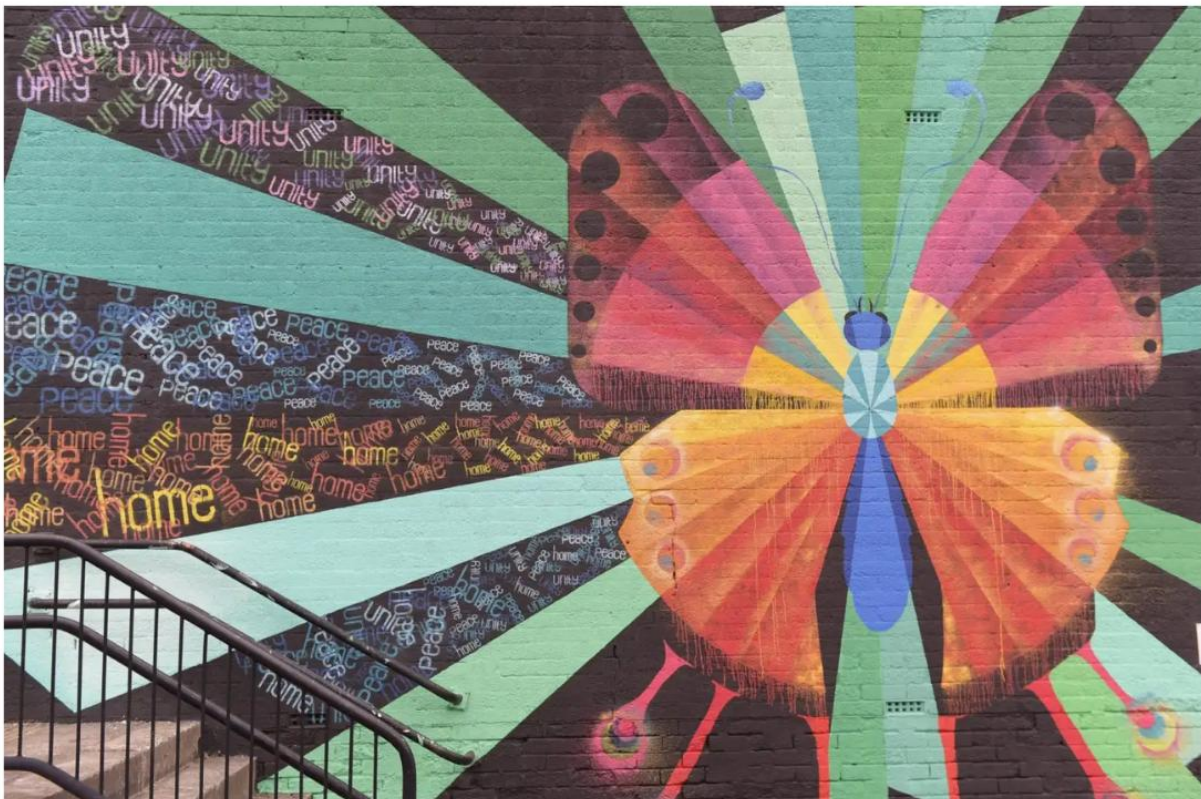


Sharro Community Forum Speak Up

June 2026



Sharrow Community Forum: Speak Up

What is Speak Up?

Speak Up is Healthwatch Sheffield's micro grants programme, offering funding of £1000-1500 to not-for-profit, voluntary, and community sector groups. The purpose is to run a project which will reach out to people across Sheffield, and hear what matters to them in relation to health and social care.



By working with groups which are already trusted partners in their communities, we can make sure we're hearing from even more people, including those whose voices aren't often heard by decision makers. This year's projects all have a focus on the voices and experiences of children and young people.

Sharrow Community Forum

Sharrow Community Forum is a community-based organisation dedicated to supporting children, young people, families, and local residents across the Sharrow area of Sheffield. The organisation works to create inclusive, safe, and welcoming spaces where people from diverse backgrounds can connect, learn, and thrive.



As part of its work, Sharrow Community Forum manages Adventures Hub and Playground, a vibrant community space offering a wide range of youth and play provision throughout the week. We focus on promoting positive relationships, inclusion, confidence-building, creativity, and emotional well-being, while giving young people opportunities to socialise, develop new skills, and have their voices heard.

Healthwatch Sheffield

Healthwatch Sheffield Healthwatch Sheffield helps adults, children and young people influence and improve how NHS and Social Care services are designed and run. We're completely independent and not part of the NHS or Sheffield City Council. We want to understand your experiences, and help your views to influence decision-makers in the city.



