

# THE HEALTH NEEDS

OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN SWINDON

2024

By the Children and Young People in Swindon



# FOREWORD



As a Director of Public Health, each year I have to produce a report about health in Swindon. This is my fourth report and this time, I have asked our youngest residents to take over. **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (CYP)** make up a third of all people living in Swindon and we have the largest proportion of CYP in the South West region and so it is incredibly important that we hear their voices.

Swindon children face significant challenges regarding their health and wellbeing that are similar to the rest of England. Social, emotional and mental health really stands out as a key issue for children and young adults. Keeping teeth healthy and being able to eat healthily and exercise are priorities for improvement, as is learning and the school environment, which we know is so important to overall health and wellbeing. What causes these issues is complicated and it will be different for each young person. Therefore, we must make sure we talk to children and young people to understand what would help them to be healthier.

I am delighted to have handed over the creation of this report to a number of voluntary sector partners, led by CYP with the support of WAY UK.

To be absolutely clear – I have had no involvement in the engagement work, nor the writing or design of this report. These words have come directly from CYP, via CYP. My thanks specifically go to Sandra Ebenezar (a young leader at local charity WAY) and the WAY Changemakers (aged 12-25) who have led the work, providing us with such rich insight into the views of Swindon CYP.

Alongside lots of facts and figures we gathered on Swindon children's public health, in a CYP Health Needs Analysis, this report will inform work to continue to improve children's health in Swindon over the coming years.

All children deserve a happy and healthy childhood and start to adulthood. We know that for some CYP, this isn't the case and we are particularly committed to making improvements to their health, creating a fairer Swindon. That is why improving children's health is a priority in the Swindon Plan.

Research tells us that if we put more effort into improving children's health, they are more likely to be healthy adults. Therefore, by prioritising this work, we are not only making a commitment to the children of today but also to the adults of tomorrow.

**Professor Steve Maddern**

Director of Public Health

December 2024



# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS THIS REPORT ALL ABOUT?

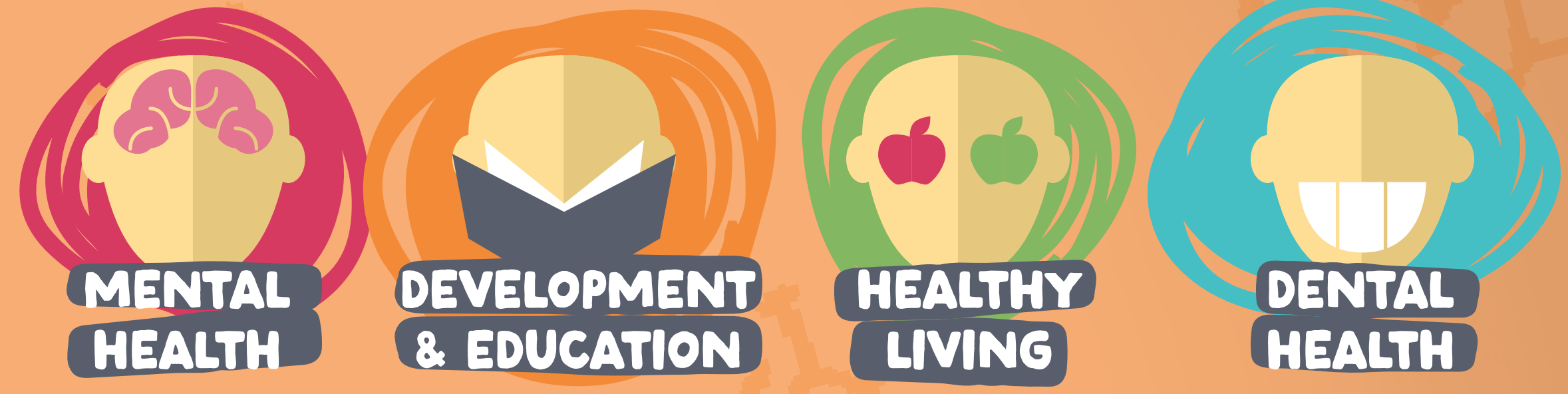
Swindon has a big community of **Children and Young People (CYP)**.

Just like other groups in the area, their health and care needs are very **DIVERSE**.

This report dives into the thoughts and experiences of CYP **aged 4-24** in Swindon, focusing on their health needs and how well those needs are being met.

"I think it's a good shout to include up to 24 year olds and not just stop at 18. You're still so young between 18-24 and are still developing loads and figuring out adulthood."

This report focuses on 4 main health topics:



## HOW WAS THIS REPORT FORMED?

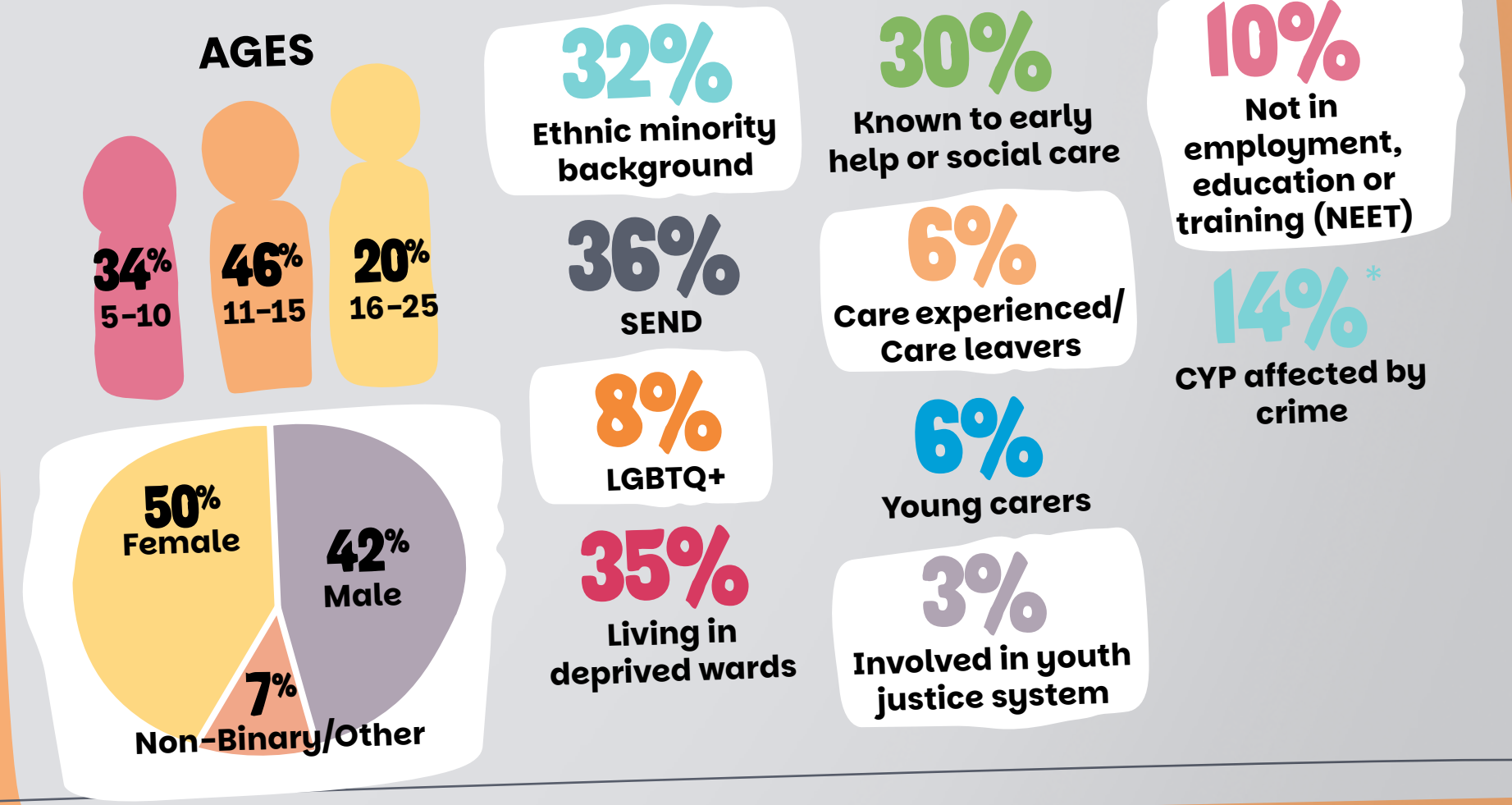
This report was written by Sandra Ebenezar (a young leader at local charity WAY) and the research design and facilitation was coproduced with Swindon's Young Changemakers - a diverse group of young people 12-25 with a range of experiences, passions and skillsets who seek to address the needs young people face and identify opportunities to drive lasting change in our communities.

The wider research was conducted by a partnership of local charities WAY, SMASH, STEP and Voluntary Action Swindon, who have established trusted relationships with a wide group of children and young people across Swindon.

## WHO DID WE SPEAK TO?

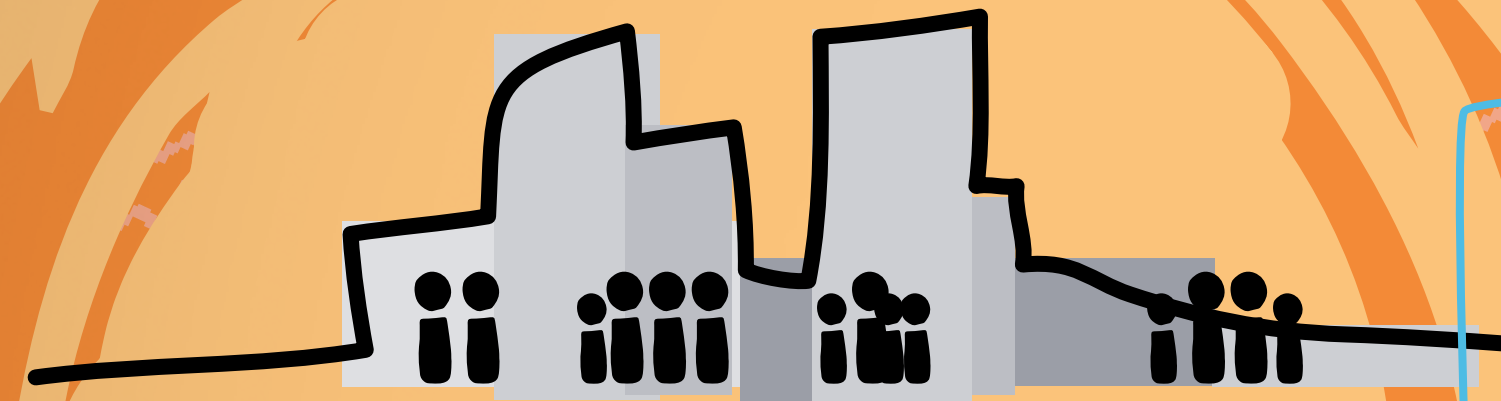
As part of the research we spoke to over 160 children and young people aged 4-25 through focus groups, groups and 1-2-1 consultation, creative workshops and a participatory school assembly.

