because of the uniform and subs but there are financial support packages for families who aren't able to afford it, people just don't know about it.



WEST WIRRAL

Challenges

41% of West Wirral participants mentioned their own or their child's **mental health as a significant challenge**, the highest of any area.

33% discussed challenges involving **relationship breakdown or domestic violence**.

For families facing these hardships, they feel that accessing appropriate support, or forming trusting relationships with school and professionals is an additional challenge.

Assets

Many residents in West Wirral said **connecting with other parents was most beneficial** in challenging times and that they would like more opportunities to do this. West Wirral residents saw the building and preservation of **relationships between parents and professionals** (health and education) as the most important factor in successfully overcoming challenges, with 40% of people highlighting these relationships as an asset.

Current perceived gaps

Whole family support for children, young people, parents and grandparents, was mentioned by 18% of our West Wirral residents.

27% said they would like greater access to emotional support, while 18% said they would like greater access to practical support.

The need for more financial advice and support was identified by 10% of our West Wirral sample.

Hopes for Early Help

28% of West Wirral residents would like greater consistency in the frontline service staff they see. These residents identified staffing changes as a barrier to getting the help they need, stating that it left their care feeling impersonal.

28% residents felt that their needs had gone unrecognised and hoped that Early Help would be more responsive and person-centred.

29 Steph West Wirral

“

Please be mindful of the fear I have of having my children taken away from me. My default thought? I am the world's worst parent and you can't tell someone otherwise if that's how we feel.

My husband and I have three beautiful children; a son aged 11, a daughter aged 9 and our youngest son aged 6. I have recently been diagnosed with ADHD which has been a huge challenge in itself.

We are currently waiting 35 weeks for a paediatrician appointment due to the behavioural difficulties of my eldest son. He was born premature and from a very early age, he has exhibited signs of both high functioning Autism and ADHD, such as repetitive behaviours in play and day to day life, increasingly violent meltdowns, issues with toileting and high levels of restlessness and anxiety. School have been supportive but we have had to push for a referral as he is bright and academic. His need for control and constant attention has made family life extremely difficult over the years, especially for his siblings who bear the brunt of his meltdowns. My daughter suffers

from anxiety and low self-esteem as a result, and my youngest son also shows signs of being on the spectrum. I am a teacher used to dealing with challenging children, but when they are your own, it is exhausting and isolating.

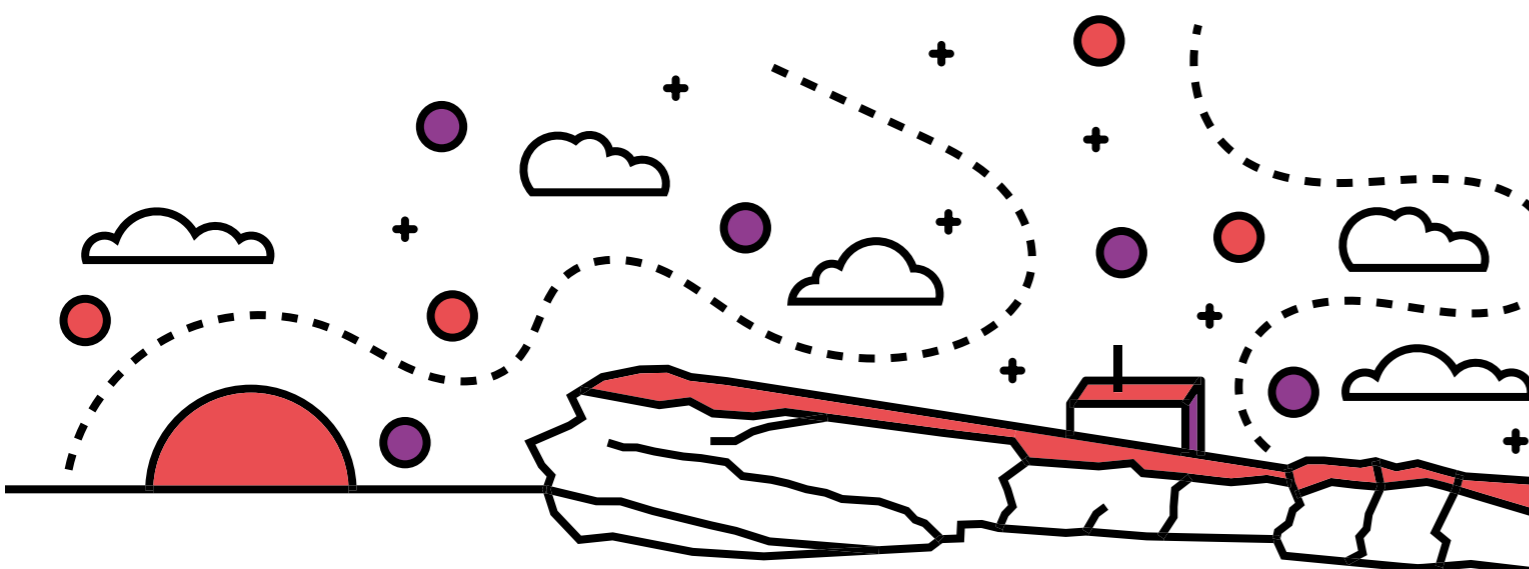
There seems to be very little help available. We have been turned down by CAMHS, and yet we all need help to move forward as a family and help our children effectively manage their emotions. My son is due to move to secondary school soon, and I am already concerned about how he will cope with the transition, especially without a diagnosis. The stress is taking its toll on all of us both physically and mentally, but I also know that we are one of so many families struggling to cope while on the Autism / ADHD pathway.

