

STOCKPORT PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT



2025
CREATIVE HEALTH

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FOREWORD

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Report Author,
Jilla Burgess-Allen



Take a moment to pause and think about how engaging in creative activity makes you feel. What words come to mind? Engrossed? Connected? Calm? Energised?

Many people might say they aren't that creative, but sometimes we think quite narrowly about what creative activity can mean. Yes, it might be playing the guitar or making a festive decoration, but it might equally be cooking a tasty meal and presenting it with care, or writing a journal, or planting a beautiful flower bed. There are endless ways we can express our creativity or appreciate the creations of others. As David in the Pennine Care case study later in this report says, creativity is for play and relaxation (you don't have to be good at it).

In my report this year I want to focus on how these activities can benefit our health and wellbeing. They can help us stay well as well as helping us recover; they can help us build the confidence and skills to get into employment, they can inspire us, strengthen us, and connect us to others.

I want to celebrate the incredible wealth of creative activity going on in communities across our borough and show some of the ways this is already improving people's health. And I want to explore how we can enhance the creative potential in Stockport to reduce the inequalities in health we continue to see.

CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND ADULT SOCIAL CARE



**Cabinet Member,
Cllr Foster-Grime**

In recent years we have seen how creative activity can help people manage long-term conditions, strengthen mental wellbeing, and build the social connections that keep communities resilient.

Stockport is at the forefront of this movement. We have a proud local heritage, from the pioneering work of Arc, to the launch of Stockroom, a creative health hub in the town centre. As GM Town of Culture, we celebrated making things, moving, music, and food together, bringing creative opportunities to every corner of the borough.

None of this happens without the commitment of partners across our voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector who create safe, welcoming spaces to make and belong. I want to thank practitioners, volunteers, artists, carers, and residents who have shaped the stories and examples in these pages, and our Director of Public Health and her team for pulling them together into a report that should make us all very proud.

Our commitment is simple: to ensure creative opportunities are available in every neighbourhood, for every resident to support their health and wellbeing.

1. WHAT IS CREATIVE HEALTH?

PAINTING A PICTURE: HOW CREATIVITY LINKS TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Many people are intuitively drawn to creative activities during times of ill-health or stress, such as calming music or adult colouring books.^(1,2) The emerging field of creative public health looks at the bigger picture, integrating arts and creativity into health and wellbeing strategies. It is grounded in a growing body of evidence demonstrating that creative engagement can have a positive impact on physical, mental, and social health throughout life.⁽³⁾

The National Centre for Creative Health (NCCH) defines creative health as “creative approaches and activities which have benefits for our health and wellbeing.”⁽⁴⁾ This includes both actively participating in creative processes and more passively enjoying them. There are countless ways to express creativity, making creative activities uniquely flexible and accessible. Which means there are many ways we can embed creative interventions within health systems for a variety of different needs and interests. ^(4,5)

‘Creative Health at a Glance’ offers practical examples from a wide range of health priorities and approaches.⁽⁶⁾ In many cases, more research is needed for interventions to be adopted in the mainstream. However, creative methods do already feature in clinical guidelines; the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends that arts therapies are considered for everyone who has psychosis or schizophrenia for example.⁽⁶⁾

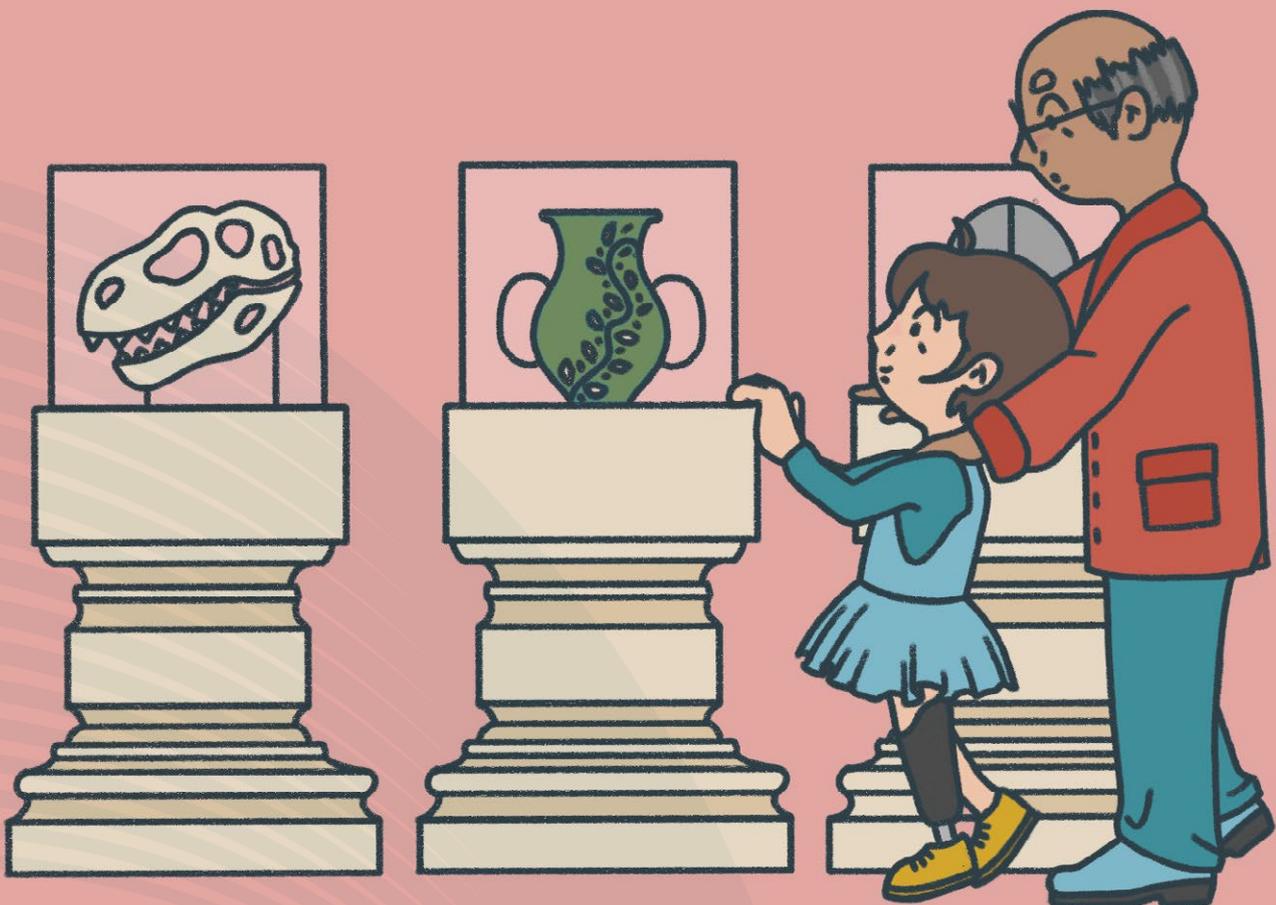
We all know that our physical and mental health are intertwined, and the clinical impact of creativity reinforces their interconnectedness. For example, blood pressure can be reduced by dance therapy and by viewing art in a museum;⁽⁶⁾ For adults with moderate asthma, reducing physiological stress through expressive writing can improve lung function by 14%. ⁽⁶⁾

In addition to improving symptoms and disease outcomes, creative strategies can help to prevent or slow the onset of disease. Movement and dance prevent an estimated 387 cases of breast cancer per year and save £157 million annually by reducing the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. ⁽⁶⁾ Likely influenced by the huge potential benefits to health and social care, a dedicated All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for creative health was established in November 2024. ⁽⁷⁾

The interplay of social, cultural and economic capital is a powerful determinant of health. ⁽³⁾ Culture-led economic regeneration attracts local investment, providing opportunities for social mobility and community empowerment. ⁽³⁾ Place-based creative collaboration via networking and volunteering builds cohesive communities. Anchor institutions, such as museums and libraries, welcome all to celebrate local heritage, fostering a sense of belonging. It's not hard to see how the health, social and economic benefits start to add up.

An interesting area of research is the connection between creativity and empathy. ^(8,9) Engaging with art can evoke deep emotional responses, prompting self-reflection and a better understanding of others' experiences. Creative expression also promotes the cognitive flexibility needed to develop innovative solutions. ^(8,9) Creativity can therefore both improve understanding of health and wellbeing challenges and act as a catalyst for positive change.

In summary, creative health offers a transformative approach to public health. Championing creativity improves wellbeing, reduces pressure on clinical services, and builds more resilient communities. The challenge now lies in scaling up successful models, securing long-term funding, and integrating creative health into mainstream policy, practice, and clinical pathways.



2. Spotlight on Stockport

SETTING THE SCENE: HOW HEALTHY IS STOCKPORT?

As the Demographics of Stockport image highlights below the most recent estimate for the total population of Stockport is just under 300,000. ⁽¹⁰⁾ The number of people living 2023, with the biggest rise among over-65-year-olds.⁽¹⁰⁾ This means that Stockport, like many other areas in the country, has an increasing demand for health and care services, especially to support its ageing population.

Stockport has fewer younger adults than the national or Greater Manchester (GM) average. ⁽¹⁰⁾ This is partly driven by 18-29-year-olds leaving Stockport in pursuit of further education, work or affordable housing. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Stockport is less ethnically diverse than GM and England on average; however, diversity is increasing.⁽¹²⁾ The number of people identifying as being from a Black, Asian or other minority ethnic group rose by 65% between 2011 and 2021 to 37,240 people.

