



NOW 2026

YOUNG PEOPLE'S
MENTAL HEALTH FESTIVAL

Report

- 9th - 11th Feb 2026 at The Epstein Theatre
- 335 children + young people, 22 schools + groups, 3 sold-out shows



“Storytelling can open conversations about mental health in ways policy alone cannot”

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We were delighted to host the 11th NOW Fest with the continued support of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB), Liverpool Place and the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership.

This year's theme was 'Mental Health and the Environment'. Evidence shows that a wide range of environmental and social factors in young people's lives - both physical and social - have a profound impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Using the 'Ecological Model, exploring the 'Global', 'Online', 'School', 'Community', 'Home' Environments and how the Environment impacts our 'Identity', we:

- Explored how local social, economic and environmental factors either support or harm mental health and how these have changed over time.**
- Highlighted how these influences affect different communities, contribute to inequalities and shape the demand for mental health services.**
- Heard directly from children and young people about how they experience their local areas and what matters most to them.**
- Celebrated the strength of social networks and community assets.**
- Used youth voice to challenge how these wider influences on health can be addressed through prevention and early support.**

We asked performers to rate from 1-10

I feel I have a voice around children and young people's mental health

57% scored 8-10 before their NOW Fest performance

69% scored 8-10 after their NOW Fest performance

I know what my skills are

60% scored 8-10 before their NOW Fest performance

75% scored 8-10 after their NOW Fest performance

I develop and use my skills with confidence

68% scored 8-10 before their NOW Fest performance

83% scored 8-10 after their NOW Fest performance

I am hopeful that I can achieve my goals

76% scored 8-10 before their NOW Fest performance

90% scored 8-10 after their NOW Fest performance

I feel that I belong and am part of my community

88% scored 7-10 overall

I feel good about myself and the world around me

78% scored 7-10 overall

How much do you think you understood about the link between mental health and your chosen environment theme?

51% scored 9-10 before their NOW Fest performance

67% scored 9-10 after their NOW Fest performance

I feel my NOW Festival piece will have a positive impact on others

96% scored 7-10 overall

The following questions asked performers about the impact NOW Festival has had on them, their group, the audience and the wider community - their 'Social Signature'

ME – What impact has your performance (including your contribution to creating your NOW Festival story) had on you as an individual?

- I'm good at acting
- Made me realise what other people go through
- Helped me build my confidence in acting
- It has taught me valuable lessons on how to use social media correctly
- A big one
- It has shown me who I can go to for support
- This had an impact on me by making me more confident in theatre
- It has shown me how there are more people I can go to
- Helped me understand that working with others can make a change
- It has given me a fun teamwork opportunity a big amount
- I learned to work with people in a different age
- It helped because I could work in a team easier
- Don't trust people even though they seem nice or if they ask you to do something you don't feel comfortable about
- Don't carry weapons and don't join gangs!

WE - How has your NOW Festival story and performing at NOW Festival helped you to engage with others and work as a group?

- Helped us grow and build our confidence
- It helped me realise that others can help me
- Courage
- Be more confident
- It has shown us how much bigger the community really is
- Now I am more confident to work as a team
- Be kind and respect others
- Seeing my voice MATTERS!
- I got better at acting in a group

THEM – How has your performance impacted the audience (What is your call to action)?

- They looked emotional and we got our message about belonging across
- We have tried to make people notice the dangers of poor mental health
- Make people be more brave and proud to have help
- More kind and have more help
- Change the way people feel about themselves
- May inspire them to reach out
- It has made them more aware
- Hopefully a lot
- Taught LGBTQ+ people they are not alone
- I'd think it impacted well and can make people open their eyes
- I think it showed them the impact on victims to bullying and how to stop it
- Speak up, reach out, ask for help because we are strong together
- Always trust friends you want to trust

US – What do you want the audience and the wider community to do following your piece?

- **Make everyone belong in their community**
- **It could inspire people to make a change and get help**
- **Good communication**
- **Try to make an impact with fellow kids with poor mental health**
- **Go get help if you need it**
- **Reach out for help if they need it**
- **Accept people for who they are**
- **Help people being bullied**
- **I'd want people to have an open mind about the situation but also enjoy the acting**
- **I would want the wider community to take notice of bullying**
- **Don't do things you feel uncomfortable about**
- **Listen to our message**
- **LISTEN and spread our message**
- **My friends to speak a message**
- **People spreading important stuff**

Performers' Feedback

"I love spending time with my friends and spreading awareness"

"It's really fun"

"Another incredible show"

"It's improved my confidence"

"It was so good"

"It helped me build on my acting and singing skills"

"Brilliant, just like my last 2 years of doing it"

"It's been a great experience so far"

"That children should take part making sure people know WHAT IS RIGHT!"

"It is fun and I've enjoyed myself so far"

"It made me love dance a bit"

"I feel like it's going to make a big impact on others"

"It is amazing, I love it so much"

“I have really enjoyed it”

“So much fun and I've learnt so much about myself”

“I feel like I know a lot more now”

“I am really happy I have made it this far..”

“I love NOW Fest”

“It's just fun”

“It's nerve-racking for now but it might change as time goes on, I just want to enjoy it”

“It's helped me realise people's mental health is not always amazing and that everyone has different lives so don't judge a book by it's cover”

“I hope this will help others”

“I think it gives a great message”

“Before NOW Fest, I felt insecure and not strong enough - and now I feel better about myself”

“It has been extremely great”

“This is my second performance like this”

“I’m proud of my community”

“I loved being in the show”

“I’m super excited”

“I’m proud of how far we’ve all come”

“It has been a fun experience”

“I love taking part”

“It is like my Christmas and is my favourite day of the year!”

“We are all so grateful for the opportunity to share our message to the wider community and help others in any way possible.

Thank you for putting on this event, we enjoy it every single year.”

“Next year - Make it as good as this year”

Performers' Calls to Action

- **Make school the home that some children don't have'.**
- **'Speak up, reach out, and ask for help - because we're stronger together.'**
- **Value human interactions and don't rely on APPs for validation of your worth.**
- **"Before you scroll, remember you're in control: confidence comes from within, not the feed, so take the lead."**
- **Listen to us- we are going to be the hope for the next generation .**
- **It doesn't matter who you are.**
- **Remember you have a right to help people belong.**
- **Words stick so be conscious of their power.**
- **We invite you to help us champion inclusive opportunities and environments. Open doors. Start conversations. Challenge assumptions.**

And most importantly, stand with us as we work to build inclusive environments – in education, in employment, and in our communities – where every person has the chance to shine.