What is helping

- Making connections with other local families raising children with additional needs
- Strong local friendships and a network of support with childcare
- Being honest about the challenges we face
- Courses run by the ADHD Foundation
- Getting my own diagnosis and realising that through no fault of my own, my brain works differently just like my boys
- Time out
- Speaking to a CAMHS psychologist and being given some strategies to manage violent meltdowns
- Emotional support for all my children at school

What else would help

- Support from an ADHD specialist, especially for my husband
- Sibling support for my daughter who is anxious and stressed
- Respite / stress-free time out
- A clearer pathway. I have had to fight for my child every step of the way so far, despite being told when he was born that likely to be behavioural issues due to his low birth weight.
- I need CAMHS to answer the phone when I ring
- Well publicised strategies about meeting the needs of multiple children e.g. dealing with meltdowns and violence towards siblings
- Finally, I want a diagnosis so that the behaviour of my boys is recognised as symptomatic of a neurological condition and that they deserve love and support, not blame and judgement from others. I also want help to improve the self-esteem of everyone in my family



SOUTH WIRRAL

Challenges

36% of South Wirral adults feel their own, or their child's **mental health** is a significant challenge.

22% of South Wirral residents also described **struggling with their physical health**, the only ward this theme appeared in.

Bereavement was a common challenge, presenting in 14% of South Wirral interviews.

Assets

Similar to Wallasey, 29% of South Wirral residents stated that their **GP was their primary source of support** and that interactions with their GP were amongst the most helpful they had received. Almost 10% of South Wirral participants mentioned specific instances of **good communication (e.g. opening times, good advice, etc.) from service providers as a significant help to them**, the highest of any ward.

Current perceived gaps

South Wirral residents want greater practical support during difficult times. Communities in South Wirral also want more emotional support, describing a gap in opportunities to form local friendships. Residents described a lack of close friendships between parents in the area.

Hopes for Early Help

38% of South Wirral residents want to see a **greater range of support offers in the area**. These residents felt that, while there was support available in the area, many offers were specialised or didn't meet their needs.

25% felt that the support they received felt like a "check-box exercise". Residents want **support to be more flexible and person-centred, taking into account the unique needs of their family**.

“

Just having adult company is support enough sometimes! Having a baby can be the loneliest time.

Jenny & Ian Bebington

Just having adult company is support enough sometimes! Having a baby can be the loneliest time. We used to have a tea and toast group where a few of us would go and take the toddlers and we would take it in turns in pairs to go outside the playroom and have a cup of tea and some toast for 15 minutes (and be able to eat and drink them whilst still hot!) while the other mums would watch your baby – then rotate. *The Delamere Centre* is good – and there are One Stop Shops at some of the libraries. The cafe at *Mothercare* in Bromborough has some facilities for babies too and there are more mums and tots groups in Bromborough.

Stay and play/settling in sessions at school were great, you would get chance to speak to other parents and the children had a bit of a staggered approach to school days. My son cried every single day I dropped him off until he was in Year two. I sat and cried in the car every time I dropped him off. What seemed to help was taking him to social groups outside of school where he could build his confidence but it becomes very expensive if you have to take them to two or three groups a week, and that's if you only have one child, what about if you have more than one?



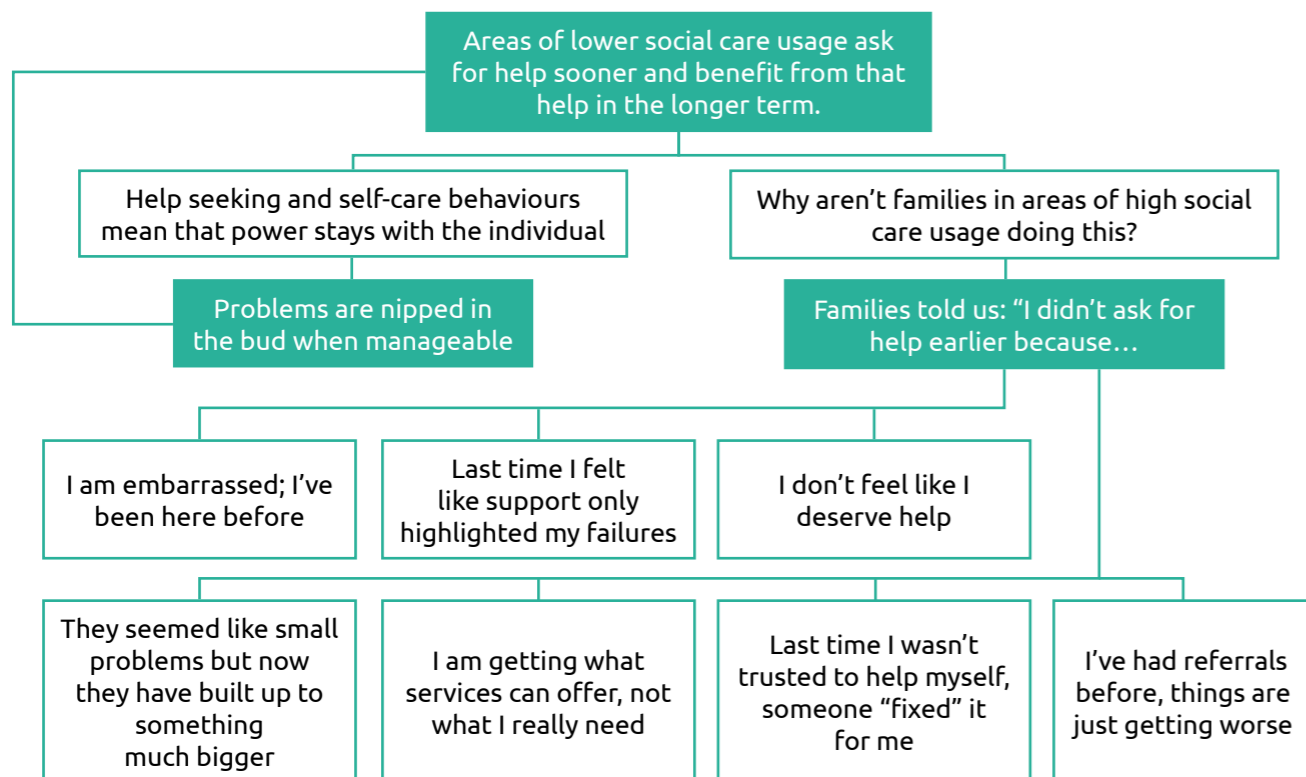
COMMUNITY DEEP DIVE: LEARNING FROM LSOAS