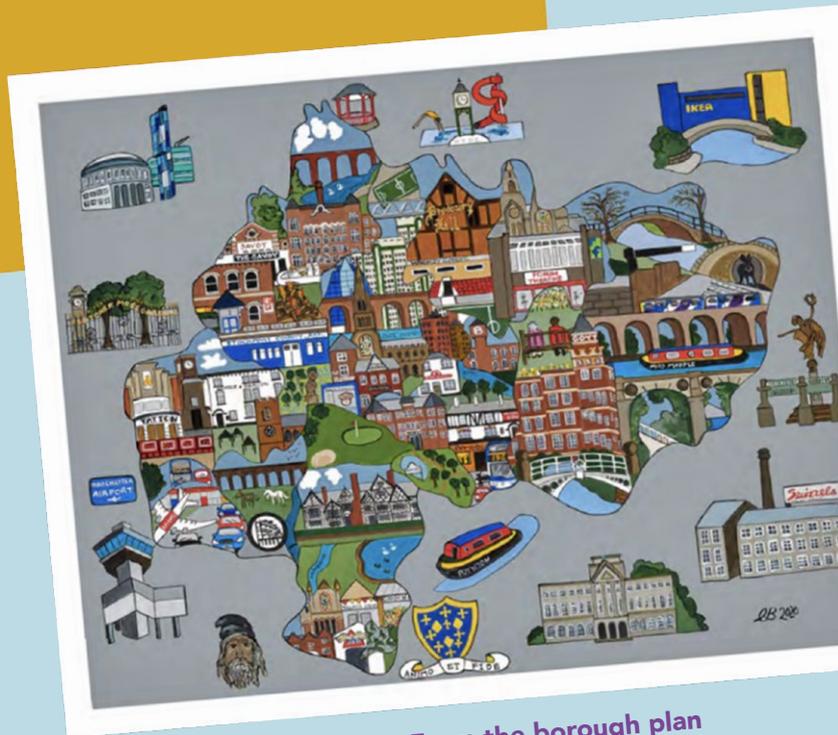


Image 1: From the borough plan - by artist Lucy Burgess

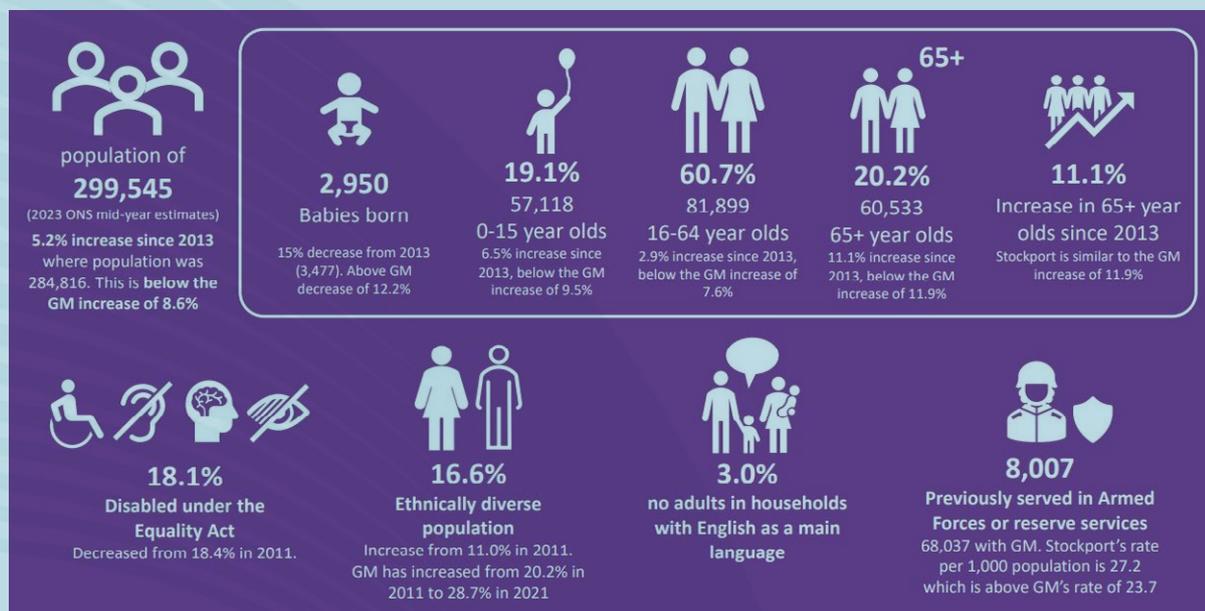


Figure 1: Demographics of Stockport ⁽¹³⁾

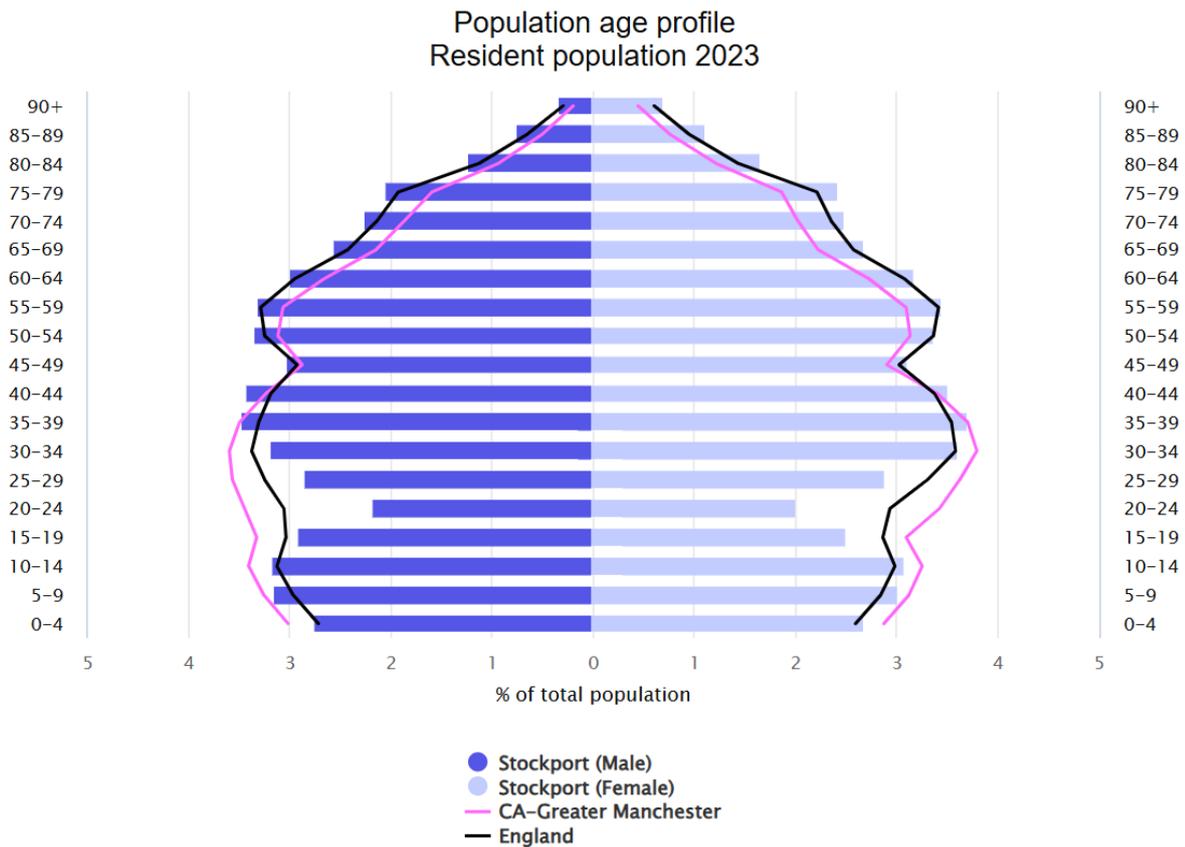


Figure 2: Population pyramid for Stockport⁽¹⁴⁾

Social determinants of health describe the conditions in which people live, work and age, including access to power and resources.⁽¹⁵⁾ These factors have a profound impact on health outcomes, resulting in unfair and avoidable differences referred to as health inequities. While Stockport is a flourishing borough there are very concentrated pockets of deprivation alongside relatively affluent areas.

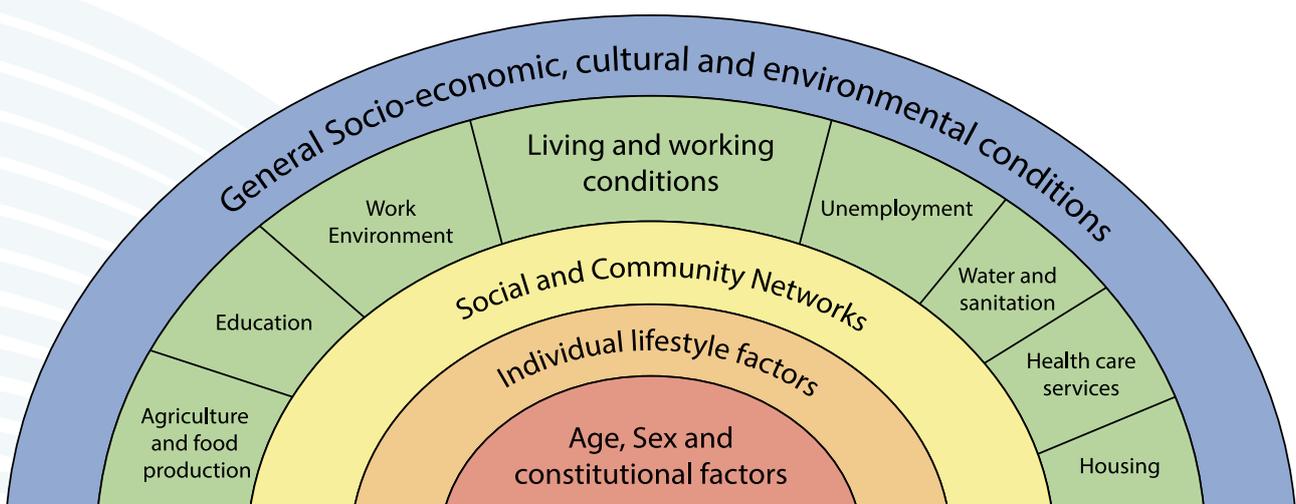


Figure 3: Dahlgren and Whitehead social determinants of health diagram⁽¹⁵⁾

As there is significant socioeconomic variation within Stockport, it can be helpful to look at smaller areas within the borough to identify patterns and trends. For example, in the 2021 census, the proportion of residents with a disability in Stockport (18.1%) was very similar to the rest of GM (18.4%). However, this rose to over 30% in parts of central Stockport, compared to 10% in parts of Bramhall, following the social gradient of many health inequalities. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) considers income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment. ⁽¹⁷⁾ High levels of deprivation particularly impact areas to the centre and north of the borough, including Lancashire Hill, Brinnington, Offerton, Adswood & Bridgehall, Woodley and the town centre. ⁽¹⁰⁾

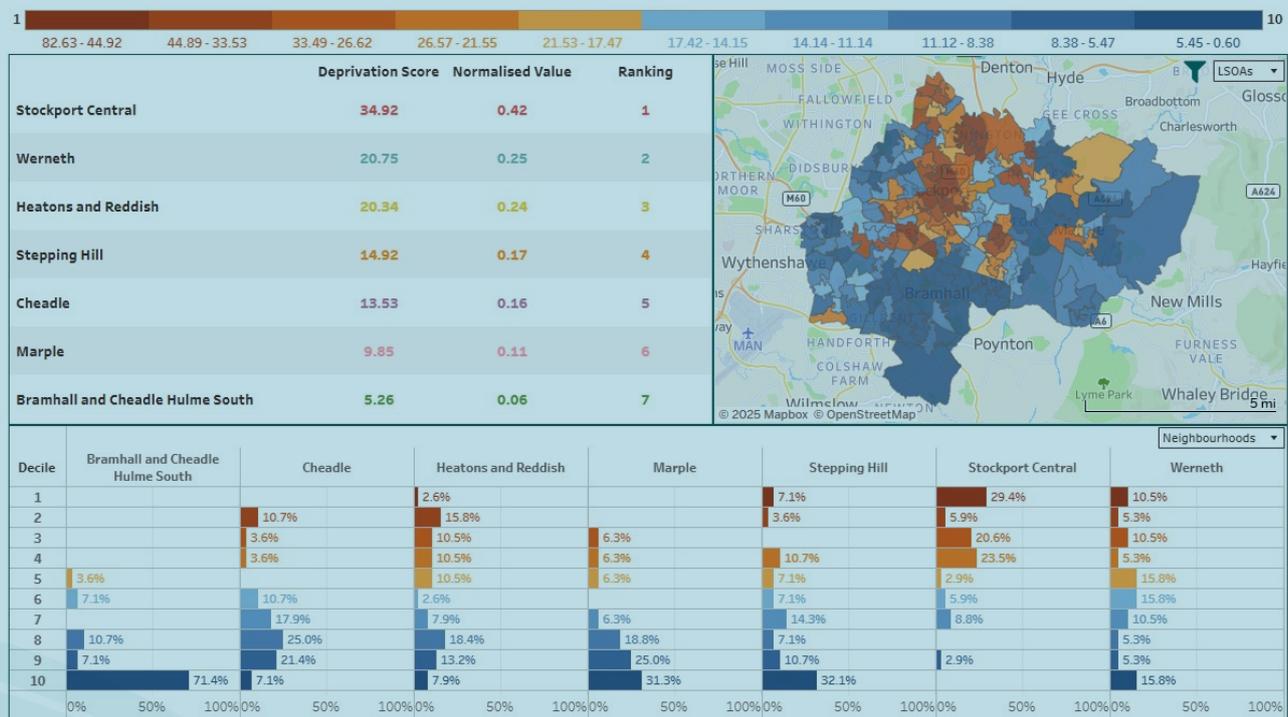


Figure 4: Map of Stockport by Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025 ⁽¹⁶⁾

On average, residents in the most deprived areas of Stockport die almost 10 years earlier than those living in the least deprived areas. ⁽¹³⁾ However, the inequality in healthy life expectancy, which is the average time an individual is expected to live in “very good” or “good” general health, is even greater. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Those living in the most deprived areas can expect to live more than a quarter of their lives in “not good” health (26%), compared to 13% for males and 14% for females in the least deprived areas.