Here is a snapshot into the children and young people we spoke to:



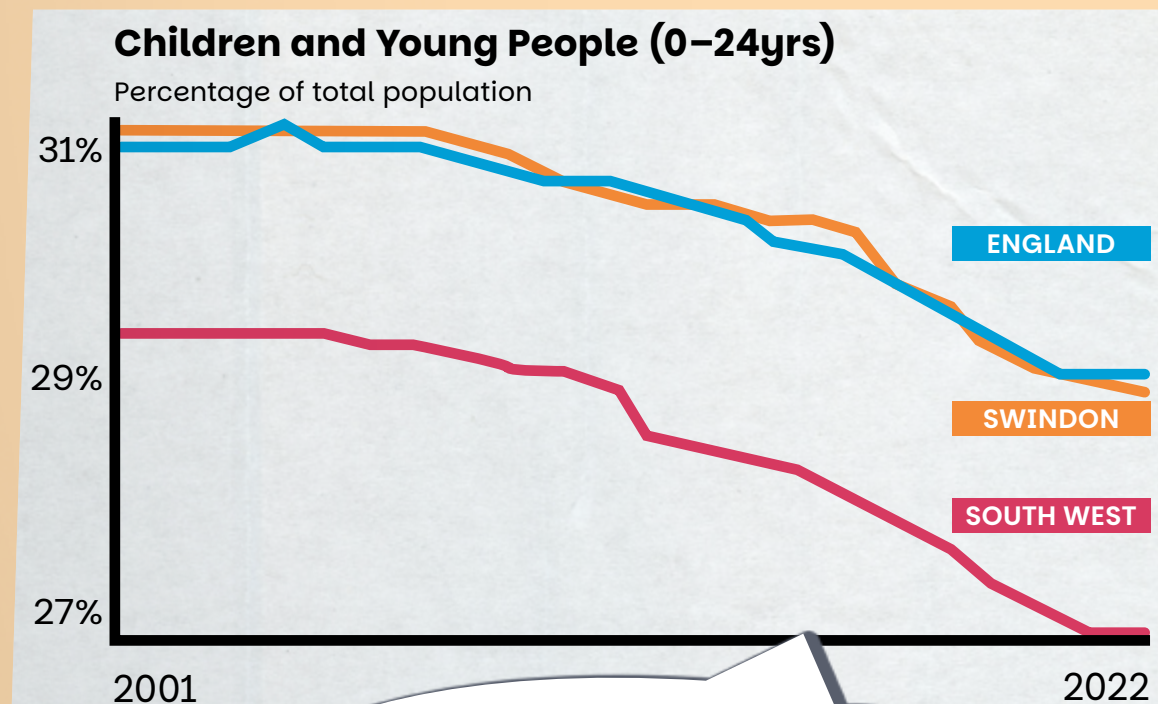
# A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CYP DEMOGRAPHICS IN SWINDON

"Swindon's CYP population is ethnically diverse"



**SWINDON'S POPULATION = 233,408**  
**SWINDON'S CYP POPULATION = 67,856**

Over the last two decades, Swindon's population has experienced a declining proportion of CYP residents.



"Even though the CYP population is declining, it feels like the support needed by CYP is increasing so much!"

### Swindon's CYP Place of Birth

CENSUS 2021

Age Group	UK	Middle East & Asia	Europe (incl Ireland)	Africa	The Americas & Caribbean	Australasia & Oceania
Aged 0-15	90.5%	4.8%	3%	0.6%	1%	0.1%
Aged 16-24	81.1%	9.1%	6.2%	1.6%	1.8%	0.2%

### Ethnic Groups in Swindon

CENSUS 2021

Age Group	White	Asian, Asian British	Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	Other Ethnic Group
Aged 0-15	74.2%	14.2%	6.3%	3.7%	1.5%
Aged 16-24	79.7%	11.9%	4.3%	2.6%	1.6%

### Percentage of pupils whose first language is not English

ALL SCHOOL TYPES

Region	Percentage
England	20.2%
South West	9.7%
Swindon	21.5%

"IF PEOPLE CAN'T SPEAK ENGLISH OR SPEAK IT WELL, HOW DO THEY COMMUNICATE WITH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS? ARE THEY PROVIDED WITH ANY TOOLS OR HELP?"

Out of 132 small neighbourhoods in the Borough, **19** are in the **20% MOST DEPRIVED** areas in England. On the other hand, **28** neighbourhoods in Swindon are in the **20% LEAST DEPRIVED** areas.

Children and young people (CYP) living in poorer areas face more challenges, like limited access to resources and opportunities. Studies show that these children are less likely to finish secondary school, go to college, or earn as much money later in life. They also find it harder to break the cycle of poverty.

"The range is crazy. Swindon alone contains some of the most deprived and some of the least deprived. How has that happened? How can the gap be closed?"



# MENTAL HEALTH

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MENTAL HEALTH?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes Mental health as the state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community.

## DATA AND STATISTICS ABOUT CYP'S MENTAL HEALTH IN SWINDON

Since 2019, the number of CYP in Swindon going to A&E for mental health issues has stayed pretty much the same. Most of these visits are by White British CYP (87.5%), with the second-largest group being Asian/Asian British (3.4%). Around **69%** of these cases are **FEMALES**.

"Why are more females than males? Or maybe is it actually equal and males are less likely to speak up?"

The most common reason people go to A&E is **SELF HARM** (including self-poisoning), which is when someone hurts themselves to cope with tough emotions or situations. The second most common reason is mental health crisis, primarily depression.

Swindon has **MUCH HIGHER RATES** of self-harm admissions for CYP, especially for those aged 10 to 24, compared to the rest of the South West and England.

In Swindon, around **2%** of CYP are officially diagnosed with depression according to their GP records. Most are aged 20-24, and a large percentage (67%) are female.

