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Knowsley

A complementary local report to the Cheshire & Merseyside (C&M) Early Mental Health System Review -
“Seen, Heard, Supported? Young Voices, Local Services”

On behalf of:



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Foreword

What an incredible year of action, commissioned by the Cheshire & Merseyside Directors of Children's Services, the nine Local Authorities, and the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside ICB. This work responds to a clear and urgent need to address rising demand in children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. We must act earlier, more decisively, and together.

The Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Faith sector is a vital partner in this endeavour. I am proud that we committed funding to enable the sector not only to contribute to this work, but to lead it. The scale and depth of this review are impressive, with over 480 services mapped and the voices of more than 1,000 children and young people shaping its findings. The result is a report that is rich in insight, grounded in lived experience, and firmly focused on solutions.

The report is clear about gaps in current provision and the need to strengthen and grow models that are already working well. Above all, it reinforces the importance of supporting children and young people in the here and now. It will not surprise many of us that young people want different approaches, delivered in different ways and settings. What comes through overwhelmingly is their preference for non-clinical, flexible, and relational support rooted in their communities.

This is a powerful call to ensure that our collective investment is balanced across prevention, early intervention, and statutory services. Getting this balance right will reduce escalation, avoid unnecessary statutory involvement, and, quite simply, change lives.

This report would not have been possible without the commitment and trust of our voluntary sector partners. Their deep connections within communities enabled us to hear from children and young people whose voices too often go unheard within statutory systems. They helped surface services that are rarely captured within formal databases and were honest about the challenges they face: limited capacity, short-term funding cycles, and a lack of infrastructure to consistently evidence and share their impact. These realities are not peripheral to the findings; they are central to them.

What this report asks of us is simple, but not easy. It challenges us to act as one system across Cheshire & Merseyside so that every child and young person, wherever they live and whenever they need help, can access timely, early support without barriers or delay. It reinforces the value of local, accessible spaces and the importance of maximising the community assets we already have.

This is a timely and important report. Need is rising, the evidence is clear, and national policy is increasingly aligned towards prevention and early intervention. As system leaders, we are called to do more and to do better.



Crucially, this report does not just describe the challenge; it brings insight from children and young people themselves, alongside tangible, proven models that already exist and work. It invites us to work together, at every level, to meet the needs and expectations of our young citizens.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the children and young people who shared their experiences, insights, and hopes through this work. Many spoke openly about difficult moments in their lives, and their honesty and generosity have shaped this report in powerful and meaningful ways. Their voices sit at the heart of these findings and must continue to inform how we design and deliver support.

I am also grateful to all partners who contributed their time, expertise, and challenge throughout the process. A big thank you to Nasima Patel and the team for making this happen with such professionalism and passion, and special thanks to the steering group:

- Kevin Bradburne – Director of Youth Federation
- Dave Packwood - VCSFE Children and Young People Network Manager (Cheshire & Merseyside)
- Monique Collier - Chief Executive Officer for YPAS
- Val O'Donnell – Director of Services for YPAS
- Anne-Marie Thornburn – NHS Transforming Care CYP Programme Lead
- Lisa Carden Doorey – Head of Sector Development for Community & Voluntary Services Cheshire East
- Rachel Smethurst, Charlotte Hall & Louise Houghton – NHS Young Adults Mental Health group

Kind regards,

Mark Palethorpe

Chief Executive, St Helens Borough Council
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Executive Summary

This report provides a Knowsley place-based analysis to complement the Cheshire & Merseyside Early Mental Health System Review. It brings together system mapping, partner insight and, critically, the voices of children and young people (CYP) to assess how well early emotional wellbeing and mental health support meets local need.

Why this review matters

Children and young people in Knowsley are experiencing rising levels of emotional distress, shaped by some of the highest levels of deprivation and inequality nationally. Local evidence highlights increasing complexity of need, including high levels of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), adverse childhood experiences and wider health inequalities.

While a broad system of support exists across statutory, education and VCSFE sectors, it remains complex, difficult to navigate and unevenly experienced. Young people report not knowing where to go, facing delays in access and encountering support that can feel inconsistent or short-term. Transitions, particularly into adulthood, continue to present a “cliff edge” where continuity is lost.

What we did

The review draws on a mixed-methods approach, including:

- Mapping a wide range of early emotional wellbeing and mental health services
- Engagement with children and young people through surveys, targeted group discussions and wider participation activity facilitated by local youth providers.
- Input from VCSFE organisations, schools, Family Hubs and system partners
- Analysis of local needs data, policy and best practice

This approach ensures findings reflect both system insight and lived experience.

