

Strengthening families

SCALING INNOVATIONS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE



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Acknowledgements

The Department for Education, Mutual Ventures, Innovation Unit and Social Care Institute for Excellence - partners in the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme - would like to take this opportunity to recognise the extraordinary work of the innovators and adopters taking part. Your complex and important work has continued throughout the most challenging of contexts, adapting both to Covid restrictions and to increasing and unpredictable pressures on our most vulnerable children and families. We thank you and hope that we have been able to reflect, to some extent, the hard work, creativity and leadership that you have shown over this period in this first and, we hope unique, issue of this journal.





Foreword

ISABELLE TROWLER

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families and
Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel member



Department
for Education

In 2015, when the Department for Education launched the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, we set out to identify new ways to support families and protect children, by promoting innovation and experimentation in the sector, gathering evidence about what worked, and then scaling the most effective innovations.

Through the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme, the Department for Education is investing heavily in scaling three of the most successful innovations from the first wave of the Innovation Programme to 18 local authorities.

These three innovations - Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding, Leeds' Family Valued and North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door - are transformational in nature. They rethink how we build resilience in families, strengthen local practice systems, enable social workers to manage risk with more confidence and, where possible, enable children to safely remain at home.

Any kind of change journey is difficult and innovating is challenging work at any time. I want to offer my sincere thanks and respect to all involved in the Programme - the innovators, the adopters, our programme evaluators and support partners - who are bringing skills, commitment and energy to this complex work in a very difficult delivery context due to the coronavirus pandemic. I am really pleased to see the adaptations needed to the normal implementation process working so well, and the strong progress being made across the Programme.

In the absence of more traditional learning events, this Journal is aiming to share what those in the Programme are learning about adopting and

adapting innovation from one place to another. The articles in the journal are authored by those involved in the programme and the focus of the first one is delivering this work while working remotely. Examples of authors and articles include:

- Andy Lloyd, the Head of Workforce Development and Change from Leeds describes how they have been more intentional in delivering restorative and relationship-based working in a remote environment in scaling Family Valued, and what some of the upsides have been.
- Iain Kirkup, a Team Manager in the No Wrong Door Central Delivery Team, describes how going live with their No Wrong Door model in April 2020 helped Rochdale manage the challenge of Covid-19 and better serve children and families.
- Sue Williams, Hertfordshire's Programme Director for Family Safeguarding, describes how an in-depth understanding of the Children Act 1989 was critical to the development of Family Safeguarding and plays an important role for local authorities who are adopting and adapting the model.

I hope you enjoy and find the reflections and insights in these articles helpful. The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children team at the Department for Education will be happy to deal with any queries. Please contact them on Strengthening.FAMILIES@education.gov.uk

I am sending my very best wishes to all those involved in the Programme and I look forward to hearing more in the next Journal.





Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Strengthening Families Journal – the quarterly publication dedicated to capturing learning from the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) Programme.

SFPC is a five-year Department for Education programme to support local authorities to improve their work with families and safely reduce the number of children entering care by implementing successful sector-designed whole system change projects.

The Strengthening Families Journal will diffuse learning from the programme, and model and support best practice in the successful adoption of innovation. The Journal will also connect programme learning to a wider evidence and policy context, contributing to knowledge in the sector.

The Strengthening Families Journal is intended for people working in, and in partnership with, children's social care. Directors and service managers and frontline practitioners along with partners from education, health, housing, police and adult services will all find articles relevant to their work. In fact, anyone interested in the role innovation has to play in improving children's lives, will find something of interest.

Throughout the Journal, you will read about the impact innovation in children's social care has had on the lives of children, young people and families, and the mechanisms by which innovations are being implemented by local authorities around the country.

The theme of this first issue is the ways in which local authorities participating in the programme are responding to Covid-19. We explore how authorities are successfully supporting and adopting innovation during a pandemic - overcoming challenges and adapting approaches. The articles highlight some of the outstanding work that has continued to progress during this challenging time, supplemented by up-to-date research and evidence from the UK and around the world.

Each issue of the Journal will capture the latest and most relevant learning from the SFPC Programme, considering the current context of the wider sector. The articles have been developed in collaboration across the SFPC partnership, led by the innovator and adopter local authorities who write about their experiences first hand.

We would welcome your feedback on the Journal so we can ensure the series adds as much value as possible. Please do this via our [website](#) and look out for further opportunities to provide feedback via reader reviews, surveys and social media in the coming months.



Who is Involved?

The 'innovators'

LEEDS CITY COUNCIL: FAMILY VALUED

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL: FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL: NO WRONG DOOR

The 'adopters'

FAMILY VALUED

 **1** Darlington Borough Council

 **2** Warwickshire County Council

 **3** Newcastle City Council

 **4** Coventry County Council

 **5** Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

 **6** Sefton Council

FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

 **7** Cambridgeshire County Council

 **8** Walsall Council

 **9** Lancashire County Council

 **10** Telford & Wrekin Council

 **11** Wandsworth Borough Council

 **12** Swindon Borough Council

NO WRONG DOOR

 **13** Middlesbrough Council

 **14** Rochdale Borough Council

 **15** Norfolk County Council

 **16** Warrington Borough Council

 **17** Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council

 **18** Leicester City Council

THEIR ROLE:

The 'innovators' - The innovators are three local authorities who have designed and implemented successful and innovative children's social care models within their own areas. The innovators provide on-the-ground support to local authorities who are implementing their respective models (the adopters). Putting the innovators at the heart of spreading and scaling innovation in this way is in itself an innovative approach.