Performers' Calls to Action

- Choose real connection.
- 'Use technology - don't let it use you.
- Use the online environment safely and respectfully, speak out if others are not.
- Be the reason someone feels like they belong.
- We want young carers to feel empowered.

We want them to know how strong and resilient they are and tell them they should be proud of everything they are doing. We want to tell them to never feel like they have to hide behind a closed door.

- We want to inspire young people living in an environment like they see in our story to not shut people out.

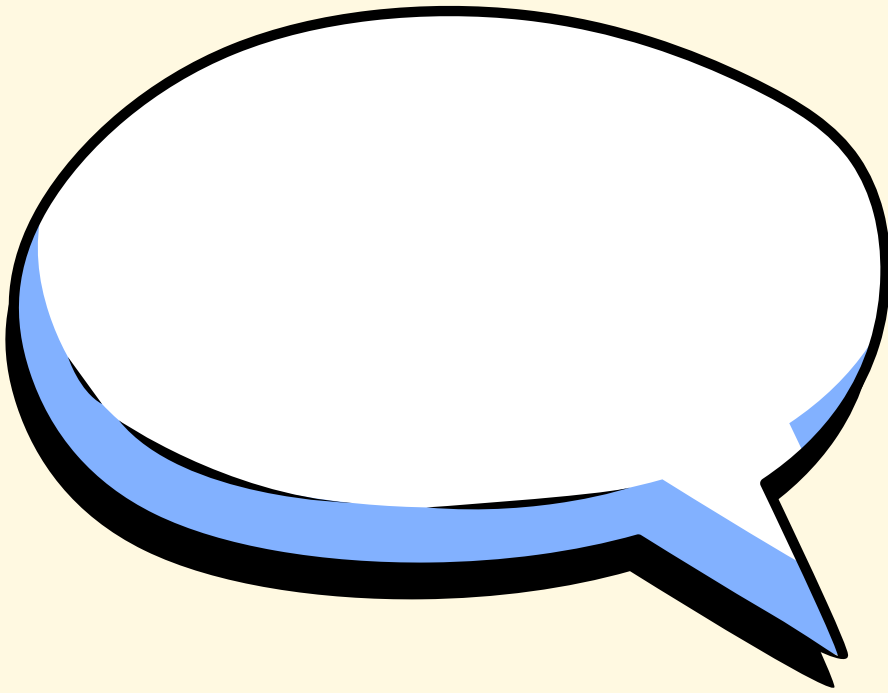
There are people out there who can help, and speaking about a problem is always better than keeping things bottled up.

- We want to thank the adults in the audience for being our everyday heroes.

What might seem like something small, asking if we're ok, listening to our problems, and supporting us, can have a lasting effect. Never underestimate your power!

NOW 20 26

YOUNG PEOPLE'S
MENTAL HEALTH FESTIVAL



We asked our
NOW Fest audiences a
number of questions on
the theme of how the
environment impacts our
mental health..

**Accessibility -
no restrictions**

**Importance of schools
+ Youth Centres**

Safe spaces

Lighting

Emerging Themes

Physical activity

**Connection
face-to-face**

**Mental health
awareness**

creativity

Sleep



The theme was rooted in the Ecological Model exploring how different layers of a young person's environment influence their mental health.

We specifically asked:

How does the local area where you live impact your mental health? What has a positive or negative effect?

Some reflections:

- There was collective agreement that more community hubs are emerging across Liverpool, which is positive.**
- However, many teenagers expressed that there still aren't enough spaces designed specifically for them.**
- A recurring theme across children, carers and professionals was the impact of social media; many felt it is deteriorating young people's mental health and requires stronger regulation.**

We create spaces for children

We create spaces for adults

But adolescence often feels overlooked.

Teenagers are exposed to adult content, adult pressures and adult expectations yet we hesitate to create environments where they can simply be teenagers.

Storytelling can open conversations about mental health in ways policy alone cannot.

From a public health perspective, this reinforces how place, policy, digital environments and community infrastructure shape mental wellbeing and the importance of youth voice, prevention and creating environments where young people can truly thrive.

Young People

“I’m **not allowed** in most of the places in my area - it’s **stereotyping kids**”

“My family, school, shopping when you actually get good stuff, my bedroom”

“To feel safe - increase the amount, of lights we have, so it’s **light and not dark.**”

“We would like maybe to have some more **pedestrian crossings and red light crossings.** But our school now is getting a lot of roadwork done to keep us more safe”

“There’s a lot of **green spaces** that help me. I love to walk and run in and I love dance as well. We have quite a few parks in Huyton. I think there’s like 3 literally around my homes - walk one way. There’s a park the other way. There’s a park. But some of the green spaces don’t have good lighting - they’re **very dark** so at night I prefer not to walk down there. But during the day I love it. Love it.”



What things in your local area make it easier to feel happy and safe?

Young People

Have you noticed any changes in your community that have affected how you or your friends feel?

“Strict timing on kids’ accessibility to places”

“A lot of **rubbish everywhere**. I think we need a cleaner area cause it's not good for the environment and stuff”

“There hasn't been much change, to be honest.

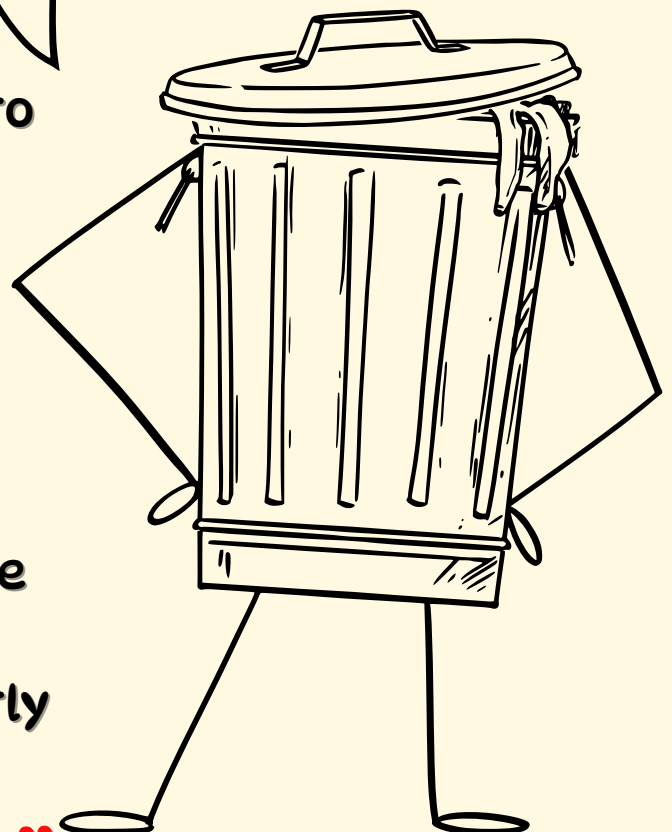
I think the one big change was all local McDonalds not letting us in past 5pm.

