WAKEFIELD FAMILIES TOGETHER
happy, healthy, safe

Wakefield Early Help Strategy

2026-2028

BEST START IN LIFE | FAMILY HUBS

Introduction

Wakefield Families Together is an umbrella term to describe our partnership that brings services together, to join up how we work, so that it's easier for everyone to find and access support when they need it, at the earliest opportunity. All partners are committed to the Children & Young People's vision and are ambitious in how it is shaped, designed, developed and delivered. This Strategy sets out how the partnership will work to transform the whole system of Early Help to ensure all families and partners know where to have one conversation to get to the right service with the right offer.

The Early Help Partnership Board will oversee this strategy that aims to provide support for babies, children and young people and their family to improve a family's resilience to life's ups and downs, reducing the chance of a problem getting worse so that we can improve outcomes for everyone. Whether from professionals, family, friends or volunteers, our aim is to work together as one system of support taking collective responsibility to provide the right provision locally.

We are putting the voices of parents, carers, children, and young people at the heart of our Early Help approach. Through our strengthened Family Voice partnership, families will have a direct role in shaping the Best Start Family and Youth Hub Network and Early Help pathways. This means ensuring that improvements are visible and that families feel supported to challenge local services if concerns arise.

Our Best Start Family Hubs offer ongoing, accessible local support that is face to face, online and through outreach, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of families and working closely with community and faith partners. Collaboration between all partners working with babies, children and families is essential to improve outcomes for children and ensure their wellbeing.

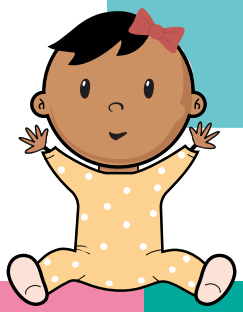
Guided by national best practice and evidence of 'what works,' our Best Start Family Hub Network and workforce are building capacity and capability to deliver effective Early Help. Acting as a non-stigmatising gateway from universal to targeted whole-family support, the hubs use a 'Team Around' model and Family Help approach to create one connected system that delivers ambitious, innovative, and visible change.

Our ambition is clear: to promote access, connection and strong relationships in everything we do - working in partnership with families and all those who support them.

Our vision directly links to Wakefield's Children and Young People Plan 2025-28 which was co-produced by children and young people, staff and partners.

We will work in partnership to achieve 10 core outcomes:

- Good education
- Good early years levels of development
- Improved mental and physical health
- Recovery from substance use
- Good family relationships
- Child safety from abuse and exploitation
- Diversion from crime
- Safety from domestic abuse
- Secure housing
- Financial stability



Looking back at the 2023-2025 Early Help strategy we want to tell you about what we have achieved together

The number of Best Start Family and Youth Hub contacts from families exceeded 50,000 in 2023-2024. Staff work above and beyond to support families in Wakefield, they hold space for people knowing that anyone might need help. Staff are family centred: the needs of families are at the centre of all the work that they do.

(Independent Evaluation Leeds University 2024).

Evidence Based Programmes for Parents are now embedded into the Best Start Family Hub Offer including delivery face to face, online and via outreach. In total 44 different support programmes were delivered in 9 Family Hubs and 3 Youth Hubs that reached 14,519 people every 3 months.

(MI Data July-Sept 25).

The Team around the School had approx.150 meetings with schools each month, 83% of plans are help by schools and 13% on average as referred to Targeted Early Help for further support.

An Early Years Speech Language and Communication Pathway is now in place, with the PEEP Talk Programme embedded into Family Hub Stay & Play sessions and partner delivery.

Partner Services have co-located to deliver local services from Best Start Family and Youth Hubs. This includes; midwives for antenatal support, Speech and Language Therapy, Community Paediatrics, infant feeding support, housing & financial welfare support and a wide offer from the voluntary and community sector.

Capital funding was used to create 9 play and sensory gardens in all Family Hubs.

A Housing and Debt Advice Pathway is now in place for families to reach the support they need at the earliest opportunity.

Wakefield Families Together website, communication leaflets and promotional campaigns have been developed to raise awareness of Early Help support and the Family Hub Network offer. 5,964 hits on the top 10 pages, 28,602 organic reach up 84% (Oct 2025).

A new Early Help Learning & Development pathway is available for staff and partners across the Family Hub Network. On average 25 Programmes were delivered each quarter and reached 277 staff/ partners.

(MI Data July-Sept 25).