What young people told us

Young people’s feedback was clear and consistent:

- Awareness of services is low, with unclear pathways and reliance on schools or family
- Experiences of support are mixed, with some feeling unheard or unsupported
- Support is not always available when needed, particularly outside school hours
- Relationships, trust and feeling understood are the most important factors
- Some young people do not access support at all, indicating unmet need

They also highlighted what works: safe and informal environments, trusted adults, activity-based approaches, and support that is flexible, consistent and rooted in their everyday lives.



The current system

Knowsley has strong foundations, including a well-developed VCSFE and youth work sector, extensive outreach provision and emerging integrated models such as the Knowsley Open Gateway Service (KOGS). Many young people report positive experiences where support is relational and accessible.

However, the system is not yet experienced as clear or coherent. Key challenges include:

- A gap between available provision and awareness or understanding
- Fragmented pathways and reliance on existing connections rather than a clear “front door”
- Uneven access across neighbourhoods
- Capacity pressures and reliance on short-term funding
- Limited continuity and fragmented pathways for 18–25 year olds

What must change

To deliver a more effective and equitable system, there is a need to:

- Strengthen early help and prevention, reducing reliance on crisis and thresholds
- Improve visibility and navigation through a clear, youth-friendly “front door”
- Expand community-based, outreach and out-of-hours provision
- Address inequalities in access across communities
- Strengthen 16–25 pathways and transitions into adulthood
- Ensure no young person waits for support without ongoing contact

A call to action

Knowsley has strong partnerships, a committed workforce and a rich network of community based provision. The challenge now is to better connect, coordinate and sustain these strengths so that the system feels visible, accessible and dependable for every young person.

By building on existing assets and centering young people’s voices, there is a clear opportunity to create a more joined-up, preventative system, where support is easy to find, consistent over time and available when it is needed.



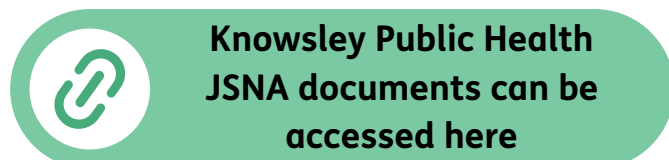
Introduction

Children and young people's (CYP) mental health remains one of the most urgent and widely recognised challenges nationally, and Knowsley reflects this clearly. Emotional wellbeing locally is shaped by a complex combination of social, economic and environmental factors, including high levels of deprivation, inequality and wider determinants such as income, education, housing and adverse childhood experiences. These factors influence both the level of need and how easily young people and families are able to access support.

Local evidence (Including Knowsley Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) highlights increasing levels of emotional distress, anxiety and complexity of need, alongside inequalities in access to support. In Knowsley, this is intensified by the borough's context. A significant proportion of neighbourhoods fall within the most deprived decile nationally, around 45% of children live in income-deprived households, and rates of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and neurodevelopmental need are among the highest in England. Indicators such as elevated hospital admissions for self-harm, persistent absence and wider health inequalities further demonstrate the cumulative challenges facing many children and families. There is also variation between neighbourhoods, with some communities experiencing higher levels of need alongside greater barriers to accessing support, including transport, awareness and connectivity.

Nationally, around 1 in 5 children and young people are estimated to have a probable mental health need, reinforcing the scale of demand reflected locally.

Knowsley has a broad and established early help offer, including statutory and NHS services, school-based provision, Family Hubs, digital platforms and a strong voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCSFE) sector. The VCSFE sector plays a particularly important role in delivering flexible, community-based and relational support, often through youth work, outreach and activity-based provision. The borough also demonstrates strong partnership working and a growing emphasis on integration, early intervention and place-based approaches that bring together education, health, social care and community services. Developments such as the Knowsley Open Gateway Service (KOGS) reflect this commitment to improving coordination and directing young people to appropriate support.



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However, despite these strengths, the system is not always experienced as clear or easy to navigate. Many young people and families report uncertainty about where to go for support, with provision spread across multiple services, platforms and routes. Access can be affected by referral processes, awareness, service availability and individual experiences of waiting for support, particularly outside of school hours, while transitions between services, especially into adulthood, can feel fragmented or unclear. These challenges can be more pronounced for neurodivergent young people and those with more complex or overlapping needs.

This report builds on local and regional work by mapping provision across Knowsley and examining how well current services align with the needs and experiences of children and young people. By combining system mapping, local intelligence and direct engagement, it provides an evidence-based foundation to support the development of a more visible, connected and equitable early help system. This aligns with national policy direction and the ambitions of the Cheshire & Merseyside Mental Health Plan, alongside local priorities focused on prevention, early intervention and improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

Our ambition is to support a system where help is clearly visible, better connected and easier to access, enabling children and young people to find support when they need it, in places that feel safe, familiar and relevant to their everyday lives.

A young person friendly version of this report will be available alongside the Cheshire & Merseyside report.