To ensure learning about what does and doesn't work can be built into the new service design, we conducted deep dive engagement in 10 Wirral LSOAs. All the areas had high rates of deprivation, yet 5 of the areas had far fewer families in social care. We were keen to understand what is keeping these families out of the social care system:

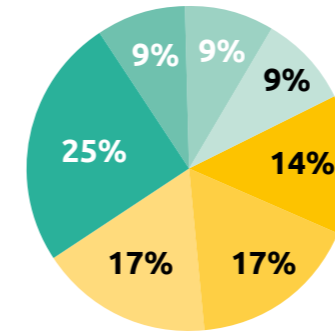
To gain a wide picture of each LSOA, alongside speaking to families and members of the community, we looked at data held about the local area, such as the amount of green space in the area or the presence of betting shops or licensed premises.

- Are families facing different types of problems in different LSOAs?
- Are there particular gaps in support in certain communities?
- What role do community assets play in helping families to thrive?

What did we learn?



32 Challenges in areas of high social care usage

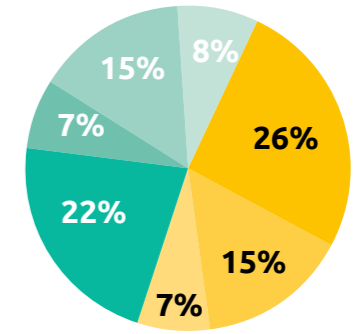


- Relationships and Comms
- Environment
- Pressures of Parenting
- Additional Needs
- Other
- Mental Health
- Accessibility

Across all 10 LSOAs, people described similar gaps in support

- Emotional support and encouragement
- Information sharing and joined up working
- Professional knowledge
- Communication of what's on in the local area
- Affordable varied activities for the whole family
- Groups which prepare you for the reality of having a baby
- Effective signposting
- Adult mental health support
- Spaces for young people to hang out which aren't focused around sport or specific 'activities'

Challenges in areas of lower social care usage



- Relationships and Comms
- Pressures of parenting
- Additional Needs
- Environment
- Other
- Finances
- Accessibility

In addition, people living in areas with high levels of social care usage feel there are gaps in:

- LGBTQ+ support (particularly for SEND young people)
- Good links between adult social care and children's services.
- Practical support to manage additional needs (incl. hands on support and access to affordable equipment)
- Community/ plain clothes Police/Social Workers
- Adult mental health support
- Environmental initiatives


In Summary:

1. Areas of higher social care usage are more densely populated with community assets, organisations and children's centres
 - Families from areas of high social care usage identified assets within the community which were more targeted services such as *Safe Families for Children*, *Involve North West* or the women's refuge.
 - Families from areas of lower social care usage were more likely to identify universal services, such as libraries, beaches, parks, or faith groups as assets which could help families thrive.
2. The types of challenges faced by families in the 10 LSOAs did not vary significantly, although the overall number of challenges identified was higher in areas of high social care usage.
3. Families from areas of lower social care usage have better local social relationship scores, higher belonging scores and have more green space. They also have less community needs (as scored by community needs index).
4. Areas of lower social care usage are also less densely populated with licensed premises, betting shops and takeaways.

1.


Insights from families in areas of high social care usage

BIRKENHEAD CENTRAL


 **Key Challenges**

We can often feel unheard and we are trying to address multiple challenges at the same time, such as:


- Issues with our housing
- A lack of childcare options
- Keeping ourselves and our families safe
- Supporting our children who have additional needs

 **Current perceived gaps**

- Environmental initiatives in the local area
- Appropriate housing solutions that meet our needs.

 **Assets**

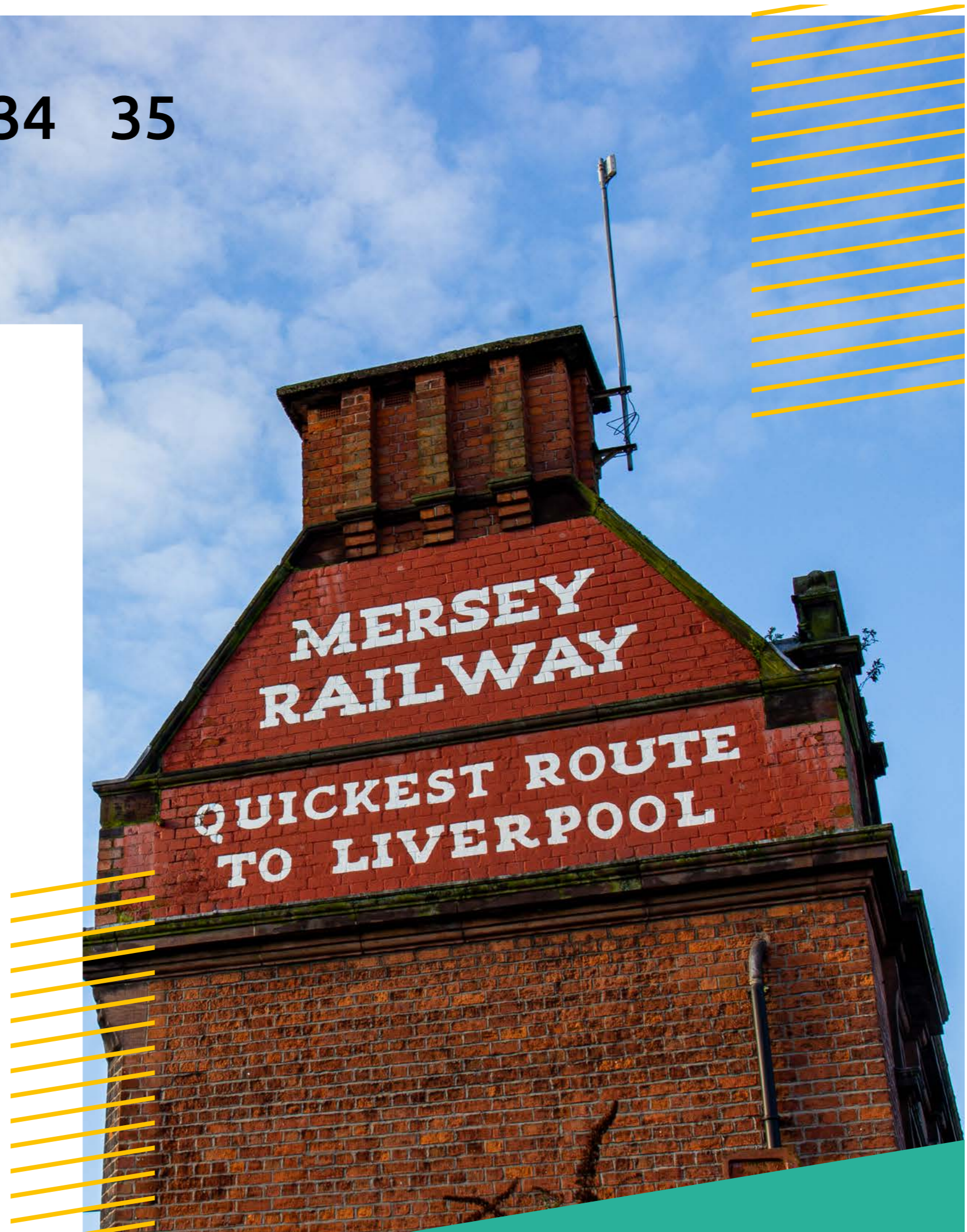
- We have lots of love and support from family, friends, professionals and members of the community.
- There are some fantastic hubs within the community which offer experiences for families to take part in.