In the 2023/24 "How Are You?" survey, **35%** of Year 10s stated that they feel like they don't have healthy ways to deal with tough feelings, and **8%** said they don't have a single friend to lean on.

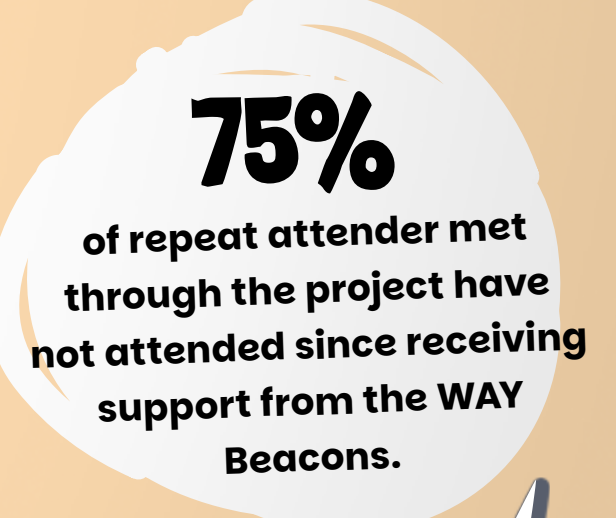
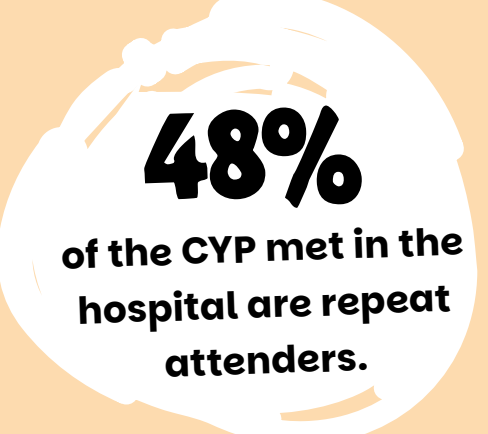
"This is so true and is so evident even in the research for this report too. So many CYP don't even know how to deal with difficult feelings. Clearly CYP need to be taught and supported in how to do this well."

As is the case nationally, there are long waiting times for mental health services. It's therefore important to try new models of support for CYP and the time they need it, for example WAY Beacons is an award-winning project based at Swindon's Great Western Hospital that helps break the cycle of hospital reattendance, crime, violence, and risk-taking behaviour among children young people aged 10 to 25. In 12 months, the project has supported **115 YOUNG PEOPLE**. The following data is the percentage of CYP supported due to mental related admission:



CYP met at Great Western Hospital (GWH) emphasised the impact of school on their mental health, particularly the impact of exam stress and school behaviour policies. This is consistent with the data which shows that certain secondary schools, with a more rigid behaviour policy, have a higher number of their students attend GWH due to mental health related admissions.

However, this project which provides a relational approach at a reachable moment and follows up with ongoing community support also demonstrates the impact of a long-term relational approach.



"It's the first time someone has seen me as a person, and not an illness."

We asked children and young people about Mental Health.

This is their response:

### WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO BAD MENTAL HEALTH?

- Having a negative view of myself
- Not having enough support
- Feeling disconnected from the community
- Isolation and no friends
- School behaviour policies. Particularly locking toilets and not having opportunities to be listened to.
- Exam stress
- Bullying
- Struggling with physical health
- Personal situations at home or in life

"Not being accepted socially, having a rough childhood."

"Group session like STEP, so you know you're with people like you who know how you feel"

### WHAT DOES HELP?

- Creative: Music, Art, Drawing and journaling
- Talking to people they trust
- Gaming
- Playing Sport: football, martial arts
- Pets and therapy animals
- Faith
- Group sessions and 1-2-1 long term mentoring

### WHAT DOESN'T HELP?

- Short-term support
- Long waiting lists
- High turnover of staff in services.
- Not having time to build trust, high intensity of conversation and being made to feel like 'the problem'
- Talking about "feelings and problems" without having the time to build trust

"I find it hard opening up to people I don't know or trust".

"If it's bad now, how is it going to be in 12 months.... I might be dead."

"I always feel worse after my CAMHS appointment than I did before".

CLICK TO HEAR COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE



## CYP'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Here are some ideas and recommendations from CYP in Swindon about mental health:

### MORE TRAINING:

**For friends and family:** Since friends and family are often the first to support CYP, and with longer waiting times for professional help, they need to be better equipped to provide support when it's needed. **58% OF CYP** said they felt friends and family **DON'T KNOW** how to support.

**For teaching staff:** Teachers should receive training on how to support CYP with their mental health. Improvements within education settings: Start teaching CYP from a young age how to cope with difficult emotions.

Review of school behaviour policies - **DON'T LOCK TOILETS**

### MORE TYPES OF PROVISION AND IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY:

- Make professional mental health support easier to access (Don't just base it in school or in the town centre)
- Address the lack of community by offering more accessible activities, like sports groups, that everyone can join, not just those who can afford it
- There are lots of online options, resources and helplines, but there's a need for more long-term relational projects and services
- More support for relationship problems
- More support for boys and young men



# DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION?

The NSPCC defines Child development as the physical, cognitive, emotional and social growth that occurs throughout a child's life. Education refers to the process of teaching or learning, especially in a school or college, or the knowledge that you get from this.

## DATA AND STATISTICS ABOUT CYP'S CHILD DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION IN SWINDON

In Swindon, only **5.9%** of CYP get three or more A grades in their A-levels, **WHICH IS WAY LOWER** than the national average of **13.3%**.

Ofsted reports are positive in Early Years and Primary schools, where **97%** and **92%** have earned these top ratings—**HIGHER** than the national average.

