

Post event briefing

**CIRCLE Children, Young People and Families stakeholder workshop:
'Developing Sheffield priorities & collaborative relationships'**



The Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) working group

The purpose of the CIRCLE group:

The Children, Young People and Families (CYPF) working group is led by Harrie Churchill, Becky Driscoll and Julie Walsh and sits within the University of Sheffield's Centre for International Research, Care, Labour and Equalities ([CIRCLE](#)). The CYPF group aims to create a supportive and inclusive forum for researchers and stakeholders who have shared interests in care, wellbeing, labour, rights and equalities, and how these relate to children and families' experiences, conditions and outcomes. The CYPF group also aims to build on member's research strengths and expertise working collaboratively to:

- Enable the sharing of ideas and generation of new research ideas and partnerships
- Facilitate wider policy, practice and public engagement activities to promote knowledge exchange and impact across academia, policy and practice
- Provide a forum of collaboration and support enabling researchers and stakeholders to deliberate and advance research plans, research in progress and new collaborative projects

The purpose of our stakeholder workshop (held 14th October 2025):

The CYPF group organised a stakeholder workshop to bring together researchers and stakeholders (including practitioners, service managers, the voluntary sector) working in Sheffield and the wider region to:

- Introduce the aims and activities of the working group
- Discuss ways of working together to forge future research partnerships
- Collaboratively share priorities for communities of care and opportunity for children, young people and families in the city of Sheffield
- Develop a forward thinking action plan to build future collaborations and address the potential priorities we identified together

Children, Young People and Families in Sheffield:

Sheffield has seen significant improvements in health and education outcomes in recent years, but levels of child poverty, neighbourhood deprivation and health inequalities place child and youth well-being and outcomes at risk. The city is also ethnically diverse with Learn Sheffield (2025) indicating children and families across the city speak an estimated 146 different languages, and Save the Children describe Sheffield as one of the greenest cities in England.

More specifically, the 2022-2023 [End Child Poverty data](#) for relative child poverty rates at local authority levels, found that 32% of children in Sheffield were classified as growing up in relatively low income households; and research has indicated that the city has stark patterns of neighbourhood deprivation in concentrated areas. As an indicator of significant poverty risks, 33.8% of primary school-age children in the city and 33% of secondary school-age children were eligible for Free School Meals in 2024-2025 ([DfE 2025](#)). The [Learn Sheffield \(2024\) Insight: SEND](#) review reported a 53% increase in the number of school children with Education Health and Care (EHC) plans from 2018-19 to 2022-23.



Several Sheffield City Council strategies drive investment in children and young people, improved support for families and communities, and tackling poverty and inequalities:

- The [Sheffield City Council Plan 2024-2028](#) seeks to reduce inequalities for children, young people and communities, and ensure delivery of 'the right care and support to those who need it, at the right time and in the right place'
- The [Tackling Poverty Framework 2020-2030](#) seeks to ensure 'a great start in life' and access to essential goods, services and equal opportunities
- Access to essential goods, services and equal opportunities also frame the objectives of the [Start for Life Sheffield: Early Years Strategy 2023-2028](#)
- The [Fair and Health Sheffield Plan 2024-2034](#) echoes these city goals, seeking to improve access to, and availability of, community, health and social care services and co-produce service improvements with users and communities

Stakeholders participating in the workshop:

The workshop was open to researchers and stakeholders involved with the care, support, early help and specialist services that children, young people and parents/ guardians need to support their inclusion, wellbeing, life chances and daily lives. 20 people attended, including academic researchers, strategic leads and service managers from local government and the NHS, frontline practitioners, staff from a primary school, and representatives from charities and advocacy groups in Sheffield.

Outcomes of the workshop:

During the workshop, participants discussed their work and identified priorities for Children, Young People and Families in Sheffield. Themes related to opportunities and barriers to furthering collaboration were also considered. Key points of discussion and agreement are noted below.

Identification of priorities - highlights from our discussion included:

- Co-production with people with lived experience and ensuring voice and influence
- Having a shared understanding of what participation and co-production mean
- A need for peer-led services and advocacy
- Resources, culture shifts and support for practitioners to facilitate humane and relational practice
- Having a shared understanding of what 'trauma-informed practice' means, and understanding the role that services can play in re-traumatisation
- Tackling child poverty and addressing inequalities
- Generating useful qualitative and quantitative evidence and learning from the international evidence base
- Understanding the positive and negative impacts of education on children and young people
- Prioritising 'scaling deep' not 'scaling up' - focus on in-depth local knowledge ([The Systems Sanctuary](#))
- Developing an alternative shared narrative for South Yorkshire
- Understanding policy and influence in early years
- Community cohesion in the current context (understanding family and community radicalisation) and the role of social media in young people and families' lives
- How to communicate with each other on a regular basis - including sharing data, evidence and contacts

Opportunities for working collaboratively:

- The CIRCLE CYP&F group - allows conversation, provides a reflective space, and allows attendees time to connect and not rush
- Co-Pro Futures Inquiry - Beth Perry is part of the project team
- Collective strengths - the Children, Young People and Families Coalition to shape and deliver the child poverty strategy for South Yorkshire
- NIHR funding - particular focus on increasing applications focused on children's social care. Katherine Runswick-Cole can advise potential applicants.
- Collaborative students and placements from the University of Sheffield
- Impact funding from the University
- Working with Sheffield Play Partnership – to tackle the scarcity of opportunities for play and support local communities to address this
- Participatory Research Network at University of Sheffield

Barriers to working collaboratively:

- Differences across agencies and sectors - e.g. expertise, organisational languages, cultures, knowledge and access to resources
- University funding schemes can be complex to understand for external stakeholders
- Inappropriate research priorities - not always co-produced; often decided by researchers
- Conflicting timescales - funding applications and bureaucracy can move slowly

Priorities identified:

- Developing collaborative work between researchers, community groups, practitioners, people with lived experience and policy-makers to achieve shared goals
- Breaking boundaries between different services, professionals and sectors, so that we can move beyond siloed thinking and conversations
- Creating a shared narrative about the key issues affecting the wellbeing of children, young people and families in Sheffield, and the collaborative action needed to address our local challenges, including structural resourcing issues

Next steps identified:

- Share attendee contacts and workshop slides
- Create and share a briefing of workshop discussions and outcomes
- Commence programme of follow-on meetings and activities
- Share further information for those interesting in contributing to developing the first South Yorkshire Child Poverty Strategy (led by Save the Children)

Showcase of research and partnership working in the city:

[Dr Harrie Churchill](#), shared her research about '[Virtual parent support portals](#)' conducted in partnership with [Action for Children](#) and funded by the [Nuffield Foundation](#). This mixed-methods study seeks to better understand, evaluate, and develop online and digital resources and support for parents and parenting as: a) beneficial services for parents; and b) components of early help and family support systems for families, children, and young people. Case studies include Sheffield and Salford.

[Dr Julie Walsh](#) shared her ESRC-funded project, '[Everyday bordering in the UK: the impact on social care practitioners and the migrant families with whom they work](#)'. The project focused on impacts of the UK's 'hostile environment policy' on migrant families' experiences of accessing services, and collaborated with social care providers in Hull and Sheffield, members of migrant families and social care practitioners. Outputs include a [briefing note](#) summarising project findings, an [online practitioner resource](#), and in-person training piloted in Humber, North & South Yorkshire, and North Lincolnshire.

[Becky Driscoll](#) shared her team's work on '[Valuing kinship care in England](#)' report, which estimates that kinship carers contribute £4.3 billion to society every year. There are over 132,000 children living in kinship care arrangements in England, many of whom would otherwise be in state care. The analysis includes a breakdown by local authorities - with kinship carers contributing £51 million to Sheffield. She has worked with [Kinship](#) on their [#ValueOurLove campaign](#) for much greater investment, rights and recognition for kinship carers, in parity with support for foster carers.

[Prof. Beth Perry](#) and members of [Arbourthorne Community Primary School](#)'s team shared their framework for schools as integrated community infrastructure. Their research and practice agenda is premised on schools playing a critical role in building community capacity and tackling place-based inequalities. Activities have included a community kitchen, a Library of Things, inter-cultural experiences, climate literacy, employment advice and parent-to-parent peer learning. The work developed with a comparative study with 6 schools in England. Outputs include [a report](#), a short film, a policy brief, and resources to support implementation with 'pathfinder' schools.

[Nicola Ennis](#) shared [South Yorkshire Children and Young People's Alliance](#)'s work. The alliance highlights that children and young people are overlooked by policy makers, with lifelong consequences. In response, they have focused on embedding a system-wide approach to involving children and young people in the transformation of city services. Examples of co-created work in Sheffield includes: training young people to become oral health peer educators; organising a conference for and run by young people on these issues; and writing a manifesto on health inequalities with the Mayor's office.

Sarah Godfrey shared Save the Children's vision for a multi-sector Child Poverty Strategy for South Yorkshire. This builds on Save the Children's [Sheffield Early Learning Community](#), established in 2019 to improve support for children aged 0-5 years. In February 2025, the [first child poverty summit](#), was held with support from South Yorkshire's 4 local authorities and Mayor, the voluntary sector and Sheffield Hallam University. The UK Government will publish a national child poverty strategy in 2025. Save the Children proposes South Yorkshire leads by example and develops a regional strategy, rooted in lived experience and an ambition to make South Yorkshire the best place to grow up.



About CIRCLE

CIRCLE (the Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Equalities) is a Faculty of Social Sciences Research Centre at the University of Sheffield, led by Co-Directors Professors Liam Foster and Nathan Hughes.

Established in 2006 by Professor Sue Yeandle, CIRCLE has successfully played a key role in conducting interdisciplinary research, evaluation and consultancy on contemporary policy, practice and theoretical issues and debates on topics around care, labour and equalities, subsequently influencing policy and practice for nearly 20 years.

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