



# Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023

# Foreword



**During the last three years the Covid-19 global pandemic followed by the UK cost of living crisis, war in the Ukraine, the ensuing energy crisis and the long-heralded climate emergency has had an unprecedented impact on Sandwell as a place to live and work and on the health and wellbeing of our residents. As we now know, Covid-19 highlighted and exacerbated existing health inequalities, with Black and Minority Ethnic communities more likely to have Covid-19, be hospitalised and die as a result when compared with other parts of the community. The cost of living crisis and energy crisis which hit the UK immediately following the pandemic as we began to recover, are further increasing fundamental inequalities in terms of food and fuel poverty and with high inflation, those with the least available income are hit the hardest.**

The Covid-19 Global pandemic hit Sandwell hard. Places with lots of face to face jobs, large Black and Minority Ethnic communities, overcrowded housing and poverty experienced some of the highest incidence of Covid-19, hospitalisations and mortality. Long Covid is having a lasting impact on the health of our residents with higher risks in more deprived areas and in key public facing jobs including health and education.

High inflation and the largest fall in real incomes are putting huge pressures on household budgets creating greater levels of food and energy poverty for many, but disproportionately for those with the lowest incomes. This pressure is creating the dilemma of 'heat or eat' for some of the most disadvantaged communities in Sandwell. Food poverty has increased the use of foodbanks from their initial role as crisis providers of food and nutrition for the poorest to their current role as a food distribution services for people in

low-income employment. Poor nutrition and cold homes contribute to worsening health for diseases like heart disease, respiratory disease and poor mental wellbeing.

The pandemic is further thought to have had an impact on vaccination and screening rates which further exacerbate health risks from communicable disease and this year, with the levels of MMR vaccination down to less than 85% in Sandwell. Nationally we have seen an increase in measles which had all but disappeared in the years before the pandemic.

In the coming years the global climate emergency will continue to cause instability in world climate with more spells of very hot weather and an increased likelihood of extreme weather events. Increases in temperatures generally will increase the risks to health through hot weather, risk of floods and the changing patterns of mosquito- and tick-borne diseases.

Despite these threats to the health of our communities and the risks of increasing health inequalities we are responding and have a strong programme of health improvement which will:

- support health and health literacy for our migrant communities
- tackle poor mental wellbeing through our programme of Better Mental Health
- focus on improvements to the health of migrants through our partnership with Brushstrokes
- support reductions in health inequalities with our community partners
- provide support for children young people and families through our developing network of Family Hubs

- continue to improve our outcomes for people with needs related to substance use through our partnership across the health, criminal justice and voluntary sector.

The Commonwealth Games Legacy Plan provides us with opportunity to improve health, wellbeing and physical activity and get people moving. During the Games Sandwell played a pivotal role in the organisation and the lasting impact of the Sandwell Aquatics Centre and the strong grassroots links forged will be felt for many years. Changing travel patterns following the pandemic and driven by climate change and the impetus for low carbon transport have further provided an opportunity to encourage active travel, cycling, walking and wheeling.

This report aims to reflect on what we know about Sandwell as a place, as people and as communities. It aims to spell out what we have done to think about the major challenges that confront us and the impacts that the work of public health, Council and partners on health outcomes, health inequalities and all the things which affect them. It sets out the way we work in collaboration to provide leadership and local empowerment to make a difference to the health and wellbeing of Sandwell.

**Liann Brookes-Smith**  
Interim Director of Public Health  
Sandwell MBC



# Foreword

These pages give you a summary of big changes that have affected Sandwell recently. Liann Brookes-Smith, our Interim Director of Public Health, put together this report to show how our community has stayed strong in the face of global issues.

Over the past three years, things like the Covid-19 pandemic, UK cost of living crisis, war in Ukraine, energy crisis, and the looming climate emergency have had a big impact on the health and well-being of our community. This report gives you a closer look at Sandwell, its people, and communities, and shows the ups and downs we've been through.

We're committed to making Sandwell a healthier place, and this report lays out a plan for that. It talks about how we're working together to address health differences and teaming up with partners for community well-being.

This report isn't just for information — it's a call to action. It stresses how important it is for us to come together, work as a team, and start community-driven projects to tackle challenges. As a community, we're staying strong in our goal to make Sandwell a healthier and fairer place for everyone.

Warm regards,

**Clr Syeda Khatun MBE**

Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities





# Sandwell Story

Sandwell is a place in the West Midlands with six towns: Oldbury, Rowley Regis, Smethwick, Tipton, Wednesbury and West Bromwich. There are about 341,900 people who live here.

Here are some interesting facts about the place we live:

## Age groups

About 27% (that's 93,200 people) are kids and young people under 19 years old, and 15% (49,700 people) are 65 or older.

## Growing population

In the last 10 years, the number of people in Sandwell went up by 11%. That's from 308,100 in 2011 to 341,900 in 2021. Our population grew faster than in other parts of England.

## Lots of young people

The growth in people is mostly in kids and adults of working age. This means Sandwell has a smaller aging population.

## Diversity

Many people from different countries come to live in Sandwell. Between 2002 and 2020, people moved here from more than 130 countries. More than one in three people are from different ethnic groups. This mix of people brings in different cultures and languages from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Americas and the Caribbean.

## Challenges

Even though some areas in Sandwell have improved, it's still the eighth most deprived place in England. This is because of problems like low numbers of people who have good skills and education, families struggling with money and not everyone being healthy and living a long time.





# Our place

Sandwell is part of the Black Country and it has a strong history of industry. The area grew because of coal and ironstone, especially when canals were built in the 18th century.

## Local businesses

About 340,000 people live here and there are more than 9,000 businesses. The local economy is worth £6.5 billion, making it the most productive in the Black Country. There are lots of companies making Sandwell a great place for business.

