

# **Engaging with Young People**

**Healthwatch Norfolk's  
Crucial Crew Project**

# Contents

Contents.....	2
Who we are and what we do.....	3
Summary.....	4
Why we looked at this.....	6
How we did this.....	8
What we found out.....	13
What this means .....	20
Recommendations .....	23
References .....	25
Appendix.....	25

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# Who we are and what we do

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather people's views of health and social care services in the county and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

The people who fund and provide services have to listen to you, through us. So, whether you share a good or bad experience with us, your views can help make changes to how services are designed and delivered in Norfolk.

Our work covers all areas of health and social care. This includes GP surgeries, hospitals, dentists, care homes, pharmacies, opticians and more.

We also give out information about the health and care services available in Norfolk and direct people to someone who can help.

At Healthwatch Norfolk we have five main objectives:

1. Gather your views and experiences (good and bad)
2. Pay particular attention to underrepresented groups
3. Show how we contribute to making services better
4. Contribute to better signposting of services
5. Work with national organisations to help create better services

We make sure we have lots of ways to collect feedback from people who use Norfolk's health and social care services. This means that everyone has the same chance to be heard.

# Summary

At Healthwatch Norfolk, we are committed to gathering feedback from people of all ages. However, between 2020 and 2024, fewer than 1% of our respondents were aged 15 or under. To address this gap, we made it a priority to seek out the views of children and ensure their experiences of health and social care services were represented. Around this time, we were approached by the organisers of Norfolk Crucial Crew, a multi-agency education programme that works with Year Six pupils across the county, to promote personal safety and essential life skills. We were invited to present at several of these events during the 2024/25 academic year.

At these sessions, we delivered interactive presentations, centred around the message "Your voice counts". We introduced Healthwatch Norfolk, explained our role, and highlighted why patient feedback, especially from younger people, is so important. The presentation included an engaging skit to help the children understand star ratings and recognise the types of things they might give feedback on.

As part of each session, pupils were invited to complete a short feedback activity. This included providing star ratings for five common services they may have used: hospitals, GP surgeries, dentists, opticians and pharmacies. Additionally, we asked them to provide a written response to the question "What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services?".

Our findings showed that hospitals received the highest proportion of positive ratings (4 or 5 stars) at 75%, closely followed by opticians at 74%. Pharmacies received the lowest proportion of positive ratings, at 56%. Analysis of the free text responses generated 20 categories, which were then grouped into three overarching themes: being

treated well, a good environment and ensuring understanding. Being treated well reflected children's desire for kind and friendly staff, to feel listened to and to not experience pain. A good environment encompassed shorter waiting times, access to distractions to reduce boredom and colourful, welcoming surroundings. Finally, ensuring understanding emphasised the importance of avoiding complex language, ensuring information is explained to children as well as adults and allowing children to have a trusted adult with them in appointments.

This engagement has provided us with valuable insights into what young people want from health and care services. Notably, children expressed a desire to be listened to and involved, which aligns with current National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance that highlights the importance of involving children in decisions regarding their care (NICE, 2021).

To conclude, Crucial Crew provided a fantastic opportunity for us to gather feedback from an underrepresented group and the knowledge we have gained can allow us to shape further engagement and suggest change within healthcare.

# Why we looked at this

As the champion of patient voice for health and social care in the county, Healthwatch Norfolk strives to ensure that all voices are heard, not just those that are easy to reach or who shout the loudest. By frequently evaluating the demographic data from the people who provide us feedback, we were able to identify children as a group that we rarely engaged with. In the period 2020-2024, less than 1% of our feedback respondents were in the '15 and under' age group (Healthwatch Norfolk, 2024). As such, working harder to reach young people through engagement in schools and community events was identified as a priority in our 2023/24 Annual Report.

In the summer of 2024, we were approached by Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service, whom we communicate and collaborate with on a regular basis, inviting us to participate in the Norfolk Crucial Crew project for the 2024/25 academic year. Norfolk Crucial Crew is a multi-agency education project, led by the Norfolk Fire Service. Various partners engage in sessions with Year 6 students across the county to help educate them around personal safety and valuable life skills which they can take forward in life and share with family, friends, carers and the wider community. Sessions were run from Monday to Friday, twice a day, and are free for schools to attend with every school in Norfolk receiving an invitation.



Figure 1 - An image of the Crucial Crew logo

The project has the potential to reach 1,000 students a week. Additionally, students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those who are home schooled are also invited to attend. Sessions consist of seven different partner organisations, with groups of children spending 15 minutes with each organisation. A wide variety of partners attend including: The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), Norfolk Police, The East Anglian Air Ambulance and St John's Ambulance.

Seeing this invitation to Crucial Crew from the Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service as a brilliant opportunity to meet the priority of engaging with young children, Healthwatch Norfolk were enthusiastic to become involved in the project for 2024/25 to understand the perspectives that young people in the county have in relation to local Health and Social Care services.

