

Introduction: Children and Families in Manchester

Off the top of your head you can probably reel off a list of issues which affect children: from the more widely known ones such as child protection, teenage pregnancies, obesity, truancy, etc. to the less headline-grabbing issues such as support for children with disabilities, mental health needs or enabling young people to move on from being in care to taking control of their own lives and futures.

As with people in other age groups, children and young people face issues around health, crime, education and employment - perhaps not all directly, but, for example, it's well known that low-income families (unemployed or low-waged) tend to be less healthy, are less likely to achieve in education and training, etc. and face greater obstacles in trying to change any of these things. It's a phrase which has gone out of fashion in recent years, but this used to be known as the "poverty trap".

The children of Manchester are a diverse bunch! Some of them have a good start in life in a safe, healthy, stable and happy environment. Others are not so lucky – Manchester has some of the highest levels of poverty in the UK and inevitably this has an impact on the lives children and young people, perhaps hitting them hardest of all.

To take a specific example, Manchester has a major problem in the high number of babies with a low birth weight. It has been shown that this affects the child's health for the rest of his or her life. There are initiatives from a whole range of agencies including the City Council and the local NHS to try to improve this situation. This is a recognition not just that these are important issues now, but that improving the lives of children today means improving the quality of life in Manchester in years to come.

Many voluntary and community groups are also working with this issue in providing support to families (of all kinds). These range from play groups right through to in-depth support services for families struggling with issues such as drug or alcohol addiction. Most of these services have been started by local people as a response to seeing people in their community struggling and wanting to help. Within the voluntary sector, support for children and families is far and away the largest area of activity.