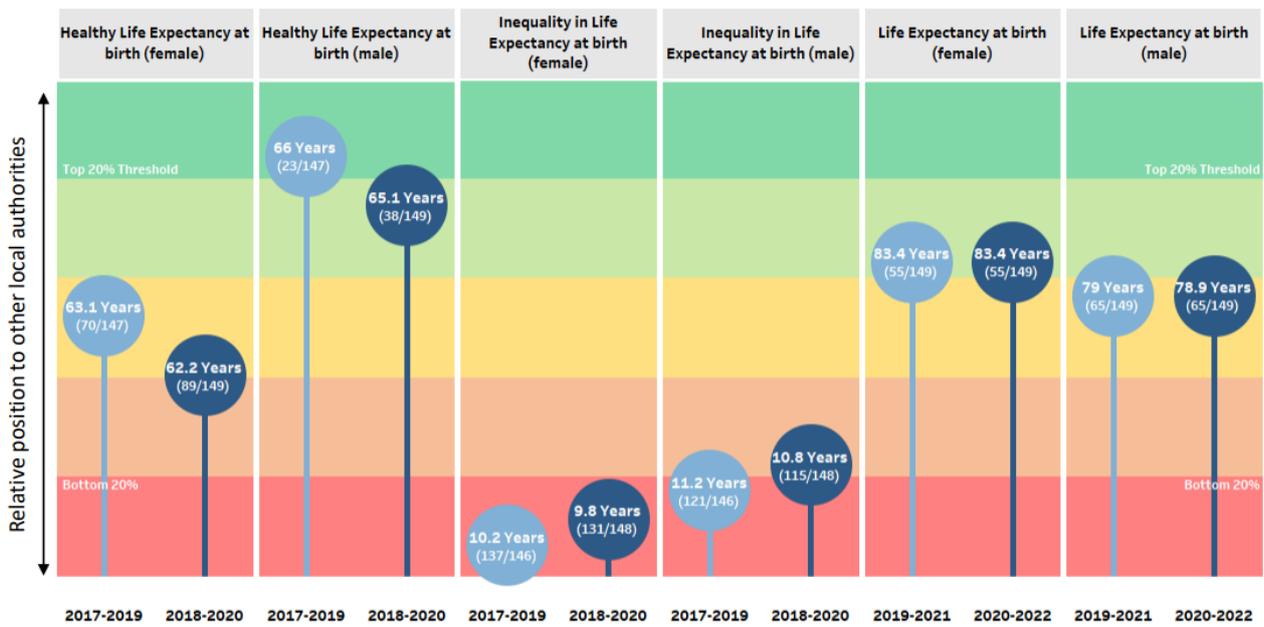


Figure 5: Life expectancy in Stockport relative to other local authorities ⁽¹³⁾

This report explores how creative health approaches can help to support the health and wellbeing of the local population and tackle health inequalities in Stockport.

CENTRE STAGE: STOCKPORT AS A CREATIVE HEALTH LEADER

Stockport sits within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), whose ambition is to become the first Creative Health City Region. In November 2022, Greater Manchester (GM) published the GM Creative Health Strategy, which showcased lots of amazing examples from Stockport. ⁽¹⁹⁾ As Creative Health lead for the Greater Manchester Public Health Network, and a member of the GM Creative Place Partnership, Stockport's Director of Public Health is well placed to help put Stockport at the heart of the creative health agenda

Stockport truly is a pioneer of creative health not only within GM, but also nationally. The Mind Arts Project, the first arts on prescription service in the country was established in Stockport in 1994, supporting patients with mild and moderate depression. This organisation has since evolved into Arts for Recovery in the Community (Arc, est. 2004). Arc continues to offer creative and therapeutic programmes to help vulnerable adults and young people improve their mental health and build social connections.

Arc has paved the way for many more creative health pursuits throughout the borough. As the GM Town of Culture 2023, Stockport was immersed in celebrations of local culture and creative health. Building on this momentum, Stockport's new creative and cultural centre, Stockroom, opened in May 2025. This report captures the impact and potential of creative health within Stockport at a pivotal point in its journey.



CREATIVE BY DESIGN

Stockport is not a leader in creative health by accident; creativity is woven into the fabric of the town. One Stockport: One Future sets out five big things to unlock change and ultimately reduce inequalities in Stockport over the next 15 years. ⁽²⁰⁾ Creative health methods contribute to all the five big things. Creativity supports the growth and development of children. Creative expression is core to the celebration of diversity and culture and builds community cohesion. Imagining creative solutions can help the borough to become more sustainable. Embracing and showcasing creative talent in Stockport, and in particular digital skills, will boost local communities and economies, and creative activity can prevent ill health, promote mental health, and support recovery from illness.

The way this future vision will be delivered is through Stockport Live Well. This is Stockport's approach to joined up neighbourhood working and embedding prevention, as part of the Greater Manchester Live Well programme.

By threading creative health into the fabric of Live Well we have the opportunity to put creativity at the heart of our residents' health and, through community-rooted creative engagement.

Greater Manchester's Live Well movement and its Creative Health strategy are tightly interwoven together forming a powerful, community centred approach to improving health, and social equity across the city-region. Blending art, culture, and community-led participation into public health.



From nurseries and youth mental health services to respiratory care and ageing communities, creativity is being woven into everyday support systems. This aligns with Live Well's broader goals of empowering communities, shifting power locally, and tackling the social roots of ill-health through health creation, connection, and belonging.

Stockport's Cultural Strategy for 2022-25, 'The place that makes itself', reinforces the narrative that Stockport has carefully and consciously crafted its creative legacy. ⁽²¹⁾ This is captured beautifully by the overarching ambition of the strategy: "We will be the place in the north where makers dream and dreamers make." From the outset, health and wellbeing are listed amongst the top priorities in the strategy:

- Make sure cultural and creative businesses and enterprises thrive
- Connect our communities through culture and creativity
- Promote health and through culture and creativity

'Take Care' is the simple message from the health and wellbeing strand of the strategy. More specifically, Stockport sets out the aim to:

- be the place making and taking part in our culture is the first way people think of to get and stay well
- make sure that all elements of local plans are informed by an understanding of arts in health and who can deliver locally
- establish a hub for Arts in Health which informs work throughout the borough and brings in best practice from elsewhere

CREATING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

When you start to look it doesn't take long to realise that our communities are buzzing with creative talent, ideas, and places to connect, get involved and make things, whether it's making music, making murals, making friends, making a difference.

People are getting creative in community halls, faith buildings, museums, libraries, gardens, nurseries, at work, at home, online, you name it. Creating shared experiences that bring people together. Turning an overgrown patch of land into a community garden for example is a process of co-creation. Or when a diverse group of people from different backgrounds and heritage come together, to dance, or to prepare a shared meal, it can cement social ties and strengthen community cohesion.

The Health and Fun Day in Reddish and the WellFest in Brinnington were both fabulous, fun-filled events that showed just how powerful it can be when the community comes together. Imagine the park is filled with stalls from local health and services such as debt advice, domestic abuse support, and GP surgery sign-ups. Now add a silent disco, karaoke, a cheerleading display, crafting, a football tournament, outdoor games, a fancy dress 5KM walk, face paint and even sunshine! It's not your average signposting event; it's a festival to connect local people and the support in their communities.

Image 2:
Brinnington WellFest



CREATIVE HEALTH AND SKILLS

Stockport is a borough in the midst of a remarkable transformation. Investing in its creative and cultural assets to drive regeneration, boost local pride, and build a more inclusive economy. But entrenched inequalities remain, with some communities facing persistent barriers to opportunity. In this context, creative health is not just about individual enrichment; it can also be a strategic lever for inclusive prosperity and social mobility.

Creative engagement can help people develop skills like adaptability, collaboration, and problem-solving. Creative industries are among the fastest-growing sectors, and creative health has recently been recognised as a new creative industry with an important role to play in health promotion and supporting the shift to prevention, for example through innovative ways to use createch. ⁽⁴⁾ This is an exciting time to consider how to unlock the full economic and social potential of Stockport's residents, through creativity and in ways that narrow our inequality gap.

Richard Mortimer, Head of Economy Work and Skills at SMBC, is a strong advocate for investment in creative health:

“Creative health is central to how we build inclusive economies and resilient communities. It recognises that people are whole entities, not just workers or service users, and that their wellbeing must be nurtured across all dimensions, mental, emotional, social, and physical, to enable them to thrive.

In Stockport, we've seen how creative health initiatives, such as those delivered by Arc, can transform lives. Participants report improved mental health, reduced isolation, and renewed confidence. These outcomes are not just personal victories; they are economic assets. A happier, healthier person is more likely to engage in education, volunteering, and employment, contributing meaningfully to the local economy.”

SECTOR 3

Sector 3 is the Local Infrastructure Organisation for Voluntary, Community and Faith-based groups, and Social Enterprises (VCFSE) organisations in Stockport.

⁽²²⁾ They support groups big and small across the borough with funding, volunteer recruitment, training and advocacy. John Clarke, the Communities Inclusion Lead for Sector 3, describes seeing creative health in action throughout Stockport:

“In the work of so many groups, services, networks and organisations I work with, we see how valuable doing something creative can be. It doesn't have to always be something like painting or drawing; just the chance to allow the mind to switch off, be away from screens, outdoors or with a community, we can remember simpler times. We can give ourselves a chance to catch our breath, realise we are resilient and resourceful. The health benefits are profound.”

STOCKPORT TOWN OF CULTURE

Stockport was announced as GM Town of Culture (ToC) for 2023/24 in May 2023, and the town sprang into action immediately. Informed by engagement with residents and creatives, Stockport adopted a broad definition of culture- any activities celebrating local heritage, landscape, people and stories. Crucially, the ToC celebrations were inclusive of the diverse communities in Stockport and reached right throughout the borough.

Four themes were developed to inspire wide participation in a range of activities:

- **Stockport MAKES** – celebrating creativity and making in all its forms in Stockport and giving people an opportunity to showcase their creativity and try and something new
- **Stockport MOVES** - celebrating and promoting the opportunities that Stockport’s unique environment presents to move about and be active
- **Stockport SOUNDS** - celebrating and promoting music and spoken word being made in Stockport, creating new opportunities for developing and showcasing talent and our dynamic music heritage
- **Stockport TASTES** - celebrating and promoting food and drink in Stockport

Throughout the year, as ToC, several major events attracted lots of engagement, including:

- Krazy Races
- Underbanks Secret Street Party
- Stockport Moves
- Stockport Town of Culture Spectacular
- Stockport Town of Culture Weekender

There was strong promotion of culture and creativity for health and through the ToC programme. Many residents took the opportunity to try new creative activities, allowing them to express themselves and connect with others in new ways.