# How we did this

## Methodology

### Presentation

Before delivering the Crucial Crew sessions, the engagement team ensured the presentation was clear, engaging and effective in gathering meaningful feedback from children. As part of this planning, we visited two primary schools (Wensum Junior School and Firside Junior School) to speak with Year 6 pupils and involve them in co-designing the session content. Across these visits we engaged with a total of 60 pupils. During these visits we explored the children's understanding of the NHS and healthcare, as well as playing a variety of games to interact with them and facilitate discussion. For the final activity, students were given a postcard and asked to answer the question "What one thing do you think health professionals should know about 11-year-olds. What should they consider?". This informed the development of our Crucial Crew presentation and helped ensure it was as relevant, targeted and as accessible as possible.



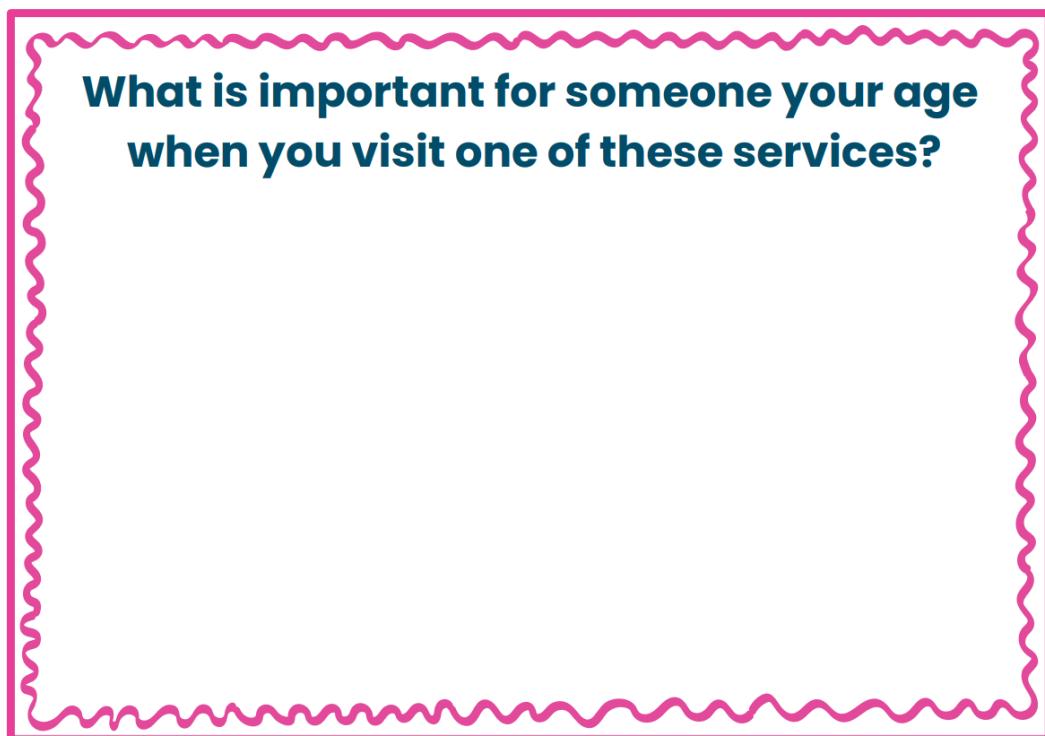
Figure 2 - Healthwatch Norfolk staff at a Crucial Crew event at Gresham's School

During each presentation at Crucial Crew, we followed the same pre-planned structure. Children were welcomed and we introduced ourselves and explained

the role of Healthwatch Norfolk, the purpose of our work and why feedback from people of all ages is important. Throughout the presentation, we stressed to the children that their voice counts and that their feedback can help improve local services. The Engagement Officers then performed a short skit illustrating a young person's experience at a doctor's appointment. They discussed with the children what might make the visit either positive or negative, such as the clinician being kind to them, or having a long wait before the appointment. Using these examples, the officers introduced children to the star-rating system and took time to ensure children understood how this worked. Following this, each child was given a pen and a double-sided postcard. One side featured star-ratings to fill in for various health services, and children were asked to think about a time they had used these services and to rate their experiences accordingly. The reverse side asked, "What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services?" with space provided for the children to write a response. An additional verbal prompt was given to children to support their understanding and help them reflect on what matters most to them.



*Figure 3 - The front side of the postcard given to children at Crucial Crew events to record their feedback of services*



*Figure 4 - The reverse side of the postcard given to children at Crucial Crew events to record what they feel is important for someone their age when visiting health services*

During the year we visited 6 Crucial Crew events. These were:

- 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – Gresham’s School
- 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024 – Great Yarmouth Racecourse
- 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024 – 10<sup>th</sup> December – The Nest, Horsford
- 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025 – 7<sup>th</sup> February – Gressenhall
- 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025 – 6<sup>th</sup> March – Letton Hall, Shipdham
- 14<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2025 – Norwich City College

## **Analysis of feedback**

We received 3,426 responses to the feedback postcard given to children at the Crucial Crew events. These responses were manually added into SmartSurvey to allow for easier analysis. Due to the substantial amount of data, we chose to analyse this within SmartSurvey. For the written responses, we used the text analysis feature to assign categories to the responses which we were then able to group into themes. Quantitative data was exported to Microsoft Excel for visuals to be created.

