



*Children and young people voices on what it
is like growing up in Walsall to help our
Strategic Thinking and Doing*



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

About children and young people living in Walsall

Walsall has a **population** of **286,716**

69,375 of whom are **children aged 0-17**

The number of children and young people aged 0-17 is projected to rise to 71,822 by 2030

● 0-17 ● 18 and over



Almost a quarter of the population are children and young people
2020 mid-year population estimates

● BME ● White



Almost a third of Children are from BME backgrounds 2011 Census

Almost a quarter of our children have English as an additional language

Children and young people have more health challenges than their peers

In 2019/20 hospital admissions for accidental or deliberate injury in 0-14 year olds in Walsall were lower than regional and national rates.

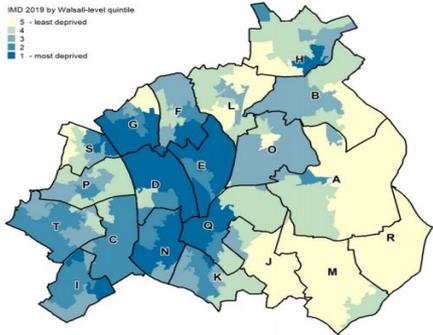
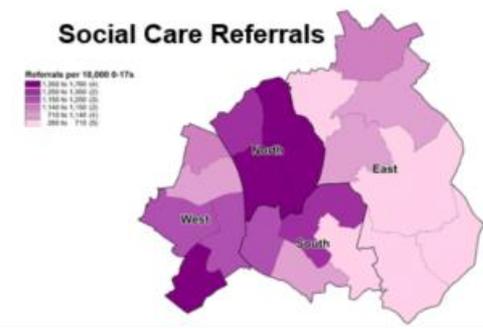
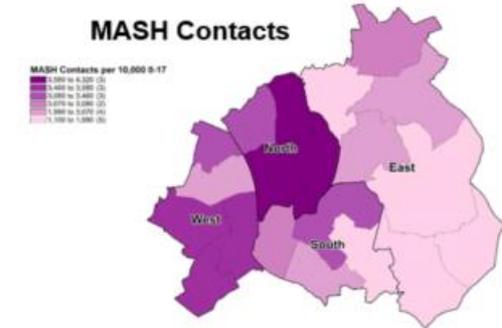
In 2019/20 hospital admissions for accidental or deliberate injury in 0-14 year olds in Walsall were lower than regional and national rates.

Walsall is the 19th most deprived Local Authority in the country (IDACI)



39% of children live in poverty after housing costs Campaign to end child poverty – May 2021

Need is unevenly distributed across the borough



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Children Voices need to be at the heart of our thinking and doing by:



LISTENING



REFLECTING



RESPONDING



LISTENING – what did we do?

Three key pieces of engagement work undertaken with children and young people growing up in Walsall provided us with valuable and rich information that help us to understand their lived experience and the things Walsall partnerships need to consider in ensuring all children in Walsall can be happy, healthy, safe and learning well.

The key pieces of work are:

- An ethnographic Study on ‘growing up in Walsall’ – commissioned by Public Health - November 2020
- Big Conversation – Summer Daily Conversations programme – undertaking by Children’s Services during Summer 2021.
- The Big Ask/ The Big Answer undertaken by the children commissioner for England – September 2021

A separate report is available on each pieces of work.



Growing up in Walsall – public health report

Walsall Council commissioned M·E·L Research to undertake a detailed ethnographic study to help them understand what it is like to be a young person growing up in Walsall.

The Council were particularly interested in hearing from girls and boys aged between 11-18 years old (i.e. from year 6 of primary school and throughout secondary school), who had different educational needs, came from different parts of the Borough, required different levels of parental input and came from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Walsall Council commissioned M·E·L Research to conduct up to ten in-depth ethnographic case studies with children and young people. The ethnography study focused on the young person's experience of growing up in Walsall, their challenges, hopes, dreams and fears, what support they access in comparison to what they need, and their recommendations to help make Walsall a better place to grow up

The findings from the research were used to inform the Council's Public Health 2020 and 2021 annual reports and its 'Walsall Best Start 4Life' (BS4L) strategy.



Big Conversation – Summer Daily Conversation 2021

Children's Service created the **Big Conversation** programme as part of its Walsall Right 4 Children transformation journey - a programme of activities, aimed at listening to and acting on what children and families are saying about the services we deliver as well as seeking out opportunities to collaborate with them on aspects of day to day practice and / or transformation.