Approach

This report examines emotional wellbeing and early mental health support for children and young people (CYP) aged 5–25. This age range reflects the well recognised challenges associated with transitions between children’s and adult services, while also complementing existing work focused on early years provision (0–5). Throughout this report, references to CYP relate to this 5–25 cohort, and “young adults” refers to those aged 16–25.

The Knowsley analysis forms part of the wider Cheshire & Merseyside Early Mental Health System Review and follows the same mixed-methods framework outlined in the main report. The aim is to develop a detailed understanding of local provision, with a particular focus on accessibility, visibility, timing and lived experience.

The approach combined four key elements:

- **Service mapping and review:** A comprehensive mapping exercise was undertaken across statutory services, VCSFE organisations, schools, Family Hubs and community providers. This explored delivery models, access routes, age ranges, outreach activity, digital provision, waiting times, operating hours and funding stability. The mapping reflects a diverse, community-based system spanning universal, targeted and specialist support, including youth work, therapeutic provision, SEND and neurodiversity support, substance misuse services, bereavement support and crisis pathways.
- **Direct engagement with children and young people:** Insight was gathered through survey responses from 17 children and young people in Knowsley, alongside additional focused group discussions and engagement activity facilitated by local youth organisations including Merseyside Youth Association (MYA). Across all engagement routes, a broader cohort of children and young people contributed to the findings, helping to ensure the report reflects a wider range of lived experiences and perspectives.
- **Inclusion of underrepresented groups:** Targeted engagement sought to include groups facing additional barriers to support, including neurodivergent young people, those with disabilities, young carers, LGBTQ+ young people, care-experienced young people and those less likely to engage with formal services. This was supported through trusted relationships with local VCSFE organisations and youth providers to ensure a more inclusive evidence base.
- **Desk-based analysis:** This included review of local need, policy and best practice, drawing on sources such as the Knowsley Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), Public Health insight and wider system learning. The analysis aligns with national and regional frameworks, including the NHS 0–25 pathway, iTHRIVE, the National Youth Strategy and Young Futures guidance.



This mixed-methods approach prioritises co-production, inclusion and practical system insight, ensuring findings reflect both lived experience and service delivery within a community-based system.

Although the work initially focused on physical provision, the scope was broadened to include outreach, home-based, community and digital support. This reflects how children and young people in Knowsley access support in practice—through a range of settings and routes rather than a single, linear pathway.

Terminology within early mental health provision is often used inconsistently. For the purposes of this report:

- A youth hub refers to a community-based space providing open access activities, advice and early emotional wellbeing support without referral or thresholds
- Early mental health support refers to provision for mild to moderate needs, aligned with “Getting Advice” and “Getting Help” within iTHRIVE
- CYP pathways are not linear, and young people may access multiple services simultaneously or move between levels of need
- Youth hubs are distinct from Family Hubs, but form part of a connected early help system alongside schools and community services

Overall, this approach provides a robust and evidence-informed understanding of how early help is delivered and experienced in Knowsley, identifying both system strengths and areas for development.

The findings relating to service experience are primarily derived from qualitative feedback provided by children and young people and stakeholders. They should be interpreted as perceptions and lived experience rather than an assessment of service performance, waiting time compliance or clinical outcomes.

i-THRIVE Framework



Children and Young People's Voice

Young people in Knowsley shared a clear picture of how they experience support for emotional wellbeing and mental health. While experiences vary, a consistent message emerges: support is valued, but not always easy to access, clearly understood, or shaped around individual needs.

Across responses, young people emphasised the importance of being listened to, feeling understood, and having access to support that feels safe, consistent and relevant to their lives. Positive experiences are closely linked to trusted relationships and safe environments, while less helpful experiences are often described as impersonal, limited or difficult to engage with. A recurring theme is uncertainty about how to access support, with many relying on school, family or existing connections rather than a clear, accessible route into services.

Awareness and routes into support

Young people identified a range of places they might turn for support, including school, home, youth hubs and community-based services. However, there is no single, clearly understood pathway into support.

School and home were the most common access points, with youth workers, counsellors and community settings also valued where available. Youth hubs and community centres were particularly seen as informal and approachable environments. Some young people also highlighted a preference for receiving support at home, where it feels more private and familiar.

Despite this, significant gaps remain. Young people and families described:

- Uncertainty about what support is available
- Lack of clarity in referral pathways and eligibility

Some young people and families described delays accessing support or uncertainty around referral pathways. These comments reflected individual experiences of navigating the system rather than a measure of current service performance.

This creates a system where families often feel they are “guessing where to go,” placing significant pressure on parents and carers to navigate support without clear guidance.

(Examples presented in this section reflect feedback received during engagement and should not be interpreted as representative of current waiting time performance across all services.)