Young People's Experiences of Health, Mental Health and SEND (Special Educational Needs & Disabilities) Services

What we did

22 Participants: Young people aged 10–19

Setting: Outdoor engagement sessions held around a fire pit to create a relaxed, non-clinical environment

Approach:

- Group discussions
- Individual 1-to-1 conversations

Topics explored:

- Mental health support
- SEND support and diagnosis
- Experiences in schools, colleges, health and community settings
- Barriers to accessing support
- Young people's ideas for ideal services

This approach supported participation from young people who may struggle in formal consultation settings and enabled honest, reflective discussions.

What young people told us works well

Supportive school environments

Some young people reported positive experiences of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and mental health support in schools, particularly in primary school. Examples included:

- Dedicated SEND teams
- Safe or quiet rooms for emotional regulation
- Adjusted expectations and understanding from staff
- Access to key workers or lead workers



Young people described how key workers helped them regulate emotions, feel listened to, and supported communication between school and home.

“She helped me calm my emotions... she was always there for me.” Young person aged 13

Early intervention and personalised support

Where support was provided early, young people felt it made a significant difference to their confidence, learning and wellbeing.



Barriers and challenges

Long waiting times for diagnosis

Waiting lists for SEND and autism assessments were described as extremely long, in some cases lasting close to a decade. Young people felt this delayed access to meaningful support.

“It took almost a decade... that’s a ridiculous amount of time.” Young person aged 16



Lack of support before diagnosis

Young people felt strongly that support should not depend on a formal diagnosis. Many felt they struggled for years without help despite clear needs.

“Even if it’s not clear... you should still get some sort of support.” Young Person Aged 12



Transition gaps (school to college)

Several young people described a sharp drop in support after leaving school:

- Not knowing where to go for help in college
- Large, unfamiliar environments
- Lack of clear information about SEND or wellbeing services



“In college I don’t even know where to go to talk to people about my autism.” Young Person Aged 16

Feeling dismissed or not believed

Young people repeatedly shared that adults often minimise their experiences:

- Being told they are ‘too young to be stressed’
- Being labelled as ‘lazy’, ‘naughty’, or ‘problematic’
- Feeling talked over rather than listened to



“They think we don’t hold the same weight... but we do.” Young Person Aged 11

Pressures on young people’s mental health

Young people spoke powerfully about the pressures they face, including:

- Academic expectations
- Social pressures
- Fear of judgement
- Pressure to be “perfect”



Many felt adults underestimated how intense these pressures can be for them.

“Our whole world is school and social life... it feels like everything.” Young Person Aged 10

What young people want to see improved

Better Access and Shorter Waiting Times for support

- Increased number of diagnosis centres across the city
- Reduced waiting lists
- Clearer pathways to support



Support Without Needing a Diagnosis

Young people were clear that help should be available **before**, **during**, and **after** diagnosis.



Listening and Person-Centred Support

Across all discussions, the strongest message was simple:

“Just listen.” Young Person aged 14

Young people want:

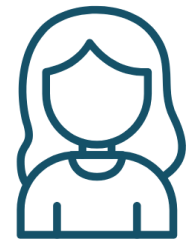
- Adults to ask what *they* want
- Support shaped around individual needs
- To feel respected and believed



Safe, Youth-Friendly Spaces

Young people described a vision for a dedicated wellbeing space in their local community:

- Drop-in
- Judgement-free
- Confidential and safe
- Youth-only
- Relaxed, welcoming environment
- Not clinical or “babyish”



Ideas included:

- Wellbeing cafés that included evening opening hours (6pm – 8pm)
- Comfortable spaces to talk or sit quietly 1:1 with support workers
- Activities with animals, creative painting sessions, dance, drama and food making activities that helped relax and de-stress them, and help with emotional expression
- Supportive adults available to listen

“Not condescending... not dumbed down.” Young Person Aged 12

Communication and Awareness

Young people highlighted that many services already exist, but:

- They are not visible
- Young people do not know what they do
- Opening times and activities are unclear



Social media is key

Facebook was widely seen as ineffective for their age group.

Young people said services should use:

- TikTok
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- YouTube



Conclusion

This engagement clearly shows that young people in the area of Sharrow in Sheffield have valuable insights into how health, mental health and SEND services can be improved. While positive experiences exist, particularly in primary school, gaps remain around access, waiting times, transitions, and community spaces centered around young people's mental health and being listened to.

Young people are asking for **timely support, respect, and spaces where they feel heard.**

Based on young people's feedback, we believe the following changes would make a positive difference:

1. **Reduce SEND and autism diagnostic waiting times** by increasing local capacity rather than relying on schools and GP for referrals.
2. **Provide interim support** for young people while awaiting diagnosis, in community spaces or wellbeing cafes that are easy for them to travel to.
3. **Strengthen transition support** between school and college.
4. **Invest in youth-led wellbeing spaces** that are informal, safe and accessible, with wider opening hours including evenings.
5. **Train professionals** to listen actively and avoid dismissive attitudes.
6. **Improve visibility of services** through youth-friendly communication channels.
7. **Ensure confidentiality and trust** are clearly explained to young people.