Anyone under 18 has to be accompanied after 5pm.

Apparently, they were saying, we're disruptive.

We're just trying to get food exactly like you do.

Please. We're hungry.”



Young People

“We’ve got a **youth centre** - its good”

“Park”

Are there places or activities in your area that help you relax or feel supported?

“Probably me bedroom again, I **play out** with me friends, karate”




“I go to the gym quite a lot too. That's my **safe space**. That's where I like to let everything out, it's 10 minutes away from my house.

And I also **dance** as well. And that's a 10-minute walk as well. There are a lot of dance companies in the area.”

Young People

Do you think everyone in your area has the same chance to get help if they're struggling?

Abandoned



“I know most of these **schools offer support**, but they don't really implement it like it'll just be a poster on the wall or a post it in the toilet.... ‘If you need help, ring this number’ but they don't really implement it.

There's **no action**. It's just like we're doing it because we have to, not because we want to. Not everyone can really always come to you or not everyone has **access** to phones to just ring up or call because what if their **home is not safe** to have those conversations or those calls? That's a huge deal.”

Young People



Are there groups of people who you think find it harder to get support?

“In college, we don't really get as much **support** as in school. where we had support and we knew what to do if we needed it. In college, I wouldn't know what to do. I've got no clue - no one's ever told me.

But I think that's like the main thing because in college we've got A-Levels and stuff like that. We get stressed out so easily because I know for a fact I do.

I would not know what to do at all if I need the support in college, but that might just be my college.

But at the same time, I know a lot of people who do the same like they they'll like come to me and be like “I don't know what to do in college if I need help, genuinely I don't.”

Me neither. I don't, really. I know there's like, certain things, like there's Health and Wellbeing Officers. But if someone sees you walk into there. They're like “Ohh, wonder what's going on.”

There's not enough support.”

Young People

What would make it easier for everyone to get the help they need?



“More guidance because I feel like with schools, especially because I know in my school it was very hard to understand where to go and even though there was posters, you didn't want to say and we weren't allowed our phones to even put the number in - say there was a poster saying ‘Call this number if you ever need help’.

Well, let us have our phones to do that!

So I didn't look for a lot of times when I went to toilet, it was literally just me and my blazer, and I don't have a pen in my blazer and a notepad - not everyone carries pen and paper everywhere.”

Young People

What do you like most and least about where you live?



“Probably that there's a lot of **activity space**. So, there's like a youth club, a gym or swimming baths - there is a lot of that.

But at the same time, it's **all in one area**. They had to put them all on the same road.

So, that's probably what I like the least as well.”

Young People




“The violence - there's a lot and it's not even just in my area. Like Liverpool in general. I was walking down and I just saw lads beating each other and I was like 'Oh, what's going on there?'. But you could walk anywhere around Liverpool and probably see that and that's worrying.”



Stop the violence. Literally. Just stop it. That's it.

Parents+Carers



What do you think are the biggest challenges for young people's mental health in our community?

“Socialising - **everything is online, mental health issues.**


They have 2 personas - I've seen it with me lad, he's got an online persona where he's completely outgoing, very well spoken, perfect.

Then in real life, even with his family, he goes inside himself.

Just turned 18 now after going through this for years - he's only now just starting to talk to us (parents) and know who he is, but he had a lot of **bullying in school** and **no support** from the school. He was bullied and actually told by the headteacher 'just suck it up'.

The only option we had was to take him away from the school and home-school him.”

Parents+Carers



What do you think are the biggest challenges for young people's mental health in our community?

"I think its going to be **social media**, I think everyone's going to say that.

I'm the same, scrolling, though we do go to a lot of clubs, we try to get them both doing clubs as well.

It's a **struggle to get them out of their rooms**, off social media, more my son than my disabled daughter, because he likes to be on his phone. Example - little boy in the street, they are best friends, they see each other and then say 'I'll phone you in a minute' and they then play a game together online but in their own homes not together in person, and they literally live over the road from one another."


"Definitely social media because my daughter is nearly 16 and I have an 8 year old boy who has Youtube and you've really got to watch him because **I do worry about boys' mental health**, because girls are a bit different, they talk about things.

I've also got a one year old and I hope to God that something changes when they get older.

But then **I can't say anything because I go on social media and they see me on it**, and I put their pictures on social media so its like a vicious circle.

It's bad but then I'm on it and I just don't know - it's bad and **I'm just as bad as them.**"

Parents+Carers



What local resources or supports do you find helpful to your family?

“MYA 100%”

“Speke Adventure **Playground** – The Venny”

“Bank View High school - they’ve been amazing.

We’ve seen **no support in primary school** but going into Bank View - within a short time we’ve seen a **completely different child** and she’s only been there since September.

She’s made us **proud** tonight, - this has given her **something to look forward to.**

We did have another sleepless night last night with her worrying, but it’s been amazing and she’s smashed it.

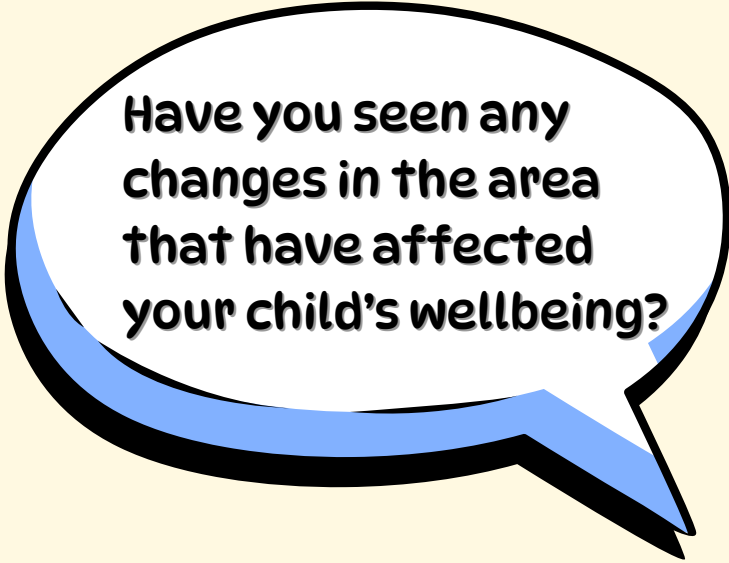
We can’t thank the school anymore, we can’t.”