Image3: Highlights from Stockport Town of Culture



STOCKROOM

Stockroom is an ambitious £14.5 million creative and cultural hub located in the heart of Stockport's Merseyway Shopping Centre. Stockroom is at its heart with and of the people of Stockport; it has a programme that offers creative opportunities for residents of all ages recognising how important exploring your creativity is to promote your wellbeing and live well.

It puts creative health on the high street offering opportunities such as writing, music, photography alongside modern and attractive library services. Stockroom is what you make of it: a quiet café, a library, a playground, a yoga studio, an art gallery, a craft workshop, a gig venue and more. The creative events space, Stockroom Studios, hosts a year-round programme that's ever-changing. First opening its doors in May 2025, Stockroom has welcomed on average 100,000 visitors a month, and has quickly become a favourite spot for learning, creativity and community connection. The space is always full of life, with people of all ages getting creative, and residents dropping in throughout the day to read a book or meet friends.

Image 4: Creative activities being done by children and adults at Stockroom



Image 5: Outside art class on an easel hosted by Stockroom

3. Making a start: 0 to 18

CREATIVE HEALTH TO HELP US GROW, LEARN AND THRIVE

Anyone who has cared for a child knows that creative activities are essential tools not only for keeping children occupied but for developing their skills, confidence and pride in what they can do. Whether painting, imaginative play, dance, music or storytelling, creative experiences help children explore the world, develop independence and learn who they are. Creativity shapes belonging and connection, helping children form relationships, build resilience and feel part of their community.

For Stockport, these early foundations matter. Creating strong developmental building blocks in the early years is central to the ambition in the Start Well strategy and One Stockport plan to ensure every child has the best possible start in life. This commitment is also grounded in our borough wide inequalities ambition, which recognises that health gaps begin early and widen rapidly without the right support. ⁽²⁰⁾

Investment in early years is one of the most effective ways to reduce inequalities across the life course. Evidence shows that children from the least well-off families are four times more likely to experience serious mental health difficulties by age 11 compared with those from more affluent families. ⁽²⁴⁾ Addressing child poverty and its drivers remains crucial but so does strengthening skills, confidence and protective factors through meaningful relationships and community belonging. Creative health approaches support this ambition by building capability, connection, expression and emotional regulation in developmentally appropriate ways.

As the saying 'it takes a village' implies, a child's development is shaped not only by family circumstances but also by the strength and capability of the surrounding system. These include the early years workforce, community groups, neighbourhood assets, local culture and accessible opportunities for safe play and exploration. Stockport Family, Live Well neighbourhood working and One Stockport commitments recognise this shared responsibility. They aim to ensure the right support is accessible, local and shaped around the needs of the children and the communities they grow up. ⁽²¹⁾

All children learn and develop at different rates and Stockport uses the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ3) to help identify development needs early so additional support can be offered as early as possible. The purpose of the ASQ-3 is not to label or diagnose but to ensure no child misses the support that would help them thrive. According to the latest data from the Department for Education (2023/24), 68.7% of Stockport children achieved

a good level of development (GLD) at the end of reception compared with 67.7% across England. ⁽²³⁾ While this improvement signals promising progress, children eligible for free school meals (FSM) continue to experience significantly lower outcomes with the lowest rates across Greater Manchester localities and only 43.3% children on FSM achieving GLD in 2023/24 (see Figure 6 below).

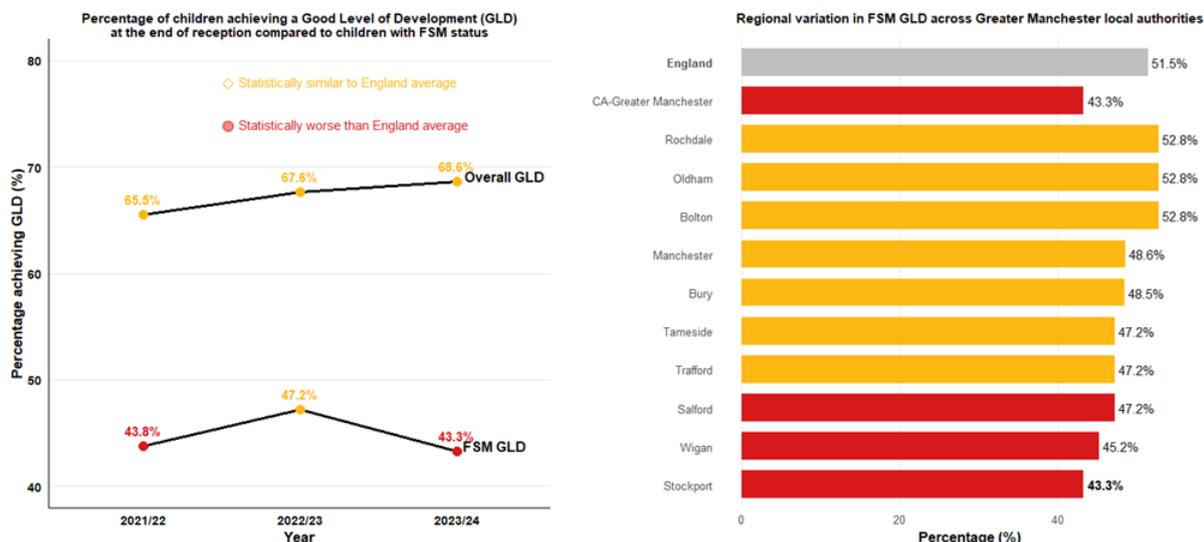


Figure 6: Percentage (%) of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception compared to children with free school meal (FSM) status (left), and Figure 7: regional variation in FSM GLD across Greater Manchester local authorities (right). Early years foundation stage profile results, Department of Education (2023/24). ⁽²³⁾



The most recent ASQ3 analysis for Stockport also shows local development outcomes remain below national averages, particularly in communication and early language and the trend has declined over the past five years.⁽²⁵⁾ This evidence reinforces early intervention priorities already in place in the Start Well strategy and Stockport Family model and highlights the value of approaches that support communication, confidence, imagination and expressive play.

Alongside this, increasing numbers of children are not 'ready' for reception⁽²⁵⁾ and around half of parents and teachers have expressed growing concerns about the impact of screen time on school readiness. Digital engagement can support learning when used well but it is often replacing play, social interaction and sensory experiences especially for children living in areas where safe and stimulating opportunities to explore outdoors or with others are limited.

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) measures the height and weight of children in reception class and year 6 to assess overweight and obesity levels within primary schools.⁽²⁶⁾ In Stockport, rates of overweight and obesity are significantly higher for more deprived children and the inequality gap is wider for year 6 than for reception (see Figure 7 below).⁽²⁶⁾ This mirrors the broader pattern observed across Greater Manchester and reflects the cumulative impact of structural disadvantage, limited access to safe green space, cost of living pressures and restricted opportunities for positive movement and play. Overweight and obesity in childhood increases the risk of overweight and obesity in adulthood, alongside associated medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease.⁽²⁷⁾ However, some impacts appear earlier in life, with childhood obesity linked to asthma, sleep apnoea, type 2 diabetes and menstrual disturbances.⁽²⁸⁾

NATIONAL CHILD MEASUREMENT PROGRAMME: 2022-23 ACADEMIC YEAR

Obesity trends in Stockport by Deprivation Quintile

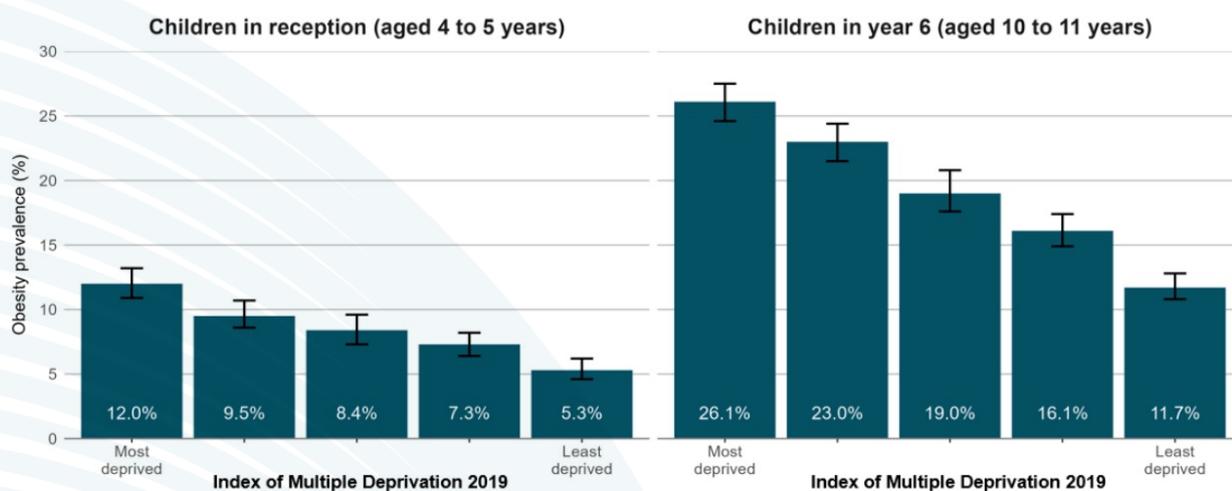


Figure 7: Obesity trends in Stockport by deprivation quintile⁽²⁶⁾

One Stockport example already supporting this ambition is the creative food, art and culture offer developed by Culture Bridge as part of the holiday activities and food programme. Their sessions combine shared cooking, art, music and storytelling, creating an experience where preparing and eating nutritious food becomes part of the cultural celebration and belonging rather than a health message. Children explore ingredients, try new foods and create meals alongside activities such as drumming, creative play, language, movement and visual art. Parents and staff report that children replicated recipes at home and showed increased confidence with food textures, flavours and mealtimes. This approach uses creative methods to strengthen identity, confidence, connection and everyday healthy behaviours in families most impacted by inequalities highlighted in the NCMP data presented earlier.

National guidelines recommend at least 3 hours of physical activity per day for 1 to 5 year olds (Figure 8).⁽²⁹⁾ This does not need to be a structured exercise as every movement counts. Rolling, climbing, dancing, imaginative play and interactions with the environment all build stronger muscles and bones, improve sleep and support emotional regulation. Active play also strengthens social connections, build relationships and social skills, support brain development and school readiness. Encouraging regular active play is therefore a practical and meaningful way to improve children's health and creative activities offer a compelling route to achieve this in a way that feels joyful, inclusive and developmentally appropriate.

Within Stockport, many early years settings have begun including creative health approaches into everyday practice. Movement is no longer simply framed as physical activity but as a way to support language, imagination, identity and belonging.



Physical activity for early years (birth – 5 years)

Active children are healthy, happy,
school ready and sleep better

 BUILDS
RELATIONSHIPS
& SOCIAL SKILLS

 MAINTAINS
HEALTH &
WEIGHT

 CONTRIBUTES TO
BRAIN DEVELOPMENT
& LEARNING

 IMPROVES
SLEEP

 DEVELOPS
MUSCLES
& BONES

 ENCOURAGES
MOVEMENT
& CO-ORDINATION

Every movement counts

Aim for at least
180
Minutes
per day
for children 1-5 years



Under-1s
at least
30 minutes
across the day



Get Strong. Move More. Break up inactivity

UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, 2019

Figure 8: Physical activity recommendations for early years (Birth-5 years) (29)

CREATIVE HEALTH AT A GLANCE (6)

A growing evidence base demonstrates the impact of creative health interventions for children and young people. These are presented below.