During the Summer the Local Authority and its partners took time to talk to 323 children aged 5 to 18 and 102 parents with the aim to better understand;

- Their lived experience of growing up in Walsall?
- The impact of COVID on their lives, their peers and their community
- What might help improve their lived experience now
- What their ambitions are for the future
- What might be barriers to achieving their future ambition
- What help or support could help remove these barriers to achieve their ambition



Big ask/big response

The Children's Commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza DBE, launched the Big Ask in 2021 as a means of hearing the voices of as many children in England as possible.

She undertook this as one of her first tasks on becoming Children's Commissioner. Every school and Local Authority were asked to engage with over half a million children aged 6-17 responded to the survey.

Over 1,700 children and young people in Walsall responded to the questionnaire. This data was made available to help our local developments.





**REFLECTING
on what
children told us**

What do children say needs to happen to make Walsall the best place to grow up?

- More place to go
 - More events – especially music
- More friendly neighbourhoods
- More green spaces
- More green streets
- Support home for homeless people
- More support around mental health for children/young people
- Support around poverty
- More people that we can trust
- More listening to children and young people
- Clean up the rubbish
 - More police



What does Being Happy mean to children?

What does being happy mean to children?

"Happiness means when something good has happened to me or to someone I know"

"Satisfied, and having no worries. Having a laugh"

"Happiness is important especially because it allows me to make the best memories"

"To not be upset, nothing negative around. Calm and everything positive"

"For me, happiness is having good relationships with my friends and family, being healthy and having a peaceful time"

What makes children happy?



- Having a supportive network of friends, families (and pets)
- Keeping active, doing things and making memories
- Money, having nice things
- Listening to children and hearing them out
- Making others happy and yourself happy
- Always looking on the bright side and thinking positive thought
- Learning new things

What does Being Happy mean to children?

Big Ask told us that

7% of children in Walsall are **unhappy with their lives overall** England-wide the total unhappy with their lives was 9%.

- The biggest cause of unhappiness was **the choice of things to do in my local area** with 19.5% (1,687 children) of 9-17 year olds responding to the survey unhappy
- The second biggest cause of unhappiness for 9-17 year old respondents was **my mental health** at 17%
- **Life at school and college** ranked third at 14%
- Unhappiness with **progress in education** ranked fifth at 9.4%
- Unhappiness over **personal safety** ranked as one of the lowest causes of unhappiness at 3%
- For children aged 6-7, who responded from Walsall the factors that made them unhappy included **how much I can play** (6.3%), **my family life** (4%), **the places I can have fun** (3.4%) and **education** came fourth in the things that caused unhappiness.

“Walsall has a good community – everyone seems to know each other and get on with their neighbours. It is also very multicultural. I have seen lots of weddings in different cultures and religions taking place – hearing the music and seeing all the colourful outfits makes me happy.”

“The main thing that concerns me whilst growing up in Walsall is the gangs. Sometimes when I go into town, I see lots of ‘dodgy’ people. This makes me nervous as I think they may follow me and something bad might happen to me. I don’t really feel safe walking somewhere on my own as there can be big groups of children.”



What does learning well mean to children?

Key drivers for doing well at school are

- To earn good money
- Having a nice car
- Owning a nice house

Getting a good job

Going to university

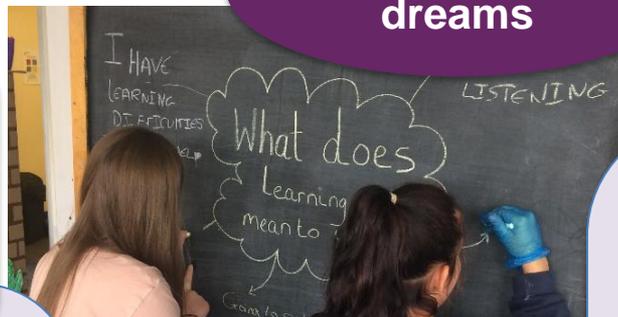
When I grow up I want to...
SET HIGH ASPIRATIONS

Following my dreams

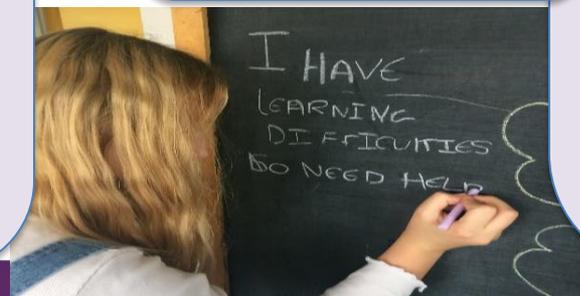
Getting good grades

What children say they are responsible for to help them learn better

- Positive mind set
- Working hard
- listening
- Not being disruptive or distracted in class
- Being on time
- Asking for help
- Not giving up on dreams.