“**Nothing in our area.**

The most support we have is from school like **drama** and **after school** and she’s doing her GCSE’s so revision classes – without this there is nothing else.

She doesn’t go out as she’s **terrified of gangs** and isn’t streetwise. It’s not safe for them, me and her Dad do not like her to go out – she is **growing up too soon** as her conversations are always with adults.”

Parents+Carers



Have you seen any changes in the area that have affected your child's wellbeing?

“Not really no, **the Venny do a lot with mental health and stuff so quite good.**”

“Haven't seen any changes because **we don't allow our children outside.**

We don't think its safe enough with the **build up of cars.**

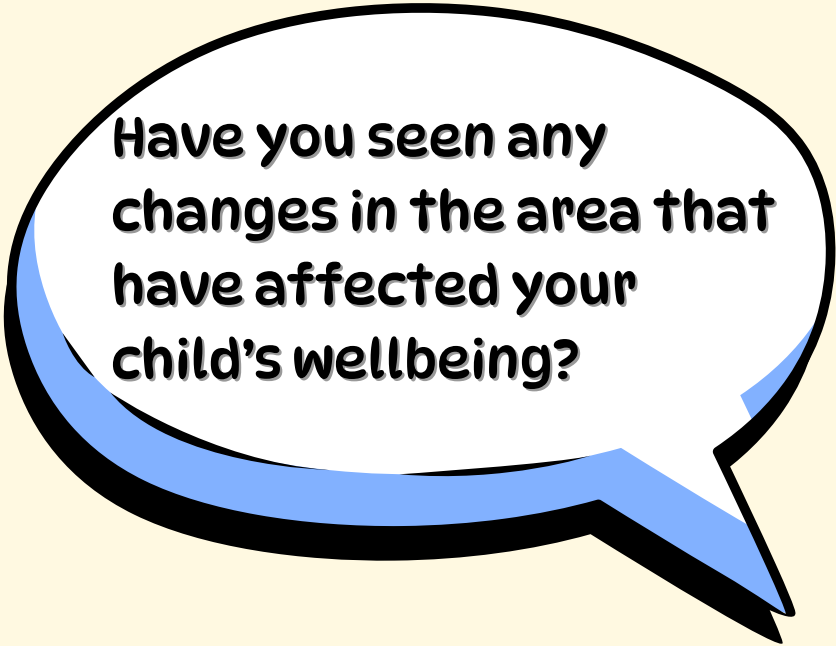
When we were younger growing up in the 90's your mum threw you in the street, you had a game of footie and you were ok.

Nowadays, even down little side streets, like where we live, you've got cars going up and down and its **not safe** for them, so they are **not socialising** unless you take them to places to socialise.

They are **not getting the diversity** of seeing other people unless you do it yourself.

You **don't know your neighbours** anymore like you used to, so you don't know who is around.”

Parents+Carers



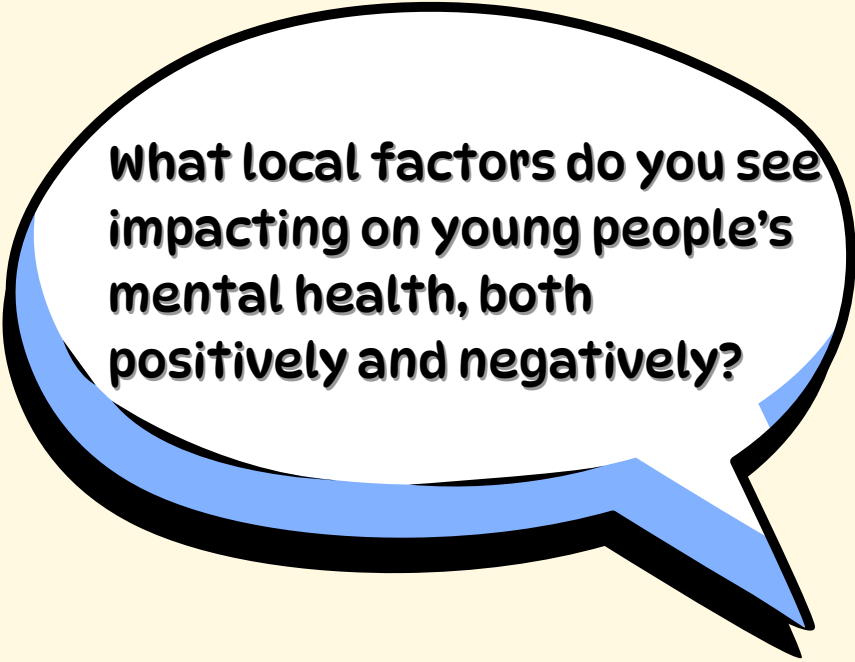
Have you seen any changes in the area that have affected your child's wellbeing?

“Positively is what is happening now with my disabled daughter, about a year ago was struggling with friends, leaving junior school was feeling a bit **isolated**, her friends were nice but she **couldn't keep up with them because she is in a chair** and they're running around the playground so we started struggling with her friends then she joined MYA and its snowballed since then, she did a film last year with the girls, she just goes around and is dead **confident** and she's got another film now about accessibility, being shown tonight – so that's a positive reason.”

“We don't have any services in Childwall, there's nothing for the young ones at all. There used to be a youth club when (Mum) was in her teens, 20 years ago through the church and they couldn't wait to shut us down and then ever since I don't think there is anything that's come up at all in the Childwall area.

There's **nowhere for the young ones to go**, they are at the **most sociable age** but there's nowhere to go. If only they had somewhere.”