“There is no clarity who offers what service... my parents struggle to find support”



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Experiences of support and relationships

Experiences of support in Knowsley range from very positive to not helpful at all, with the quality of relationships emerging as the most important factor.

Positive experiences were associated with:

- Feeling listened to and taken seriously
- Having a safe, non-judgemental space
- Building consistent relationships with trusted adults
- Regular opportunities to talk and reflect

“The worker was kind and helped me understand anxiety”

One young person described therapy as “a safe space” where they felt heard and supported in ways they could not always access elsewhere.

Less positive experiences were linked to:

- Feeling unheard or talked over
- Support that felt one-sided or overly structured
- Lack of personal connection with practitioners
- Limited or short-term input

“I don’t feel as sad anymore now I have a therapist”

Some young people described support as “not helpful,” even when available, highlighting that availability alone does not guarantee meaningful engagement. A consistent theme was the importance of having space to speak and being genuinely listened to. Where this is missing, support can feel transactional rather than relational, reducing its impact and discouraging future help-seeking.

Young people also highlighted the importance of choice. Preferences varied between speaking to adults, peers, or both, emphasising the need for flexible and personalised approaches. Relatability and understanding were important, with some expressing a preference for those with shared or lived experience.

“Been listened to... not just them speaking for an hour”

“It feels like a safe space”

“If I get on with the person helping me more it would be better”



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Timing, availability and continuity

Young people consistently reported that support is not always available when they need it most.

Key times of need include:

- After school
- Evenings
- Weekends

“If I could have more than one session a week”

While some provision exists during school hours, many young people described emotional pressures building throughout the day, with fewer options available later. Greater flexibility in timing, including options outside of the school day, was seen as important in improving access and reducing stigma.

There was also a clear message about continuity.

Young people want:

- More regular and ongoing support
- Greater consistency in who they see
- Longer-term engagement rather than short-term interventions

“Continuous care... having a set number of sessions is reductive”

This highlights a gap between how support is currently delivered and how it is experienced in practice.

Gaps in access and unmet need

Some young people described needing support but not receiving it, or facing barriers that prevented access.

This included:

- Waiting lists delaying support
- Limited provision for younger children
- Unclear pathways between services

“Been listened to... not just them speaking for an hour”

There is also evidence that negative or ineffective experiences can discourage future help-seeking. For some, this results in unmet need even when services are available.

Gaps in provision for younger children were noted, with some families struggling to identify appropriate support before needs escalate. A lack of continuity across age ranges, particularly from early years through to adulthood, was also highlighted.



Strengths and what works well

Despite these challenges, many young people shared positive examples of support.

Effective support was associated with:

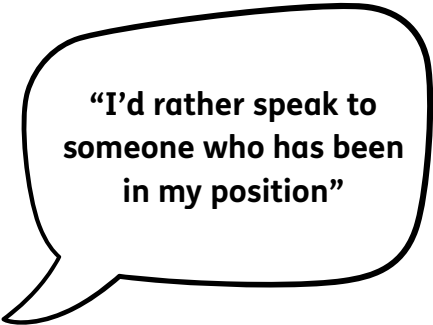
- Feeling understood, supported and able to build trusted relationships
- Support that leads to improved wellbeing

A range of support was valued, including youth workers, school-based support, therapists and community provision. Informal support from family and trusted adults also plays a key role.

Young people also expressed strong interest in activity-based approaches, including:

- Art, music and creative expression
- Sports and physical activity
- Spending time with friends
- Learning new skills
- Peer support and/or peer led support

These were seen as important entry points into support, particularly for those less comfortable with formal or conversation-based services.



"I'd rather speak to someone who has been in my position"

What Young People Want More Of

Young people were clear about how support could be improved. Key priorities include:

More personalised and relational support

Genuine connections with people who listen and understand

More consistent and ongoing support

Regular sessions and continuity over time

Support at the right time

Greater availability outside school hours

Clearer pathways and information

Simpler, more visible routes into support

Accessible, informal spaces

Safe environments such as youth hubs where young people can talk, socialise and take part in activities

Choice and flexibility

Including who they speak to and where support takes place



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The table below summarises what young people in Knowsley consistently identify as helpful and unhelpful in their experiences of support.

