



thrive at five

Thrive at Five's vision is a society where every child can thrive and achieve their potential.

Our mission is to help children in their early years develop strong foundations for life and learning. Focusing on communities impacted by poverty, our place-based model supports positive development from pregnancy to five. We achieve sustainable change by unlocking the power of parents and carers and enabling collaboration to strengthen holistic early years support.

thriveatfive.org.uk

Charity number 1195059

Why the early years?

The development of a child's brain from pregnancy to five is critical. Rapid brain growth means that by age two a child's brain is around 80% of its adult weight. Early development profoundly shapes the adults we become, and by age five, is predictive of a range of life outcomes including educational and socio-economic attainment, health and wellbeing. Focusing efforts on the early years is one of the best investments we can make for the long-term health, wellbeing and happiness of society.

The problem we need to solve

Many children are not thriving in early childhood. In 2023/24, 18% of 4-5 year olds in Scotland had developmental concerns. This proportion is more than twice as high for children living in the poorest areas (25%) compared to children living in the most affluent areas (12%)¹.

Young children from more deprived areas are more likely to have an Additional (educational) Support Need identified in nursery or primary school, and are less likely to have achieved the Curriculum for Excellence early level by the end of Primary 1 compared to children from the most affluent areas.

Scotland has lower child poverty rates compared to England, but poverty continues to affect an unacceptably high number of families, with impact on children's long-term health, wellbeing and attainment. Reducing early inequalities is therefore key to meeting a range of policy commitments in Scotland.



"These inequalities often last throughout people's lives resulting in poorer overall health, worse educational outcomes, more involvement in the criminal justice system, and less participation in the economy and therefore more chance of being in poverty than if we got it right from the start.

These outcomes affect not only individuals but also public expenditure on the repercussions of systems that don't provide the support that families need, and therefore our overall success as a society."

Scottish Government Early Child Development
Transformational Change Programme,
December 2023



¹<https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/32602/2025-04-29-early-child-development-publication-report.pdf>

Our levers for change

Parents and carers are the first and most important influence on children's development. To provide nurturing care to babies and toddlers, parents and carers themselves need to be supported by their communities and the early years system, to build their confidence, resources and wellbeing. However, the current system is often fragmented and detached from children and families and may not reach those who are most in need. With increasing pressures on public finances, both statutory and third sector support for families with young children is under strain.

Currently, across all the nations of the UK, there is insufficient join-up of early years support and a need to foster more community-based early support and stronger links between services, parents and carers and the community, based on up-to-date evidence, data, and critically, the views of parents about their needs and how best to address them. Building on the lessons from other initiatives, Thrive at Five seeks to address these issues with a long-term and sustainable solution.

Thrive at Five's approach

We achieve change with a two-fold approach:

- 1 Unlocking the power of parents and carers to give their children the nurturing care and supportive environments they need.
- 2 Enabling collaborative action within and across the public, private and voluntary sectors to coordinate and strengthen early years systems, practices and pathways of support.

Evidence and data underpin our approach and strong trusting relationships are the golden thread that run through all our work as we work alongside communities to strengthen ecosystems of support, based on the priorities and strengths of families and the wider community.



What do we want to achieve?

As we help build a stronger ecosystem of support around children, we aim to improve children's development and wellbeing. We do this by supporting local systems to simultaneously target five intermediate outcomes (below) that are all critical to positive early development.

- 1 Children's early communication and language development
- 2 Parent infant relationships
- 3 Parental wellbeing
- 4 The quality of children's home learning environments
- 5 The quality of early education and care

"The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years, starting in the womb, has life-long effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing."

Sir Michael Marmot, Director,
UCL Institute of Health Equity

Putting the approach into practice

We employ local teams in local authority areas where there is a shared commitment to improving outcomes in early childhood. Collaboration starts with a data-informed exploration of the early years landscape. We identify what services and community assets are available and use this analysis, and in-depth conversations with everybody in the community, to understand the experiences, opportunities and challenges which exist. With this learning and using the evidence of what works, we co-design the best approaches to improve support from pregnancy to five, with a strong focus on our intermediate outcomes.

Each local programme includes the adoption and careful implementation of evidence-based approaches alongside broader work to create the underlying conditions necessary to sustain better outcomes for the long-term. For example, working together with our partners, we find ways to strengthen the system and upskill the early years workforce. Our local team, including our parent champions, engage with parents and carers to ensure that support meets their needs and increases their confidence and capability so they can, in turn, meet their children's needs. We continually test, learn and refine our approach and embed the things that work for children, parents and carers.

Thrive at Five is currently working with two local authorities in England and we are seeking collaboration to launch a pathfinder in Scotland in 2025.

Thrive at Five support each local place to deliver this work in the following ways:

A minimum seven year commitment

We know that making meaningful and sustainable positive changes to early years outcomes takes time. In each place, we are committed to working for a minimum of seven years to properly embed a thorough change process.

A local backbone team

We provide capacity for collaborative action through 'backbone' teams of talented and passionate local people. They work in partnership with the whole community, supporting system join-up in the public, private and voluntary sectors, alongside supporting parents to be at the heart of driving change to services and positive outcomes for their children.

Access to expertise

Our local backbone teams are supported by a central team which includes expertise in the delivery of early childhood programmes, and research and evaluation. A Scotland Director is supported by Thrive at Five's wider team, Board and Advisory Council to ensure decision-making takes account of the best available evidence.

Additional resource

We support the implementation of new activities by channelling additional capacity, technical expertise and funding to support local practitioners, organisations and parents to implement solutions where gaps are identified.

Our partner schools saw an improvement in the percentage of children eligible for free school meals achieving the expected standard in Communication and Language by the end of Reception in 2024, compared to 2022, with several schools outperforming the overall Stoke-on-Trent improvement of 6 percentage points (from 67% to 73%).

"Thrive at Five is taking us on an amazing journey, the children and the families in our community are benefitting, there is no doubt about it. I pledge to keep the magic alive."

Reception teacher, Eaton Park School, Stoke-on-Trent

"What Thrive at Five has achieved in a year has been exceptional."

Jon Rouse, City Director, Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Evaluating and replicating the Thrive at Five model

The Centre for Evidence and Implementation is evaluating our work and the Isos Partnership is helping us to develop a “playbook”: a step-by-step guide on how to roll out the Thrive at Five model. Our long-term ambition is to take an effective and replicable model to scale, across geographical areas where the work is most needed. We are currently working in two local authority areas, Stoke-on-Trent and Redcar & Cleveland, with the aim to roll out the model in two more areas by the end of 2025.

“I had been allocated a little girl who suffered with selective mutism. I would collect her from the classroom in silence – with not even a hello – but by reducing her anxiety, this little girl began to talk. I found it hard to stop her sometimes! Her anxiety switched her voice off in social situations but within our little group she felt confident to speak out.”

Jacqueline Thedens, Staffordshire University Student, delivering Nuffield Early Language Intervention

“Without coming to parent, baby and toddler groups there isn’t much you can do. Has my nephew changed? Massively. He doesn’t push and shove anywhere near as much. He’s talking more. Fine motor skills wise and stuff, he can grab and share. As somebody coming with a lot of depression, you feel a lot better after coming.”

Laura, carer, Stoke-on-Trent



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Contact us

Thank you for your interest. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Please contact:

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