## **Limitations**

One limitation identified relates to the wording of the free-text question: “What is important for someone your age when you visit these services?”. Several children may have misinterpreted this prompt or were unsure of what was being asked, resulting in responses that did not clearly relate to the question. As a result, some answers offered limited insight compared with what might have been captured had the question been phrased more simply. Examples of these responses included comments such as “don’t score them”, “everything” and “health”. This suggests that should we participate in future Crucial Crew events, or other targeted engagement for children, the questions asked should be refined and expressed in more accessible language to support clearer understanding.

During our analysis, we observed that many of the free-text responses shared similar themes regarding what children felt was important to them, and in some cases also had identical wording. This may reflect their genuine views; however, it is also possible that some degree of suggestibility may have influenced children’s answers. During the Crucial Crew presentations, Healthwatch Norfolk staff performed a short skit depicting a doctor’s appointment and highlighted

potential examples of what can be perceived as positive and negative experiences. The specific examples discussed, such as staff being kind, long waiting times and having nothing to do in the waiting room, were among the most frequently cited points in the children's responses. Given this overlap, it is possible that some responses were guided by examples provided during the presentation, rather than representing the children's independent views. As a result, the data collected may not fully reflect their authentic opinions and experiences.

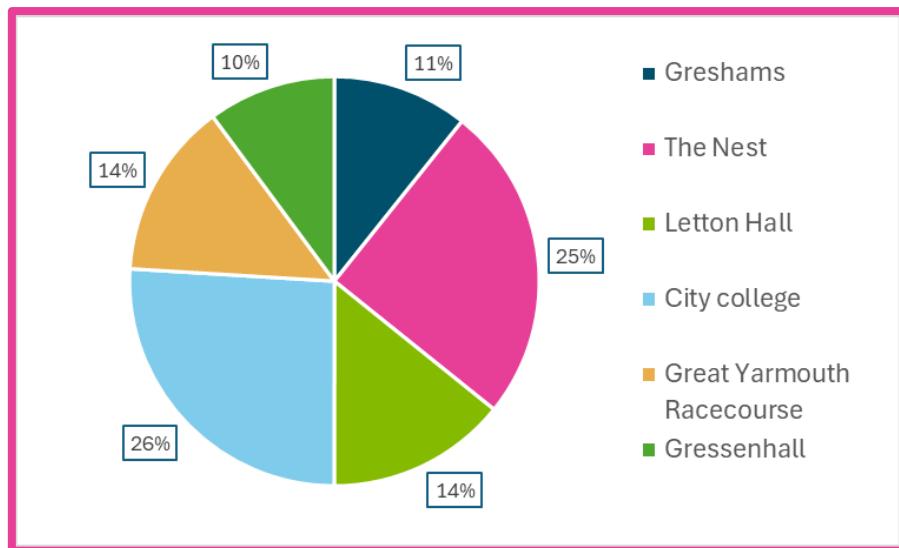
Additionally, while Crucial Crew provided an excellent opportunity to gather the views of young people, the event only involved Year 6 pupils (aged 10-11). Therefore, feedback from other age groups remains underrepresented in the insights that we collect. Nevertheless, the data obtained via Crucial Crew is still valuable and has helped to build connections, establish trust and increase awareness of our work amongst local schools. These relationships may enable us to undertake further engagement with a broader range of age groups in the future, helping us to capture a more comprehensive picture of younger people's experiences of healthcare.

# What we found out

## Crucial crew sessions:

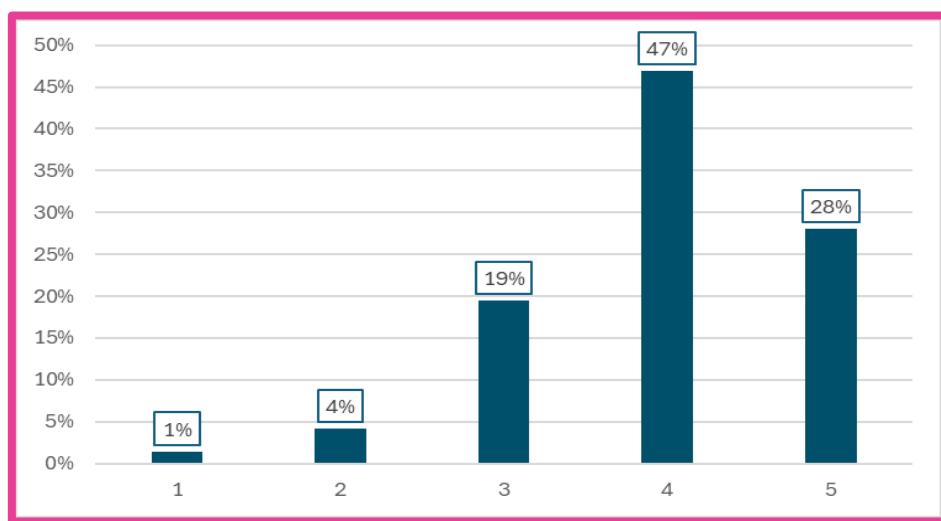
In total, we received responses from 3,788 children from a total of 6 sites across the county. The distribution of these responses by site can be seen below.