Other things that could help with learning better



- Good role models
- Good friendships
- Being more active
- Good sleep routines
- Getting feedback on your achievements
- Different teaching styles to meet different learning needs
- Additional support for children who need it
- Early identification of SEND and additional support
- Supportive parents/adults.
- Funding to go to university

What does feeling safe mean to children?



What children say about what keeps them safe

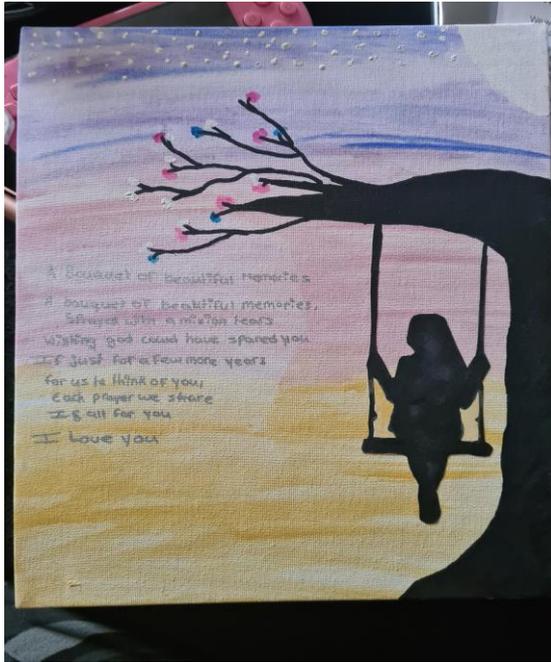


"I feel safe in the area where I live because I know the people and they know me and my family."

"Feeling safe is knowing that nothing can happen to you and you just knowing you're not going to get hurt and everything will be fine, surrounded by your family and friends."

"The main thing that concerns me whilst growing up in Walsall is the gangs. Sometimes when I go into town, I see lots of 'dodgy' people. This makes me nervous as I think they may follow to me. I don't really feel safe walking somewhere on my own as there can be big groups of children"

What do children say about the pandemic and the impact it has had on them, their friends and family?



- Not being able to see family and friend is the main issue children raised. Some young people connected more with friends online.
- Many children said they felt bored most of the time.
- Some younger children mentioned the lack of ability to play because no garden or park nearby
- Some young people also expressed feelings of loneliness, worry and fear during the pandemic.
- Children said their learning had been impacted by the pandemic with lots of children saying they struggled with online learning and feeling they got behind on work. Most children indicated they were happy to be back at school, but would welcome extra help to ensure they can adjust again and catch up with lost learning.

“what I found difficult was following the rules, trying to stay safe, not be able to go places and walk in queues everywhere and not being able to see normal again.”

“I suffered from panic attacks during COVID. I was worried my family would catch it. I have an older brother who has Cerebral Palsy so he would be really ill if he caught it. During COVID, I also suffered with my mental health as I was not seeing my friends. I went from seeing them every day to not seeing them at all. I got all the help I needed from my parents during this time.

“found going back into society difficult and was scared of crowds, but it is better now. When I returned to school some of my friendships changed. I lost some old friends and made some new ones.”

What do children say about their future

Big Ask told us that

- As to what was important for their future as 6-8 year olds 68% said **getting on well with their current family**; 66% said **being healthy and active** and 65% said a **good job or career**. 45% saw a good education as being important to their future which implies some in this age group don't correlate a good education with a good job or career.
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- For 9-17 year olds the most important issue for their futures was a **good job** (72%) (69% England-wide). This was followed by: **having enough money to buy the things I need** (59%), **having a good education** (55%), **having good friends** (53%) and **getting on well with my current family** (33%).
- **Good mental health** came fifth in terms of things important to their futures for 7-19 year old respondents in Walsall. Interesting **physical health** came in eighth at 31%.
- **Living in a nice area** was important for 11% of respondents and being part of a **good local community** was rated by only 4.6% as being important.
- 14% of respondents aged 9-17 in Walsall **were not worried about anything**. Of the key worries for that age group 39% were worried about **not having enough money to buy the things I need**, 35% were worried about **having a good job or career**; 34% were worried about a **healthy environment** and 32% were worried about their **mental health**. 19% were worried about **having a good education**.
- When asked whether they thought they would have a better life than their parents 53% thought that they **would have a better life**. 9% however thought that it was **unlikely that they would have a better life than their parents** (8% Walsall North, 11% Aldridge-Brownhills, 9.49% Walsall South).