Professionals



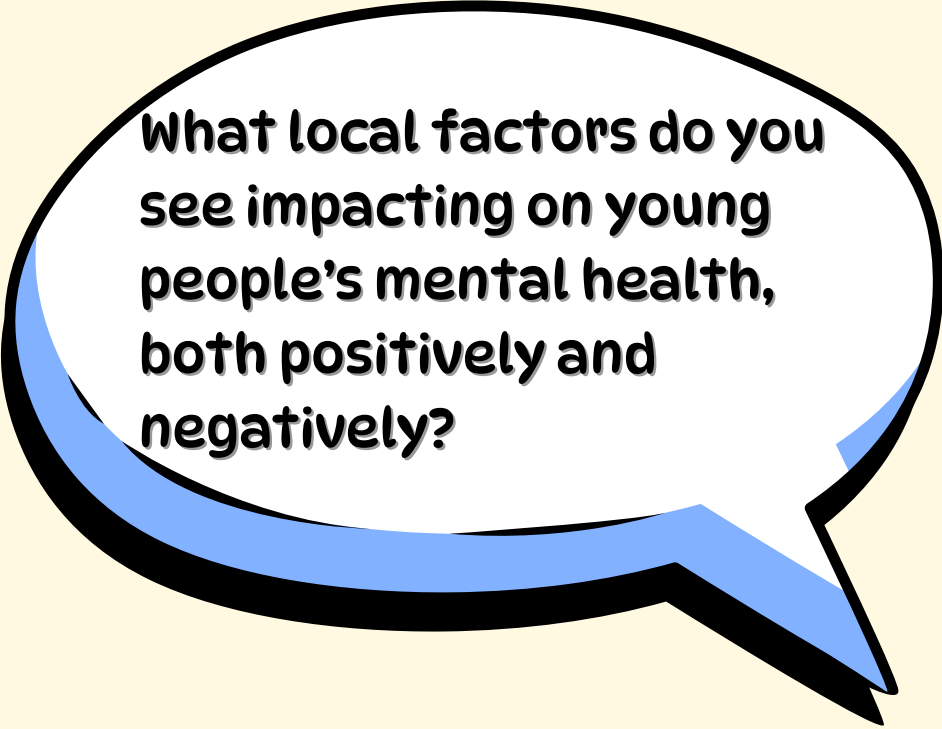
What local factors do you see impacting on young people's mental health, both positively and negatively?

“Positively – there’s a lot more **clubs opening** that our kids can access for **children with special needs to feel included**, like the inclusive hub and YPAS has lots of groups they can attend.”

“Both positively and negatively I would say social media because it can be **used positively** but from can be negative due to all the **bullying** that goes on, and everything is in your face, there is **bad news everywhere** and information is at your fingertips – that can be good sometimes but that can be bad.”

“Negatively – there’s **nothing in their own communities**, nothing local to where they live like there was years ago.”

Professionals




What local factors do you see impacting on young people's mental health, both positively and negatively?

“I work in the Liverpool School Health Team and I see a lot of positive factors in terms of how well **community organisations** are working to reach young people. So, it's voluntary and non-voluntary sectors.

Negatively - In the city there's a lot of **deprivation** and there's a lot of groups that have **inequalities**, so trying to reach out to the hard-to-reach young people that might be involved in **criminality**, that may have **come from overseas** and had kind of a **rough journey** to get here to particularly focusing on the **hard-to-reach people** or people living in **poverty** to improve their mental health”

Professionals



What local factors do you see impacting on young people's mental health, both positively and negatively?

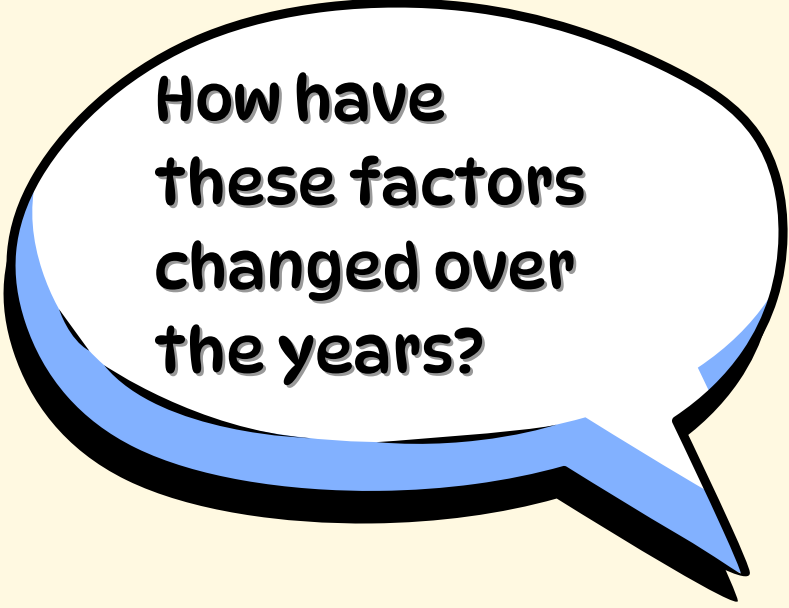
“I just think it would be like **support hubs, community centres**. They're really positively impacting young people because it gives them an **extra space** to go outside of school.

I think maybe negatively it's the **places that are most deprived** and that are in need of just a little bit rejuvenating, a little bit of TLC.”

“I think positively is definitely the **community that we've got in Liverpool**. We've got such strong knit community and there are so many **different services**, different **local organisations** all popping up and we're very good at **collaborating and working together**.

Negative is **low deprivation areas**, so obviously historically Liverpool's always had those low deprivation areas. We still see pockets, but with that **connection**, that **collaboration in the community**, we do really aim to support those in those most vulnerable areas and those most vulnerable children and young people.”

Professionals



How have these factors changed over the years?

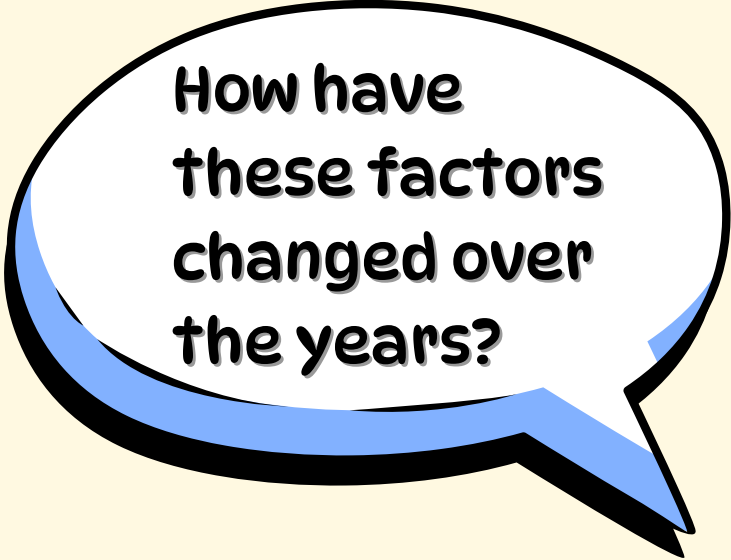
“Obviously with mental health and mental wellness and kind of looking at yourself as being **recognised more** and more. And more obviously, we all know this, but it's also evident in the way that kinds of **professionals like organisations**, healthcare, are responding to that need as well. It's just becoming more recognised.”

“So I moved to Liverpool in 2021 when I didn't know about the lot of services, but I say as I've lived longer in Liverpool, they're **popping up more**, things are coming out and people are getting the word around.