### What children thought of different services:

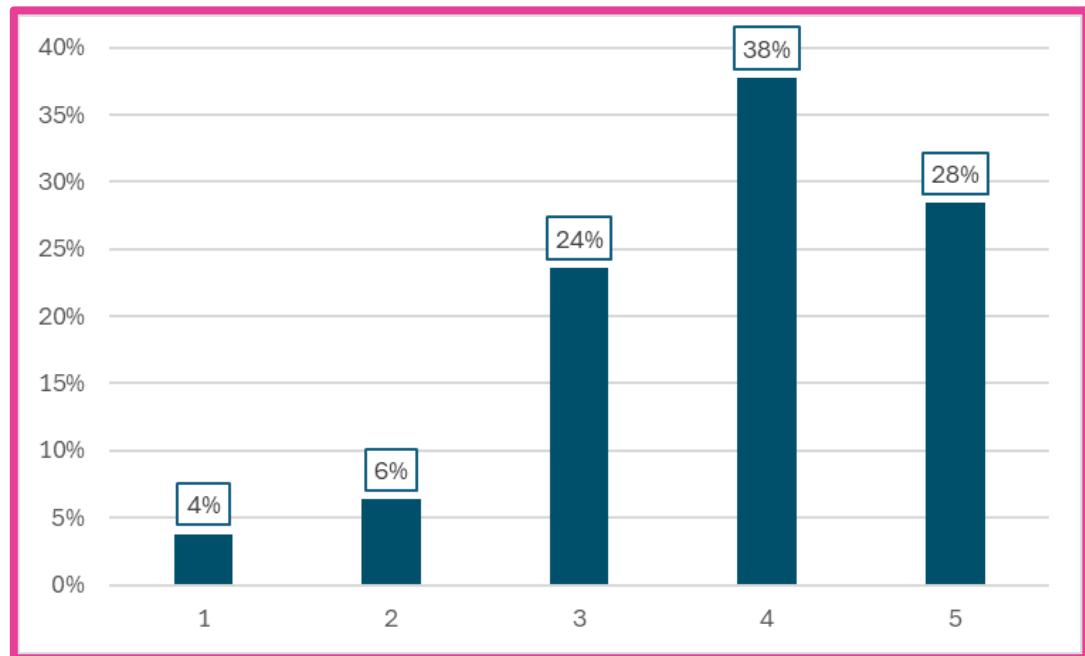


*Figure 5 - A graph to show the distribution of responses received based on site visited for Crucial Crew event*

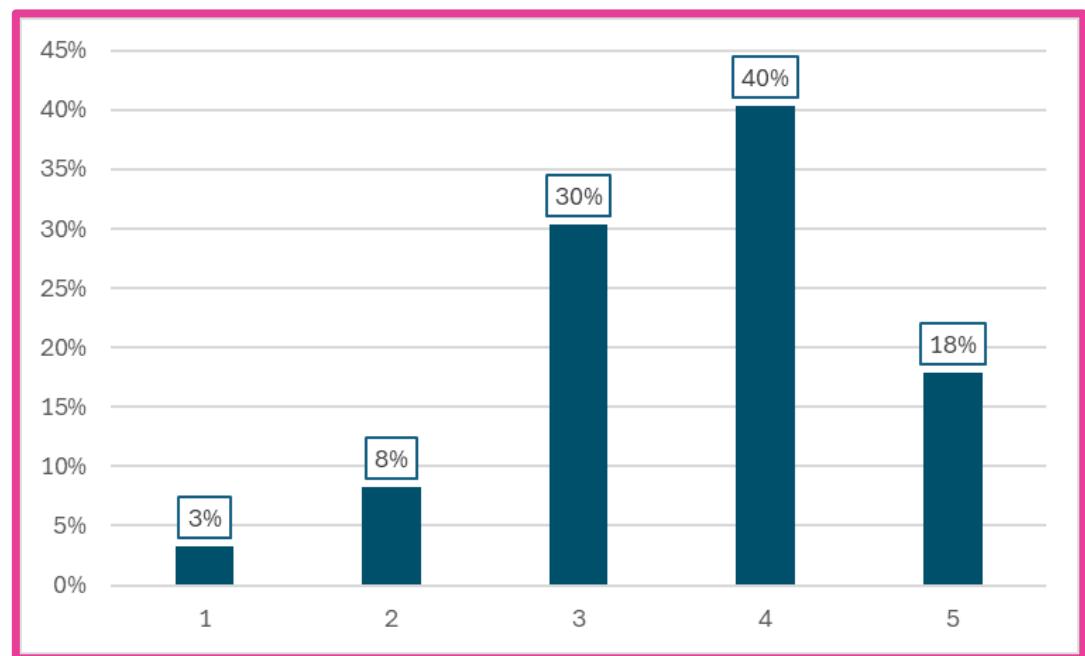
Children were asked to rate five different services using a 5-star rating system. These were hospitals, GP's, dentists, opticians and pharmacies. The results of these ratings are shown below.