 **Aspirations for early help**

- For it to be encouraging, warm and led by what we need
- For services to be coordinated and work in a joined-up way.

“
We like coming here and being with our friends and working on our music; we feel supported to work towards our goals.

- Group of young people from *The Hive*



2.

Insights from families in areas of high social care usage

BIDSTON ST. JAMES EAST

Key Challenges

We don't know where to go for help when it comes to many of our challenges, such as:

- Managing our mental health and social isolation
- Coping with additional caring responsibilities
- Domestic abuse
- Developmental delays in our children

Current perceived gaps

- Good links between Adult Social Care and Children's Services
- Safe places for families to go following domestic abuse
- Respite opportunities from caring responsibilities

Assets

- There are some lovely places to visit locally such as Birkenhead Park and the St. James' Centre
- Our own networks of family and friends and our online communities too
- Local children's centres and schools.

Aspirations

- For it to be consistent, informative and well publicised
- For support to be trauma informed
- We want to be able to take part in experiences as a family which are varied across times and days.



“
When we don't have extended family support I don't know anywhere to go for help when I've got the baby.”



Insights from families in areas of high social care usage

SEACOMBE ST. PAUL'S



Key Challenges

We feel unprepared for the intense demands of parenthood, in particular:

- The impact of parenting upon our relationships, mental health and finances
- Feelings of social isolation
- Navigating pathways if our children have additional needs of any kind



Current perceived gaps

- Affordable, local and varied activities and experiences for our whole family to take part in
- Groups after school and work which help families to prepare for the changes a new baby will bring
- Support with breastfeeding and weaning and the impact on wellbeing.



Assets

- We love family activities such as reading groups, the free museums in Liverpool, woodland walks and going to the beach
- We have good relationships with the people around us
- The health visitor drop in service



Aspirations

- For it to be local, affordable and well communicated
- For it to offer us a host of opportunities to spend time together as a whole family

Lisa

Life with a new baby

I've always been around babies, always looked after other people's babies, but nothing prepares you for your own. I had an infection following my c-section and I desperately wanted to breastfeed, but my daughter would not latch. I've been exclusively pumping since my daughter was born and I'm still pumping now, it's even harder than breastfeeding as even when my daughter is sleeping I have to wake up every four hours to pump, and then clean and sterilise the pump and then she needs feeding again. One of the hardest things is not being able to pick her up while I'm pumping.

My health visitor (HV) sent me to my GP as she felt as though my mood was very low and I seemed to be very down. I had noticed this myself but I never would have done anything about it because it's just another thing to sort. It's like the HV's suggestion gave me permission to go and it felt like it was okay to get help for yourself and not just your baby. I would say to other mums: don't be afraid to ask for help. What I really wanted from support as a new parent was someone to reassure me that I am doing a good job and to tell me to keep going, someone who understands the lengths you

have gone to, to get to where you are now and celebrate the little wins. On a recent visit from a *Home-Start* family support worker, I got the opportunity to make myself some hot toast with butter, and enjoy it while it was still hot. I can't remember the last time I ate toast that was actually hot!

“

I would say to other mums: don't be afraid to ask for help. What I really wanted from support as a new parent was someone to reassure me that I am doing a good job and to tell me to keep going.



CAPACITY

4.

Insights from families in areas of high social care usage

BIRKENHEAD EAST FLOAT

Key Challenges

We find managing additional needs within the family a challenge, whether they are physical or mental health related. This experience can be made worse by:

- Poor accessibility
- Lack of transport
- Broken down relationships with our families or professionals

Current perceived gaps

- Support to take children out when additional needs are involved (either our own or of a child)
- Support around understanding our children's behaviour and opportunities to spend 1:1 time with our children
- Affordable equipment for SEND children, such as prams for children with additional needs

Assets

- We enjoy making the most of our surroundings including, Birkenhead Park, Churches and school coffee mornings
- There are some wonderful services such as sensory play groups, *Tomorrow's Women Wirral*, *Safe Families for Children* and Wirral Council's Early Help (TAF)

Aspirations

- For it to be non-judgemental, open and supportive: both practically and emotionally
- For it to offer local and accessible solutions and experiences which takes into account the needs of parents and siblings too



41

5.