## Connected place

Sandwell is surrounded by other Local Authorities, such as Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton and Birmingham, with lots of motorways and train stations. This makes it easy for people to travel around.

## Green spaces

Sandwell has many parks and green areas, winning 14 Green Flag awards. These spaces are great for being active and staying healthy.

## Homes

There are 133,000 homes in Sandwell and there are plans to build 8,000 more by 2030. Having a good home is important for people's health but some struggle to heat their homes because of the cost.

## Rich heritage

Sandwell is proud of its history and the different cultures in its six towns. Each town has its own unique identity. This is what makes our home so special.





# Health inequalities

Sandwell is a place with lots of different cultures and friendly communities. But there are some problems with money and health. Sandwell is ranked twelve out of 317 areas in England for being not so well-off (ONS Indices of Deprivation 2019). People in Sandwell live to be around 75.5 years old if they are men and 80.4 years old if they are women. In England, it's a bit longer, about 78.7 years for men and 82.8 years for women.






People in Sandwell also spend more time not feeling well. For men, it's 61.6 years of healthy life and, for women, it 60.5 years. This is compared to England where men have 63.1 years of healthy life and women have 63.9 years. Many people in Sandwell work in healthcare, retail or manufacturing.

Despite major leaps in clean air technology the air quality is still not as good as it should be due to the number of cars and other traffic. Sandwell is marked as a place where the air needs to be managed better.






Breathing in polluted air can be bad, especially for pregnant women and kids. It can make lungs grow slower, make asthma worse and even affect how we feel. Sadly, some people in Sandwell have been more affected by COVID-19 and the impact of climate change.

This makes it more important for everyone to work together to help people in Sandwell stay healthy. We need to make sure they get the right help at the right time and in the right place. Bad health can affect people across every stage and age of life. Here are some of the important differences in outcomes:








## Best Start in Life

		Sandwell	England
 <b>Infant Mortality</b>	Infants that die before age of one (%)	<b>5.7%</b>	3.9%
 <b>School Readiness</b>	% of children ready for school before reception	<b>59.1%</b>	65.2%
 <b>Child Poverty</b>	% of children (28.1%) live in low-income families	<b>28.1%</b>	15.3%
 <b>Healthy weight</b>	% of children at a healthy weight in reception	<b>69.9%</b>	76.5.1%
 <b>Poor child dental health</b>	% of children that show dental decay aged 5	<b>30%</b>	23.7%

## Growing up

 <b>Children in Care</b>	Proportion of looked after children	<b>98</b> per 100,000	<b>70</b> per 100,000
 <b>Obesity</b>	% of children obese in Year 6	<b>34%</b>	23.4%
 <b>Road Traffic Accidents</b>	% of children killed/ seriously injured on the roads	<b>22.4%</b>	15.9%
 <b>Asthma admissions rate</b>	rate of children and young people admitted to hospital with asthma	<b>207.4</b> per 100,000	<b>131.5</b> per 100,000
 <b>Employment</b>	% of people in employment	<b>69.6%</b>	75.4%

## Growing Older

 <b>Male Life expectancy</b>	Average male life expectancy	<b>75.5</b> years	<b>78.7</b> years
 <b>Female life expectancy</b>	Average female life expectancy	<b>80.4</b> years	<b>82.8</b> years
 <b>Cancer Screening</b>	% of cancers diagnosed early	<b>48.8%</b>	52.3%
 <b>Preventable mortality</b>	high preventable mortality rate (271.4/100,00) for people aged under 75	<b>271.4</b> per 100,000	<b>183.2</b> per 100,000
 <b>Healthy Weight</b>	% of adults considered overweight or obese	<b>69.4%</b>	63.8%
 <b>Physical Activity</b>	% of people are physically active	<b>56.4%</b>	67.3%
 <b>Smoking</b>	% of adults who smoke	<b>21%</b>	12.7%



# Health and wellbeing

## Best Start in Life

**From pregnancy until a child turns two is an extremely important time. It sets the foundation for how they'll grow, learn and live in the future. If families don't have enough money, it can make it hard for kids to get good nutrition, learn well in school and have access to future opportunities. That's why we focus on the first 1,000 days of a child's life and help families get the support they need.**

The Children and Families Strategic Partnership wants to make sure kids have a great start in life: They focus on six important areas:

1. Early Help: Helping out early when families need it.
2. Early Years and Family Hubs: Making sure young kids have what they need.
3. Mental Health: Taking care of kids who need extra support.
4. SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities): Helping all kids do well in school.
5. Children in Care: Making sure children in care get the right support.
6. Educational Attainment: Making sure kids do well in school.

We want kids to be ready for school and we want schools to be ready for kids. Families and communities helping out is really important. We're working as a Local Authority to get kids ready for when they're grown-ups, especially those who need extra help.

Our big goal for 2030 is to have a happy and strong community in Sandwell. We want kids to have the best start and a great education, with lots of support from their teachers and families.

In 2021, we're planning to spend more on services to keep kids healthy, like school nursing and health visiting. We're also creating Family Hubs that bring together services for kids and families from when they're born until they're 19 (or 25 for young people with special needs). We're investing in important services from the time a baby is conceived until they're two, and services that help parents take care of and play with their kids. Our plan is to have one place where families can get the help they need and every family gets what they need when they need it.