What makes support feel helpful	What makes support feel unhelpful
Feeling listened to, understood and safe in a trusting relationship	Feeling unheard, dismissed or talked over
Regular, ongoing support with consistent contact	Support that is infrequent, time-limited or ends too quickly
Kind, supportive practitioners who build genuine connections	Lack of personal connection or difficulty relating to staff
Support that improves how they feel and helps them cope	Support that is available but does not feel meaningful or effective
Clear, simple pathways into support	Confusing systems, unclear services and difficulty knowing where to go
Support that is easy to access when needed	Long waiting times or barriers to accessing help
Flexible support that fits around their lives (including evenings)	Limited availability that does not match when support is needed
Safe, familiar and youth-friendly environments (home, school, community)	Environments that feel formal, uncomfortable or not designed for young people
Opportunities to build trust over time	Lack of continuity, frequent changes in support or staff
Informal and activity-based approaches that make it easier to open up	Overly structured or clinical approaches that are hard to engage with
Personalised support that reflects individual needs and preferences	Generic approaches that do not feel relevant
Choice over who to talk to and where support takes place	Lack of choice or feeling uncomfortable with the support offered



How Young People Hear About Support

Access to support is largely shaped by immediate networks, particularly:

- Schools
- Family members
- Youth workers and community provision

While effective for some, this creates a gap for those not connected to these networks. Services are not always easy to find or understand, particularly for families accessing support for the first time. This highlights a disconnect between availability and awareness, where support exists but is not consistently visible or well understood.

Design: What Works Best

Young people consistently favour support that feels informal, accessible and embedded in their everyday lives. Familiar environments such as home, school and community settings are preferred over clinical spaces.

Support is most effective when it:

- Feels natural and easy to access
- Is delivered alongside activities or in relaxed settings
- Builds relationships over time

Practical features also matter. Young people highlighted the importance of:

- Comfortable, calm environments
- Quiet spaces and softer lighting
- Access to sensory tools, particularly for neurodivergent young people

Activity-based approaches play a key role, providing engaging and low-pressure routes into support. These enable conversations to develop naturally and help reduce barriers for those less likely to access formal services.

Digital support was seen as a useful complement, offering flexibility and privacy. However, it does not replace the importance of face-to-face relationships, which remain central to effective support.

Overall, support works best when it is relational, flexible and embedded in young people's everyday lives.

Across responses, one message stands out clearly:

Young people in Knowsley want support that feels safe, genuine and easy to access, delivered by people who listen, understand and build relationships over time.



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Age-Related Differences

While many themes were consistent across age groups, some differences were evident.

Younger children (10–13) tended to value:

- Support from trusted adults
- Familiar settings such as home and school
- Structured, creative and play-based approaches

Young people aged 14–16 placed greater emphasis on:

- Independence, choice and flexibility
- Privacy and access outside school hours
- More regular and ongoing support



This group was more likely to report mixed or negative experiences, particularly around feeling unheard or facing barriers to access. There is a risk of disengagement where support does not meet their needs or feels inconsistent.

Across all ages, the message is clear:

Young people in Knowsley want support that is easy to access, built on trusted relationships, and delivered in environments where they feel safe, understood and able to be themselves.

**What young people told us most clearly
We want to...**

"Be listened to"
"Know where to go"
"Get help when we need it"
"Have someone we trust"



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Current Landscape

Knowsley has a broad and active early help landscape for emotional wellbeing and mental health. However, this is not yet consistently experienced by children, young people and families as a clear, joined up or easily accessible system.

There is a strong local commitment to early intervention, delivered through a mix of statutory services, schools, VCSFE organisations and community-based provision. The offer includes counselling, youth work, early help, SEND support, health services and targeted interventions, alongside activity-based and informal support delivered across neighbourhoods.

However, the system is characterised by a gap between what exists and how it is experienced. Services can feel fragmented, difficult to navigate, and often dependent on existing relationships rather than a clearly understood pathway into support. Feedback from young people reinforces this, highlighting uncertainty about where to go, challenges accessing support at the right time, and reliance on schools, family or trusted adults rather than a visible and accessible system.

Access to support varies significantly depending on the service, with some offering immediate open access and others requiring referral and waiting periods, creating inconsistent experiences for young people and families.

Range and diversity of provision

Knowsley has a diverse local offer spanning early years through to young adulthood (0–25), including:

- Therapeutic services and counselling
- Youth work, mentoring and participation
- SEND and neurodiversity support
- Health and school-based support
- Community and activity-based provision
- Crisis, urgent and safety-net support pathways
- Specialist services including substance misuse, bereavement and young carers support

Alongside preventative and early intervention provision, Knowsley also benefits from established crisis and urgent mental health support pathways. While these sit outside the primary scope of this early help review, they form an important part of the wider system and provide escalation routes where needs become more acute. This reflects a wide-ranging but sometimes complex system of provision.

A key strength is the VCSFE and youth work sector, which delivers a significant proportion of early help through outreach, mentoring and activity-based provision, often in community settings and outside school hours. Organisations play a central role, particularly in engaging young people less likely to access formal services. A full list of services is available at the end of this report.



Integrated models and partnership working

There are clear examples of partnership working and integration within the system.