And so things are spreading and it's becoming **more of a conversation**. And I think that's really positive for the community. When I was looking for mental health support myself when I first moved to Liverpool and it was **very limited** in what would be offered for me.

Now if you look for a young person - what support do they need? We'll **advocate** for this, for them and they'll find a **pathway** to give them the support rather than just to generalise, you need to go here.”

Professionals



How have these factors changed over the years?

“Impact of social media is a big one for our children - **a lot more time spent online than actually conversing and being out in the community.**”

“As in social media changed – well it’s got worse, very confusing with the **number of platforms**, which we heard about today which was educational, I think it’s got worse basically.”

So I've worked in Liverpool School Health for the past four years, so over the time that I've worked with the service, I can see that there's a **lot more links** being made between different professional organisations to make sure that we're not doubling up on the same service that we can **signpost to the best suited service** and which I do think is a positive and obviously there are some changes in terms of how social media impacts young people's mental health. **Vaping** has had a huge impact on habits that people choose and as well as **drugs and criminality**, which is quite an issue in this.

Professionals



Are there any trends in young people's wellbeing that you think are linked to changes in the local area?

"I think what's having an impact is not having those centres to go to, such as **youth centres and organised activities** that the children can attend that would then get them meeting friends in the area.

Social media and Covid is still having an impact - children are at **home a lot more** than they used to be."

Sleep is a definite big issue because everything is out there now, accessible 24/7, 365 days a year.


Digital technology is to blame for that as is social media - one of the biggest factors that's come out.

Loneliness - given that we've got social media and everything is connectable, people feel more lonely."

"I think with young people there's a lot of **peer pressure**. The impacts of young people **vaping** - often we'll see young kids as as young as 12, but it will mainly be because their peers are also vaping.

Social media as well - how that affects kids **body image**, how it affects their **sleep** and which all overall impacts their health."

Professionals



Are there any trends in young people's wellbeing that you think are linked to changes in the local area?

“I'd say **social media** has a massive impact in the sense in terms of kids are swiping through and seeing all of these trends and thinking ‘ohh, I want to try that’, but not necessarily being able to tell the difference between if this is a benefit, or something that will have a negative impact.

And I think by giving the awareness and showing these kids that they can **make these decisions for themselves**, but also just have that **information and the understanding** will help them differentiate between if this is a good or bad, because it's great scrolling on TikTok and seeing all these cool things in connecting with friends.

But are we doing this safely?”


Obviously, being at Kooth, we are an anonymous service, so I didn't really get to see kind of that face-to-face impact, but when I go to different conferences or when I meet different teams, I hear from them, and they say obviously this implementation.

So, for example in Liverpool, I think it's 5 or 6 **new Family Hubs have just launched**.

So, like I said, that increase or not, it's going to have that positive effect.

I do think it is obviously getting positive.

Professionals



Which groups of young people seem to face the most barriers to good mental health?

“I would say generally anybody who is either part of the LGBTQ+ community or the non-white community. I wouldn't say that they are generally segregated on purpose, but I'd say the kind of help is **generalised** and we need to kind of focus on **more specific help** for that person, because we can't just have a book and think that it's going to represent everybody. We want to be **diverse.**”

“**Low deprivation** - I do think that's one, but one that I always think about is **young lads feeling like they don't have a place in society anymore.**”

I often see that hesitancy of young lads getting support, or even just talking about their mental health or prioritising wellbeing, so instead they are being the class clown. They want to laugh and joke about it, which is fine.

But they put on that barrier because they're a bit embarrassed or maybe a bit scared.

So it's really just important to get that message through to them. Boys can have difficulties with mental health just as much as girls can as well.”

Professionals

How do inequalities in the community show up in your organisation?



“We need to listen to all types of young people, and so I feel like by not generalising and being a bit more specific to that young person - e.g. if they are part of the LGBTQ+ community, if they are part of their community -
What do they need to thrive more?”

“In my organisation - we are an anonymous service so we don't really see that as much.
What we do see is in the trends and patterns.
For example - in **low deprivation areas** we do have high number of service users but again it just really fluctuates with us.”

Professionals

What concerns do young people share with you about their local area?



“We all share concerns often about what their peers are interacting in.

In terms of **crime**, how that's increasing, but then also the access to mental health.

So, they've acknowledged that there is a high need for mental health, and **often it's not so easy for them to find the right services** or there might be a waiting list which is a concern.”

Professionals



What extra support do you think is needed for certain groups?

“I feel like they need a space. We need to create **more spaces** for them and specific spaces just for them so that they don't have the issue of feeling uncomfortable because they're with other people that are just like them and they can **express their identity**.

They can express their personality in all the beautiful creations that it is.

But also **learn about other things within their community** and express that in a way that's positive, so creating more spaces just for them would be great.”

“I think the **support that is out there is just absolutely amazing** and I think it's just that understanding of creating that awareness - **I think a lot of children and young people who might be struggling might not even know all the services out there.**

So, I think the only thing to do extra is just making sure that they're all aware of them and different criteria when they can access them and how to access them.”

Professionals



How do you support young people to talk about their worries?

“As a school health service, we are all trauma-informed practitioners, so we have a concept of the wider impacts that are affecting them.

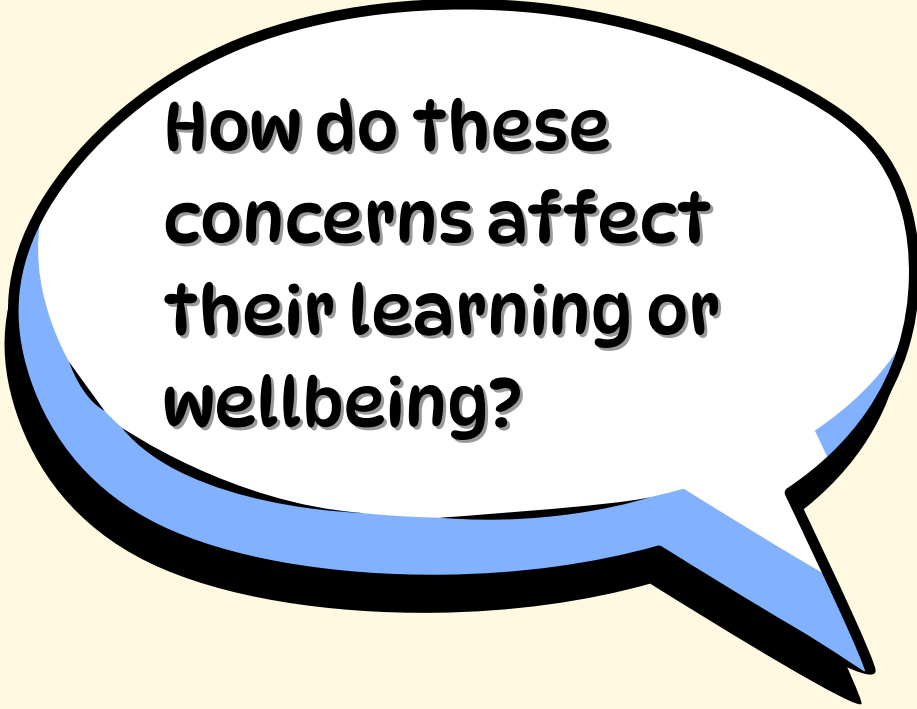
We all come in with kind of an **open, approachable start** by **building a rapport** with young people based on their likes and their dislikes.