## Growing Up

**We believe that the kids and teens in Sandwell are vital for the future. We want to hear their thoughts and ideas, so we did virtual workshops with seven schools in the area. We also joined discussions at the SHAPE Forum (a programme designed to listen to children and young people in Sandwell), and Care Leavers Forum. To make sure we talk to young people the right way, we followed Sandwell's Children and Young People's Engagement Strategy. This helps us connect with young people in the borough.**

We had great sessions with students from Grove Vale Primary School, Christchurch Primary School, St Phillip's Primary School, St Michael's Secondary School, Shirelands Secondary School, Q3 Langley and Q3 Tipton. The officers learned a lot from these sessions and it helped shape what's important to young people.

In the future, we plan to keep working with young people and include their ideas in the Corporate Plan. We want to keep building on these opportunities to make Sandwell a better place for everyone.





# Health and wellbeing

## People Live Well and Age Well

In Sandwell, we want to make people healthier and happier by working together with our residents. Instead of just doing things for them, we believe in involving the community, which includes people with talents, skills and local knowledge. We know that they are the real experts on what they need.

We see the people in Sandwell as an asset and we want to use their strengths and ideas to make things better. By teaming up with our residents, we can come up with solutions for problems and make the community stronger. We're invested in our towns to create places where everyone can do well and support each other. This makes people healthier and lessens the need for service, which in turn makes the service available to more people.

We follow this approach for many health priorities, like dealing with COVID-19, working on drug and alcohol issues, promoting physical activity and more. It's all about working together with the community to make Sandwell a better and healthier place for everyone.

## Getting Moving

The latest Sport England survey tells us kids in Sandwell are among the most active in the West Midlands and the fourth most active in all of England. This survey, called Active Lives Children and Young People, checks how many kids aged 5 to 16 are getting enough exercise, at least 60 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous activity. The good news is that in Sandwell, 59.7% of kids are meeting this target, even with the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

We're working with different groups in all six towns to keep kids active. They're doing lots of activities like dance, football, martial arts, basketball, cricket, swimming, gymnastics and athletics. Staying active throughout life is important because it helps lower the risk of getting sick, and we know it can make us feel better, sleep well and reduce stress.

We're not just focusing on kids; we're also helping adults to be more active. After the pandemic, many people started enjoying parks and green spaces more. So, we're planning new activities for adults in all towns to make the most of these spaces. We're also working to make cycling more accessible across Sandwell, helping people feel confident on a bike and making sure they can easily find bikes nearby.

There are already great projects in Sandwell to get families involved in activities like cycling. The Sandwell Valley Explorer is a family-friendly bike ride, and the Benson Community Project in Smethwick offers family bike rides and learn-to-ride sessions. These are great ways to learn new skills, help others and stay active. We're also looking into training more volunteers to lead activities in other parts of Sandwell. The Cradley Community is one group training young people as cycle champions, not just to lead rides but also to share bike care skills.



# Health and wellbeing

## Addictive Behaviours

**Drug and alcohol misuse can be harmful to individuals, families and the community. In Sandwell, we have a strategy to reduce the harms and overall use of drugs and alcohol. We worked with key partners, including service providers, those with lived experience and the community to create this strategy.**

Our three main priorities are:

1. Addressing supply: Working to control the availability of drugs and alcohol.
2. Delivering a world-class treatment and recovery system: Providing effective treatment and support for those affected.
3. Achieving a generational shift in the demand for alcohol and drugs: Working to change attitudes and behaviours towards substance use.

We understand that there's no single answer, so we collaborate with different partners like health services, criminal justice, the voluntary sector and the community.

The Sandwell Drug and Alcohol Partnership (SDAP) brings these partners together to improve our response to drugs and alcohol. We also connect with the West Midlands Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership (CDAP) to work on regional issues.

Treatment services are crucial, and we have two providers: DECCA for young people and Cranstoun for adults. DECCA focuses on preventing misuse through education and awareness sessions in schools, reaching over 19,000 young people. Cranstoun provides a range of interventions, including outreach, harm reduction and recovery support.

Despite challenges, our efforts show positive outcomes. Hospital admissions for substance misuse and alcohol-related conditions in young people are lower than the national average. We're committed to increasing access to our services. The proportion of people with unmet needs for alcohol or drug-dependency in Sandwell is lower than the national average and we aim to reduce it further.

We also address smoking-related harms with targeted support for priority groups and populations. Our smoking cessation services offer various support options, including face-to-face, phone and digital support. While the prevalence of smoking in Sandwell may be high, our smoking cessation support has led to a higher number of successful quits compared to similar areas.

We're aware of challenges posed by illegal tobacco and vapes and collaborate with regulatory services for enforcement. Educational efforts in schools aim to prevent young people from starting smoking or vaping. For more information and the full strategy, visit [www.healthysandwell.co.uk/drug-and-alcohol-strategy](http://www.healthysandwell.co.uk/drug-and-alcohol-strategy).





# Health and wellbeing

## Strong Resilient Communities

**COVID-19 made things hard for people's health, both in their bodies and minds. It affected many parts of life, like how people get together and help each other. Some areas, like Sandwell, had it even tougher because many people worked in jobs where they couldn't keep far apart from others. This made it easier for COVID-19 to spread.**

But, in Sandwell, the people are strong and helpful. Even when they couldn't meet face-to-face, leaders in the community and faith groups found ways to help everyone stay safe. They shared important information and kept in touch with those who needed help. As time went on, they also made sure everyone knew about getting vaccinated.

In 2021, the Sandwell Public Health Team received an LGA award for doing a great job in getting more people vaccinated. They focused on groups of people who had not received the vaccine. They worked with the NHS and other groups to set up vaccination clinics in different places, like mosques and community centres. They even had a special 'Vaccination Bus' at The Hawthorns Stadium.

Sandwell also gave money to community groups to help them to do important things. Over 25 groups got more than £250,000 to do things like talking to people, helping them on social media, translating information and supporting them to get vaccinated.