- Community gardening increases physical activity, improves fruit and vegetable intake, and reduces stress
- For children with asthma, music therapy improves lung function, symptom management, medication adherence and overall quality of life
- Among children who have experienced maltreatment and/or poverty, music therapy improves attention, reduces depression, anxiety and withdrawal
- Dancing in preschool improves motor skills, coordination and balance (30)

EARLY MOVES

Sophie and Natasha, from Ladybird Childcare in Brinnington, have taken part in an innovative project piloted across GM, reaching over 250 children. Facilitated by world-renowned dance company Rambert, the project aimed to help develop the gross motor skills of nursery-aged children (See Image 6 below).⁽³¹⁾ Rather than delivering sessions directly to children, Rambert trained two early education practitioners from each setting to confidently and skilfully deliver short, fun and regular movement sessions.



Image 6: Early Moves programme for nursery school children by dance company Rambert.⁽³¹⁾

“**Tasha:**

Many of our children join us at two years old but are still developing in all areas, and one of our settings is based in a high-rise flat with very limited outdoor space. The project helped us realise that dance and movement don't always need a structured session; they happen every day in play, routines, and small gestures.

Sophie:

Early Moves has changed how I approach my week. Instead of seeing movement as an extra activity to fit in, I now see it as something that naturally fits into everything we do. It's not about planning a big session, it's about recognising opportunities as they come, whether in imaginative play, transitions, or even daily routines.

Tasha:

For the children, the impact has been clear: their confidence has grown, their understanding has developed, and the laughter we hear during sessions shows just how much joy and connection the project has brought.

Sophie:

We've learned that movement can happen anywhere, and even the smallest moments can make the biggest difference for our children.

”

GROWING



Image 7 left: Brinnington sensory garden design

Image 8 right: Garden ready for visitors



Image 9 left: Flower crowns

Image 10 right: Creative conservation with Marbury Road Edible Garden



ON THE WAY PLAY

'On the way play' is an exciting idea in development by Civic and Social with Stockport Council. (35) The approach explores how play can be integrated in public spaces to support children to engage with their environment in meaningful, imaginative and active ways. Designed to be playful rather than prescriptive, this method encourages exploration, storytelling and interaction with streets and neighbourhood spaces.

The community engagement project in Edgeley, 'A Child's Eye View', empowered the real experts, children, to reimagine their local landscape for play (Image 11)



Image11: Map for A Child Eye's View of Edgeley from Linktree @onthewayplaysk (38)

Pupils from Larkhill and Our Lady's Primary schools were tasked with taking photographs of the local area so the grown-ups could experience the world at their level. The children were encouraged to turn inanimate objects into characters and imagine what they would say. Using the children's narratives as inspiration, three walking trails were developed, incorporating playful prompts along the route. This included the installation of Busy, the Castle Street Bear, and posters of the on the way play monsters popping up everywhere.

Child-friendly events hosted around Edgeley continue to celebrate the spirit of play. Castle Street Play Day featured the Big Edgeley Castle Street Disco, a massive chalk-up with street games, seed-bomb making, and googly-eye bombing during A Child's Eye View walking tour. The power of play is being recognised across the borough and is a core consideration for Stockport's Strategic Regeneration Framework. ⁽³⁶⁾

Baseline analysis of Stockport Town Centre East Strategic Regeneration Framework showed limited opportunities for informal play in the area. In response planners have prioritised new child-friendly spaces including a destination play area alongside the River Goyt and hyperlocal playful design across each neighbourhood area. ⁽³⁶⁾

THE SCARF MY FATHER WORE

The striking mural 'The Scarf My Father Wore' in Edgeley was the result of an exciting project celebrating Stockport's year as the GM Town of Culture. In collaboration with Stockport County Community Trust, GRIT Studios, Writing Squad poet Ruth Awolola, and muralist Oskar, the project invited local youth to take part in a creative workshop exploring identity, belonging and pride. What began as a chant echoed on match days became a shared creative process that allowed young people to leave a visible and lasting mark on their neighbourhood (Image 13). ⁽³⁸⁾

The project shows how creative health can operate at the intersection of place, identity and wellbeing. For many young people, particularly teenagers, confidence, self-expression and participation in community activity can be challenging. Creative engagement through street art offered an accessible and culturally meaningful route into participation. It allowed young people to explore self-expression and confidence without the pressure of performance and the fear of being judged. This is especially important in communities where young people may feel disconnected from cultural offers or unsure whether creative spaces are for them.



Image 12 left: Work in progress

Image 13 right: The finished mural of 'The Scarf My Father Wore'

Oskar reflected on his experience facilitating the workshops:

"The reason why I'm really proud of this mural is that the young people just got really stuck in, and you know, they live around the corner.

Particularly with young people, like, particularly teenagers, it's quite difficult to get engagement. It's difficult to get people of that age really invested because there's a lot of stuff that just doesn't feel like it's made for them or it's applicable to them or they feel a bit embarrassed, or whatever it might be. And I do feel that street art is a really great medium for getting young people started with creativity, even if they don't continue using spray paint.

It opens up the door for them to do arts, doing crafts as a really positive outlet, you know, for bettering mental health, in comparison to just watching endless box sets. If you actually have projects and artistic things that you're doing, it is so much more nourishing. Having the experience can unlock that realisation for a lot of people."

4. The art of adult life

CREATIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL WELLBEING

The Big Mental Health Report 2025, published by Mind and supported by the Centre for Mental Health, highlights that 1 in 5 adults in England live with a common mental health problem. ⁽³⁹⁾ However, this is not equally distributed throughout the population. For example, the prevalence of depression in Stockport is consistently higher than the national average and continues to rise. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

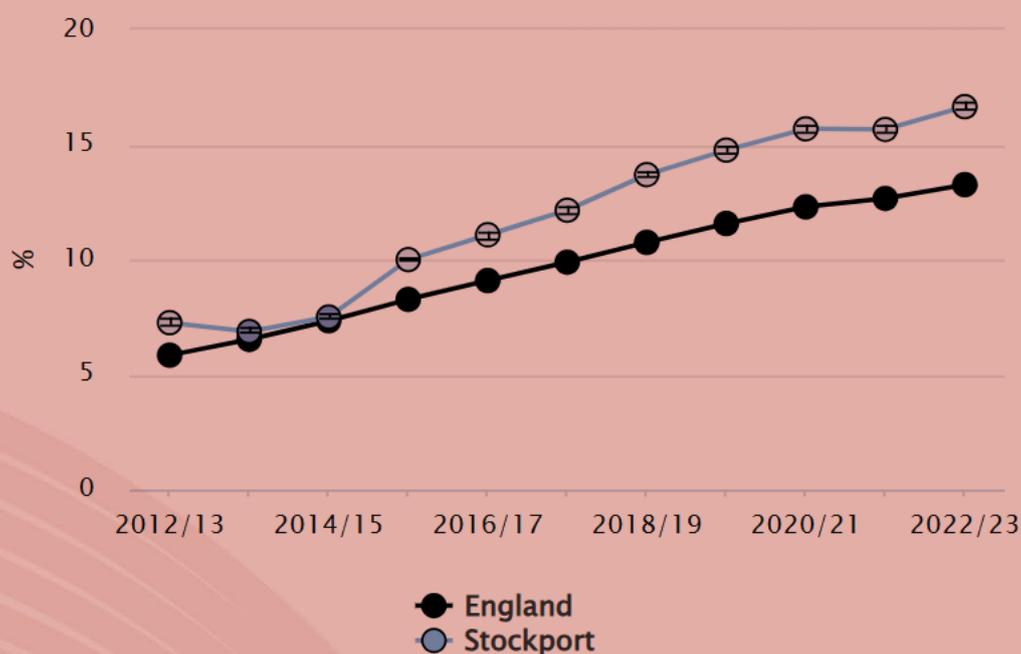


Figure 9: The percentage of patients aged 18 and over with depression, as recorded on practice disease registers, with 95% confidence intervals. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Many sociological factors increase the risk of experiencing mental health challenges. Rates of common mental health problems are 10% higher for adults in the most deprived areas compared to those in the least deprived areas, and nearly 9% higher in women compared to men. ^(39,41) Adults who are unemployed and economically inactive are 20% more likely to have a mental health problem than those in work. ⁽³⁹⁾ Poor mental health also negatively impacts physical health outcomes; patients with a severe mental illness are also more likely to die young due to physical health problems than the general population.

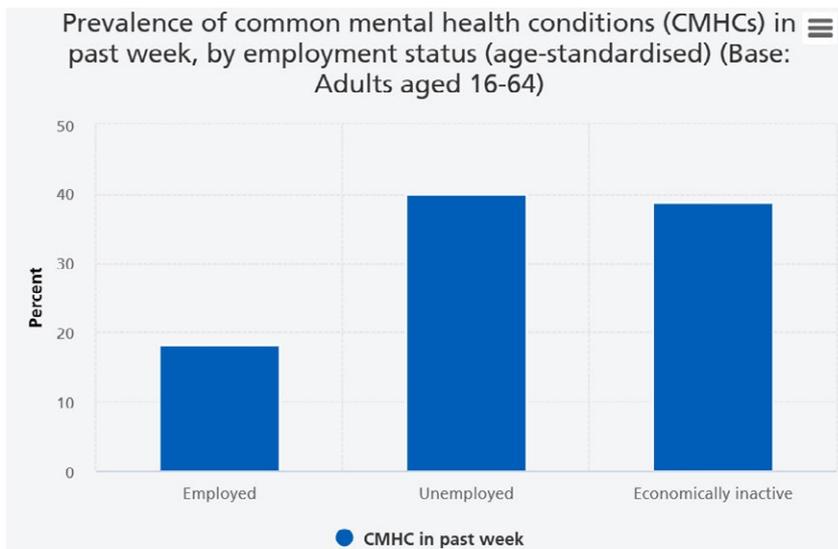


Figure 10: Prevalence of common mental health conditions by employment status ⁽⁴¹⁾

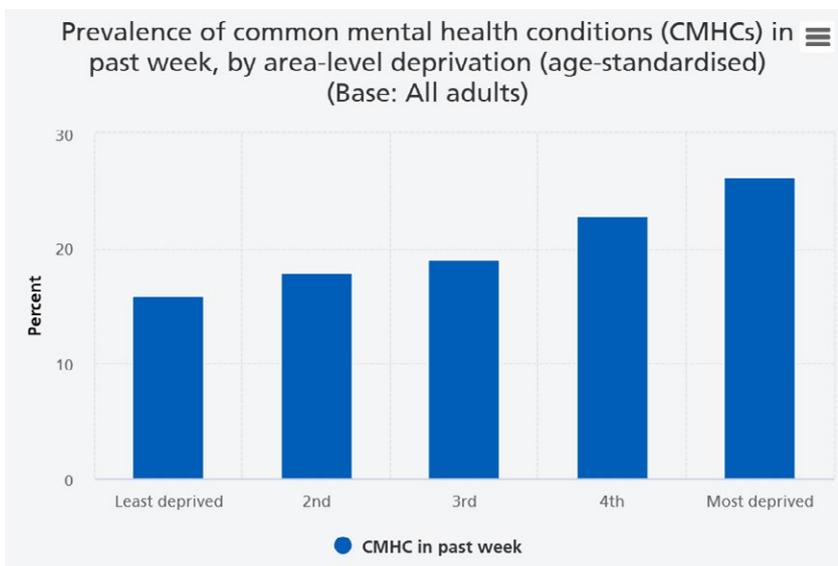


Figure 11: Prevalence of common mental health conditions by deprivation ⁽⁴¹⁾

Stockport's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy shares a vision for 2030, and creative health can play an important role:

'...for Stockport to be a place where people support each other in times of need, in communities where we find belonging and feel proud. We will have achieved real improvements in the health and wellbeing of communities with the poorest health, reducing the gap in healthy life expectancy between communities.' ⁽⁴²⁾

CREATIVE HEALTH AT A GLANCE ⁽⁶⁾

- Singing interventions for women with moderate post-natal depression improved symptoms significantly faster
- Improv theatre and comedy for breast cancer survivors improved participation in society, anxiety, depression, and fatigue
- Combining medication with art psychotherapy alleviated symptoms of depression and anxiety in Major Depressive Disorder
- Music therapy alleviated pain and depression, improving quality of life and self-esteem for patients with fibromyalgia

ARTS FOR RECOVERY IN THE COMMUNITY (ARC)

Arc have recently celebrated 30 years as a national leader of arts and mental health engagement. Since 2019, they have been based in the iconic Wellington Mill alongside the Hat Works museum.⁽⁴³⁾ Arc also delivers outreach sessions with partner organisations to support a wide spectrum of needs. This ranges from preventative events for local businesses to therapeutic sessions for psychiatric inpatients at Stepping Hill Hospital. Each activity or program provides a safe space for creative expression.