In Swindon, secondary schools have **LOWER** percentage of "Good" or "Outstanding" ratings – compared to early years and primary schools – with only **79%** achieving this.

*"The stories I've heard from different people at different schools doesn't make this surprising to me. I myself witnessed how you were very much forced to go to sixth forms and then uni."*

Data shows that there's **A BIG SKILLS GAP** in Swindon as young people move into adulthood, which could contribute to health inequalities, especially for CYP whose parents or carers are under-employed or lack skills.

*"It seems unfair that CYP might experience health inequalities because of reasons they can't control, because their parents/carers are under-employed/lack skills."*

*"I think most CYP would agree with this. Primary school was so fun and forming. I often wish I was back in primary school!"*

Employees with low job security, job satisfaction, or wellbeing are more likely to experience poor health. The Swindon Local Plan 2024-2027 highlights "ensuring young people have the education and skills they need" as a key priority.

*"I think a big focus on this could have the chance to break this cycle of health inequality."*

As of August 2024, there were **526 CHILDREN** registered as Electively Home Educated. This number has grown considerably since the pandemic and continues to grow.

Swindon has a higher proportion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) with **ONE IN TEN** needing additional support.

*"Recognise our disability and our struggle."*

**When asked how can home-schooled children be supported, a CYP replied**

*"More people understanding or trying to understand what's going on in my mind. Stress toys, music, computer to do my work, people paying attention to my behaviour. Support groups/help getting a diagnosis..."*

# CYP VOICES ON DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

CLICK TO HEAR  
COMMENTS FROM  
YOUNG PEOPLE



We asked children and young people about Development and Education.

This is their response:

## WHAT POSITIVE EXPERIENCES DO YOU HAVE OF SCHOOL?

- Feeling safe at school, especially compared to home or on the streets
- Primary school was fun and had creative spaces.
- Feeling supported in learning and academic areas, including additional activities such as homework and revision clubs
- Colleges allow more independence where CYP are treated as an individual
- Colleges are good at supporting with mental health challenges
- Friendships and socialising
- Good support and awareness for online safety

"School was good, it was safer than being at home"

## WHAT NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES DO CYP HAVE OF SCHOOL?

- Feeling that they are not allowed to be themselves
- "Persecution" from peers around faith and religious beliefs
- Being restricted from going to the bathroom – often leading to anxiety, particularly for young girls
- Teachers not understanding diagnosis of neurodiverse conditions or mental health challenges
- Secondary Schools especially schools with a "regimented" and "strict approach"
- Strict uniform policy
- Bullying in school
- Teaching not being tailored to learning styles and individuals needs
- Not feeling listened to by teachers
- Lack of mental health support

"Everyone is expected to learn the same way at the same speed"

"Spending every day pretending to be 'normal' is soooo tiring... It's so hard to 'fit in' and conform."

"Teachers didn't understand my diagnosis, thinking everyone with Autism and ADHD is the same... we're individuals before our diagnosis!"

"Secondary schools care more about their reputation than about the students themselves and their individual needs."

## CYP RECOMMENDATIONS ON DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

Here are some ideas and recommendations from CYP in Swindon regarding development and education:

### MORE TRAINING FOR TEACHERS:

- Better empathetic support for CYP's needs – particularly regarding neurodiversity and mental health struggles
- Better understanding of their students' lives, not just their academic performance

### MORE SUPPORT AROUND WELLBEING

- Schools should reach out to CYP and ask how they're doing, maybe in 1:1 conversation, rather than waiting for CYP to approach them
- Schools should provide calming rooms for CYP who need a quiet space

### MORE NON-ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES:

- More creative activities including dance, drama, art and digital media
- More provision and learning resources around IT skills, including more use of IT within learning (instead of written work)
- More options and choice in the subjects they choose





# HEALTHY LIVING

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY HEALTHY LIVING?

Healthy living is about eating good food, staying active, getting enough sleep, and taking care of your mental health. It's making choices that help you feel good, both inside and out.

"I sit there in my bedroom and vape all day cause I've got nothing else to do."

## DATA AND STATISTICS ABOUT CYP'S ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS/HEALTHY FOOD AND EXERCISE IN SWINDON

The NHS recommends that children and young people aged 5-18 should aim for at least **60 MINUTES** of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Regular exercise helps them stay at a healthy weight, boosts heart health, reduces stress, and improves sleep.

In the How are you? **YEAR 10** survey 23/24 undertaken by Swindon Borough Council, **12%** of participants confirmed they vape.

The percentage of adolescents who vape **AT LEAST WEEKLY** is higher in this survey with **12%** of adolescents using an e-cigarette weekly, compared to ASH's national figure of **7.6%**.

Factors linked to these findings are age, normalisation and pressure ( **26%** of the adolescents surveyed stated that they felt pressured to start vaping which **94%** of the time came from friends or their family), ease, social media and marketing.

"I've been smoking and smoking weed since I was 9. It's hard to stop when it's been so long."

In the How are you? survey only **2%** of **YEAR 8** students who were asked smoked cannabis, however the same students thought the percentage would be higher. This indicates that CYP believe that smoking cannabis is more of a social norm than the reality.

"It would be good to see more research into healthy living and access to positive activities." There's more that can be done!"

rising obesity rates among year 6 students, **SIGNIFICANTLY EXCEEDS** regional average.

Pupils engaging in self-development activities (including sport, physical activity) achieved **10-20%** higher GCSEs

A **WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH** to healthy school meals, universally, has shown improvements in academic attainment at **KEY STAGES 1 AND 2**, especially for pupils with lower prior attainment

# CYP VOICES ON HEALTHY LIVING

CLICK TO HEAR COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE



We asked children and young people about Healthy Living.