The council in Sandwell also gave £1.1 million to help groups that support kids' emotional wellbeing. This money helped groups offer counselling, mentoring and activities like sports. The goal was to help kids feel better emotionally and stop problems from getting worse.

To make things even better, Public Health worked with community partners to create projects that make mental wellbeing better for everyone. Public Health listened to what people need and want to make sure the projects really help.

So, even though times have been tough, Sandwell is doing lots of good things to help everyone stay healthy and happy.

The Better Mental Health Programme in Sandwell rolled out ten different projects to make people feel better.

1. **Changes:** This helps parents with different activities as they go through parenting. They offer courses for parents in early years, primary school years and secondary school years.
2. **Activities for New and Expectant Parents:** This project helps parents before and after the baby comes. They have activities for physical health during pregnancy, self-care, mindfulness and making new friends.
3. **Sandwell Libraries and Archives:** This is a safe and inclusive place. They have activities for parents and carers of children under five, like Play Talk Read and the Sandy Bear Scheme.
4. **Anti-Bullying:** This project works to stop bullying, including cyberbullying. They do things in schools to raise awareness and have activities during Anti-Bullying Week.
5. **Voluntary and Community Sector Wellbeing Charter Mark:** They are working to improve mental health across the community. They introduced the language around mental health and embedded this in the curriculum and have extended this to community groups.
6. **Team Talk Albion:** The project is for men aged 18 and older. They play football every week to improve health and wellbeing.
7. **Tough Enough to Care:** This project teaches about mental health and has support groups for men aged 18 and older.
8. **Ideal for All:** This supports minority ethnic communities with peer support, information, gardening and companionship.
9. **Mental Health Literacy:** This project has three parts: training courses, community champions who raise awareness and courses from the Kaleidoscope Plus Group.
10. **Community Mental Health Grant Programme:** This gives money for activities that help community mental health.

By 2022, over 1,400 people benefited from these projects and they felt better about themselves. People liked the projects and feedback said they felt more connected, confident and, overall, happier. The success of the programme gives a good base to continue helping people feel better.



# Working Together

**To make sure people in Sandwell stay healthy and happy, everyone needs to work together. The Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board and the Sandwell Health and Social Care Partnership are playing a big role in this.**

The Health and Wellbeing Board is a group of people like Councillors, local doctors and others who care about the community. When local people share their stories, it inspires the board to act. By combining the work happening on the ground with big plans, the board comes up with new ideas to help the community.

The Health and Social Care Partnership brings together professionals and community groups in a different way. They work on new ways to solve big health problems. They focus on making sure everyone has a fair chance at being healthy. This partnership includes health, social care and other groups.

Both boards work together, with the Health and Wellbeing Board looking out to involve communities and the Health and Social Care Partnership looking into the system to find innovative solutions. They also connect with other groups like the Children's Safeguarding Board, Safeguarding Adults Board, Children and Families Strategic Partnership and the Safer Sandwell Partnership to meet their goals.

The main goals of the partnership are the three P's: People, Patients and Population. For People, they want to have happy and engaged staff. For Patients, they aim to be good or outstanding in everything they do. The Population part is about working with partners to improve lives.

Here are some ways they plan to work together:

1. Shared Decision-Making: Partners will decide things together.
2. Shared Leadership: Everyone will work together to lead and coordinate.
3. Pooling Resources: They will combine money and resources to do more.
4. Accountability: Local places will be responsible for decisions and actions.
5. Digital Innovation: They will use technology to make things better for everyone.
6. Workforce Development: They will help each other's staff get better at their jobs.
7. Focus on Needs: They will think about what the community needs, not just what they want.

By working together, they hope to make sure everyone in Sandwell has the best chance to be healthy and happy.





# Working Together

## Improving Primary Care

**In Sandwell, we're working together to make it easier for people to get the healthcare they need and manage their health better. The Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and the Integrated Care Board are leading this effort. PCNs were started in January 2019 as part of a plan to make the NHS better. They bring together different healthcare services like GPs, community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services in local areas.**

The goal is to move from just giving appointments when needed to actively taking care of people and communities. This means providing more personalised, coordinated and integrated health and social care closer to home. In this effort, we're reviewing how people currently access primary care services. This review will help shape the Network Contract Direct Enhanced Service (DES) that support PCNs. The DES helps make general practice stronger and improves the range and effectiveness of primary care services.

Sandwell's Adult Social Care team will lead the way, working with Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust and Black Country Healthcare NHS Trust to create care teams for each of the six towns in Sandwell. In each town, community and primary care providers will work as one team to manage citizens' care directly and proactively. This will simplify their journey through the healthcare system, making it a better experience for everyone. Removing duplication across providers will also help us use resources better and reduce the need for hospital beds.

We have a history of working together in Sandwell, but we want to do more to support people and make sure everyone has the best possible life. Integrated Town Teams will be set up in each of the six towns to provide holistic support tailored to citizens' needs. Each town will have one core team made up of physical and mental health providers, public health, social care and voluntary services. This team will respond to people exactly when needed, eliminating the need for multiple referrals.

The Town Teams will provide a one-team approach with continuity of care, based on trusted relationships to avoid missed opportunities. They will have the skills and knowledge to provide person and family-centred care, reducing the need for multiple hand-offs and missed chances to help. Additionally, each town will have a family hub working with the core teams to specifically support children, young people and families. Using health data, these teams will know who needs help the most and provide support to reduce urgent care needs and crises.



# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

In this section we will explore six projects that aim to improve the lives of residents and enhance public health outcomes in each of the six towns. Sandwell Council has been officially recognised as a Council of Sanctuary; a prestigious status awarded by the national City of Sanctuary movement. This achievement reflects our commitment to unity and collaboration. We followed a One Council, One Team approach for our application, with Public Health working closely with other Council teams and joining forces with voluntary sector organisations to create our Borough of Sanctuary Strategy and Action Plan. This strategy is designed to reduce health inequalities within our communities and make a positive impact on the lives of our residents.





# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## 1. Language and Health Literacy in West Bromwich



We understand that our diverse population in the borough can lead to unequal access to health, care, and education. Communication, especially through a common language, plays a crucial role in both physical and mental health. Learning English opens doors for residents, allowing them to connect with neighbours,

engage in local activities and navigate healthcare services. This is particularly important for some of our most vulnerable residents, providing them with increased confidence, better access to healthcare and education. In turn, this leads to improved health outcomes, increased resilience, independence, more employment opportunities and better integration into the community.

In our pursuit of the strategic outcome where people live well and age well, we acknowledge that many new migrants face additional challenges such as poverty, low literacy levels and unfamiliarity with local systems. These challenges are further complicated by language barriers. Public health recognises the importance of offering extra support to address these issues and ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to thrive in our community.

### Prevalence

In our community, one in eight people (12%) from migrant communities and established minority ethnic communities don't use English as their main language, compared to the national average of 8%. Among this group, one in four (24.8%) can't speak English well and one in twenty (5.5%) can't speak English at all. In five wards in Sandwell, more than one in five residents (20%) don't use English as their main language. Our borough is incredibly diverse, with over one hundred languages spoken.

After English, the most spoken languages in our community are Punjabi, Polish, Urdu and Bengali. Gujarati, Arabic, Latvian, Czech and Tamil are also among the top 20 most spoken languages. Migration plays a significant role in our population growth, bringing diversity, energy and skills to our local economy. This enriches our communities, creating

vibrant, multi-ethnic, and multi-faith neighbourhoods in each of our six towns.

### Sandwell Language Network (SLN)

The Sandwell Language Network (SLN) is a team that works together to help people in Sandwell learn English. They want to make sure everyone can understand and speak English well. SLN helps people who might find it hard to speak English and they also work with other organisations like Sandwell Adult Family Learning and Sandwell College to teach more than just language – like skills that can help with jobs. The goal is to make sure everyone in Sandwell feels connected and has the chance to learn and grow together.



# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## What is the model by town?

The Sandwell Language Network (SLN) is a team that helps adults in Sandwell learn English. They provide free English classes and other helpful sessions for anyone who needs it. SLN is run by local people for local people.

SLN has different kinds of classes, like English language learning, digital skills, employability skills and Health Literacy. It is run from the main office and within 16 local community organisations across Sandwell.

In 2022-2023, SLN:

- taught 41 language classes taught by 15 community partners
- were joined by people from 52 countries, with over 55 nationalities
- ran sessions for people, almost half of whom (44%) were new to the UK
- had 98 volunteers and peer mentors helping out
- did 91 sessions to help people get ready for jobs.

They also did amazing things for people's health and wellbeing:

- People learned more about health services and how to stay healthy.
- They became more independent in taking care of themselves and their families.
- They got more chances to volunteer, learn new skills for jobs and find jobs.
- They had more chances to make friends and feel like they belong in their communities.

By far the most important achievement of SLN is the impact that this programme has on individual people who are given opportunities to transform their lives through being part of SLN. The following story about Kanwal from West Bromwich shows how SLN works with people and the impacts on people's lives.

Kanwal was born in Pakistan and has been in the UK since January 2020.

She was an Art Teacher in a school in Pakistan before she came to the UK. Kanwal came to the UK as she had got married and came to join her family. She is now living happily in West Bromwich with her husband and two children.

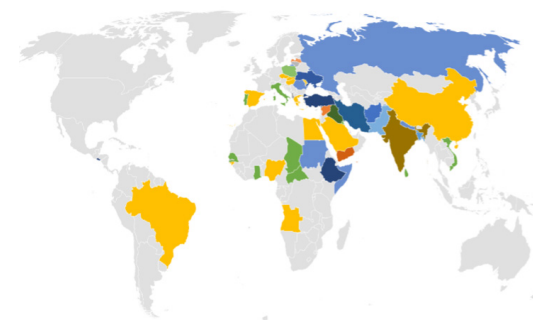
Kanwal joined the Yemini Community Association's (YCA) Parent and Toddler group and the Women's Wellbeing groups in West Bromwich. Even though Kanwal was able to speak basic English, she lacked confidence and had limited opportunities to practice, this had a knock-on effect in her social interactions. Kanwal found it difficult looking for employment, attending hospital and GP appointments as well as general social activities. This meant she felt very isolated. So, she was referred to and encouraged to attend the intermediate (Entry 2-3) ESOL classes at YCA.

Kanwal has gone from strength to strength, from being a student in the Yemini Community Association ESOL classes to becoming a volunteer on the SLN course. She has a lot more confidence in herself and her increased language skills means she can now independently go to GP appointments and actively look for employment. She now has the confidence to combine her language and art teacher experience to deliver craft sessions for the Women's Wellbeing groups at the Yemini Community Association.

Kanwal has also completed and passed the Level 3 Award in Education and Training and was appointed an assistant tutor during the ESOL booster sessions.

Kanwal Reflected that *"The education here is very different from my education back home. I have learned a lot, in my time at YCA Sandwell, firstly as a student, then as a volunteer. I have seen my confidence grow with all the support I have received from Yemini Community Association and from my tutor Kevin. All this started with a lady chatting to me in a park and signposting me to YCA."*

SLN is proud of everything they have achieved, and they were shortlisted for an LGC award. If you want to know more, including watching a video about SLN to hear more stories from local people, visit [sandwellconsortium.co.uk/service/sandwell-language-network](https://sandwellconsortium.co.uk/service/sandwell-language-network)





# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## 2. Mental Health and Wellbeing in Oldbury

In Sandwell, there are more people who experience feelings of sadness or stress compared to other places. Some people even go to the hospital for help with their mental health. But it's important to know that this can happen for different reasons, like the environment they live in, how much money they have or the kind of support available.

