



**BOLTON
GPFEDERATION**

Supporting and Shaping Local Communities

Health issues that affect children and young people in Bolton today

By Jasmine Bennett

Year 10 Work Experience Student
Westhoughton High School

It is estimated that in Bolton, there are 72,458 young people under the age of 18.

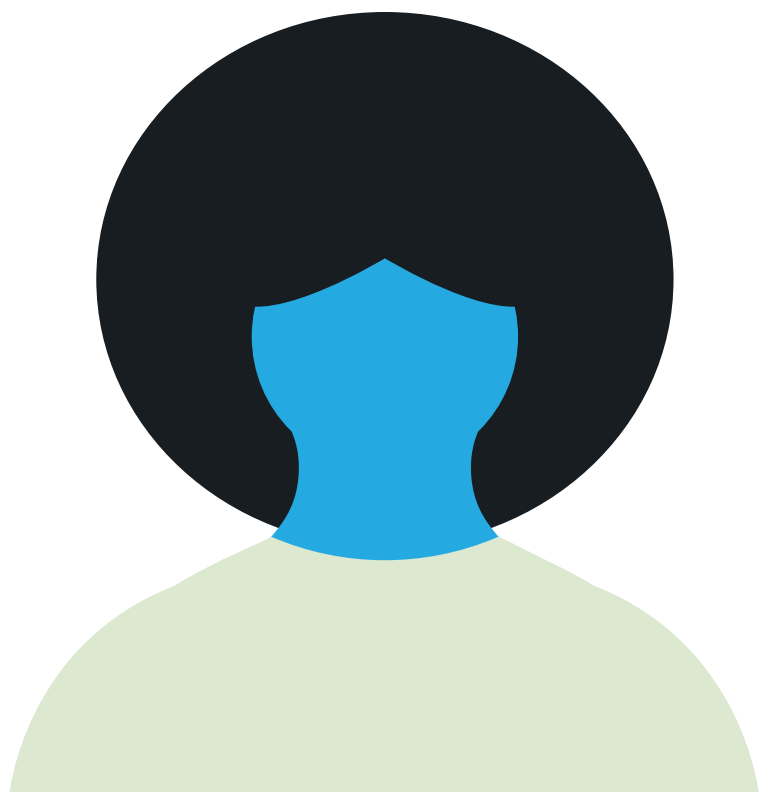
There are multiple health issues that can affect these children, that we are aiming to reduce as much as possible.



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“As a young person growing up in Bolton, I have seen a lot of children and young people that have been affected by their environment. It was great to look at the drivers that sit behind behaviours and explore ways to make a difference to support them.”



Here are three big issues facing children and young people in Bolton today...

Growing mental health and wellbeing issues in children and young people (C&YP).

In the Children and Young People's Mental Health Support in Bolton report, it was stated that the top four reasons for referral to CAMHS were:

- anxiety (387)
- in crisis (352)
- depression (256)
- and neurodevelopmental (247)

Self-harm, which is typically a result of poor mental health, resulted in more than 100 hospital admissions in Bolton last year.



Increasing amounts of vaping

7% of 11 to 17-year-olds were reported to be currently vaping in 2022, compared to 3.3% in 2021. Additionally, it has been said that 10.4% of 11 to 15-year-olds have tried vaping at least once in their lives.

It was reported that Westhoughton High School staff had to resort to calling an ambulance after school children had inhaled a substance using an e-cigarette.

Turton School and St Joseph's RC High School have had cases in which young people have collapsed after using e-cigarettes filled with unknown substances.



Child poverty

According to a recent Bolton News article, the rate of child poverty in Bolton was 41.6% in 2022, compared to 32.8% in 2014 – signifying the increase of child poverty over eight years. This figure is third highest in Greater Manchester, and 14th highest in the UK.

Children born to parents living in poverty are more likely to have a low birth weight, and are less likely to survive their first year of life. As well as this, they are more likely to suffer from asthma and other childhood diseases, and have poor health in later life.



What is currently happening or available to help children and their families?

C&YP mental health services

Kooth is an online service that provides a free, safe, and anonymous place for young people aged between 11 and 25 to find support and counselling. They believe every young person has the right to thrive and access high quality mental health care. They work alongside the NHS to improve the mental health of C&YP.

Bolton CAMHS (child & adolescent mental health services) help C&YP typically between the ages of five and 18 to cope with their feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. They work with GPs, hospitals, and other professionals such as teachers to treat, assess, and support children and young people – as well as support their parents/carers.

Bolton Lads and Girls Club is a youth club that offer a range of services to eight to 18-year-olds (up to the age of 21 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities) to support their needs, including:

- emotional health and wellbeing
- mental health
- and building resilience.

They have project nights that offer activities that cater to different interests and talents, providing a safe and inclusive space for C&YP to come together and develop essential life skills.