This is their response:

## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT NUTRITIOUS FOOD?

- **58%** of CYP we asked didn't feel they had access to nutritious food
- Healthy food is too expensive
- No healthy options at secondary school compared to primary school
- Younger ages enjoyed fun initiatives for healthy eating, like 'Fruity Friday' at Goddard Park Primary School

"It's just too expensive!"

## WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT EXERCISE?

- **84%** of CYP we asked felt that they exercised regularly
- School is where most CYP access exercise
- Don't like the idea of exercise but do like the idea of sports and activities
- Most CYP viewed themselves as healthy, though thought they could do more.
- CYP had different views on what being healthy meant
- Many young people (particularly boys) wanted more opportunities to play sports
- Accessing sport and activities costs too much

"I would but the gym is too expensive, everything costs too much. I used to like the Oasis but that's gone."

## CYP RECOMMENDATIONS ON HEALTHY LIVING

Here are some ideas and recommendations from CYP in Swindon regarding healthy living:

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT:

- Support to buy healthy foods
- Support with sports/exercise clothing and equipment
- Inclusive and accessible sports and activities
- Affordable sports and activities.
- Inclusive sports for those that feel they aren't good at a sport but still enjoy it
- More localised sports (less travelling to other parts of Swindon)

"Regular exercise often comes with a cost. While walking and running might be 'free,' good trainers can be expensive."

### MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT:

Mental health plays a big role in how CYP look after themselves. Investing in mental health support is investing in helping CYP live healthier lifestyles.



# DENTAL HEALTH

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DENTAL HEALTH?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), oral health is defined as the state of the mouth, teeth and orofacial structures that enables individuals to perform essential functions such as eating, breathing and speaking.

## DATA AND STATISTICS ABOUT CYP'S DENTAL HEALTH IN SWINDON

At age 5, Swindon has a much higher rate of dental decay (**28.9%**) compared to England (**23.4%**) and the South West (**20.4%**).

Nationally, dental decay in this age group is more common among children from deprived backgrounds and those of Asian/Asian British ethnicity.

"Why again are certain CYP at more of a disadvantage?  
How can this be changed?"

"Access to NHS dental care is almost impossible! Especially for 19-24-year-olds. The only option pretty much is to go private, which costs a fortune."

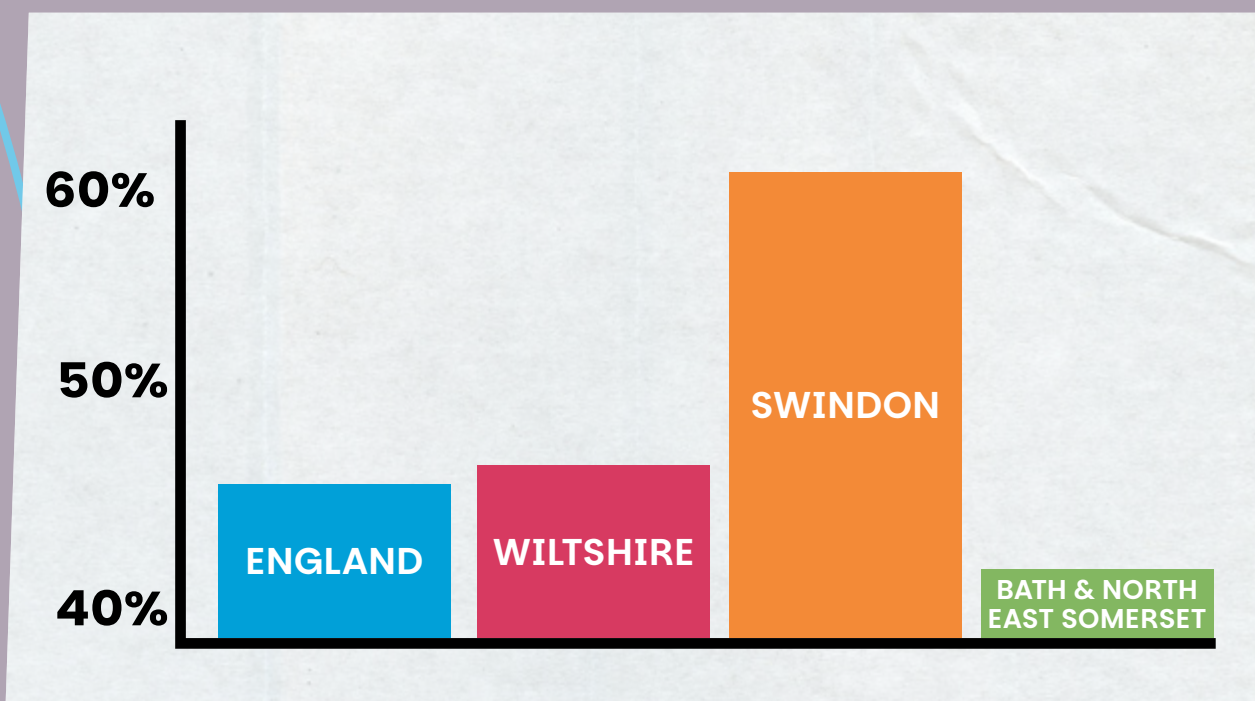
Swindon also has the highest percentage of CYP who haven't accessed NHS dental services in the past year within the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon, and Wiltshire [BSW] region, and this is above the national average. Across all age groups, children of Asian or Asian British ethnicity and those from the most deprived areas have the highest rates of dental problems that need hospital treatment.

**TOOTH EXTRACTIONS** due to decay continue to be a major problem, as they are the leading cause of elective hospital admissions for children aged 5 to 9, both locally and nationally.

