CHILDREN IN CARE IN FOCUS
‘My Health, Our Future’ is a Healthwatch Suffolk project exploring the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and young people (aged 11 - 19) attending schools and colleges across the county. To date, the project has recorded views from over 26,000 young people.

As part of this project, young people are asked about their views on a range of important topics including (amongst many others) self-harm, self-esteem, body image, stress, bullying and their experiences online.

The survey is generally delivered as part of a co-produced lesson plan on mental health and wellbeing in school or college and this helps to ensure a high rate of response.

In total, 11,950 students completed the survey in 2019 from 14 schools and four colleges across Suffolk.

‘My Health, Our Future’ is partly commissioned by the NHS to shape and inform developing models of providing services and support to children and young people across the county.

Additionally, schools and colleges receive a bespoke report about their students. This enables them to consider plans and to introduce initiatives targeted at improving the wellbeing of their students and addressing any issues they highlight within their responses.

For more information about how ‘My Health, Our Future’ is making a difference, and to download the full report about the 2019 survey, please visit our website.

Inside this report

‘My Health, Our Future’ 2019, is available to download as a series of short reports that focus on subject areas young people explore as they complete the survey.

For the first time, we are including short reports about specific groups of young people. This particular report is focussed on those students who said they have a disability.

Some of the other short reports in the My Health, Our Future 2019 series include:

- Wellbeing
- Getting support
- Mental health
- Mental health education
- Body image
- Self-esteem
- Online activity
- Resilience
- Sleep
- Young carers
- LGBTQ*
- Children in care

Find them on: www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof

Got a question?

You can reach us at any time. Call 01449 703949 or email info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk.
How we measure self-esteem

The 2018 survey asked students to rate their own level of self-esteem. It found that 16% of males and 37% of females rated their self-esteem as low or very low.

In this year’s survey (2019), instead of asking students to identify their own level of self-esteem, the survey used the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

The scale measures self-esteem using a series of ten statements with respondents indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement.

The possible scores range from 0 - 30, with a higher score indicating higher self-esteem. Scores sit within either a low, normal or high range.

What is self-esteem?

The NHS defines self-esteem as the opinion we have of ourselves.

When we have healthy self-esteem, we tend to feel positive about ourselves and about life in general. When our self-esteem is low, we tend to see ourselves and our life in a more negative and critical light.

Figure: We will use the self-esteem dial throughout this section to indicate levels of self-esteem amongst the 2019 sample. It is not possible to compare our results with previous samples because this is the first time we have used this particular measure.
Demographics

This report explores the wellbeing of those young people in Suffolk who are living in care or have lived in care in the past. ‘Children in care’ or being a ‘looked after child’ can include living with foster parents, living in a children’s home, or living in other council provided residential settings.

For the purposes of this report, the terminology ‘children in care’ will be used.

Of the 11,950 young people who completed the survey, 207 (2%) said that they were in care or had been. The responses came from young people across the county:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic area</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Suffolk</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Suffolk</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waveney</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>207</strong></td>
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150 were aged 11 to 15, and 57 were aged 16 and over.

There were more boys in care (122) than girls (81), and 14% of children in care belong to an ethnic minority background (compared to 12% of the overall survey responses).

68% also reported having an additional need – such as needing help with English, having a mental health difficulty, or having a disability. In particular, children in care were more likely to report having learning difficulties (29% compared to 7%) or a physical disability (14% compared to 2%).

Children in care were more likely to report having an additional need such as a mental health difficulty, learning disability or needing help with English. 68% had an additional need compared with 31% of their peers.
Wellbeing

Children in care had an average wellbeing score three points lower than their peers who are not in care. Children in care were most likely to disagree with the statements ‘I’ve been feeling good about myself’ and ‘I’ve been feeling useful’.

30% said they never or rarely felt loved, compared to 18% of their peers.

Poor mental health

Those in care were more likely to report having experienced poor mental health in the last 12 months. However, they were more likely than their peers who were not in care to have sought support for this mental health difficulty.

Children in care were also more likely report having a current mental health issue – with almost 1 in 3 saying this.
Parent/carer support

Children in care were less likely than their peers to say they would go to their parents/carers if they needed support with their emotional wellbeing.

Those who said they would not go to their parent/carers were asked why. They were most likely to say it was because they feel unable to open up (40%). The second most common reason was because they feel they have a poor relationship with their parent/carers.

22% of children in care reported a poor relationship being a barrier to seeking parent/carer support, compared to only 8% of their peers. They were also more likely to report ‘family’ as a cause of stress.
School and college support

Whilst they are less likely than their peers to go to their parents for emotional support, children in care were more likely than their peers to say they would go to their school or college for support.

Self-esteem

On average, children in care had a self-esteem score over two points lower than children who are not in care. 2 in 5 agreed with the statement ‘I am inclined to feel that I am a failure’ and only half agreed with the statement ‘I am able to do things as well as most people’.

Self-harm

Children in care were twice as likely as their peers to say that they have self-harmed. 1 in 3 children in care have self-harmed and 14% currently self-harm.

“I live with my grandma and she doesn’t understand a lot of the things I say.”

“I’m scared to open up to my mum, because I didn’t live with her. I’m not very close with my mum at all.”

“I miss my dad but I know that I can’t see him without somebody being there and I have my social worker there for me.”

“I experienced lack of trust with an old foster carer.”
“My dad abused me and I have been thinking and getting scared about it.”

“I’m getting help at the moment but they can’t help most of the time because I don’t have a stable home or my own house.”

“My mum abused me so I went to live with my dad 9 months ago.”

“It will be 2 years on my birthday since I haven’t seen my mum and I feel really upset and I can’t sleep because I’m worried what’s going on and I’m worried I won’t be able to see her or my brothers and sisters again.”

“When my mum got rid of me I didn’t see her for 2 years. I didn’t know what was going on at the time as I was only 8.”

“I’m adopted and it doesn’t help that they might not help with it and might judge me.”
Explore the full series of short reports on:
www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/mhof
This report has been produced to support the ongoing development and implementation of children and young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing support in Suffolk.

It will be publicly available on the Healthwatch Suffolk website. It will also be made available to Healthwatch England and bodies responsible for the commissioning, scrutiny or delivery of local health and care services. This may include Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Groups, the Suffolk Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee, the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board and Suffolk County Council.

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