Efforts to stop vaping in young people

Schools A Bolton Council Cabinet Member was recently quoted as saying: "Bolton's public health team are working with school settings to share messages to prevent vaping among children, alongside the many talks that teachers have with their students about the dangers of vaping."

At St Joseph's High School in Horwich, vape sensors were fitted into the school toilets. Their headteacher, Tony McCabe, found that on the first day of its use, it went off 112 times. This allows teachers to find and appropriately discipline these students.

Government says disposable vapes are set to be banned as part of plans to tackle the rising number of young people taking up vaping, while adult smokers trying to quit will still have access to this alternative. It has also been proposed to introduce powers to stop vapes being sold in flavours marketed at children, as well as requiring they be produced in plainer, less appealing packaging.

Accessible help for C&YP in poverty.

Charities CPAG (Child Poverty Action Group) is a charity that:

- Campaigns to strengthen public commitment to end child poverty
- Ensures government adoption of evidence-based policy solutions to child poverty
- and uses their expertise to maximise family incomes and reduce child poverty.

Save the children is one of the leading charities in the UK that runs a range of programmes aimed at supporting children living in poverty in the UK. They have several programmes in over 100 countries, helping 118 million children worldwide.

Free school meals are offered throughout the UK, including in Bolton, to families that meet certain requirements. People who receive housing benefit or council tax support are automatically entitled to free school meals. Certain income related benefits also allow for free school meals – such as child tax credit, universal credit, and guaranteed pension credit. These free school meals allow a weight to be lifted off of parent/carers shoulders, ensuring that they do not have to worry about where all their children's food is coming from. Additionally, during covid food parcels were sent home to the children who required it, meaning the pandemic did not stop these children getting food.

What's missing?

Below are some of Jasmine's own ideas and views on what more or different could be done to support children, young people and their families.

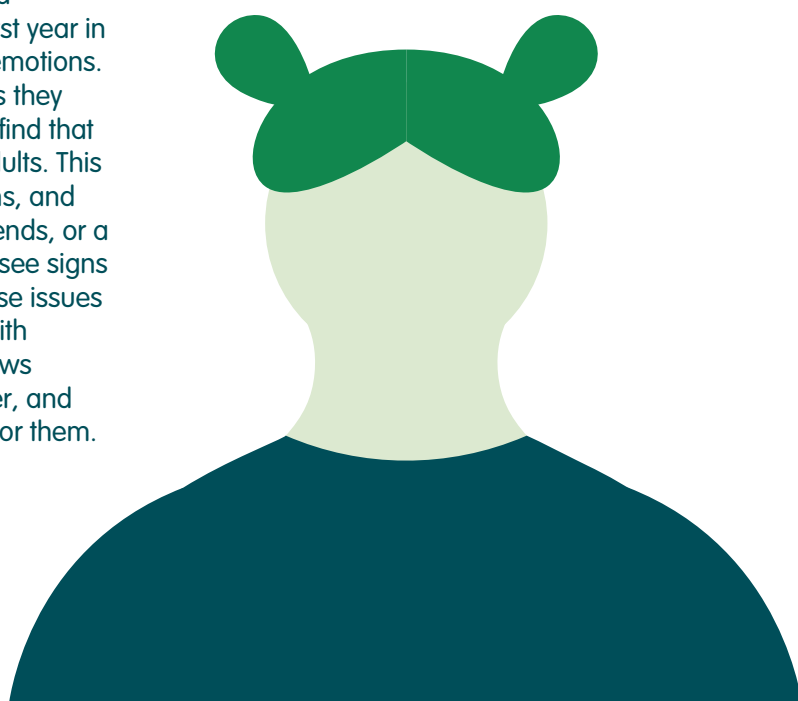
Mental health and wellbeing in C&YP.

Safe social spaces

Creating safe spaces for children in Bolton who suffer with mental illness or are not feeling themselves is very important. Many children feel they do not want to speak to family members or friends they are close with, causing them to bottle up their emotions instead of speaking out to someone. A solution to this is to create a space in the main part of Bolton (to make it accessible to as many C&YP as possible) in which it is free to come in without needing to book an appointment. Here, there could be therapists/mental health professionals available for children to talk to, and allow them to talk to others their age who are there for similar reasons. As well as this, there could be small activities for them to do when feeling stressed or down, and items like a TV or gaming station for young people to use – which they may not have access to in their home due to financial issues. Snacks and drinks could be provided, and there could be certain evenings where the C&YP have dinner together with the professionals as a community. Children who do not want their parents/carers to always know that they are struggling could also say that they are just going out into town with their friends, allowing both the child to be safe, and the parents/carers to not worry too much about their children. This enables young people to be able to talk to a trustworthy adult, or just have a space they know they can express themselves without any backlash. This also gives the young people a sense of security, and like they belong somewhere. While this may be expensive, either charities could come together, or funding could be provided by the council, as well as trying to get professionals who could volunteer.