Swindon consistently has **HIGHER RATES** of hospital tooth extractions compared to the South West and England averages, with particularly high rates among children aged **6 TO 10**.

Percentage of resident child population not accessing NHS dental services in the last year

NHS digital 30/06/2023



"These findings show how important it is to take action on dental health inequalities, especially in Swindon and for kids from disadvantaged backgrounds."

# CYP VOICES ON DENTAL HEALTH

CLICK TO HEAR COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE



We asked children and young people about Dental Health.

This is their response:

## WHAT DO CYP THINK ABOUT THE DENTIST?

- Some CYP as old as 12 have never been to the dentist
- Negative experiences of dentist and now anxious to attend
- Many CYP 18-24, can't get a dentist as private is too expensive and there are not any NHS spaces
- Some CYP are travelling 50 miles just to access a dentist through the NHS
- Struggle due to the lack of support for sensory needs – bright, not calming and overwhelming
- Many CYP feel Dentists don't understand how mental health impacts going to the dentist

"It's too stressful, a mental overload".

## HOW DO CYP LOOK AFTER THEIR TEETH?

- Of the CYP we asked **77%** said they look after their teeth well
- CYP with sensory needs don't like the sensation of brushing teeth and don't know of other options
- Poor bedtime routines lead to teeth not being cared for

"Is there an alternative to using a toothbrush and paste?"

## CYP RECOMMENDATIONS ON DENTAL HEALTH

Here are some ideas and recommendations from CYP in Swindon regarding dental health:

### MORE NHS PROVISION:

Where CYP and families are forced to go private, they are less likely to actually take action with their dental care when they need it because they simply can't afford it.

"More NHS dental provision is vitally needed!"

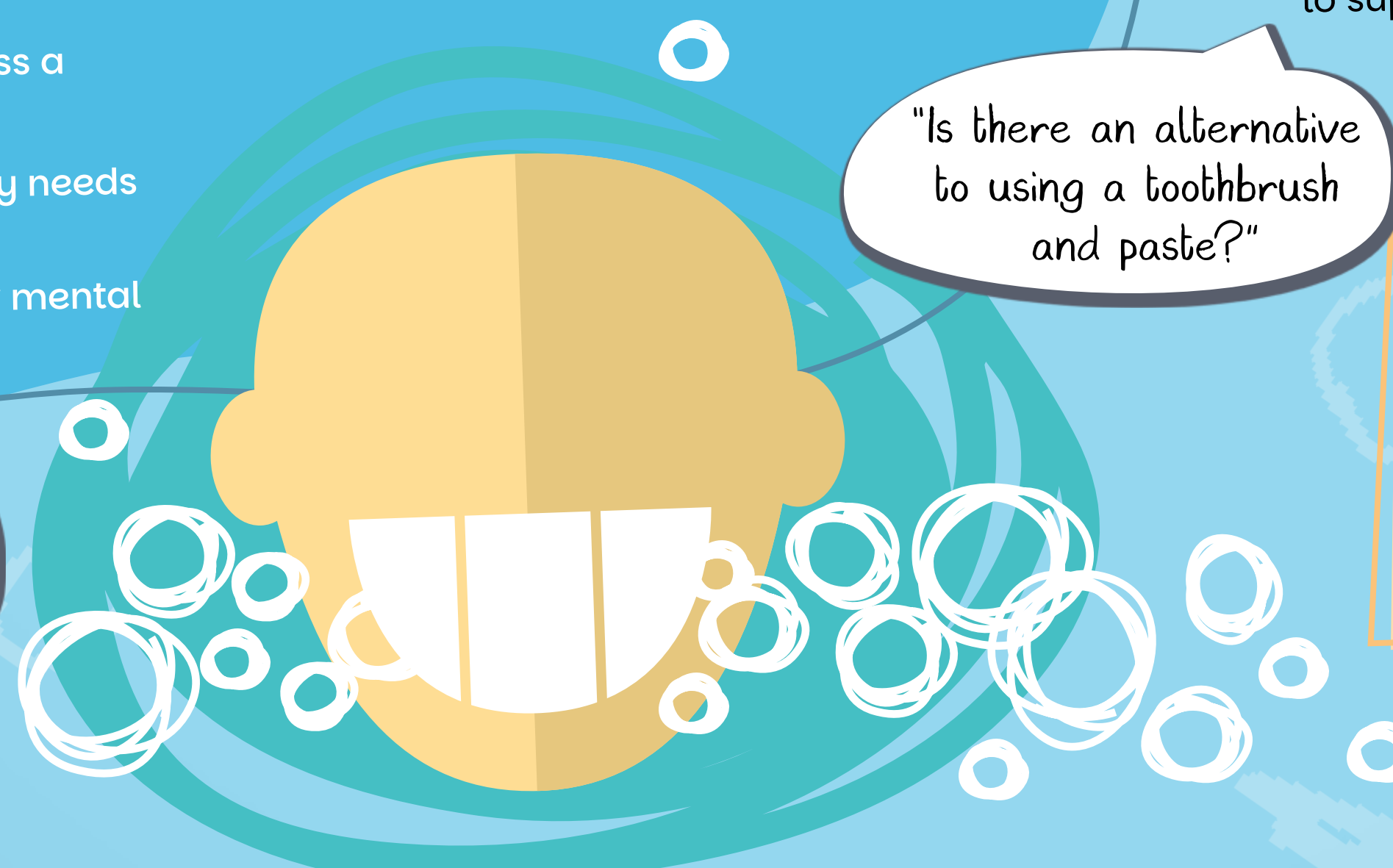
### SUPPORT FOR CYP WITH SENSORY ISSUES:

Research into dental health/care and how to support those who have sensory issues.