Specific groups cater to individuals with similar lived experiences. For example, 'Creative Mums' supports perinatal women experiencing mental health challenges. Participants can then move to the follow-on group, 'Mums Meet & Make', a creative social for all mums. However, Arc does not only offer visual arts. Other artforms used in their adult and young people's programmes include creative writing, animation, movement and music; the Men's Music for is a 10-week course that leads participants through the basics of songwriting and production. James from Stockport Homes spoke about why this programme is so popular with his clients:

"Some men don't like support groups; they would prefer to be doing something with support in the background, so the focus isn't on them and how they are feeling."

Participants can be referred by health and social care professionals or can access Arc via self-referral and attend drop-in sessions, such as the family-focused Saturday Art Club. Many build up the skills and confidence to become volunteers, supporting their personal and professional development. Arc continues to evolve to meet the needs of its community. A new strategic partnership with the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust (AIUET) will help to address inequalities and transform the diversity across staff and participants.



Image 14:
Men's Music
For at Arc (43)

CULTURE BRIDGE

Chinar Najib is the Director of Culture Bridge, a group which connects communities through art, music, education, and food. ⁽⁴⁴⁾ Every week, 100 to 150 people engage with Culture Bridge, taking part in activities such as Refugee Connect, Women Art and Culture, Children Art & Culture, and their eclectic band 'Waran Music'.

"We always say the best language of communication is the language of music. You don't need to speak any language, just listen."

Unable to work whilst awaiting refugee status, Chinar felt very isolated when she first moved to the UK. Making connections with singers, musicians and artists from Kurdistan, the Middle East, and Iran built a sense of community. However, Chinar felt her family, especially her son, was lost between two cultures.

"We thought no, it's not enough. Let's take it to the next level, connect our culture with this culture, this ground, this life. We wanted to actually build a culture, to have local artists and musicians also involved. We needed that bridge of connections. We wanted to create this Culture Bridge."

Culture Bridge works closely with St Peter's Helpers in Hazel Grove and a community group of local Hongkongers. Chinar is especially passionate about providing workshops to support the health and wellbeing of other women, as she sees many women suffering from depression as they struggle to adapt to life in the UK.

CULTURE BRIDGE- SUMMER HAF WORKSHOPS

ART, MUSIC, DANCE, FILM AND FOOD

| Tuesday | | Wednesday | | Saturday | |
|---|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|---|
| 22 July Food workshop | 29 July Music workshop | 23 July Drama workshop | 30 July Dance workshop | 26 July Art & physical Activities | 2 August Filmmaking-1 & Physical Activities |
| 5 August Photography workshop | 12 August Drum workshop + | 6 August Music workshop | 13 August Skills for life | 9 August recycling Art & physical Activities | 16 August Filmmaking-2 & Physical Activities |
| 19 August Jewellery-making | | 20 August Nature-Art | | 23 August Summer celebration event & Outside activities | |
| Parish Centre 16 Green Ln, Hazel Grove, SK7 4EA | | Parish Centre 16 Green Ln, Hazel Grove, SK7 4EA | | Torkington Centre, Torkington Rd, Hazel Grove, SK7 4PY | |
| 1 to 4 pm | | 1 to 4 pm | | 1 to 4 pm | |

Please reserve your place early:

www.culturebridge.uk

Image 15: Culture Bridge Poster for summer holiday activities and food (HAF) programme. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Image 16: Shift Click: community learning in action.



MANCHESTER DIGITAL LABORATORY (MADLAB)

MadLab works with technology and people to shape our world for the better.⁽⁴⁵⁾ They run creative technology events for all ages and skill levels, such as stop-motion animation workshops for families at Stockport Museum. Make Stuff was MadLab's six-month-long creative festival in central Stockport, which included the DigiCamp 'unconference' on art, technology and community.

MadLab also provides free training for unemployed and underemployed 18 to 30-year-olds in Stockport via Shift Click. They teach digital and practical skills such as CV writing and provide a safe space to meet new friends. Learners also have the opportunity to access high-quality mental health support through Beacon Counselling. There is a higher than average proportion of LGBTQ+, neurodiverse and non-white members and mentors, demonstrating that Shift Click is an accessible and inclusive learning community.

"MadLab has really changed my life and given me motivation in hope where I didn't have it in other areas of my life. It's given me confidence and opened my opportunities, which I would love more people to have access to!"

'Introduction to Web Development' is a great way to learn fundamental transferable programming skills. Learners can explore the creative side of coding to develop eye-catching pages on topics they are really passionate about. Example projects can be viewed in the digital gallery for the Making Good Prize, which displays entries from all over the world, including the website for Marbury Road Edible Garden.⁽⁴⁷⁾ There were two winners from MadLab: the mindfulness app 'Attract' and the LGBTQ+ book review website 'The Queer Nook Book'.



Image 18: Poster for Creative Health Awareness and Taster Event at Stepping Hill Hospital

STOCKPORT NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

Kay is a Cancer Care Coordinator at Stockport NHS Foundation Trust, and has lived experience of the benefits of creative approaches at different stages of her own cancer journey. Recognising the stress her colleagues are under, Kay partnered with Arc to organise a “Creative Health” Awareness and Taster Event, inviting staff to explore a different way to improve wellbeing. This approach draws inspiration from Manchester Foundation Trust, where Lime Arts runs a successful Arts Referral Service for staff called Create+.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Collaboration discussions have continued, and Arc attended Stockport NHS Trust’s annual Staff Health and Roadshow to gather opinions about the use of creative approaches. After a time of particularly high pressure, Arc ran a session for members of the pathology department, receiving positive feedback. A joint bid is now being submitted to NHS Charities Together Workforce Fund, to roll out a creative health programme across Stockport and Tameside & Glossop NHS Trusts, in partnership with Arc, to further reap the benefits of creative approaches for pressured NHS staff.

Kay hopes that creative health approaches can also be translated into patient care:

“...it is something that everyone can do outside of the hospital environment in their own time, as well as together, which can increase a sense of belonging. It is particularly beneficial for patients who may not be able to do the more physical activities they have previously enjoyed and need to find something new that may help with their wellbeing. The block is overcoming people’s perception of creativity, and until it has been experienced, it is difficult to get across how beneficial it can be to anyone.”

“CREATIVE HEALTH” Awareness and Taster Event

Monday, 22nd September 2025 from 1.00 pm until 3.30 pm
In the Lecture Theatre, Pinewood House, Stepping Hill Hospital

THIS IS A SMALL AND INFORMAL ‘POP-UP’ STAFF WELLBEING EVENT
WITH GUESTS FROM ARC (based at HATWORKS)
one of the UK’s longest-standing and most respected arts and mental health charities
OFFERING TASTER CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

JUST DROP-IN or STAY A WHILE

Explore a different way to wellbeing for yourself, family, friends, colleagues and patients

PARTICIPATE, COLLABORATE, OBSERVE - no pressure, the choice is yours

If you already enjoy creative pursuits, you might like to bring along something to show or share ... painting, drawing, photography, poetry. Gardening, cooking, performing, creative writing, dancing are all part of Creative Health.
We may have fibre art to show and a song or two thanks to Kay’s colleagues!

There may be CAKES! courtesy of a familiar member of Staff, donations to the Charity welcomed



HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Share your thoughts about health inequalities at a personal level and how you believe they impact staff and patients, including health literacy, professional bereavement, advanced care planning at end of life.

OPTIONAL

Bring an object - perhaps a book, bag or box that has meaning for you to help inspire curiosity and the sharing of stories

BLOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

September is Blood Cancer Awareness Month - come and chat to Lindsey, one of our Haematology Clinical Nurse Specialists.

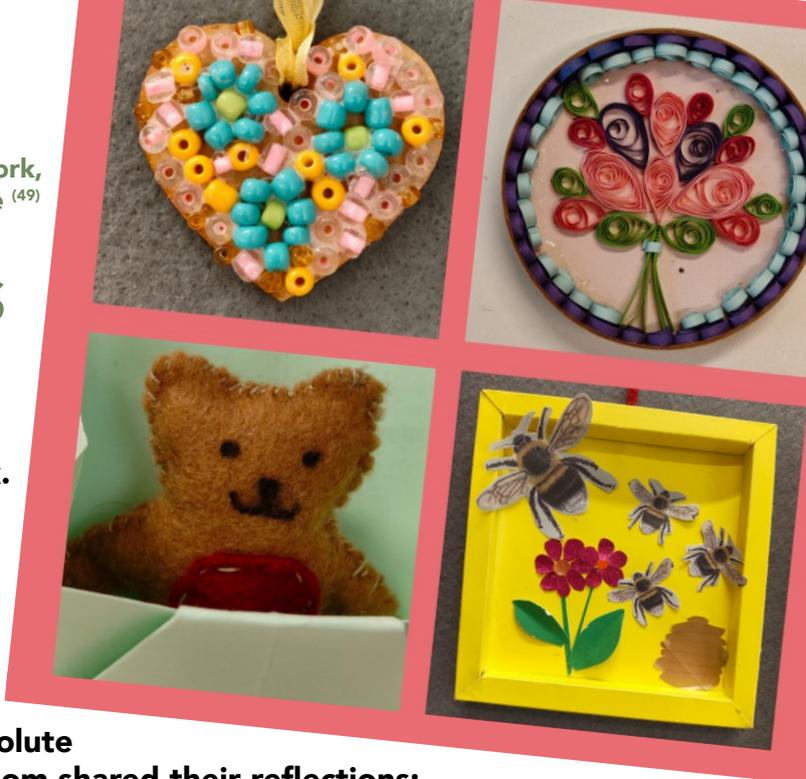
This is an NHS England CORE20PLUS Ambassador project event organised by Kay in relation to health inequalities and staff wellbeing, to raise awareness and provide opportunities for staff to start talking, experiencing and sharing the benefits of Creative Health, particularly as a preventative measure in relation to serious mental illness. Kay has lived experience of blood cancer and mental health, and experiencing the therapeutic benefits of the process of creativity has really helped her in getting through challenging times.