Insights from families in areas of high social care usage

HAMILTON SQUARE

Key Challenges

We are worried to ask for help in case it leads to our children being taken away. The types of challenges we are worried about seeking support for are:

- Mental health
- Substance misuse and addiction
- Domestic abuse
- Bereavement
- Additional needs

Current perceived gaps

- Local support, all under one roof where children are welcome or crèche facilities are available.
- Support and signposting around adult mental health

Assets

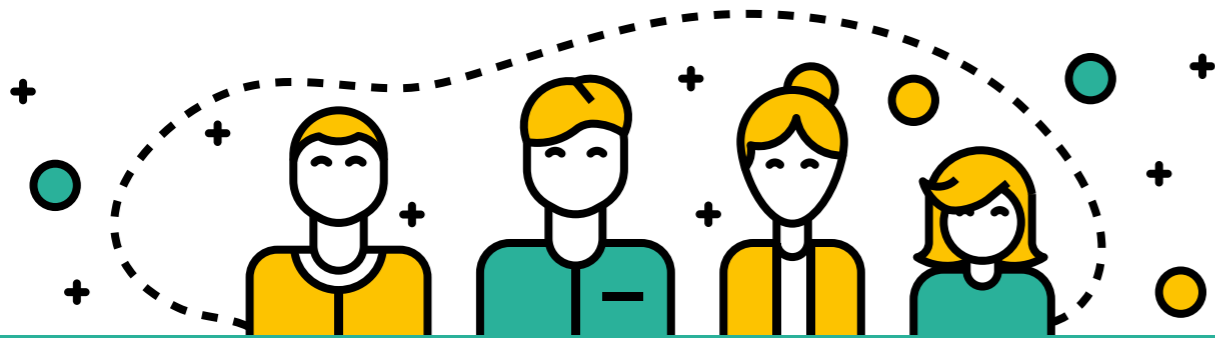
- Supportive relationships with health professionals
- Services such as *Involve North West*, the women's refuge and *Creative Youth Development*

Aspirations

- For it to offer informal and safe places for us to ask for help
- For it to support our whole family
- For there to be a strong community support presence, like plain clothes police officers and social workers who are based in the community.



OUR FAMILY



Dad (Tom) Mum (Sue), and their children, Peter (19) and Ashleigh (14), live in Birkenhead. Sue has anxiety and a physical health condition which limits her mobility and both Peter and Ashleigh have additional needs.

Peter's journey (age 19)

When Peter was a baby he never cried and he never really played either, although he was very fast in his development. This was the first sign for us that he was different from other children. He also had difficulties at nursery and seemed to develop incredibly fast. We didn't initially think he was autistic, but we weren't sure. Peter was assessed by an Educational Psychologist and CAMHS completed an assessment for autism and social communication disorder. Following Peter's diagnosis, we paid privately for a sensory integration (SI) assessment. This was really helpful as it gave us specific exercises and routines for Peter's hyperstimulation which really benefit him.

It was a lot of money but the waiting list for an NHS assessment is particularly long as there are limited staff trained in SI.

Something we have found challenging in getting support for Peter over the years is that as soon as organisations/professionals hear he has a diagnosis, they say that is the cause of any other issues and refer us to *Autism Together*. This is inaccessible to us because my wife has reduced mobility so when I'm at work they wouldn't be able to attend.



Our children have additional needs; they are also both really nice kids. The focus for us has always been about the social side of their lives. They have always been academic, and we have always known they could achieve whatever they set out to, but we chose their schools based on the pastoral offer. We wanted them to be able to have relationships, they both have good groups of friends and they are both very kind. Ashleigh loves helping out at the Brownies and does a lot for her mum and Peter is becoming very independent which we are incredibly proud of.

Ashleigh's journey (age 14)

Ashleigh has diagnoses of ADHD, ASD, ODD and Sensory Dysfunction. Ashleigh struggles with impulse control (risk taking behaviours), anxiety, friendships and concentration. From age three we could tell she had trouble managing her emotions, particularly anger. We had a referral to CAMHS quite early, and she had the assessment for ADHD, then she was put on medication at age six. We noticed a huge difference in her behaviour once she was on medication and her schoolwork and concentration improved. Her language development flagged an assessment for Autism, and she was later diagnosed. In the past 18 months Ashleigh has been exploring her gender. We have been told that this is 'common' for girls of her age who are autistic, and we have had no support other than to be told 'it's probably just a phase'. We want to be supportive and able to help but we aren't really sure where to turn.

"Our children have additional needs; they are also both really nice kids. The focus for us has always been about the social side of their lives. They have always been academic, and we have always known they could achieve whatever they set out to, but we chose their schools based on the pastoral offer. We wanted them to be able to have relationships and they both have good groups of friends and they are both very kind. Ashleigh loves helping out at the Brownies and does a lot for her mum and Peter is becoming very independent which we are incredibly proud of."

What has helped?



Having a single contact to go to gives us confidence that someone is there when we need them



Counselling support for Sue



The Sensory Integration assessment

What we need

1. Support which is:

- Led by needs, not the diagnosis
- Local
- Individual: We want somewhere the children could go where they are understood as individuals with their own likes, dislikes and needs.

2. Full and proper assessments which are well coordinated then recommendations to be outlined in a report which is given to us to refer back to.
3. We would like activities not based around sport. Somewhere where we have a shared interest with other young people but not focused on our diagnosis.
4. Time for dad to do something by himself, even just go to the allotment.

6.

Insights from families in areas of lower social care usage

EGREMONT PROMENADE SOUTH

Key Challenges

Our main challenges are focused around the impact of the following on family life:

- Lack of childcare
- Relationship breakdown
- Closure of facilities in the area

Current perceived gaps

- Activities for us to do together as a family and to promote the parent relationship
- Specific groups for particular needs, such as support with twins or home education
- Practical support groups which Dads feel comfortable and able to attend

Assets

- Our own networks of family and friends within the community are our main source of support.
- We love libraries, art galleries, and local woodland areas as well as home-based activities such as board games, crafts and baking.

Aspirations

- For it to focus on helping us to strengthen relationships within our family
- For it to be a community based approach.

“As a single dad, I’d like to see more groups which enable us to come together and help us to learn about the practical things about raising children that you don’t know before you do it.”