Because we are health, often young people will see our uniform and it's quite a trusting profession, so they will open up to us.

They do understand that we're looking at all their health aspects.

So, whether or not they're talking to us, just about body image, that could then lead into a conversation about sleep, about their home life, about their friends and because we do one-to-one health assessments, it really makes the young person feel **empowered to make their own changes and their own choices.**”

Professionals




How do these concerns affect their learning or wellbeing?

If a young person is suffering with their mental health, often that comes with a lot of **worries**. So, while they're at school, instead of worrying about school, they might be worrying about **external factors** e.g. how they look, how they feel, what's happening with their friends, what's happening with family members at home.

If they're not getting that support at an early age, they're not learning to regulate their emotions which has an impact on what coping mechanisms they might go to - which is why some young kids might go to **vaping, drugs, alcohol to steer away from these negative mental health impacts.**"

Professionals

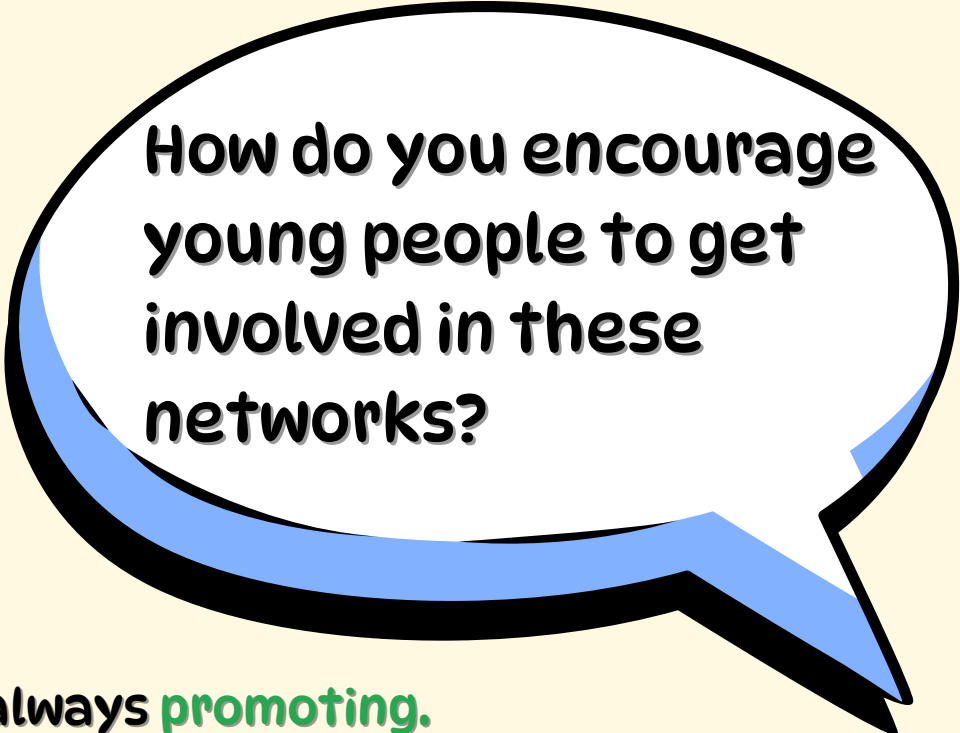


What community assets or networks do you see supporting young people?

“So I'd say YPAS 100%.

We have a lot of different avenues that you can go down specified to those person's needs - not only to the **young person, but to the parents as well** because we'd be wrong to exclude them from that essentially. Everybody needs support - whether you're a young person or an adult. We support people who are from the ages of 5 to 25, so you could be 22 going through university or whatever, you're still a young person. You still deserve as much mental health support as possible, and so by having a **wide range gives so many different people access.**”

Professionals



How do you encourage young people to get involved in these networks?

“I think it's just always **promoting**.

So when young people come to our service, we don't just provide them with the **support that they need**, but we also think about the **long term goal**. So in terms of what do they want in terms of life. And so if that's they want to go down this career path, but they're just not sure how to do it, well, they can get involved in our **participation** piece and they can participate. We've got some amazing young people that have been able to express themselves that wouldn't have had that opportunity beforehand.

They found their voice. They found their niche.

And now they're able to go further in life and have the **confidence and the self esteem** to do so.

And so I feel like whenever any young person comes in, it's also just thinking - **not only what do you need now, but what, what would you like for in the future?**

Where would you like to go?

Also shows that where we want them to thrive.

And we're not just here for the here and now - We're here for the long-term.”

Professionals

What prevention activities have worked well in your experience?



“Our service does **therapeutic intervention**, but we also are a **prevention** service.

So anyone can come to us even if they're not struggling with their mental health and they just want to look after their wellbeing and they can come to us for that support.

But then if they do need that therapeutic support we are there to offer that too.”

Professionals



Are there gaps in support that you think need to be filled?

“I definitely say **funding will always be an issue**, unfortunately, and I think it's just how do we manage that? I think a great thing that YPAS does is using other young people as well to help better the experience for them and for other fellow peers to come in.

It gives them opportunities whilst also making our service better.

So, it's kind of working a bit of both and you know we don't need to offer them a full time job in that process.

We can just tell them to come in for an hour, drop in our service and it's up to them if they want to come.

And that kind of helps our service do better.

I understand that funding is a massive problem and we would all love to have money to just be able to fund whatever we can, but I think it's **instead of looking about, not what we don't have, look at what we do have and what can we do with that and not just how we can change that but how we can move into new things and make it better in the future.**”

Professionals

How can schools, organisations and communities work together to tackle wider influences?



“I do think that we do work together really, really well already.

I think it's just continuing that collaboration.

So events like this are absolutely amazing, just to see the wider community just getting together.

Different conferences, even just like on email and stuff, obviously I know it's not as kind of impactful as face to face, but just that's sharing of information and resources and just all helping each other.”