Image 19: Service user artwork,
Stockport Women's Centre ⁽⁴⁹⁾

STOCKPORT WOMEN'S CENTRE

Stockport Women's Centre offers two drop-in Creative Craft Groups every week.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ **The sessions can be seen as a creative rest, providing an outlet for stress and a safe space. Skilled volunteers are on hand to support you and are also more than happy to sit and chat over a cup of tea. The group welcomes women with any level of crafting experience, from absolute beginners to lifelong crafters, some of whom shared their reflections:**



"Having no work takes the structure out of the day; you are left with no routine. You can feel guilty for not being productive even though you are off sick. Coming to the group helps to get away from that mental stress"

"I like to craft because you get something out of the crafting process, you have something to show for it and can make friends at the same time."

Gemma Wrigley is an Art Psychotherapist and Creative Health Practitioner who works across GM, including Stockport Women's Centre. She describes creative arts as a continuum, recognising the benefits of all types, but acknowledging that not one size fits all. To meet different needs, Gemma offers closed group sessions and 1:1 art psychotherapy.

Gemma uses art-based psychoeducation to help women understand why art-making can help, even if they are not explicitly discussing their problems. By explaining the neuroscience of trauma, Gemma supports women to build their own toolbox of creative coping mechanisms. The aim is not only to help women feel better in the session, but also to empower them to use creative strategies in their day-to-day life.

THE WELLSPRING

The Wellspring provides support for adults facing homelessness or housing insecurity.⁽⁵¹⁾ The team regularly signpost to organisations such as Arc, as they recognise the positive impact of creative activities. Wellspring attendees also contributed to Di Mainstone's immersive exhibition at Stockroom called "Emotional Biodiversity", which received great feedback.⁽⁵¹⁾ The Make Every Adult Matter (MEAM) team recently held a focus group with The Wellspring to learn about and hopefully improve their experience of creative health.

The group acknowledged the therapeutic benefits of engaging in creative activities as a form of self-expression, particularly for those facing challenges such as homelessness or

poor health. This provides an escape from daily stresses and an opportunity for positive and meaningful social interaction. They emphasised the value of consistent and regular sessions to maintain engagement and build a sense of trust and community.

Three main barriers to participating in creative health activities were discussed: awareness, accessibility and motivation. Some individuals expressed that they were unaware of many opportunities in their community or struggled to get to or fully participate in events. Simple adjustments, such as covering the bus fare or providing wellies for gardening in bad weather, could help.

Individuals also need to be ready and willing to engage. Participants expressed interest in exploring a “try before you buy” approach. The group also considered using creative activities to teach practical life skills, such as budgeting for meals or preparing affordable, nutritious food. This discussion highlighted the importance of co-design.

WHAT IF?

What If? is a community space and ideas collective in Hollywood Park, Edgeley. Local residents were invited to explore how the unused building in the park could be activated to meet the needs of their community. They were asked to imagine what they'd like in this space, where they could enjoy spending time without having to buy an expensive coffee. The pop-up project was only intended to last for 2 months; however, a year later, What If? continues to grow and build momentum.

Pauline Johnstone is a People and Place Activation Consultant at Civic and Social. She has been a key player in creative community projects such as What If? and On the Way Play. Pauline reflects on the importance of building environments where people feel safe to express their creativity: “People are scared to be creative or use imagination, as to be creative, we have to be hopeful. If our hopes are dashed, this can damage our mental and physical health.”

What If? now hosts a range of regular events, including the resilient urban gardening Tuesday Night Club, film nights and neighbourhood meals. The local community have had the chance to get involved in a collaborative mural workshop, sensory music sessions, songwriting and filmmaking, share shops for creative materials, neighbourhood strolls and drop-in art classes. Combining healthy food provision via fruit and veg stalls and community cooking, fun ways to move and promote mindfulness, such as yoga and gardening, and creative activities to build meaningful connections, has promoted physical, mental and social health.

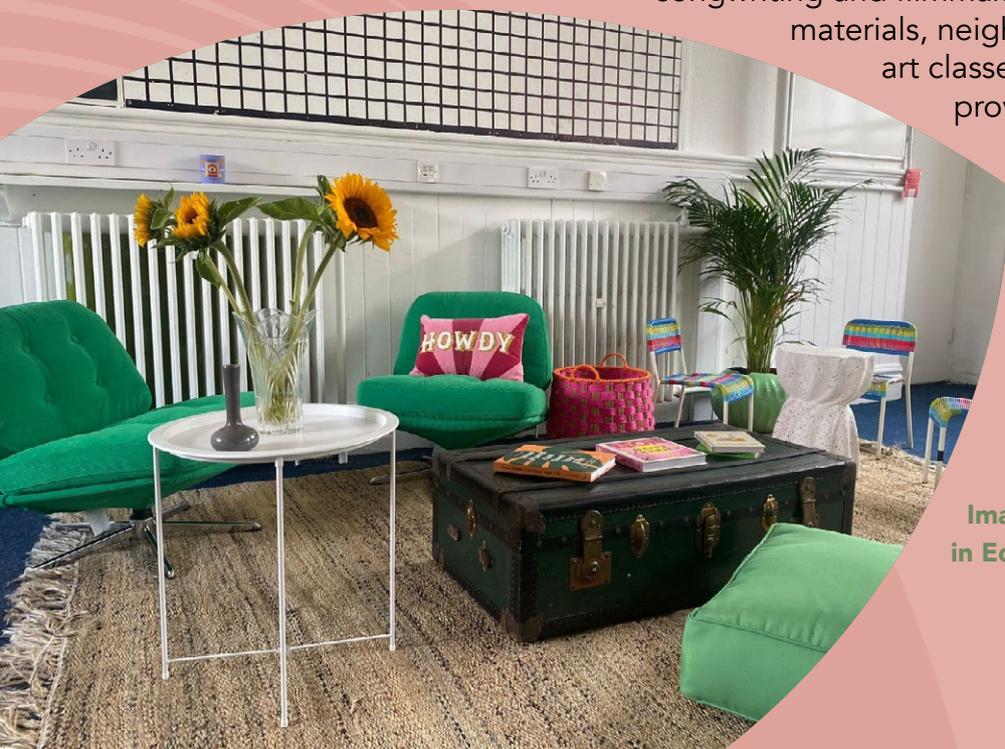


Image 20: What If? community space in Edgeley

5. Ageing creatively

CREATING BETTER HEALTH AND WELLBEING LATER IN LIFE

Maintaining our curiosity, continuing to make things, learn things and wonder at things, and retaining our youthful spirit can help us age well. Old age can be a stage of life rich with opportunity for growth, connection, and play. Creative activities—whether music, dance, painting, writing, or gardening—offer proven benefits that go far beyond enjoyment. They support brain health by improving memory and attention, enhance emotional and strengthen social ties by creating spaces for shared experiences and belonging.

Engaging creatively also promotes physical vitality: movement-based programmes such as dance can improve balance and flexibility, helping older adults maintain independence. By embedding creative opportunities into everyday life and into health and care systems, we can help older adults not only live longer but live better—thriving physically, mentally, and socially well into later years.



FRAILTY, FALLS AND FITNESS

On average, every year, 70 people in Stockport die as a result of an accidental fall. Mortality rates from falls in Stockport are around 60% higher than the national average; however, this may be due to enhanced identification of falls. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Death can occur up to 6 months after a fall due to the longer-term impact of injuries, and the majority of deaths occur in over-80-year-olds.

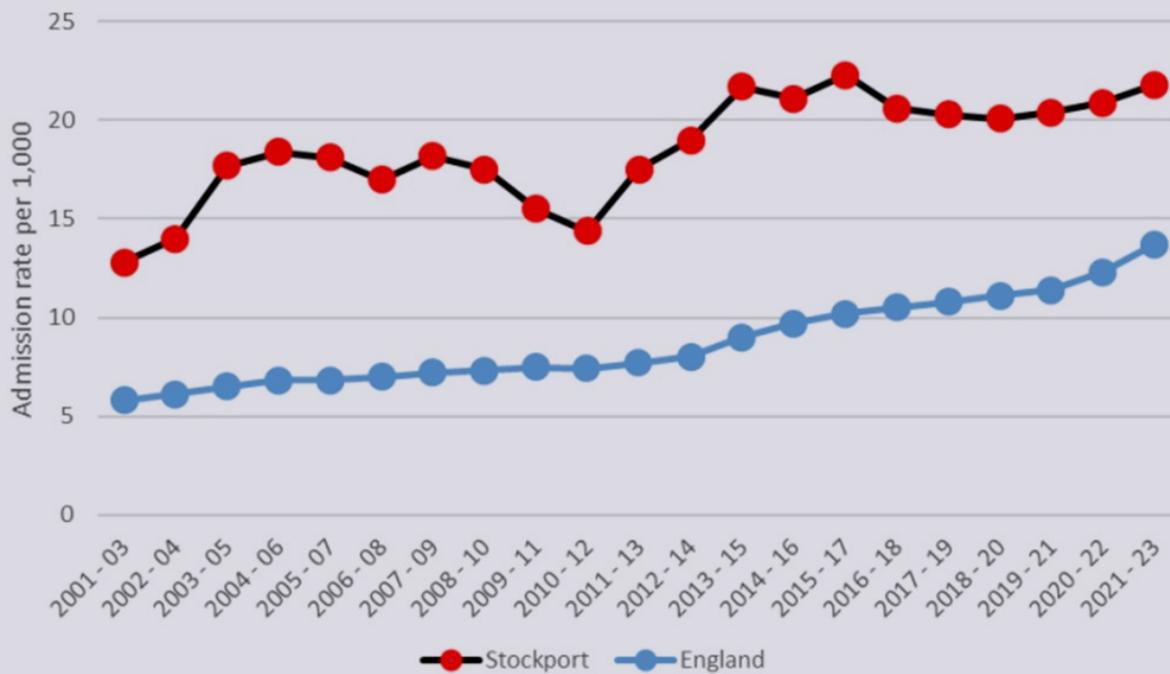


Figure 12: Mortality rate for accidental falls in Stockport and England. ⁽¹⁰⁾

As not everyone seeks medical assistance, the exact numbers of falls are not known. Estimates suggest that more than 18,000 people over the age of 65 fall in Stockport every year. ⁽¹⁰⁾ In 2022/23, records show that in this age group, 1,495 falls led to a hospital admission, 405 of those sustaining a hip fracture. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Preventing falls is a key priority within the One Health and Care Plan to build a healthy, happy and independent Stockport. ⁽⁵³⁾ Evidence shows that creative activities can improve physical health in many ways, including reducing the risk of falls and respiratory symptoms. ⁽⁶⁾

CREATIVE HEALTH AT A GLANCE ⁽⁶⁾

- Mixing dance with physiotherapy reduced falls by 58%
- Listening to music was linked to a lower risk of falls in older hospital patients
- Dance-based exercise for COPD improved lung function as well as balance, stability and peripheral muscle strength
- Six months after referral to singing support for COPD and asthma, GP appointments and A&E admissions reduced by more than 20%

BRAIN HEALTH

Ageing affects all aspects of the body, including the brain and nervous system.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Some changes with age can be considered normal, such as a gradual decline in eyesight, hearing and memory. ⁽⁵³⁾ However, ageing also increases the risk of medical conditions that impact brain health, such as dementia and stroke. Engaging in creative activities has been shown to have a positive impact on both patient groups. ⁽⁶⁾