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Insights from families in areas of lower social care usage

BEECHWOOD SOUTH

Key Challenges

We find it difficult to overcome barriers to accessing support such as lack of transport and poor communication with and between professionals. Some of the things we need support with include:

- Managing additional needs
- Managing finances
- Spending quality time with our children

Current perceived gaps

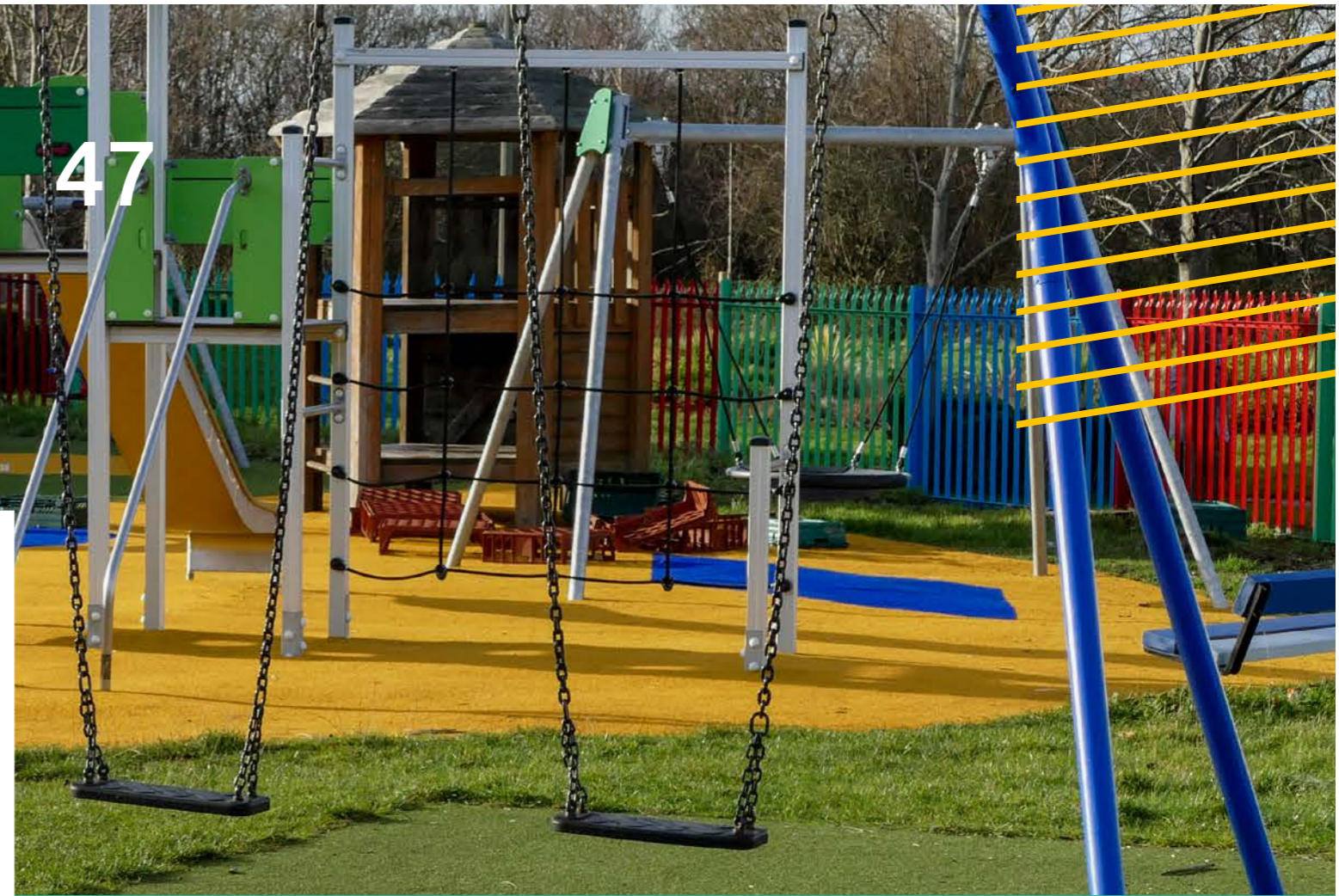
- Age specific and aspirational clubs and activities for children and young people to get involved in such as accessible swimming facilities
- Indoor places for teenagers to spend time together
- Support for homeless people
- Clear communication of what's on in the local area and across Wirral.

Assets

- Neighbours, family, and friends are important to us, and we use social media to find support groups and help ourselves
- Schools, GPs and health visitors
- Parks, beaches and sports clubs.

Aspirations

- For it to be kind, colourful and fun
- For it to be inclusive, accessible and safe



Charlotte

Life at home

I live on The Beechwood with my three kids. I had a support worker come in a while ago to help out with getting the place in order.

I knew the house was an absolute mess; our clothes were stained and my children would often get comments from other children at school but I had so many other things to think about I didn't think it was that important to begin with. I'd been scared we were going to lose the house completely, so I thought it didn't matter. We were given a support worker who came in and sat with us to figure out what we needed; a washing machine, vacuum cleaner and to get the house to a clean state so that it was easier to maintain because it was so overwhelming that I didn't know where to start.

The support worker did all of that, bought us a washing machine and a vacuum, helped to tidy and clean, we even had a photo taken at the end to show what a great job had been done. Today the house is a mess again because what

they didn't help me with was understanding how often to clean, how to use the washing machine and things like that. I've no real routine so it all just built up again and over time has ended up in the same state it was before. I'm too embarrassed to ask for help again.

Key Points

- 1** Charlotte's underlying needs were not recognised, she felt 'done to' by professionals which left her feeling disempowered and embarrassed
- 2** An improved model of Early Help must address the root cause of problems, whatever they may be, as opposed to treating the symptoms.