In Sandwell, more adults have feelings that make them sad or stressed when compared to other nearby areas. There are programmes that help adults with their mental health. These programmes focus on preventing mental health issues and promoting wellbeing, especially because of the challenges brought by COVID-19.

One of the groups helping is Ideal for All, a charity that supports people with disabilities and mental health concerns. They believe in working together with the community and creating opportunities for everyone. They use things like gardening, cooking and social activities to help people feel better. Their goal is not just to provide a temporary fix but to give people skills and support so they can help themselves.

### Case Study: Richard

Richard was referred to Ideal for All by the Job Centre where he started to build a relationship with the specialist team and opened up about struggling with his mental health. The team suggested that Richard came to the garden to take a look around and see what Ideas for All do and meet some of the group members.

Richard struggled to maintain a working routine since becoming a single father over 20 years ago. He supported his 3 children and crafted his routine around their needs. Richard has struggled to maintain his social connections and has come accustomed to a distant connection to his intimate and wider family. Since his children grew up Richard noticed how his children have distanced themselves from him, increasing his sense of isolation. This upset Richard as he feels more withdrawn from his kids and not able to communicate with them. Richards aim with his time at Ideal for All was to gain a routine with his sessions and to socialise with group participants and staff as peers and find a positive life for himself.

Working in the garden, Richard developed his knowledge of growing produce as well as seasonal growing in his time with Ideal for All. He took this back to his home life and has grown at home and taken feedback and tips for indoor and greenhouse growing. Demonstrating how far he has come in opening up to others and pushing himself to support his own wellbeing. A fellow participant observed "he has also shared the fruits of his labour by bringing in and sharing his tomato crops with us for outdoor lunches in the summertime."

Even when his financial situation was difficult Richard always turned up. He cycles to the centre not only to overcome this, but also as part of his physical outdoor activity to boost his wellbeing and healthy lifestyle further. This combined with the peer support in the group has provided him with a "massive boost to his wellbeing."

The Ideal for All team at the Garden said "Richard is very considerate and thoughtful in his approach to helping others. He really thinks about the activity each week made available by staff, and always considers how the activity of the day and his efforts can best support his peers. For example he is great at recognising hidden barriers to support and helping people overcome these with a natural ease e.g. assistance for their mobility, helping others to select the right tools which will help them and make use of aids and adaptations available."

Participation in the garden has had a positive impact on Richard's life and confidence and he felt that "It's nice to keep busy. It gives me the chance to get out the house and properly work on something and be proud of something again. It's great coming here. I never knew about it before, and I have really got back to doing something I enjoy. Great bunch."



# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## 3. Migrant Health in Smethwick

**People like Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees often face challenges and need extra help because they can be more vulnerable. They may have difficulties with language, feel alone or be in poverty. These challenges make it harder for them to get the healthcare and public health services they need.**

In Sandwell, the number of people from other countries has grown in the last ten years. In 2011, one in ten residents (10%) were born outside the UK, but in 2021, it increased to one in six residents (16%). More people from other countries are also registering for National Insurance and there are more asylum seekers in the area. The number of babies born to mothers from outside the UK is also going up, while the national rate stays the same. All this data shows that there will be more demand on healthcare services, especially for things like maternity, sexual health, primary care, health visits and school health.

These changes mean that the community and healthcare services will need to work harder to make sure these families get the support they need.

### Community-Based Intervention

To help the health and wellbeing of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, Public Health has been working together with Brushstrokes. They gave money to Brushstrokes through grants to support community activities and offer advice to migrants in Sandwell.

### Purpose

This project is trying to make things fairer for migrants who often face health challenges and are among the most marginalised in society. The goal is to help vulnerable migrants, especially those who have just arrived, by improving their health and mental wellbeing. They need extra support because of difficulties with language, feeling alone, being in poverty and not being confident or able to read well when it comes to using local healthcare and public health services. The project wants to make sure migrants have better health and feel happier.

### Aim

This project wants to make sure that migrants who have recently come to a new place get better health and feel happier. The project also wants to learn more about the health and wellbeing needs of new migrants, as well as different communities and groups that might need extra support. The goal is to make sure everyone, especially new migrants, and vulnerable groups, can understand health information and make good decisions about their health and getting healthcare. This will help them take care of their physical health and feel better mentally.

### Brushstrokes in Smethwick

Brushstrokes is in Smethwick, but they help people all across Sandwell, including asylum seekers, refugees and migrants of any age. Their goals include improving the health of vulnerable migrant communities, supporting families and expectant parents through Family Hubs, making it easier to access Public Health services for a healthy life in Sandwell and improving overall health conditions for vulnerable migrants in the area.

Brushstrokes works with migrants who often follow migration patterns in the borough. When new people arrive, they usually settle in places where there are similar communities.

The community-based programmes run by Brushstrokes, with the help of Public Health, make sure that vulnerable migrant groups get all-around support to feel welcomed and start a new life in Sandwell. In the last year, they've adjusted their programmes using the Inclusion Health Model. This model helps their Inclusion Health Worker identify challenges early and connect new migrants with local services. This makes it easier for them to understand and access health services in the area.





# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## 3. Migrant Health in Smethwick

### Support for a migrant in Smethwick

They came to the UK in 2019 as an asylum seeker because of troubles in their home country. In 2021, they moved to Sandwell, and going back home wasn't safe due to past persecution and the current war. They needed help in many areas of life and learned about Brushstrokes from their housing officer.