Dementia is a broad term for a range of progressive conditions that can affect someone's ability to remember, think, and communicate. ⁽⁵⁴⁾ The symptoms of a stroke tend to happen more suddenly and can affect any bodily function, and experiencing a stroke increases the risk of dementia. ^(55,56) The prevalence of dementia is approximately 20% at 80 years of age. ⁽⁵⁷⁾ Over the last ten years, the number of people diagnosed with dementia in Stockport has increased by more than a third. ⁽¹³⁾ Stockport has the highest prevalence of dementia within GM and consistently sits above the national average. ⁽⁵⁷⁾

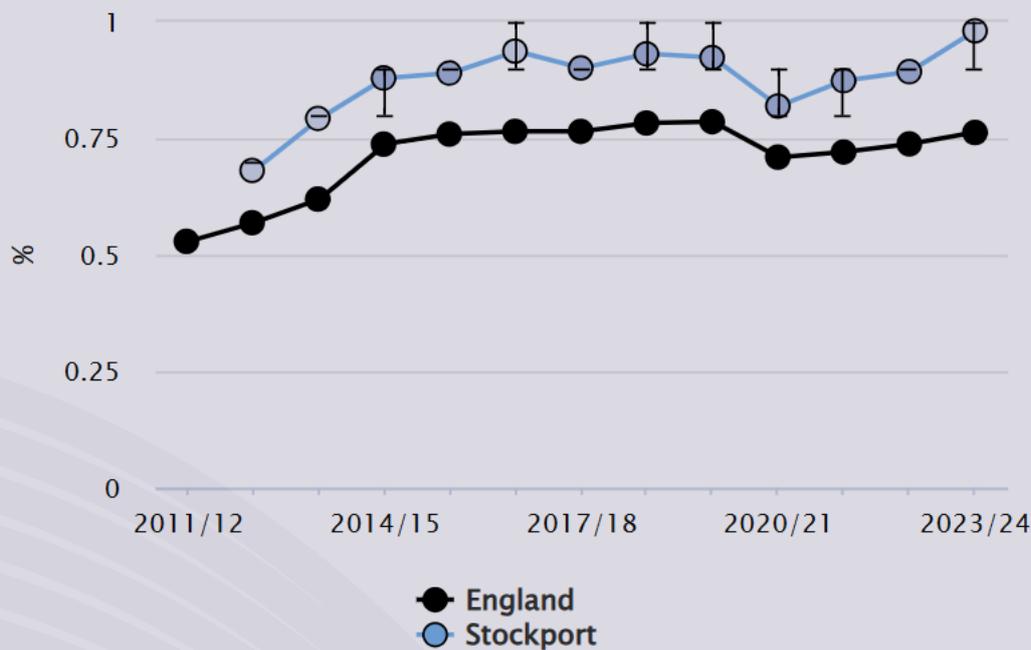


Figure 13: The percentage of people (all ages) with dementia, as recorded on GP practice registers, for Stockport and England between 2011 and 2024, with 95% confidence intervals ⁽⁵⁷⁾

Quintiles: **Low** **High** Not applicable

| Area ▲▼ | Value ▲▼ |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| England | 0.8 |
| CA-Greater Manchester | - |
| Stockport | 1.0 |
| Bury | 0.9 |
| Wigan | 0.9 |
| Tameside | 0.8 |
| Trafford | 0.8 |
| Rochdale | 0.7 |
| Bolton | 0.7 |
| Oldham | 0.7 |
| Salford | 0.6 |
| Manchester | 0.4 |

Figure 14: The percentage of people (all ages) with dementia, as recorded on GP practice registers, across GM for 2023/24, with 95% confidence intervals ⁽⁵⁹⁾

CREATIVE HEALTH AT A GLANCE ⁽⁶⁾

- Dementia patients' anxiety, depression, and verbal fluency are all improved by music therapy
- For every £1 spent on visual arts for dementia, investors can expect up to £6.62 in Social Return on Investment
- The impact of movement and dance on reducing the risk of dementia is estimated to save £149 million a year
- Following a stroke, drama and singing have been shown to have a positive effect on the development of new neural pathways

DEMENTIA DISCO

Dementia Disco was founded in 2019 by siblings Kate and Nick, and their friend Phil, who all had family members living with dementia.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The discos are a safe space for people with dementia, their carers, family and friends to socialise. Events are free to attend, and a free meal is provided. The first event took place in Heaton Mersey, and regular discos are now hosted throughout Stockport and beyond, including in care homes. Feedback from disco-goers illustrates why the events are so popular:

'It's so much fun, it gives carers some time to get back to the social life they used to have, and the music obviously is working cognitive wonders as the words and dance moves flow from those living with dementia.'

'At Dementia Disco, because everyone understands your situation, you can relax, chat, dance, eat, and drink. Dare I say it, be normal. Music is the one thing that improves my husband's mood, so if he is happy, so am I.'

'Brilliant safe space for sufferers and carers to enjoy a social time. Singing, dancing, eating, chatting, and sharing tips and resources with people who truly understand. It is just as useful for the carers as much benefit for the sufferers.'

Dementia Disco has been so influential that it featured in the 2022 'Power of Music' report by UK Music and Music for Dementia.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The report outlines how music can help to improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and makes recommendations on how to best to harness the Power of Music and unlock its full potential.



Image 21:
Dementia
Disco in full
swing

ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA: ENO BREATHE

'ENO Breathe' is an award-winning creative health programme, originally designed for people recovering from the effects of COVID-19. ⁽⁶¹⁾ The programme focuses on breathing retraining through different exercises and singing. Co-designed with respiratory specialists at Imperial College NHS Trust, the free six-week live online course has supported over 4500 people so far. A high-quality clinical trial has demonstrated that participants experience improvements in their symptoms of breathlessness and emotional wellbeing. ⁽⁶²⁾

Following on from this success, ENO has partnered with NHS GM and GMCA to pioneer a new iteration of the programme. ⁽⁶³⁾ Residents from Stockport and across GM are taking part in research to find out whether ENO Breathe can support people living with other respiratory conditions, including Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and asthma. Chief Medical Officer for NHS GM, Dr Manisha Kumar, encourages this collaboration:

"People living with COPD experience some of the starkest health inequalities in our city region, and so we welcome this partnership to explore how creative, community-based approaches can address barriers to support people most in need. ENO Breathe will make a significant contribution to Live Well – Greater Manchester's shared commitment to everyday support in every neighbourhood, changing how we work with communities and in public services to grow opportunities for everyone. As well as generating wider learning on the ways creative, community-rooted approaches can effectively support the health and wellbeing of people with respiratory disease."⁽⁶⁴⁾



Images 22 and 23: ENO Breathe video call session ⁽⁶³⁾



SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

“Social prescribing” connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community to support their health and wellbeing needs.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Stockport’s GP Federation, Viaduct Care, invests in a social prescribing service, which regularly refers patients to organisations offering creative health interventions.⁽⁶⁵⁾ GP Chief Officer of Viaduct Care, Dr Viren Metha, highly values the health benefits of creative activities:

“We’ve got one of the most vibrant voluntary faith community sectors, and I absolutely see the benefit of creative health in my practice. I’ve got patients who attend singing groups, and we see a reduction in their hospital admissions for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD). I see people who attend dance classes who are then falling less. These are the right things to do in the long term as well as the short term in terms of our current finances.”

Dr Jaweed Idoo is a local GP Partner in Stockport and a medical leader within GM. As a champion of creative health, Dr Idoo contributed to the GM Creative Health Strategy and reflects on its progress:

“We are actively integrating arts, music, dance, heritage, digital creativity and community storytelling into clinical pathways and neighbourhood-level prevention

This approach is underpinned by a growing body of evidence demonstrating that engagement with the arts enhances wellbeing, emotional regulation, physical function and social connection. It also helps moderate risk factors for chronic disease and address health inequalities. Clinically, adopting a creative health lens allows us to shift focus toward upstream prevention, reduce pressure on reactive care, build patient resilience and promote equity.”





STOCKPORT COUNTY

Stockport County Community Trust collaborates with key stakeholders across the borough to deliver a wide range of projects to address local needs and inequalities. The ambition of the Trust is: “for Stockport County FC to remain at the heart of the town, using football as a force for good and acting as a community anchor for loyal supporters and local residents.”⁽⁶⁶⁾ To achieve this, the Trust strives to cater to all ages and interests, offering far more than just opportunities to play and watch football.

The Trust has been creative in its mission to increase physical activity, improve wellbeing, increase educational attainment and build stronger communities. From delivering creative half-term activities for children to ‘sporting memories’ sessions where older fans are encouraged to take a trip down memory lane, there is something for everyone. For example, students from Stockport Academy explored their creativity in a creative writing and mosaics workshop arranged by GRIT studios.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The mosaic tiles they made spell out ‘Stockport County’ and are displayed throughout Edgeley to create an accessible walking tour for all to enjoy.

One highlight of the week for The Trust is Wednesday. Hosted at Edgeley Park, the social group offers a range of activities to build connection and relieve stress, including arts sessions. It provides those who are experiencing loneliness or living with long-term mental health conditions a chance to meet other local people over a brew and biscuit, alongside their families, friends and carers.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Image 24: Tile workshop at Edgeley Park, as part of The Mosaic Trail, designed in collaboration with GRIT Studios, supported by Age UK Stockport.



6. The next chapter: recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For System Leaders, including neighbourhood, community and VCSFE leaders, funders and delivery partners

CREATIVE THINKING

- Apply a creative lens. Creativity can be a tool for system transformation, especially critical when facing complex health challenges, fostering innovation and collaboration. This involves actively seeking diverse perspectives and approaching challenges with curiosity rather than certainty.
- Recognise that creative engagement is iterative and that the journey of co creation can be as important as the final product.
- Create safe spaces for testing new ideas and be flexible and responsive to emerging insights.

CREATING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

- Use creative methods to reduce health inequalities via the Live Well model, for example by encouraging and funding community groups supporting people at greatest risk of poor health to design creative activities that meet their particular needs.
- Understand where in Stockport there are areas and communities that currently lack creative health opportunities and activities, and seek to fill those gaps, being led by those communities.
- Health and creative industries work together to integrate arts into clinical and community settings.
- Emphasise the importance of coproduction, cultural competency and place-based approaches to ensure relevance and equity in delivery.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

- Support sustainable, inclusive and person-centred programmes that give power to local communities and artists.
- Create research opportunities, using clearer methodologies and robust evaluations, such as those outlined in the Creative Health Quality Framework.
- Wire creative health into Stockport's Live Well centres, places and offers.
- Make better use of creative education to strengthen young people's wellbeing, confidence and skills

2. For Planners, Regeneration and Placemaking Leads

CREATING SPACES

- Enhance the built and natural environment for creative wellbeing. As Stockport's Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) expands, embed creative health principles into urban design and regeneration schemes — integrating public art, community gardens and creative spaces into housing and public realm plans.

3. For Health, Care and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams

CREATIVE HEALTH AND CARE SERVICES

- Embed Creative Health into Stockport's developing Neighbourhood Health Model.
- Leverage Stockport's position as an early adopter site for the National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme (NNHIP) by integrating creative health into neighbourhood level prevention and care pathways.
- Embed arts-based interventions in primary care networks, social prescribing and community hubs.
- Embed Creative Health in neighbourhood health teams through training for basic creative health activities, toolkits for staff and volunteers, and creative workforce programmes for staff.
- Test creative health approaches in social care as part of support planning to reduce reliance on care.

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