The Knowsley Open Gateway Service (KOGS) is a key development, bringing together multiple providers to help ensure young people are directed to appropriate support. This is supported by:

- Close working between services, schools, Family Hubs and health partners
- Embedded multi-agency working through MDTs, referral pathways and safeguarding structures
- Youth sector involvement in strategic forums such as the Health and Wellbeing Board

These arrangements provide a strong foundation for integration. However, this is not yet consistently experienced as joined up from a young person or family perspective.

Accessibility and navigation

A defining challenge within the system is visibility and navigation.

Services are spread across multiple platforms and directories, with information that is not always up to date or easy to understand. As a result, it can be difficult for young people and families to identify what support is available or how to access it.

Access is often dependent on schools, professionals or existing relationships rather than a clear and visible “front door”. This creates a disconnect between availability and awareness, where services exist but are not consistently recognised or understood.

This can lead to demand concentrating within a small number of well-known services, creating pressure on capacity, while other provision remains underused. In some cases, uncertainty means young people and families may not seek support at all.

Availability vs accessibility

Availability of services does not always translate into accessibility.

Provision operates across a mix of access models, including:

- Open access (e.g. youth clubs and community activities)
- Self-referral routes (e.g. ChatHealth, ZunTold)
- Professional or school referrals (e.g. counselling and therapeutic support)

While some services offer flexible or immediate access, others involve waiting times, eligibility criteria and structured referral processes. Young people described varying experiences when accessing support, with some reporting delays or uncertainty regarding referral pathways. These experiences appeared to relate more to navigation and awareness than to any single service.

There are examples of “holding” support, including drop-ins, group provision and ongoing youth work engagement. However, these are not consistently embedded, meaning some young people experience gaps while waiting or transitioning between services.



Location and community access

Provision is largely community-based and locally delivered, rather than centred around a single hub. This includes youth hubs, community centres and outreach activity within neighbourhoods.

This approach supports engagement by:

- Reducing barriers such as transport and cost
- Providing familiar and informal access points
- Enabling relationship-building within communities

However, access is not evenly distributed. Some areas have stronger provision than others, and travel between locations can present barriers, reinforcing the importance of neighbourhood-level and outreach delivery.

Age ranges covered

Provision spans ages 5–25, but experience varies across life stages:

5–10: Support is primarily accessed through Family Hubs, early help and SEND services. These are strong in early intervention but less visible to children themselves.

11–17: This is the strongest area of provision, with a wide range of school-based support, youth work, outreach and community services. Informal and relationship-based approaches are particularly effective for this group.

18–25: Provision becomes more variable. While some services extend to 25, many are targeted or conditional, leading to reduced continuity and less clearly defined pathways.

Outreach provision

Outreach is a core strength of the Knowsley system, including detached youth work, mobile provision and engagement in informal settings.

These approaches are effective in:

- Reaching young people who may not access formal services
- Building trust and relationships
- Creating pathways into further support

However, delivery can be influenced by funding, staffing and local priorities. There is an opportunity to strengthen coordination, ensure consistent coverage and develop clearer pathways from outreach into sustained support.



Digital platforms

Knowsley has a developing digital offer, including KOGS, ChatHealth, ZunTold and national platforms such as Qwell and YoungMinds.

These provide flexible, low-threshold access, offering privacy and immediacy. However, the digital landscape remains fragmented, with multiple platforms, limited integration and varying levels of awareness.

While these provide a strong foundation, there is an opportunity to align digital provision into a simpler, more clearly recognised “front door” for young people.

Parent, carer and SEND support

Knowsley has a strong offer for parent, carer and SEND support, including Family Hubs, early help and neurodiversity-focused provision.

These services reflect a clear commitment to:

- Whole-family support
- Early intervention
- Inclusive practice

Family Hubs play a key role in navigation and signposting, making it essential that they hold accurate and up-to-date system knowledge.

However, demand continues to grow, particularly around neurodiversity and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Providers highlight:

- Gaps for younger children not meeting CAMHS thresholds
- Need for more accessible early therapeutic support
- Barriers where support relies on formal diagnosis

System pressures and sustainability

The system operates within a context of high demand, socioeconomic challenges and increasing complexity of need.

Many services, particularly in the VCSFE sector, rely on short-term or grant funding, which can impact:

- Continuity of support
- Stability of provision
- Workforce capacity and long-term planning



Additional strengths

Knowsley benefits from:

- A strong VCSFE and youth work sector
- Established outreach and community-based provision
- Activity-based, relational approaches aligned with young people's preferences
- Integrated initiatives such as KOGS
- Strong partnership working across services

However, these strengths are constrained by:

- System complexity and fragmentation
- Limited visibility and navigation challenges
- Uneven access across communities
- Funding and capacity pressures

Knowsley has a rich and committed system of support. However, the key challenge is not the absence of provision, but how effectively it is connected, communicated and experienced.