Our success

- **37k** families attended Family & Youth Hubs (June-Nov 25), with **95%** attending more than 3 times.
- Over **4000** children attended activities at Libraries each quarter
- Around **600** children were supported by Targeted Early Help at any one time
- **76%** of families with an early help plan achieved and sustained positive outcomes
- **72%** of children with a Youth Engagement intervention achieved and sustained positive outcomes
- Only **7%** of families had a re-referral to Targeted Early Help within 12 months

Our level of need

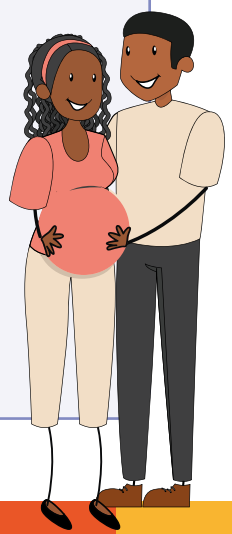
- Wakefield is the 59th most deprived district (out of 296)
- 6% of pupils say they share a bed most of the time or sleep on something other than a bed (Years 5,7 and 9 combined in 2024)
- 23% of Year 5 (8-9 years) pupils said they got 7 hours of sleep or less (2024)
- 20% of children aged 8 to 16 years had a probable mental health disorder (2023)
- 177 admissions to hospital aged 10-24 years because of self-harm (2022/23)
- 32% of students in Year 12 (15-16 years) are living with overweight or obesity, more children in year 6 (10-11 years) are living with overweight or obesity (37%) than in Reception (25% 4-5 years) 2024
- 1% of young people aged 5 to 15 years provided care (2021 Census)
- 26.3% of children are eligible for free school meals
- 3,507 babies were born to Wakefield resident mothers (2023)

Our Early Help offer to families

Our Best Start Family Hubs offer free universal and targeted activities for families across the district that align to the priorities to achieve the Best Start in Life https://www.beststartinlife.gov.uk/

From our family and youth hub network you can access:

- Advice and guidance from pregnancy to childcare through to starting school. This includes midwife and paediatrician clinics being delivered from the family hubs
- Stay and play sessions for babies and pre-school children.
- Baby Massage and Baby Sensory
- Infant feeding sessions
- Breastfeeding advice and guidance
- Activities that promote baby and parent wellbeing including delivery from partners including Turning Point and Future in Mind.
- Evidence-based programmes to support parents and carers, delivered in partnership with health colleagues (PAIRS team)
- Home learning environment (HLE) advice and support for families to support the development of their children through play in order they are school ready and achieve good levels of development.
- Activities and advice for families whose children have a SEND need, including information sessions and groups such as sensory stay and play that is delivered in partnership with partners including Portage and speech and language.
- Advice and guidance to promote good family relationships and deal with conflict in a positive, problem-solving way.
- Activities for children after school, and both universal and targeted groups for young carers.
- Support for children focussing on aspirations, wellbeing and self esteem, including delivery from partners such as Compass
- Youth clubs
- Health & wellbeing support for older children and young adults
- Employment and training advice and support for young people
- Support for transition to adulthood
- Safe space to socialise and meet new friends
- Evidence-based programmes to support young people, delivered in partnership with other partners too.



For more detail and what is available from the Family Hubs please visit our website:

www.wakefieldfamiliestogether.co.uk

Parenting Support

Wakefield's Best Start Family Hubs offer helpful evidence-based parenting support programmes for parents and carers to learn useful tips and ideas to help navigate the ups and downs of family life. Parents can access a toolbox of resources and tried and tested strategies through accessible face to face groups, one to one sessions or self-directed online modules that can be accessed at any time via the Parenting Support tab at: wakefieldfamiliestogether.co.uk

What we want to achieve over the next 2 years

Our Safety & Feeling Loved

Families can access services through connected pathways

We will do this by

- Aligning partner services through Wakefield Families Together into a coordinated, locally delivered early help system
- Developing seamless early identification and prevention support pathways to divert children from harm at home, and in their community, improving their longer-term outcomes.
- Connecting with a wider range of partnership services to celebrate the diversity of communities, and support community integration, collaboration and family engagement with early help.
- Developing a multi-agency 'Team Around' early support approach for babies, children, young people when families experience challenges in their daily life.

Parents and Professionals told us

To build my confidence, for my baby to meet other babies and get out of the house and given me a chance to reset my mood for the day.