What do children say about their future

- When asked about what concerned young people in the future, the most frequently mentioned topics were:
 - **doing well at school**
 - **passing exams**
 - **securing future employment.**

“In the future, I would like to pass my Level 3 Sports course and my GCSE Maths and English. After this, I would like to become a Sports Development Officer or PE teacher. In order to achieve these things, I would like some work experience (as getting a job is very important to me). I am worried about putting together my CV and going for interviews (due to my Autism) so it would be good if Walsall Council could give me a chance without having to jump through ‘hoops’ to get there. I think the council should give kids more opportunities to get work experience, real work experience that gets you a job.”

“I am currently studying A Level Sociology and English at Bloxwich Academy. After I finish this, I would like to train to become a support worker which specialises in young children or teenagers. I do not think young people always get the help they need whilst they are growing up.”

“I would really like to go on University visits but only the top performing classes are allowed on these. I think if the school gave the other classes the opportunity too, more kids (including me) would feel more inspired to work harder and get better grades.”

What children would do if they were the boss to ensure that all children are happy, healthy, safe and learning well:



What children told us in 2019 about what they would do if they were the boss of Children's Services is not much different to what they told us now:

- Listen to children's views more and take notice and take action.
- Listen to the people who know me well (parents, carers, key workers)
- Invest more in mental health services
- Provide the right support to keep families together
- Make sure children have places to go where they have trusted adults they can talk to and provide good help
- Provide free transport, school uniforms and food
- Help as many people as possible

"I would like the Council and other organisations to make Walsall a more enjoyable place to grow up."

"Finally, I would like The Council to listen to young people and involve teenagers in decision making going forwards"



REFLECTING
on what
parents told us
(102 responses from
parents who's children
attended Summer HAF
programme)



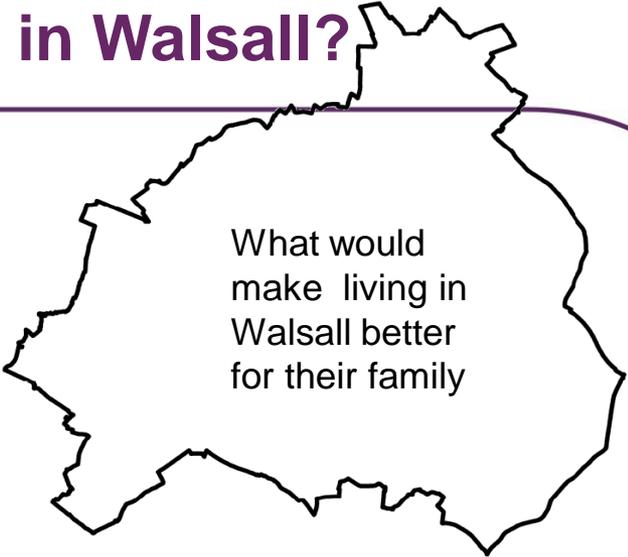
What do parents say about living in Walsall?

The best thing

- 61% close to friends and family
- 51% parks and open spaces
- 42% it's where I grew up
- 35% good schools and colleges
- 32% health facilities
- 32% affordable housing
- 31% good transport links
- 28% leisure facilities
- 28% feel safe
- 22% the shops
- 21% diverse community
- 19% community spirit

What they don't like about living in Walsall

- Crime rate – some indication parents feel its getting worse, 'not feeling safe'
- Nothing to do for young people
- No safe places for children to play
- Racism
- No information on what services or what's on in different communities
- The way some parks and places in the borough look – 'mess', 'litter', 'run down' 'look of the town centre', 'unclean'
- Too many rough sleepers
- Drug taking and drinking in the street
- Lack of support around children with SEN



What would make living in Walsall better for their family

- More activities/safe spaces for children and young people including children with SEND
- More police
- Clean-up and make-over of certain areas – like Town centre
- Community projects/ better community interaction
- More green spaces





RESPONDING

- Feedback from the Daily Conversation is influencing ways of thinking, strategic direction and multi-agency working around the Early Help Strategy, Neglect Strategy, Resilient Community Strategy, Safer Walsall Partnership and the Walsall Learning Alliance.
- We will monitor on a quarterly basis how each partnership group is considering young people's views into their planning and actions taken as a result.
- We are now in the process of working with children and young people to develop a WR4C Shadow Board to develop a response to the Daily Conversation – to consider what actions they think partners should take as a result and what actions they would like to take forward.
- The WR4C Shadow Board will take part in the planning and delivery of:
 - ✓ Walsall Right 4 Children (WR4C) staff and young people's awards evening with a focus on what good help looks like for young people
 - ✓ A digital resource to be used across the Early Help partnership; this resource, led by young people, will share information advice and guidance on Early Help partnership services and shared on Walsall Childrens services website.