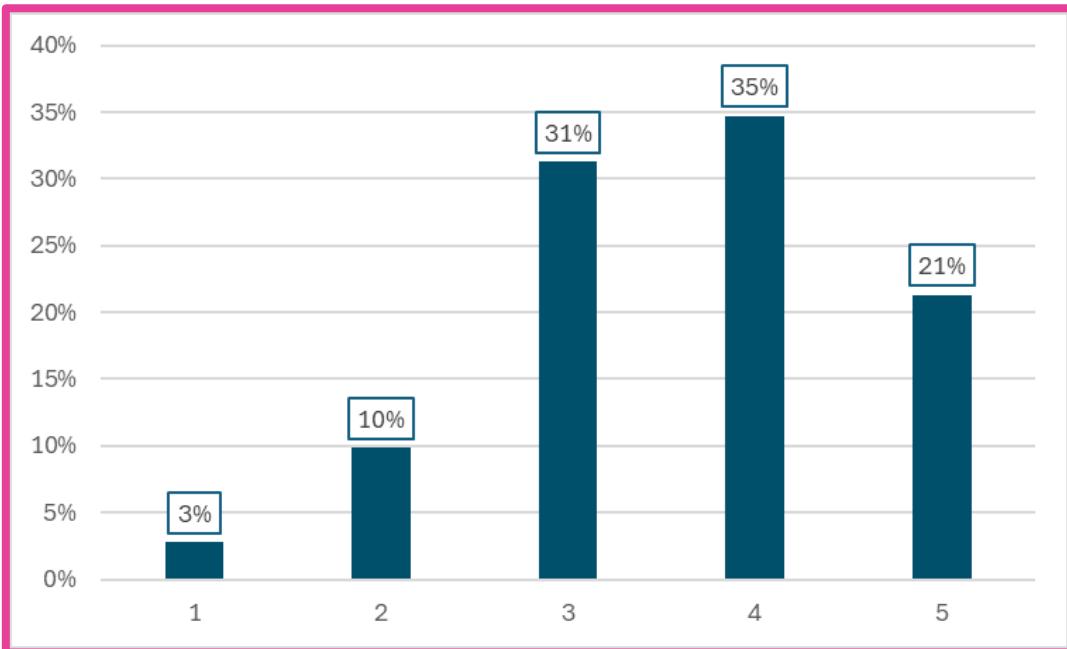
*Figure 6 - A graph to show the distribution of star-ratings for Hospitals, as rated by the children who attended Crucial Crew sessions*



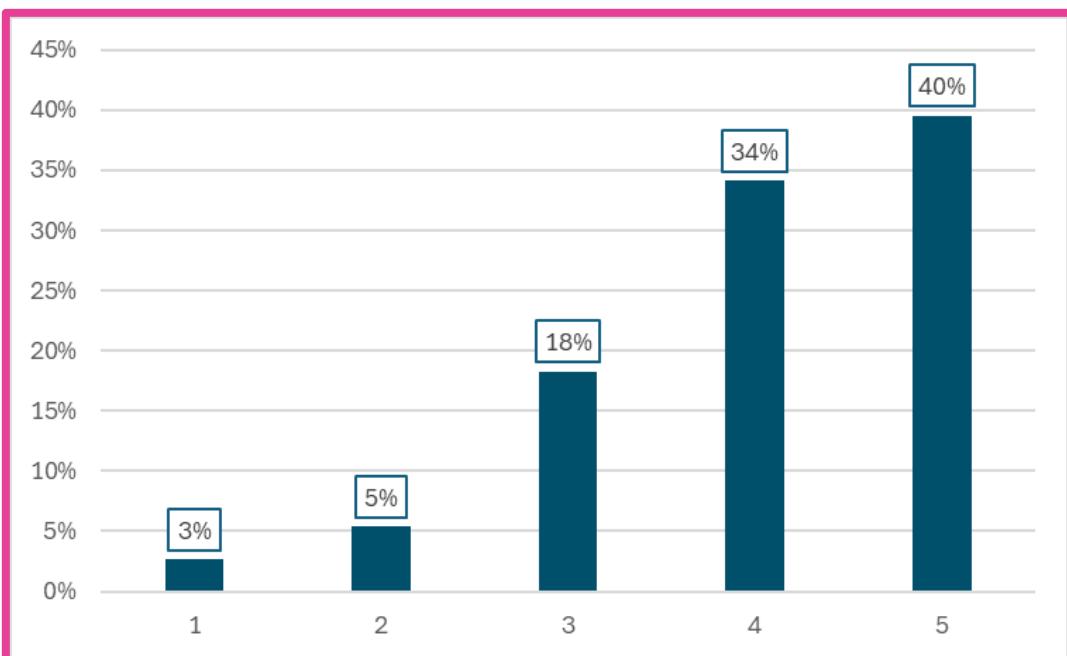
*Figure 7 - A graph to show the distribution of star-ratings for dentists, as rated by the children who attended Crucial Crew sessions*