At first, they contacted the resources team for regular food and seasonal clothing for them and their child. This support has continued since they arrived. They also needed help with learning English and immigration support. They joined ESOL classes and their English is improving. Immigration support is guiding them through their journey, hoping for a positive outcome.

They have gained emotional support and found a trustworthy group by attending ESOL classes, the food bank, community café, games nights and other projects. They've made friends, received advice, and found support from people in similar situations and the dedicated staff at Brushstrokes.

Many positive outcomes have happened for them. They have a stable source of food, appropriate clothing and a more comfortable living situation. Thanks to ESOL classes, their English has greatly improved making it easier to be part of the local community. Immigration support is ongoing, going through an appeal process with hopes of success.

By engaging with Brushstrokes, They have found friends and support, improving their mental health. Support will continue for as long as they need and Brushstrokes will remain a source of stability and trust.

They have expressed their gratitude, saying, "I am so thankful to Brushstrokes. If I have a problem, I know I can come and Brushstrokes will help. If it's something they don't do, they find help for me. It's good to find friends, support and advice with my child."



# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## 4. Reducing Health Inequalities in Tipton

The Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme (SHIP) and Sandwell Anticipatory Care Grant Programme have been created together to tackle health inequalities and support vulnerable communities in Sandwell. A recent Lifestyle Survey in 2021 revealed that 47% of residents felt their mental wellbeing had worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasising a significant need for appropriate support. This impact varied across communities, with some being more adversely affected than others.

During the pandemic, people from minority ethnic groups faced the brunt of existing health inequalities. Public Health England (PHE) stressed the importance of working closely with local minority ethnic and faith communities to address these inequalities. The belief is that solutions will be more effective if they are developed collaboratively with the local community rather than imposed on them. This requires investment in the efforts of local community and voluntary sector organisations that bring expertise and social networks to the table.

Sandwell Consortium is a collaboration of local community and voluntary sector organisations working together to address unmet needs, tackle disadvantage and promote equity and social inclusion in Sandwell. Their member organisations, which support wellbeing in various communities, including the Bangladeshi, Somali, Yemeni and others, have co-designed and implemented efforts to address health inequalities in Sandwell's minority ethnic communities.

Sandwell Council and Sandwell Consortium partnered to co-design the three-year Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme (SHIP) from 2022 to 2025. The focus of the programme is on mental health and wellbeing, as well as preventing long-term conditions. Eleven community partners are involved in SHIP, offering activities such as signposting, awareness-raising, advice and information (including educational workshops), healthy eating, exercise sessions and more. These activities aim to help individuals enhance their mental wellbeing and prevent and manage long-term conditions.

### Our SHIP Partners are:

- Bangladeshi Islamic Centre
- Bangladeshi Women's Association
- Brushstrokes
- Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisations, Greets Green Resource Centre
- Community Connect Foundation, North Smethwick Resource Centre
- ILEYS Community Association
- Sandwell Irish Society
- Smethwick Pakistani Muslim Association
- Smethwick Youth & Community Centre.
- West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre
- Yemeni Community Association





# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## Sandwell Health Improvement Programme (SHIP) & Anticipatory Care Grants

SHIP is carried out by Sandwell Consortium CIC along with community partners. This programme has successfully enhanced the health of residents by implementing various activities in eleven community organisations across Sandwell. These activities specifically target communities that often face challenges with their health.

The initiatives include:

- projects aimed at addressing childhood and adult obesity
- maternity and women's health groups
- exercise groups designed for individuals over 50 years old
- postural gentle exercises tailored for older residents
- a community swimming group
- football sessions catering to both adults and young people.

These diverse projects are contributing to improving the health outcomes of the community, focusing on different age groups and health concerns.

## Bangladeshi Women's Association Tipton

The Bangladeshi Women's Association (BWA) in Tipton is part of a special programme called Sandwell Health Inequalities Programme (SHIP). At BWA, they have fun activities to help people stay healthy, especially for those who have some health challenges.

This is the story of James. He sometimes finds it a bit hard to learn things and he's also a bit shy. But James started going to Zumba classes at BWA with someone who helps him. Since he started going, James feels more confident and really likes being part of the group. James has become friends with many people in his community and he talks and does activities with them. He doesn't need someone to help him anymore. Going to Zumba has made him stronger and he convinced his mum to join too. James thinks it helps him stay fit and it makes him feel happy and confident.

James shared, "I go to Zumba with my mum twice a week. It helps me talk with people and I stay fit. I sometimes have trouble hearing but at Zumba I can be with others. The classes let me meet people from my neighbourhood. I'm happy to see them. I feel more capable and surer of myself now. The centre where we go makes me feel alive and hopeful. The people there are nice and help me a lot. My mum and the person who helps me also like going with me, and they thank me for taking them along."



# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## 5. Children Young People and Families in Rowley Regis

**In Sandwell some children, mums and families face big differences in their health and happiness compared to other places in the country. These differences can last a long time and their health isn't as good as it could be. We've seen that these differences happen more to families who might not have as much money, especially those from minority ethnic communities.**

We've started Family Hubs in each of the six towns. These hubs will bring together all kinds of services for children and families. The idea is to make sure these services work together well. This way, we can organise things better and give the right help to everyone who needs it.

### Family Hubs

The goal of Family Hubs is to make sure babies, children and families get everything they need right from the start. These hubs are like a one-stop shop where families can find the services they need whenever they need them. Here are some of the things the hubs offer for children up to 19 years old (and up to 25 years for those who need extra help):

- help for mums during pregnancy (booking for maternity care)
- tips and support for parenting
- taking care of mums' mental health and the relationship between parents and babies
- helping babies learn language early and creating a good learning environment at home
- guidance on feeding babies
- fun activities for children under 5
- advice on health and wellbeing and pointing families in the right direction
- special help for families that need it
- support for children with special needs
- making sure parents are involved and connected.

