



Priority Area 1

Early years and family support

Key Takeaway

We can reduce impacts of poverty by embedding benefit advice in healthcare settings, helping reduce financial stress and improve wellbeing.

Mental health support through community partnerships can help earlier and potentially more equitable access to healthcare support.

Co production with young people and parents helps better ideas and service design, alongside fostering a sense of ownership and inclusion over the support provided.

2025 Highlights:

Expanding Healthier Wealthier Families

Newham: The Healthier Wealthier Families programme in Newham entered its third

year, now having supported 171 service user families at our Specialist Children and Young People Service (SCYPS) access over £1 million in entitled benefits. From January 2026 it expanded to three more SCYPS service sites and to perinatal mental health services.



My family were on the verge of homelessness, council tax arrears and rent arrears were in the thousands, I have two children with severe disabilities and was unable to cope due to my benefits being reduced...I was paid back missing elements of Universal Credit, carers benefits and a Discretionary Housing Payment was awarded to financially support me with the high private rent shortfall and paid off the majority of my arrears. My family can stay in our home, my children have stability, I am so thankful.

- Carer supported by Healthier Wealthier Families

Building on the success in Newham, ELFT is part of a new pilot bringing Healthier Wealthier Families to Luton, led by Luton Council's public health team in partnership with Citizens Advice **(see case study)**.

ELFT Perinatal Mental Health Equity programme:

Partnership with the Race Health Observatory and Institute of Healthcare Improvement to increase access to services and community support for Black African and Caribbean women. Work to date includes GP training, hosting a visit from the Health and Social Care Committee, community support in family hubs and the re-establishment of the ELFT Perinatal Equity Board. The Board oversaw an in-depth review of data and a refreshed action plan to improve equitable access and experience of services. In collaboration with the North Central East London Perinatal Provider Collaborative, the Mother and Baby Unit team will be undertaking anti-racism training in 2026 facilitated by Black Maternity Matters.



Review of ELFT's objective to support children and young people's (CYP) emotional, physical, social and learning development:

This included a workshop with the Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI) for ELFT teams alongside wider system partners from the voluntary sector, local authorities, NHS Integrated Care Boards, and academic researchers. In addition, two workshops took place with children and young people. This review is helping develop a theory of change to inform best ways to support social and emotional wellbeing at ELFT and through local partnerships.

Team Around the School (TAS) pilot: Bedford CAMHS team is working with schools, local authorities and health service partners to support earlier identification and follow up support for children and young people with additional needs. The first phase (October 2024 to July 2025) supported 12 primary and 7 secondary schools including a case coordinator to help plan, track and organise follow up actions.

N-Gage Summer Activities Programme: The East London CAMHS People Participation Team N-Gage Summer Activities Programme helps young people stay connected, learn new skills, and have fun during the school holidays. Co-produced with young people themselves, the programme is shaped around their ideas and

interests including CV writing, interview skills, a financial awareness workshop delivered with NatWest alongside trips to the Criminal Court of England and the Science Museum.

ELFT as a Marmot Trust

Our strategic objectives to “Prioritise children and young people’s emotional, physical, social and learning development” and to “Support service users, carers and our communities to achieve a healthy standard of living” link to Professor Sir Michael Marmot’s evidence-based recommendations to reduce inequities by giving every child the best start in life, enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives and ensure healthy standard of living for all.



Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England

The Plan emphasises early intervention and integrated support for children and families. This includes Neighbourhood Health Services working in partnership with family hubs, schools, and nurseries to deliver timely support for children and families, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It also recognises that frequent NHS service users often require support beyond healthcare, including housing, financial advice, and employment opportunities.

The Plan pledges national coverage of mental health support teams in schools and colleges by 2029/30, alongside embedded support through Young Futures Hubs with ‘no wrong front door’ for young people seeking help.

Why is this important?

Childhood is a critical stage of development and targeted help for children and families during this time can reduce health inequities.



Poverty and child health

The UNICEF report [Held Back From The Start: The Impact of Deprivation on Early Childhood](#) emphasises how important the early years are in providing the building blocks for good health. The analysis shows that the effects of poverty are visible across a range of important milestones for children - including dental decay, obesity and whether a child reaches a 'good level of development' at the end of their first year of school.

Maternal Mental Health

Government analysis carried out by the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID), shows that just over one in four women experience a perinatal mental health condition (2019 data, the most recent data reported on). The perinatal period covers three years; 3 months before a baby is conceived until 2 years after birth. During this time, common mental disorders affect 25.3% of women in England and serious mental illness, personality disorder and eating disorders 1.2%.

A [2025 report by MBRRACE-UK](#) found **suicide as the leading cause of death for women between six months and a year after pregnancy, with highest rates of maternal mortality in the most deprived areas**. Black women remain more than twice as likely to die

as white women. The report highlights gaps in perinatal mental health support, with those not meeting thresholds falling through the cracks. It calls for the role of specialist perinatal mental health teams to be extended to address these gaps in the system.