*Figure 8 - A graph to show the distribution of star-ratings for GPs, as rated by the children who attended Crucial Crew sessions*



*Figure 9 - A graph to show the distribution of star-ratings for pharmacies, as rated by the children who attended Crucial Crew sessions*



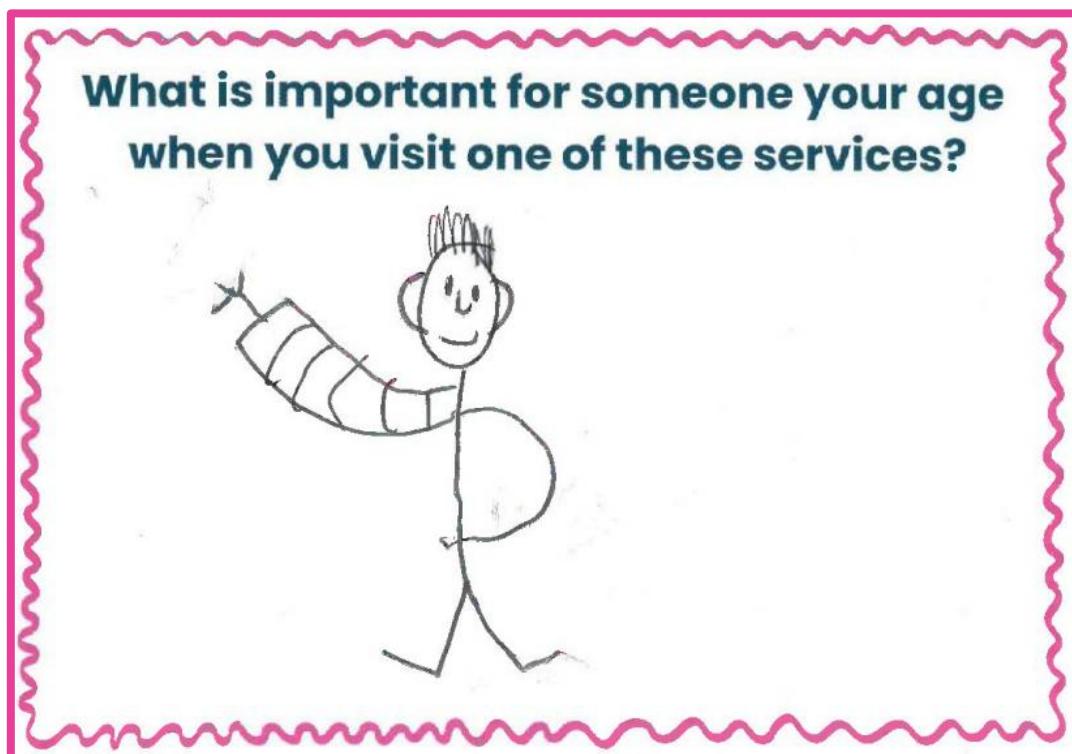
*Figure 10 - A graph to show the distribution of star-ratings for opticians, as rated by the children who attended Crucial Crew sessions*

Opticians received the highest proportion of 5-star ratings, with 40% of children awarding the service top marks. Hospitals and dentists jointly recorded the second-highest proportion, each receiving 28% of their ratings at 5 stars. All services reported relatively few 1-star reviews: hospitals recorded the lowest proportion at 1%, while dentists reported the highest at 4%.

For positive feedback overall (combined 4- and 5-star ratings), hospitals achieved the highest level of satisfaction at 75%, closely followed by opticians at 74%. Dentists received 66% positive ratings, GP surgeries 58%, and pharmacies the lowest proportion at 56%.

### **Analysis of text responses:**

On the feedback postcard given to students, space was provided for them to answer the question: "What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services?", referring to hospitals, GPs, dentists, pharmacies and opticians. We received 3426 text responses to this question. A few children used the space to instead draw an image. These picture responses were not included in the final analysis, and examples of them can be seen below. We analysed the data in SmartSurvey and grouped responses into categories that reflected the underlying themes and sentiment of responses. Through this process, we identified 20 distinct categories, which were then further organised into three overarching themes: being treated well, a good environment and ensuring understanding.