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Insights from families in areas of lower social care usage

LINGHAM PARK EAST AND WEST



Key Challenges

We worry about the impact of the challenges we face on our children and we can feel like there is a lack of community to support us with difficulties such as:

- Domestic abuse
- Poor parental physical health
- Poverty
- Social isolation



Current perceived gaps

- Indoor, safe spaces for young people which don't revolve around activities
- Support and communication from school
- Opportunities to integrate into the community if you are from outside of the area



Assets

- Activities at the children's centre for families with young children
- *Tomorrow's Women Wirral*
- Wirral Council Early Help service.



Aspirations

- For it to be connected and to connect us to others
- For it to offer opportunities to improve our own life skills, such as knowledge and understanding of housing and finances.

Scott

Aged 15

I grew up in Moreton, the community there are very together; everyone knows each other and helps each other out. I think it was hard growing up though, especially for my mum; she had me when she was 16 and we lived with my nan until my mum met my stepdad. When my little sister was born I remember I slept on a mattress in the living room until we could afford to move out.

I want to be an Engineer when I leave college so that I don't have to worry about money, I'll probably invest some money too so that I always have something to fall back on.

I'd like it if there was more for young people in my area, it's not very young person friendly. We need somewhere to be able to go and chill which is indoors but not specific 'activities'.

“ [We want] something like how adults go to a pub, it's warm and dry and you can just catch up with people, but obviously no alcohol! We don't want to hang about outside but there's nowhere else to go.





Insights from families in areas of lower social care usage

NOCTORUM CENTRAL

Key Challenges

Our key challenges centre around parenthood and the varied difficulties being a parent brings. In particular:

- Being a young parent
- Sleep
- Breastfeeding difficulties
- Social isolation

Current perceived gaps

- Support for difficult life events that everyone will experience at some point such as a new baby or a bereavement
- Peer support
- Opportunities to learn how best to support teenagers

Assets

- People within our community; we are very accepting and understand that everyone needs help sometimes.
- Information is shared well within our community
- Church and charity ran play groups, breastfeeding groups
- Cubs and Scouts

Aspirations

- For it to make use of brilliant people and organisations locally
- For it to focus on listening to our community
- For it to offer us face to face opportunities to build quality relationships in an organic way

51 Families living in areas of lower social care usage have more positive experiences of accessing support within their community.



CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this report was to pull together the experiences of children and families across Wirral in order to understand what they want and need from an effective Early Help service in the future.

There wasn't a single person that we spoke to who said they had never asked for help. Many had sought support from those around them, and this had prevented everyday challenges from escalating into issues which could have had the potential to consume or overwhelm their lives. Feeling connected to and supported by other people in the community is absolutely key; Early Help must build and nurture relationships.

What does an improved model of Early Help need to address?

An Early Help offer in Wirral needs to address a range of family challenges, particularly:

- Poor mental health, for both children and adults
- Social isolation
- Supporting a child with additional needs, particularly pre-diagnosis
- Managing times of human transitions, particularly:
 - Becoming a new parent (e.g. classes that prepare you for the reality of life with a new baby)
 - Starting a new school
 - Coping with bereavement and loss
- Domestic abuse in the family
- The impact of trauma across the life cycle

What do families want Early Help to be like?



Empower me



Be local to me



Communicate with me



Support my whole family



Inspire me



Connect me

"An **empowering model** that builds on my strengths and offers me and my family the **knowledge and tools to help myself and others** around me."

"Help that doesn't look or feel like a statutory service: **fear-free**, delivered by someone I can develop a personal relationship with, in an environment where I am comfortable and welcome."

"**Quick, immediate help, close to my home**, so that transport does not become a barrier. Make my first contact count and ideally, let me access support under one roof, before our challenges are overwhelming."

"More opportunities to build **meaningful social connections with people in my community** in a similar life situation to me so that we can share our experiences and support each other."

"**Great communication** so I know what support is out there and do not have to keep repeating my story to different organisations and professionals."

"**Aspirational experiences** that my whole family can take part in, **together.**"

"Services and organisations that **listen** to what I need and want and **respond flexibly and creatively.**"

"Experiences that **help my mum and dad** to look after themselves **so that they can look after me.**"

"Young people are given **room for second chances** and experiences that build my confidence, so I believe in myself."

What families DO NOT want

1. Families do not want to be frightened
2. Families do not want to lose confidence or feel ashamed about their problems
3. Families do not want to be 'done to'
4. Families do not want the blame to be placed on their children
5. Families do not want to sit on a waiting list or be told their situation is not 'severe' enough
6. Families do not want a scattergun approach to referrals, they want to be considered as individuals



"**Change the language around Early Help – it is there to hold you up. It sounds like you only get a 'referral' when there is a problem, but we all need help at some points in our lives.**"

What are the main barriers we need to overcome?

Fear and Shame

The new Early Help model must remove stigma and be accessible to all. It must inspire hope and positivity, so that families aren't scared or embarrassed to engage when they need to.

Wrong Time, Wrong Place

Families want Early Help support that is closer to home, preventing the need for costly travel and transport. Wirral communities want groups and activities that are inclusive for the whole family and that take place throughout the week, including evenings, weekends and school holidays so that work and other commitments are not a barrier.

Communicating Too Late, or Not at All

Communication about what's out there must improve. Many parents have expressed their frustration that they didn't know what support was out there until their problems had escalated.

Diagnosis-dependant support

Families want a true diagnosis that supports them to understand, provide for and access support for their child which is led by the individual needs of their children and family.

SO, WHAT NEXT?

This will be a radical departure from the current Early Help service and it is not a straightforward shift. Over the next 12 months, Capacity will work with partners across the community to:



Co-design a new model with communities, funders and the Local Authority.



Test what works before rolling out larger scale pilots.



Develop a collective funding model that increases the investment available to Early Help and powers a more collaborative, responsive way of working across communities.



Explore how technology can maximise the impact of Early Help.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Capacity: The Public Services Lab would like to offer our sincere thanks to all the parents, carers, young people and members of the community who shared their experiences with the team, without whom this report would not be possible.