Professionals



How do you involve young people in shaping mental health initiatives?

“We look at **childrens’ own voices**, so when we can go to schools or we do events and things like that, we ask them about their community.

I said ‘What’s it like living as a young person in Liverpool, for example, or maybe just Liverpool in general?’ - We want to hear from the person’s point of view.

We also do sessions and assemblies and we always welcome feedback on that because obviously our sessions are tailored to their needs and we don’t want to deliver a session that’s not engaging.

We want to get the message across.

So hearing their voice just gives them that power and they can actually share their experience and their own opinions.”

We asked the audience -

Where is 'Your Place'?

Where do you feel that you belong?

- My bed/ home
- With my friends/family
- Media - social media/favourite TV show
- Doing sports - Football/Basketball
- In places – Liverpool/Kirkby/Jamaica/Nigeria/South Africa/Belfast/Turkey/Northumberland/
The Dam/LIPA/Camp/Centre 63



**The audience thought
'Online Environment'
was the one children
and young people need
the most support with
at the moment**



- **Online takes them globally and we never know who's at the other end of the phone/keyboard talking to our children and young ones.**
- **Social media is integrated into lives so much earlier now even with the age limits being age 13+.**
- **Social media has a massive impact on the children, nowadays and even if they have restrictions in place with phones/games, the pressures from their peers to be available online has a massive impact on them.**
- **Constantly changing landscape.**
- **I think social media/phone use is a huge issue.**
- **Makes you realise how much of an impact the internet affects children, because lots of my peers use their phone a lot.**
- **Children need more awareness and support with social media platforms and internet usage because everyone needs time offline.**
- **The reason for this is because we want to make people aware of the pros and cons of it.**
- **Exposed to all kinds – hard to safeguard.**

...Followed by 'School Environment'

- Because the play sent me a picture and helped me get a better understanding about some things.
- Nice to see children have a voice.
- People in school might not get support in school and could be struggling at the moment.
- Because school is a place where young people can struggle with bullying, friendships and relationships.

....'Community Environment'

- Need more awareness of danger in the community.
- Children are scared to speak out because of "grass" culture.
- Because children are affected by the community so much

.... and 'Home Environment'

- Some parents do not know how to parent and home is sometimes not a safe space



Audience Feedback

Me and the family loved the event - thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to attend. Last night was excellent, well done to everyone involved! It was great to see our amazing work in action.

The event was well organised and the performances were excellent. The children were so inspiring. We all loved the 'Knock Knock' song at the end - hit home how much we need to be a kinder society to give opportunities to everyone.

MYA Governor

As a team, when we attended the NOW festival last year all together, we were inspired by the enthusiasm of the young people, their supporters, and your Raise team.

Due to the complex nature of the young people we work with, seeing other young people have the confidence to share their skills and abilities was heartwarming and we wanted to get involved and support you and your team as trusted friends and colleagues.

The whole event is such a mammoth undertaking, we wanted to be able to help – if we could.

It also gave us hope, as some of our former young people were involved in the performances or were attending to support their siblings.

Jane McHale, Dynamic Support Team

Just to say a massive thank you from all of us, we all had the best time. Thank you so much to all of the team for such a fantastic Now Fest. The team are brilliant.

Sarah Spoor, Teacher

Just wanted to say a massive thanks for inviting Pete and I to the Now 2026 festival.

We both thoroughly enjoyed it and were amazed by all the talent from all the young people and hard work the RAISE did to put on such a wonderful festival.

Looking forward to next year already!

Helen Hawkins, Social Signature

I just wanted to say a massive well done once again for another fabulous NOW Fest and a thank you for letting me be a part of it and continuing to deliver the great work that you all do so brilliantly. Feedback from everyone I spoke to was amazing.

Please pass on my thanks to all the young people who were involved in so many different ways.

**Lisa Nolan, Senior Programme Manager (Mental Health)
(Liverpool Place)**

I just wanted to say what an absolute triumph NOW FEST 2026 was. I swear it gets better each year

Appreciate how hard you all worked on the events and wanted to say a massive well done to you and all the team.

Thank you for facilitating such a joyous and powerful event.

The young people were as ever an absolute credit to themselves their families and all who work with and for them.

The performances they produced were both inspirational and moving. Damian - last night you said the young people who performed will never forget this moment - nor will I

Just BRILLIANT.

Hope you all manage to get some rest because we are already looking forward to 2027

Yvonne Maddocks, Team Manager Liverpool Youth Service

WOW!!!!!! That's my heartfelt response to the wonderful NOW Fest 2026.

Last night was amazing – so moving, poignant and educational - yet full of life, energy, hope and joy!

Thank you so much for the ticket to come and see! Loved it.

Julie Mitchell, Artist

Being involved in NOW Fest made me realise how much youth voice matters and I learnt so much from their performances and how it can bring people together.

Student on placement

Last night was amazing. I intended to say actually well done to you and all of your teams on another fantastic celebration of young people and the things that matter to them.

Jayne Cook, Advanced Public Health Practitioner

I loved it - the work your team put in is amazing - count me in next year.

**Nicola Maguire,
Dynamic Support
Team**



Audience Feedback

- Keep it going - it supports children and young people's mental health.
- Absolutely amazing experience for performers and audience. Can't wait for next year.
- They are amazing.
- I appreciate the message they've put out across every field.
- Was a really great night! First time I've been but hopefully not the last!
- Just a thankyou to everyone who was organising such a good event.
- Staff were lovely.
- If I had the chance to come again I would.
- It was brilliant.
- Brilliant show with excellent performances.
- It was a great experience.
- Most people don't see the struggles people hide, like when I went to school I would always smile and no one would ever know what's wrong even though I struggled with my own mental health.
- Never knew it existed before. And I will definitely promote from now on.



NOW 2026

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S
MENTAL HEALTH FESTIVAL**

One word to sum up NOW Fest 2026...

- Amazing
- Boss
- Brilliant
- Belter, lad
- Epic
- Emotional
- Enlightening
- Excellent
- Eye-opening
- Enjoyable
- Fantastic
- Outstanding
- Wholesome
- Wonderful

NOW 20 26

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S
MENTAL HEALTH FESTIVAL**

We were delighted to be hosting this Festival with the continued support of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB), Liverpool Place, which commissions Mental Health Support for Children and Young People in Liverpool, and the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership

Photography by Dave Brownlee

**For further information, contact
mentalhealthpromotion@mya.org.uk**

**MERSEYSIDE
Violence
Reduction
Partnership**



Cheshire and Merseyside