*Figure 11 - An example of postcard feedback where children responded to the prompt "What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services?" and they used the space to do drawings*



Figure 12 - An example of postcard feedback where children responded to the prompt “What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services?” and they used the space to do drawings

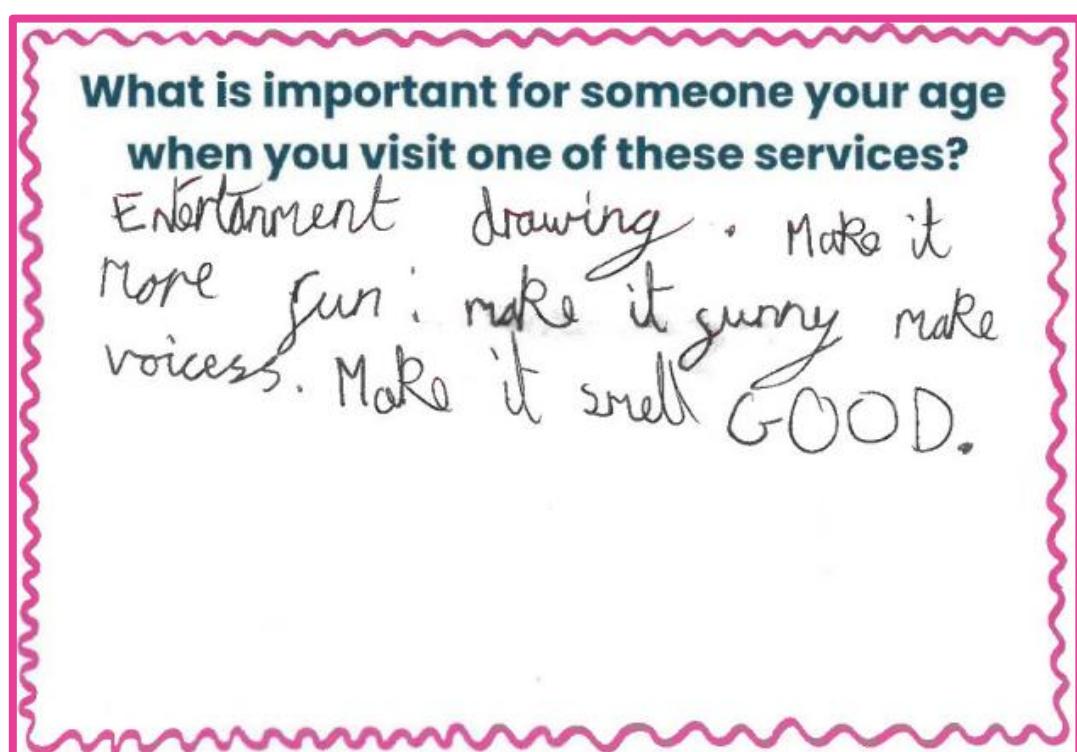


Figure 13 - An example of a response we received to the question “What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services”

## What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services?

Something to play with  
a bit more courserul  
more kindness. ❤



Figure 14 - An example of a response we received to the question “What is important for someone your age when you visit one of these services”

### Being treated well:

This theme reflects how children want to be treated by staff when accessing health services. The most significant factor in this theme was staff attitudes, with 44% of children saying that it was important to be seen by someone who was kind and friendly. Children also emphasised the importance of being listened to directly, rather than staff speaking only to their parents, to ensure their own voices were acknowledged. Many responses highlighted concerns about experiencing pain during appointments. Children expressed that they wanted clinicians to stop a procedure if asked to do so and to have their pain taken seriously rather than ignored or belittled. Although many children reported that they did not enjoy medical appointments, they recognised their importance for staying healthy and feeling better, which motivated them to attend. Additionally, small rewards, such as sweets or stickers were identified as being helpful in making the experience more enjoyable and overall positive.

“They are nice and being friendly so they feel comfortable because children can be nervous going to any of these places”

“For the staff to be friendly and help you”

## A good environment:

This theme relates to the aspects of the patient experience that occur outside of the consultation or procedure itself, such as time spent in the waiting area. Many children reported difficulties with long waiting times, explaining that these periods often lead to boredom, or in some cases, increased anxiety about the upcoming appointment. Children noted that having access to distractions, such as colouring, games or toys, helps make these waits more manageable and improve their overall experience. Children also highlighted the impact that the physical environment can have on their overall experience. They expressed a preference for bright colourful spaces with plenty of pictures and posters to look at, as well as comfortable seating. Additionally, a clean environment was particularly important to many respondents. For those who had experienced inpatient stays, the availability of good quality food was also emphasised as being a key factor in creating a positive experience.