Strengthening visibility, coordination and consistency will be critical to ensuring that existing provision translates into clear pathways, timely access and positive experiences for all young people.



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What this means for Young People and those who support them

CYP Priority	Current Position	Match	Gaps / Actions
Relational and trusted relationships	Strong across VCSFE, youth work and mentoring, but continuity is affected by funding pressures, capacity and transitions	Amber	Sustain and scale relational, youth work-led models; prioritise continuity of trusted adults and reduce disruption from short-term provision
Safe, youth-friendly environments	Strong community-based provision, but access varies across the borough and some young people cannot easily reach local hubs	Amber	Expand neighbourhood-based safe spaces; develop multiple accessible hubs; increase inclusive, calm and non-clinical environments
Activity-based support	A key strength across youth work and community provision, closely aligned to CYP preferences	Amber	Maintain and expand activity-based approaches; embed them as core entry points into emotional wellbeing support
Flexible, timely access aligned to need	Some evening and weekend provision exists, but most structured support remains daytime-based, creating a mismatch with need	Red	Align provision with real-life demand; expand out-of-hours delivery and develop a shared, visible timetable of support



Clear pathways and navigation	KOGS provides a strong foundation, but wider system navigation remains complex and difficult for CYP and families	Amber	Strengthen a clear, visible “front door” by building on KOGS; simplify pathways and co-produce a youth-friendly navigation system
Holding support while waiting	Some good practice exists, but this is inconsistent and not embedded across the system	Amber	Develop a shared “no wrong door” and “no waiting without support” approach; expand drop-ins, group provision and proactive check-ins
Continuity and sustained support	Support is often time-limited, with variation across providers and repeated transitions leading to fragmentation	Amber	Move towards flexible, needs-led support; improve coordination between services and reduce repeated assessments
Inclusive (neurodiversity-informed) support	Strong specialist SEND provision, but inconsistent practice across mainstream services and growing demand	Amber	Embed neurodiversity-informed practice across all services; increase early support without reliance on diagnosis
Local access and transport	Strong community delivery and outreach, but access varies by location, with transport barriers in some areas	Amber	Strengthen neighbourhood delivery; expand outreach coverage; explore solutions to reduce geographic inequalities



Transitions (16–25)	Some provision exists, but pathways remain fragmented and not clearly defined	Amber	Develop a clear 16–25 pathway; strengthen links between mental health, education, employability and community support
Experiences of Statutory Mental Health Pathways	Young people described mixed experiences of accessing more formal mental health services, particularly around navigating thresholds, understanding referral pathways and maintaining continuity between services.	Amber	Improve integration with VCSFE and community services; strengthen early access and reduce reliance on threshold-based models
Visibility and awareness of services	Wide range of provision exists but is difficult to find, with fragmented information and uneven promotion	Red	Develop a clear, youth-friendly directory; coordinate promotion across settings; introduce shared “what’s on” timetables
Inequality and wider determinants	Deprivation, family context and wider challenges significantly shape demand and access	Red	Strengthen integration between emotional wellbeing, early help and community support; respond to wider contextual needs
Workforce capacity and sustainability	Strong workforce, but demand pressures and short-term funding impact stability and capacity	Amber	Invest in longer-term funding; strengthen workforce development, retention and capacity
System coordination and integration	Strong partnerships and collaborative models, but the system is still experienced as fragmented	Amber	Build on existing collaboration; strengthen shared pathways, communication and system coordination



Conclusion

This report highlights a system in Knowsley that is diverse, community-driven and underpinned by strong partnership working. However, it is not yet consistently experienced by children and young people as visible, accessible or easy to navigate.

The key issue is not a lack of provision, but how effectively services connect, align and are experienced as part of a coherent system. While Knowsley benefits from a wide range of services across statutory, school-based and VCSFE provision, alongside strong youth work and outreach, this offer is not always experienced as joined-up or easy to access.

A defining message is the gap between what exists and what young people experience. Support is often described as helpful when accessed, particularly where it is relational, activity-based and delivered in community settings, but too many young people and families struggle to find it, understand it or access it at the right time.

For many, access relies on schools, professionals or existing relationships rather than a clear pathway. This can create a system that feels fragmented and can discourage early help-seeking, meaning support is sometimes only accessed once needs have escalated. Young people's expectations are clear. They are not necessarily asking for more services, but for a system that is easier to understand, more visible and better aligned to their everyday lives. They want support that is relational, flexible and available when it is needed.

The evidence points to a consistent direction of travel: improving visibility, strengthening relationships, aligning provision to when need arises, and ensuring pathways are clear and continuous, particularly through transitions into adulthood.