### TRAINING:

Training for dental practitioners on how best to support and guide CYP who struggle with their dental health due to mental health and neurodiverse conditions.


Provide better education for CYP on the impacts of poor dental health and the options available to them.



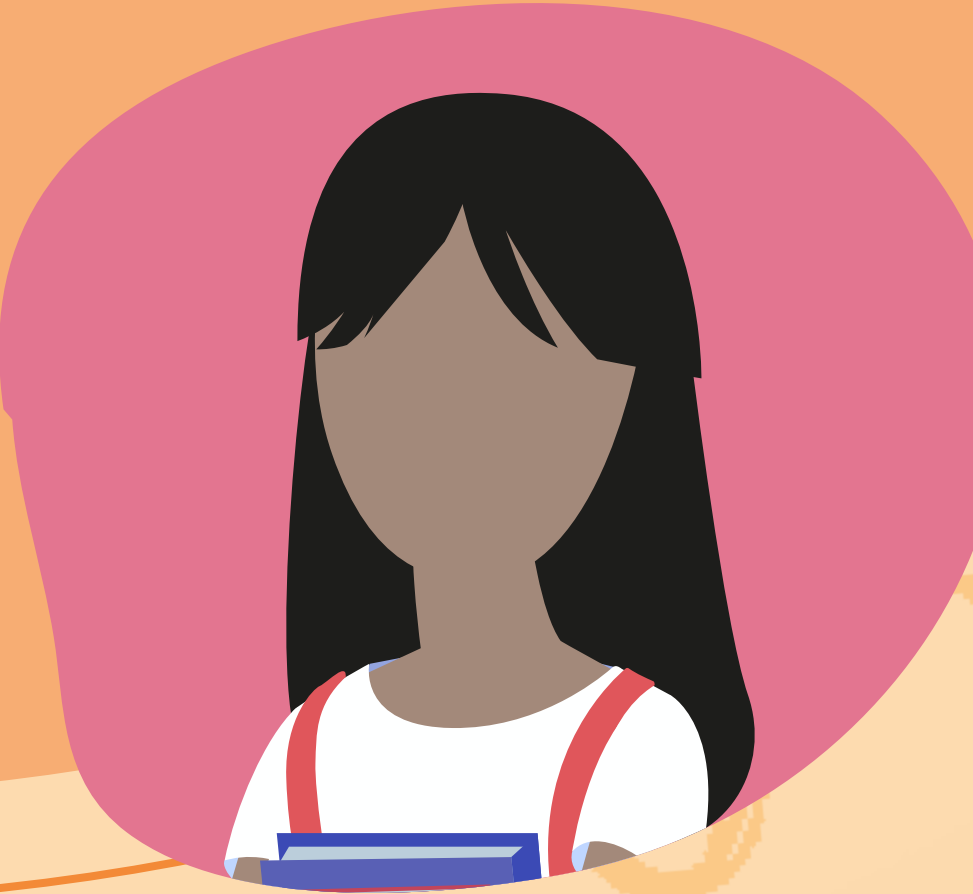
# ETHNIC MINORITY EXPERIENCE AND VIEWS

Swindon's ethnic diversity continues to grow and yet many of these CYP aren't accessing help. It's therefore particularly important we understand their views.


The experiences of CYP from ethnic minority backgrounds in Swindon are shaped by many factors. What's shared here doesn't reflect every person's experience, but it highlights some common issues.



"Growing up as someone from an ethnic minority background, I noticed how adults around me in the community would often rely on their children to act as translators when they needed to see a doctor or get medical help. I remember seeing adults who didn't speak English well having to wait a while before visiting the GP because they had to wait for their children to be free from school to help them. It was especially difficult when there was a language barrier."



"In my community there are many stories of people not being taken seriously by doctors until they insisted or even cried to get the help they needed. Personally, I've heard of cases where doctors ignored symptoms until the patients pushed harder to be heard."



"As a CYP from an ethnic minority, witnessing these things can really shape how you think about health and going to the doctor. For me, when I've had health concerns, I've often felt anxious about going to the GP. I worry they'll just dismiss my symptoms and tell me it's nothing, which makes me feel like I'm wasting their time. I'm less likely to get things checked out, and sometimes I'd rather try to deal with it myself. Even my mum has told me to "make a fuss" about my symptoms, because she believes that's the only way doctors will take me seriously."

# REPORT SUMMARY

To sum it up, the experiences of CYP in Swindon show serious challenges with health, education, and support services in Swindon. However, CYP have good awareness of the needs and great ideas for the solutions.

In addition, it's clear that Children and Young People want to have their say and be involved in making the positive change - not just consulted and surveyed.

## WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO SEE:

01

### A FAIRER SWINDON

CYP are shocked by the health disparities and clear discrimination towards certain groups. CYP from these groups want to be understood and have their needs met.

02

### AFFORDABLE SUPPORT

CYP are limited by what health support they can access simply because of the financial barriers. Particularly in relation to dentist appointments, healthy food and positive activities.

03

### WIDER TRAINING

CYP want to see their family, friends and teachers trained in understanding and supporting them with their health needs (particularly mental health needs).

04

### MENTAL WELLBEING SUPPORT

CYP need Mental wellbeing support that is quicker and easier to access. In addition, this needs to be long-term with time to build trust, tailoring the support to each person.

05

### POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

CYP have great ideas for positive activities impacting physical and mental health (sport, music, arts). However, this needs to be locally based and affordable.

"We need a seat around the table in driving change. We know what it's like being a young person in Swindon. We know what we need and what is relevant."

SEE MORE ABOUT THIS PROJECT AT  
[WAYUK.ORG/HEALTH-NEEDS-REPORT-2024](https://wayuk.org/health-needs-report-2024)