**“For the place to be bright and colourful – To not be waiting long because they might get bored and stressed”**

**“The waiting room should have things to do. The receptionist and doctors/nurses need to be kind and helpful. There needs to be lots of colour and things around to make it less daunting.”**

## Ensuring understanding:

The final theme identified was ensuring understanding. Children reported that staff sometimes used complex medical terminology, which they found difficult to understand, which could increase their anxiety. They stressed the need, and importance of clear, simple language when instructions or explanations are given. Additionally, some children commented that clinicians often directed explanations or information, solely to parents instead of also involving the child. When children were involved in these discussions, they felt more informed, more in control of their health and less frightened and they understood what was going to happen. While children valued autonomy and being kept informed, many also highlighted the importance of having a trusted adult present. This provided them with reassurance and helped support their understanding of any information being shared.

**“To word explanations in a way that 10/11/12 year olds could understand.”**

**“That they include you and don't only tell your parents what's happening. Also kindness.”**

### **Feedback of the Crucial Crew sessions:**

Although feedback was not gathered specifically on the Healthwatch Norfolk sessions delivered at the Crucial Crew events, the event organisers sought feedback from all participating schools regarding the events as a whole. Of those who responded, 94% felt that pupils benefited from taking part in Crucial Crew and 98% stated that they would recommend the programme to other schools. Based on this wider feedback, we can infer the Healthwatch Norfolk sessions were generally well received. However, to draw meaningful conclusions, we would need to have gathered specific feedback regarding our sessions. One piece of feedback highlighted that many sessions used a “sit-and-listen” format, with limited variety or opportunity for movement. This could be considered if Healthwatch Norfolk were to participate in Crucial Crew again in the future to aim to make sessions more engaging.

# What this means

Overall, feedback from Crucial Crew indicates that children have generally positive view of the healthcare they use, with all services receiving mostly positive ratings. The results showed that opticians had the highest levels of 5-star reviews, suggesting that most children had experienced very positive interactions at the opticians and that this service overall likely provides good care, particularly for those in this age group. Additionally, hospitals showed the strongest levels of overall satisfaction, suggesting that they deliver a consistently good level of care from the perspective of children. In contrast, dentists received some mixed feedback, with some moderately high ratings but also the highest proportion of 1-star reviews. This pattern suggests a substantial degree of variability in children's experiences. This may be partly influenced by children's anxieties or phobias surrounding dental appointments, which several children reported and which may contribute to lower ratings. GP surgeries and pharmacies appear to be the least positively rated services overall. Although both had relatively few one-star ratings, their overall lower satisfaction suggests that children's experiences in these settings may be more neutral or less consistently positive.

The analysis of children's responses to the free-text question provided valuable insights into what young people consider important in healthcare. Some of these priorities align with feedback typically received from adults, particularly regarding staff attitudes, short waiting times and cleanliness. However, there are notable differences between the priorities expressed by children and those highlighted by adults in the regular feedback we collect. For example, in the feedback we have received for 2025 so far, the vast majority of which is from adults, the second most common theme was the availability of appointments, with many adults expressing concerns about the difficulties in securing routine appointments or the time they had to wait for these appointments (Healthwatch Norfolk, 2025). This issue was very rarely raised by the children at Crucial Crew. This difference may be explained by the fact that, for most children in this age group, appointments are often arranged by a parent or carer, meaning children themselves may be less aware of appointment availability or waiting times.

Several categories identified in the analysis, reflected children's desire for autonomy over their health and care. This included staff listening directly to the

child, providing explanations to the child rather than only to the parent, and offering clear instructions and advice in a way that the child can understand. Research indicates that young children are more aware of their body integrity, autonomy and involvement in decision-making than previously assumed (Alderson, 2023). These considerations should therefore be recognised and protected in healthcare settings. The NICE guidelines recommend that children are included in discussions about their care, provided with information in clear and age-appropriate language, and given opportunities to express their views and needs independently of their parents (NICE, 2021). While some people may feel that withholding information from children is kinder, to prevent fear or distress, evidence suggests that non-involvement can itself be traumatic. Our research reinforces that children often wish to be included and actively involved in decisions about their care.

To conclude, Crucial Crew allowed us to gather valuable insights into the opinions of young people regarding their experiences of healthcare and discover what matters to them. This can allow us to better target and focus on areas identified where change would be beneficial and share this information with health providers in the county.

# Next Steps:

- For Healthwatch Norfolk to continue engaging with young people, and to consider other events and opportunities where we can conduct targeted work to gather feedback from age groups which are still under-represented.
- Additionally, to continue explaining the importance of feedback to young people and ensuring they know their voice counts, to empower them to feedback on their experiences.

# Acknowledgement

Healthwatch Norfolk would like to thank Norfolk Fire Service for organising the Crucial Crew events and for inviting us to participate. This report and the value insights gained from the event would not have been possible without them.

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