Children and Young People's Mental health

Mental health problems are growing among children and young people in the UK, with inequalities widening. In England, 1 in 5 children and young people are estimated to have a probable mental disorder.

Research by the Health Foundation found that **40% of socio-emotional problems in adolescence could be tied to poverty and poor parental mental health**. Emotional support within families is identified as a powerful protective factor - this means having someone to talk to openly, confide in, or turn to for advice. Emotional support is negatively correlated with lower household income and parental education; meaning is it not always available to those most in need.





Case Studies

New WAY – support for young people affected by youth violence

Newham Wellbeing Action for Youth (New WAY) is a specialist, community psychology-led service in Newham providing wellbeing support to young people aged 25 and under, along with their families and carers, who have been affected by youth and community violence. Part of the London Vanguard – a multi-system violence reduction programme – New WAY delivers accessible, flexible, and psychologically informed care for vulnerable young people.

The service recognises the structural and systemic factors that can draw young people into offending and violence, including insecure housing, school exclusion, racism, deprivation, and difficult experiences of services. These experiences profoundly affect mental health and wellbeing, and New WAY works to redress these impacts through holistic, community-rooted approaches.

Grounded in community psychology and social justice principles, the service is committed to anti-racism, anti-oppression, and dismantling ‘whiteness’. Co-production is central to this approach, ensuring that young people are empowered and included in shaping both their support and the wider service.



The stuff I’ve done with New WAY has been great, it’s allowed me to come out of my shell and explore different experiences and activities. It’s allowed me to thrive in different areas of my life

- New WAY young person



You’ve been such a blessing to X. Thank you for everything. He sure is going to miss you. Have never seen him open up or even talk to anyone like he has with you

- New WAY parent

Impact findings show:

- The service reaches marginalised young people experiencing life-long inequalities, especially those at risk of exclusion or in contact with the justice system.
- Flexible, community-based delivery increases engagement and equitable access to mental health support.
- Health-led, community interventions can drive systemic change beyond healthcare, helping to redress the longer-term impacts of health inequity.



Launch of Healthier Wealthier Families Luton

We know that financial stress is one of the biggest factors affecting family wellbeing. Healthier Wealthier Families (HWF) aims to support an easy referral pathway for families to access welfare benefits and money advice in the same building as routine health and other appointments.



...we have seen a significant increase in referrals for service users with financial, housing and immigration worries. The economic deprivation in Luton plays a huge part in poor mental health amongst our service users, particularly as they are trying to factor in the cost of a new baby and often cannot source their own baby equipment, clothing or food

- Georgia Betts, Bedfordshire and Luton Perinatal Mental Health Service

ELFT is part of a new pilot that brings Healthier Wealthier Families to Luton, led by Luton Council's public health team in partnership with Citizens Advice. CAMHS and Perinatal Mental

Health are referral partners. In the first nine months the project has supported 159 families access over £1.1million.

The project also combines HWF with an Advice First Aid approach, being delivered by Citizens Advice Luton to give staff the tools to find basic information on the National Citizens Advice website and respond confidently to common queries. This helps staff identify families who may benefit from financial wellbeing support and to connect them with advisers.

All About Me: One year on

Together with North East London (NEL) partners, young people who use ELFT CAMHS were involved in an All About Me project, to create a booklet clearly explaining young people's rights in relation to consent and confidentiality in healthcare. Young people and parents have been involved throughout the process.

The parts of the project the young people found most valuable were; working with other young people, developing content that will help others, having their voice heard by healthcare services, and learning about consent and confidentiality.

The booklet is now approved with a plan for dissemination across North East London.



Definitely a safe space! In the first session, we didn't have to give all our ideas verbally which was really helpful to share all our ideas. It also felt more like a discussion rather than an interview, which made it a more comfortable setting

- C, CAMHS young person representative



I hope it helps highlight the value of co-production especially between young people because it can provide A LOT of insight

- S, CAMHS young person representative





Next steps include

Continue the roll out of Healthier Wealthier Families in Newham and Luton and identify ways to bring similar models of practice to other areas of the Trust.

Support implementation of the refreshed Perinatal Mental Health Equity action plan to improve access and experience for Black African and Black Caribbean women.

Use the findings from the Children and Young People review to support Trust activity, including mental health in schools and strengthening social and economic support as an Anchor organisation.

Glossary

CAMHS: Child and adolescent mental health services.

MHSTs: Mental Health Support Teams are based in schools and involve the provision of Educational Mental Health Practitioners who can deliver schools based mental health support.

MBRRACE-UK: Stands for Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK. Carries out surveillance and investigations into the deaths of women and babies who die during or shortly after pregnancy.

SCYPS: Specialist Children and Young People Services are ELFT services for children and young people with a Newham GP and cover a wide range including Speech and Language Therapy and Community Paediatric services.