Knowsley has strong foundations to build on, including:

- A well-established VCSFE and youth work sector
- Extensive outreach and community-based provision
- Activity-based approaches aligned with young people's preferences
- Emerging integrated models such as KOGS
- Strong partnership working across organisations

However, these strengths are not yet consistently experienced across the system. Key challenges remain in visibility, navigation, consistency of access, continuity of support and long-term sustainability.

These challenges are most felt by:

- Young people who are less connected to schools or services
- Families navigating support for the first time
- Older young people transitioning into adulthood



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The opportunity for Knowsley is not to redesign the system, but to strengthen, connect and scale what already works well. Improving how services are communicated, coordinated and experienced will be critical to ensuring that existing provision translates into meaningful access and positive outcomes.

Knowsley has the foundations of a strong, preventative system. The next step is to ensure these strengths are experienced consistently across all communities, so that every young person can access support that feels timely, relevant and built around them.

As reflected in young people's voices:

Support should be easy to find, easy to access and available when it is needed.



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Recommendations

1. Create a Clear, Youth-Friendly System “Front Door”

Develop a single, visible and youth-friendly access point that brings together services across the system.

This should:

- Build on existing infrastructure such as KOGS
- Provide simple, clear information about available support
- Be accessible across digital, school and community settings
- Be co-designed with young people

2. Strengthen visibility and communication of services

Improve how services are promoted so young people and families can easily find support:

- Develop a shared, regularly updated “what’s on” timetable
- Coordinate communication across schools, community settings and health services
- Use youth-friendly channels such as social media, QR codes and peer-led promotion
- Use clear, simple language focused on what support feels like

3. Align provision with when young people need it

Increase availability outside of school hours:

- Expand evening and weekend provision
- Build on youth work, outreach and community-based models
- Provide consistent out-of-hours access across services

4. Embed a “no wrong door” and “no waiting without support” approach

Ensure young people receive timely support regardless of entry point:

- Develop a shared approach to holding support while waiting
- Expand drop-ins, group provision and low-threshold support
- Encourage joint delivery models (e.g. services working together to provide cover)
- Strengthen coordination across services to prevent gaps

5. Prioritise relational and consistent support

Strengthen continuity of relationships across services:

- Reduce reliance on short-term interventions
- Support longer-term engagement where needed
- Improve transitions to avoid disruption and repeated assessments



6. Strengthen neighbourhood-based and outreach provision

ReBuild on a key system strength:

- Expand outreach, detached youth work and mobile provision
- Ensure consistent coverage across all communities
- Develop pathways from outreach into ongoing support
- Explore informal community spaces (e.g. local venues) as access points

7. Develop a coherent 16–25 pathway

Improve transitions into adulthood:

- Create a clear and visible 16–25 pathway
- Strengthen links between mental health, education, employability and community services
- Improve continuity beyond age thresholds

8. Embed neurodiversity-informed and inclusive practice

Ensure support is accessible for all:

- Embed neurodiversity-informed approaches across services
- Increase early support without reliance on diagnosis
- Strengthen staff confidence and consistency
- Create more inclusive, sensory-aware environments

9. Strengthen system coordination and integration

Build a more joined-up system:

- Improve shared pathways, roles and communication
- Increase collaboration between statutory, VCSFE and community providers
- Explore co-location opportunities (e.g. NHS services within community settings)

10. Invest in sustainable funding and workforce capacity

Support long-term stability:

- Move towards multi-year funding models
- Strengthen workforce capacity and retention
- Invest in training and development
- Reduce fragmentation caused by short-term funding

11. Align provision with wider determinants of need

Respond to the broader context shaping wellbeing:

- Strengthen links between emotional wellbeing, early help and family support
- Embed services within community settings
- Ensure provision responds to poverty, inequality and family pressures



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List of Services

Advanced Solutions
Butterflies Project (part of listening ear)
Centre 63
CGL
Chat Health
Endorphins Knowsley
Evolving Mindset
Family Hubs
Halewood Junior parkrun
Kings Trust programme
Knowsley VCSFE MH Alliance
Knowsley Youth Chamber
Listening Ear (Merseyside)
Merseyside Youth Association
MHST
Mind Moves mentoring services
Moscroft Community Centre
One Knowsley
QWell Knowsley
Right to Succeed
Southdene Community Centre
Vibe
Wirral Community Health & Care NHS
Foundation Trust
Young Carers
Young Minds
Youth Cabinet
YPAS
ZunTold
Career connect (also in LCR)
Bully busters
Cells project (Choices, Education, Learning, Lifelong Skills)
Veas Place (part of a church)
Daisy Inclusive
Collective Encounters
The Hub (Explore Partnership) & Kidz zone and youth zone



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