The case studies in this report come from direct conversations between members of the Wirral community and Capacity's staff team. Names

and identifiable information have been changed to preserve anonymity. Whilst each person's experiences and opinions have been recounted with as much accuracy as possible, due to the nature of unstructured question and answer conversations, some sentences have been reconstructed to allow individuals' stories to be told fluidly and in first person.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Capacity was founded in 2015 from a unique partnership between Catch22, Amberside Advisors, Interserve PLC and Big Society Capital. Our mission is to rethink public services by:

- Supporting voluntary sector organisations to secure funding, run efficiently and design person-centred services.
- Partnering with commissioners to make public sector contracts more accessible to voluntary sector organisations.
- Working with philanthropic funders to ensure brilliant organisations have the funding they need to support our communities both now and into the future.

Since its incorporation, Capacity has secured more than £38.5 million in commissioned contracts and £1.5 million in grant funding for charities and social enterprises in England and Wales. In early 2019, we secured a second round of investment of £800,000 from Big Society Capital. By April 2019, we had secured contracts to provide business support for fifty GP practices in the Liverpool City Region, as well as taking over management of three GP surgeries in Wrexham, Wales in conjunction with Community Care Collaborative CIC.

Ultimately, Capacity exists to improve outcomes for every individual by building happy, healthy and resilient communities.

For more information about Capacity, visit capacitylab.co.uk.

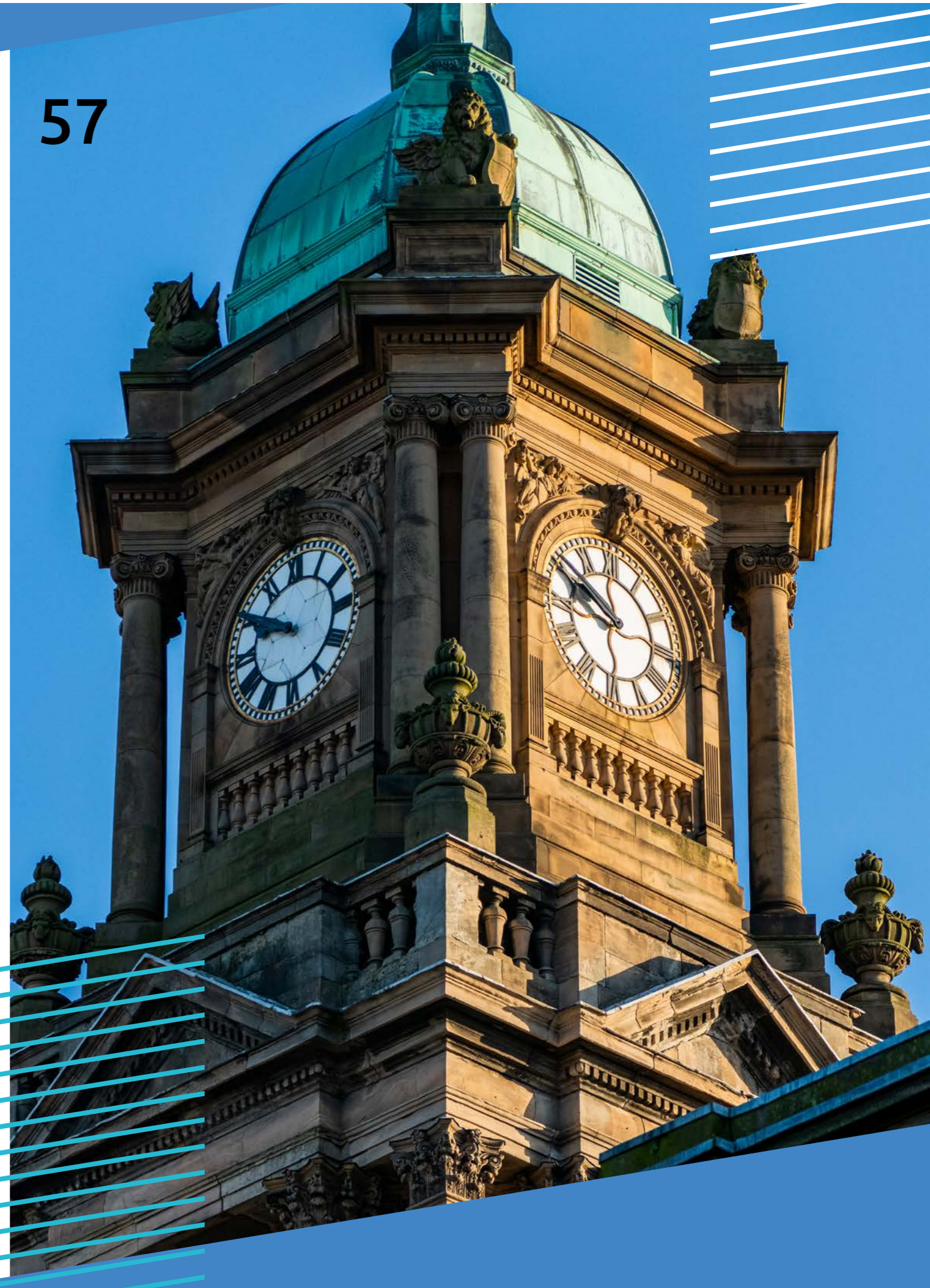
For more information about Early Help in Wirral visit

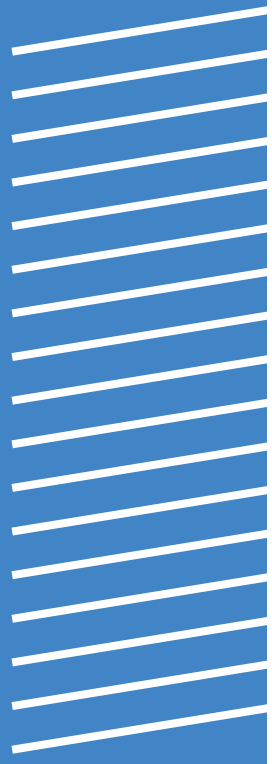
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/childrens-social-care/early-help>

or

<https://www.wirralsafeguarding.co.uk/professionals/what-is-early-help/>

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