There is a Family Hub in each of the six towns. Each hub will offer different services based on what the community needs. The Family Hub networks help families and partners to work together to help children to get the best start in life.

The anonymised case study below explains the needs and support for a young family in Rowley Regis:

The Russell family (mum, dad and three children) were referred to the Family Hub by the children's high school with support needed for school attendance, behaviour management, and emotional wellbeing support. The hub considered where the family was in terms of physical health, wellbeing, meeting emotional needs education and learning. They worked with St. Michaels C of E High School, Rowley Hall Primary School, KRUNCH, CAMHS and Inclusion Support to support mum and dad and the children.

The Family Hub talked with the children and with mum and dad to understand their needs. The children felt happy with the support they received. All children feel they have been listened to and schools are more aware of their needs. The parents are happy with the support received for the children and will continue to engage with school and services. The support that the family received made an impact for the children and family. This showed self-identified improvements in physical health, their wellbeing, meeting emotional needs, education and learning, the children's behaviour at school, and home and money.





# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## Addictive Behaviours in Wednesbury

**We want everyone in Sandwell to have a great start in life, live well and age well, free from the harms of drugs and alcohol. We believe that a system of recovery-oriented care is crucial for making Sandwell a safer, healthier, and more prosperous place.**

In 2023, we investigated how recovery works in Sandwell and what we found was that people want more help in their communities, more chances to volunteer and more support for families and those who take care of others. So, we decided to make some positive changes. We gave more money to community groups across the area to support people recovering from drugs and alcohol and now we have more projects than before.

1. African French Speaking Community Support (AFSCS), Smethwick: This project helps with finding jobs, giving advice and welfare, providing essential household items and offering chances to volunteer.
2. Community Link, Cradley Heath: This is a community café that offers a safe space for people dealing with drug and alcohol issues. They also provide volunteering opportunities and qualifications in food and hygiene. The café helps not only those dealing with substance use but also other vulnerable groups in the wider community.
3. Friar Park Millennium Centre, Wednesbury: They have a variety of activities like cooking, cycling, walking groups, sports, self-esteem workshops and volunteering opportunities, all designed with input from people in recovery.
4. Ideal for All, Oldbury, Smethwick and Wednesbury: This project includes gardening, growing and cooking activities for people in recovery and their families. They also provide employment support and volunteering opportunities. They're even creating a special garden to spread a message of hope.

5. Kaleidoscope Plus Group (KPG), Smethwick and West Bromwich: This group offers a personal development and wellbeing programme created with input from people in recovery. They have peer-led support, structured wellbeing groups and open meetings for families and carers affected by substance misuse.
6. Sandwell Asian Development Association, West Bromwich: They run a non-contact boxing programme with fitness training and mentoring.
7. The Salvation Army, Oldbury: This programme focuses on life coaching to improve health and wellbeing. It includes one-on-one sessions for building confidence, resilience, positive activities, CV writing, digital skills, peer support, sharing experiences and access to volunteering opportunities.
8. Warley Boxing Club, Oldbury: They have a fitness and wellbeing programme, including gym access, non-contact boxing and informal one-on-one mentoring.
9. West Bromwich Leisure Centre, West Bromwich: This project provides leisure passes, including up to four junior memberships, giving unlimited access to the centre's facilities for 12 weeks. They also offer tailored one-on-one support to help people make the most of the opportunities available.

These projects aim to help everyone in Sandwell recover and thrive, offering different ways for people to get support and build a healthier future.

### Recovery in Wednesbury

Cranstoun, our adult drug and alcohol treatment provider, is doing great work in Smethwick and Wednesbury. They used to provide services only in Smethwick but now they've expanded to three different places in Wednesbury: Wednesbury Town Hall, Wednesbury Library and Friar Park Millennium Centre. This way, more people can easily get the support they need without worrying about travel or money.



# Improving Health and Reducing Inequalities

## Addictive Behaviours in Wednesbury

Here's what some people who use Cranstoun's services have said:

- "I'm so happy I can just walk here and get on with my day!"
- "I would never have attended today if my appointment was in Smethwick but as it's here, I thought I might as well!"
- "It was too far going to the main Cranstoun; it could take me up to two hours to get there."
- "I didn't always have the money to get to Smethwick."

The staff at Cranstoun have found that this local approach helps build better relationships with the people in Wednesbury. For example, there's Sarah (not her real name). She lives in Wednesbury and had some challenges with substances. She also faced domestic abuse and housing issues. Sarah found it hard to go to Cranstoun in Smethwick because of health problems and travel costs. Since Cranstoun started meeting people in Wednesbury Town Hall, Sarah has been to all her appointments. This made it easier for Cranstoun to support her with an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and help from the housing team.

Cranstoun's work at Friar Park Millennium Centre has also been outstanding. People in recovery like Claire (not her real name) attend sessions with Cranstoun and then take part in activities at the centre, like baking and cycling. The Millennium Centre staff are doing a great job identifying people who need support for substance misuse and sending them to Cranstoun. They're also offering volunteering opportunities, helping people in recovery gain confidence and new skills.

Take Paul (not his real name), for example. He used to visit the Millennium Centre for a hot drink and staff noticed a few times when he seemed to have been drinking alcohol. They talked to him about it and introduced him to Cranstoun. Paul wants to stop drinking and now he's even volunteering at the centre, expressing how thankful he is for the positive support he's found there.

It's amazing to see how Cranstoun is making it easier for people to get help and support in their local communities.