More learning at schools

While schools are trying to acknowledge and educate young people about mental health, it is simply not enough. As a possible solution, children should be taught from their first year in primary school that it is okay to feel down and express emotions. If they understand from a young age about the emotions they have, and how to deal with them properly, we will likely find that less children will struggle in later school years and as adults. This is as they will not feel the need to bottle up their emotions, and instead express any worries they have with teachers, friends, or a professional. Also, teachers should be further trained to see signs of mental illness or struggle in their students, so that these issues can be identified and worked through, whether that is with medication, therapy, or other treatments. This again allows children to understand themselves and their minds better, and know that they have adults who care about them there for them.



Vaping in C&YP

Education at a young age (schools and parents)

Whilst there are measures in schools and from parents taking place, more needs to be done. It should be taught to children from primary school age about the dangers of vaping, and also help them understand that their true purpose is to help people quit smoking. If children understand this, they may never even want to try vaping, as they know that it is not meant for the users' enjoyment, but to aid the recovery of others. Also, educating the young people of Bolton about addiction in general could be useful. This would help as if they know that taking part in vaping could lead to an addiction to them, and possibly even taking up smoking later on in life, then they may never try vaping. Knowing about the addiction could also help if they are further taught about the financial strain vaping will likely take on them. If children understand at the age of around 11 (when vaping may start) how much this habit would cost them, then vaping in C&YP will likely reduce - as they will not want to waste all their money on an unhealthy, risky habit.

Discipline

When a child under the age of 18 is caught vaping, legal action is not taken. What does happen is that they may be required to attend an awareness programme, or schools may take actions to suspend/separately punish their students. This may seem like a good solution, however it is simply not enough. It is clear that the children of today are simply not bothered by this punishment, and continue to vape- regardless of the health risks. A possible solution to stop vaping is thus using harsher discipline. Whether a child is caught inside or outside of school vaping, to achieve this more effective punishment, the child's school should be informed. This will allow the school to contact their local police department, and see if there is an officer available to talk to the child about their actions. This punishment should be known to all students, as this may already dissuade some young people from participating in vaping. As well as this, it would be expected to see many children to stop vaping after being scolded by an officer, as this can be daunting and cause them to never want to be in that situation again. While this will not stop every child from vaping, this will surely dissuade many young people from vaping.

An alternative

While some parents/carers may see this solution as unsafe or wrong, this solution may be the most effective. A solution to underage vaping is having a company create a safe version of vaping, allowed for all ages/a lower age than 18. If a legal product is created that is wholly free of nicotine and any dangerous chemicals, this can allow children to take part in a fun activity that will cause them no physical harm. This could be done by using water vapour and flavouring that young people will enjoy, while ensuring that the NHS clear it from causing lung damage, and the government make it legal for children to use. This means that it will not be addictive, and that less and less children are beginning their early lives with minor crimes that have the possibility to progress more severely.



Child poverty

Help the families

Before a child can even be born into poverty, measures should be taken to help parents be able to provide for their child. A service, funded by a local council/the government, could be the solution. This service should help set out plans with these to-be parents on healthy foods the mother should be eating while pregnant, and if this is unaffordable for them then it should be provided to them by the service. Also, it should be set out to the mother what she can and can't do while carrying the baby – such as no smoking or drinking. This ensures that when the child is born, they are likely to be healthy - not already at a disadvantage for something they can't control. This service could also provide the necessary items (like a cot or pram) to the family, should they not be able to afford it. While this service would reassure families that they have someone to fall back on, the main purpose of this service would need to be focussing on getting them out of poverty as much as they can. This can be done by finding the parent/s and/or other family members suitable jobs that will pay them enough to provide for their children as much as possible. While this idea may only seem like a dream to most, if enough effort is put in by not only Bolton as a town but the UK as a whole then it is possible that at least the advice and job hunting can be done successfully.

Access to social activities

Many parents/carers living in poverty can barely afford to provide themselves and their children with the basic necessities, never mind fun toys and activities for their children to partake in. This leaves children to have no time to simply be a child and have fun, instead having to miss out on everything all their friends and children their age do – such as watching a movie in a cinema. Missing out on these vital parts of childhood can cause a child to feel isolated, unequal, and depressed. The solution to this is to open free activity centres for all children, open after school on weekdays, and all day on weekends. These centres would mean that children in poverty can not only experience things they would not have been able to afford, but they can do it with any of their friends/peers no matter their financial status. In these centres indoor entertainment such as TVs, gaming stations, board games, arts & crafts, and gymnastic mats would be provided. Additionally, there would also be outdoor entertainment including swings, a trampoline, football nets and basketball hoops. This gives children in poverty the opportunities to enjoy themselves with no cost, as well as being good exercise for them. This would be a big relief for the parents/carers also, as they can let their child go and have fun without having to worry about the money, and know they are safe.





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