Often when looking back at their journey something has been missed at a point where we were able to intervene and support them.

Our Futures

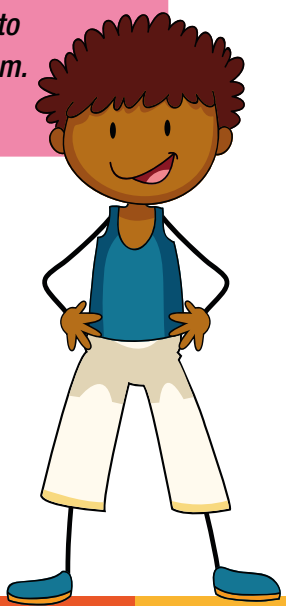
Families have support through key transition points

We will do this by

- Supporting children (6-11 years) and young people (11+) at transition points and in preparation for adulthood, including diverting them towards inclusive, positive activities in their community.
- Ensuring children and young people are digitally included and have opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and experience in technology use that is age-appropriate
- Supporting young people and parents to build positive relationships and develop the skills to resolve family conflict.

Parents and Professionals told us

There is a gap in after school provision for 7-13 year olds, it's important they have access to activities that are local to them.



Our Education

Families can learn together at home and in their community

We will do this by

- Developing our Early Help system to contribute to achievement of 77.7% of 5-year-olds with a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2027/28, and 58.9% for disadvantaged children (FSM), to bridge the critical gap as children enter school
- Ensuring those who learn away from school can access support outside of their home.
- Prioritising evidence-based support and learning for parents face to face, through outreach and online to achieve better outcomes.
- Providing an inclusive dads' offer to support dads and male carers, and improve integration into wider services
- Promote play opportunities and resources that are available in the district for babies, children, young people and families to aid learning through each stage of their development.
- Extending our Playful Learning offer and modelling into the family home to provide consistency in how we work together on play, language acquisition and early reading.

Parents and Professionals told us

They would like more readily available parenting advice maybe for example school nurse/ parenting worker drop ins for parents in school for the little things that come up that would be helpful to talk through with someone.

Our Health

Families are supported with healthier options and have improved wellbeing

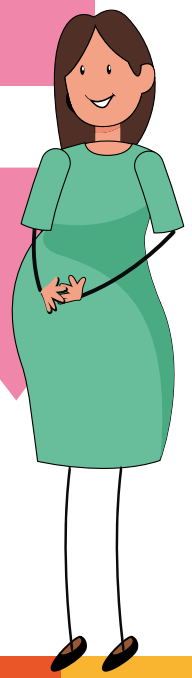
We will do this by

- Providing a coordinated point of access ('one stop shop') for families to access to food pantries, clothing banks, financial management, housing support with bed poverty delivered through the Best Start Family Hub network and wider partner services
- Providing opportunities for parents to access health appointments, advice and guidance and support from their local Best Start Family Hub network and through integrated Neighbourhood Health Services
- Promoting healthy options and support to access information and guidance on nutrition, weight management, smoking/vaping, gambling and substance use.
- Prioritising a range of evidence-based Interventions that contribute to improved family health, everyday life at home and community engagement.

Parents, children and young people told us

Seeing a growth in poverty, particularly food poverty and people coming to the Hubs for a warm meal.

It's helped me massively with post-natal depression enabling me to continue to breastfeed.



Our Early Help Delivery and Accountability

How will we know we are making a difference?

- Families tell us we used a questioning approach to understand the underlying causes of a baby, child or family's circumstances or behaviours and responded respectfully and with honesty.
- Families tell us that they know how and where to find the support they need, and that it makes a positive difference to their family life.
- Staff and partners tell us the family and child are at the centre of their own decision-making and feel able to cope and find the support they need
- Data tells us evidence-based interventions and wider support is reaching a diverse range of families who have learned something new to use at home.
- Family Voice groups hold services to account and help shape visible, accessible service improvements across the early help system.
- Good Levels of Development show an upwards trend year on year.

Conclusion

This strategy is not just a document, it is a commitment to action, change and shared responsibility that is aligned to other key Wakefield Strategies to provide seamless support. Together, we will create a Wakefield where all babies, children and young people and their families can thrive.

The Children's Health Service App

To get the latest information, advice and local support from Wakefield Families Together direct to your mobile phone download the Children's Health Service App.

www.hdft.nhs.uk/services/childrens-services/wakefield-0-19-service