The 'adopters' - The adopters are eighteen local authorities who are adopting the innovations into their local areas. There are six adopters per innovation. They receive direct support from the innovators to facilitate the successful implementation of the models into their local areas.





A Closer Look

In this section we take a closer look at each of the innovations; Family Safeguarding, Family Valued and No Wrong Door.



HERTS FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

Family Safeguarding is a whole family, strengths-based approach to child protection. Our child safeguarding work is undertaken by children's social workers, adult mental health practitioners, substance misuse and probation officers, working together as one team. Together, we combine our knowledge and expertise to assess the needs of the whole family, providing services to meet those needs and supporting parents to achieve sustained change for themselves and their children. By meeting the needs of parents and developing their confidence, we can successfully reduce risk to children and reduce the need for children to come into care.

The teams use Motivational Interviewing (MI) as a shared model of practice. MI is a strengths-based conversational approach to counselling that encourages families to improve their child's welfare by enhancing their readiness for change. The key elements

of MI are developing a partnership between the worker and the parent; drawing out the parent's thoughts and ideas about change and emphasising their autonomy, whilst recognising that the true power and responsibility of change, sits with them. We provide perpetrator, recovery and cognitive behavioural therapy programmes from within our teams, rather than referring parents/carers elsewhere and we make it as easy as we can for them to access help.

Recording has been transformed by developing the Family Safeguarding Workbook that guides the social work practice with families and makes it more purposeful as well as providing space for all practitioners involved with the family to contribute to analysis, planning and sharing the decision making. We have reduced bureaucracy to a minimum to free up time for practitioners to spend more time in direct work with children and families.

Family Safeguarding has resulted in positive outcomes for children and adults, as well as for Hertfordshire's Safeguarding Partnership. These include:

- 66% reduction in repeat domestic abuse call outs by police, achieved for successive cohorts of families over a 5-year timespan
- 60% reduction in the number of children on child protection plans for 5 years
- 30% reduction in children under 12 becoming looked after as a result of abuse/neglect, each year for 5 years
- Improved staff recruitment and retention across all disciplines as staff felt more supported
- Partnerships strengthened across agencies and Courts
- The savings achieved exceeded the cost of the set-up of the model by month 8 of the first year
- Cumulative cost avoidance for HCC is on target to exceed £220m by year 10¹





LEEDS FAMILY VALUED

Family Valued (FV) is an approach that seeks to promote relational (restorative) practice. It is underpinned by fostering a clear set of shared values and practice principles which emphasise the strengths and importance of family and is centered on productive working relationships between workers and families, and beyond that with partner agencies and the wider community. FV is centered on a clear focus on the child and how reform and day-to-day work will improve their outcomes.

FV is underpinned by the relational principle of working *with* children and families, rather than doing things to or for them. It is designed to function as a whole system change across children's services, whereby practitioners, teams and wider partnerships' practice is shaped and informed by shared restorative language, culture, behaviours and ways of working.

There are four core strands within the FV approach:

1. A foundation of restorative practice training for all staff and managers to develop and embed shared relational and restorative language, values, principles and practices.

2. An intensive programme of leadership, culture and practice development. This begins with working with all levels of leadership and managers to promote their role in driving culture change, organisational reform and practice leadership. This is then supplemented by a wider programme of practice development for practitioners, aiming to provide practical tools to apply relational theory to daily practice and promoting restorative high support and challenge in reflection and supervision.
3. Creation or expansion of the Family Group Conference (FGC) service, in order to assert the right of families to develop their own solutions, to provide practical support for them to do so wherever it is possible and safe for the child; and to act as a catalyst within the local system in promoting changing practice. The aim is that, over time, all families should be offered an FGC before the local authority undertakes any statutory intervention (unless this would potentially place a child at significant risk). This scaling of FGC had not been previously seen in the UK, and builds on work already undertaken and evidence of what works to take restorative practice to a much wider scale across, and beyond, children's services.
4. Work with local leaders to critically review local systems and structures and identify where reform or investment is needed in order to help reduce pressures and create the time and space for relational working. This is tailored to the needs of each local authority and might include such areas as the Front Door; restorative approaches to domestic violence or the functioning of the Independent Reviewing Officer role.

The impact of the Family Valued model in Leeds includes a reduction in the rate and number of children looked after, as well as reduced child protection plans and children in need. A cost benefit analysis of the use of FGCs found an average saving of £755 per family when compared to 'business as usual' social work without FGCs, due to families spending less time in the system.²



NORTH YORKSHIRE NO WRONG DOOR

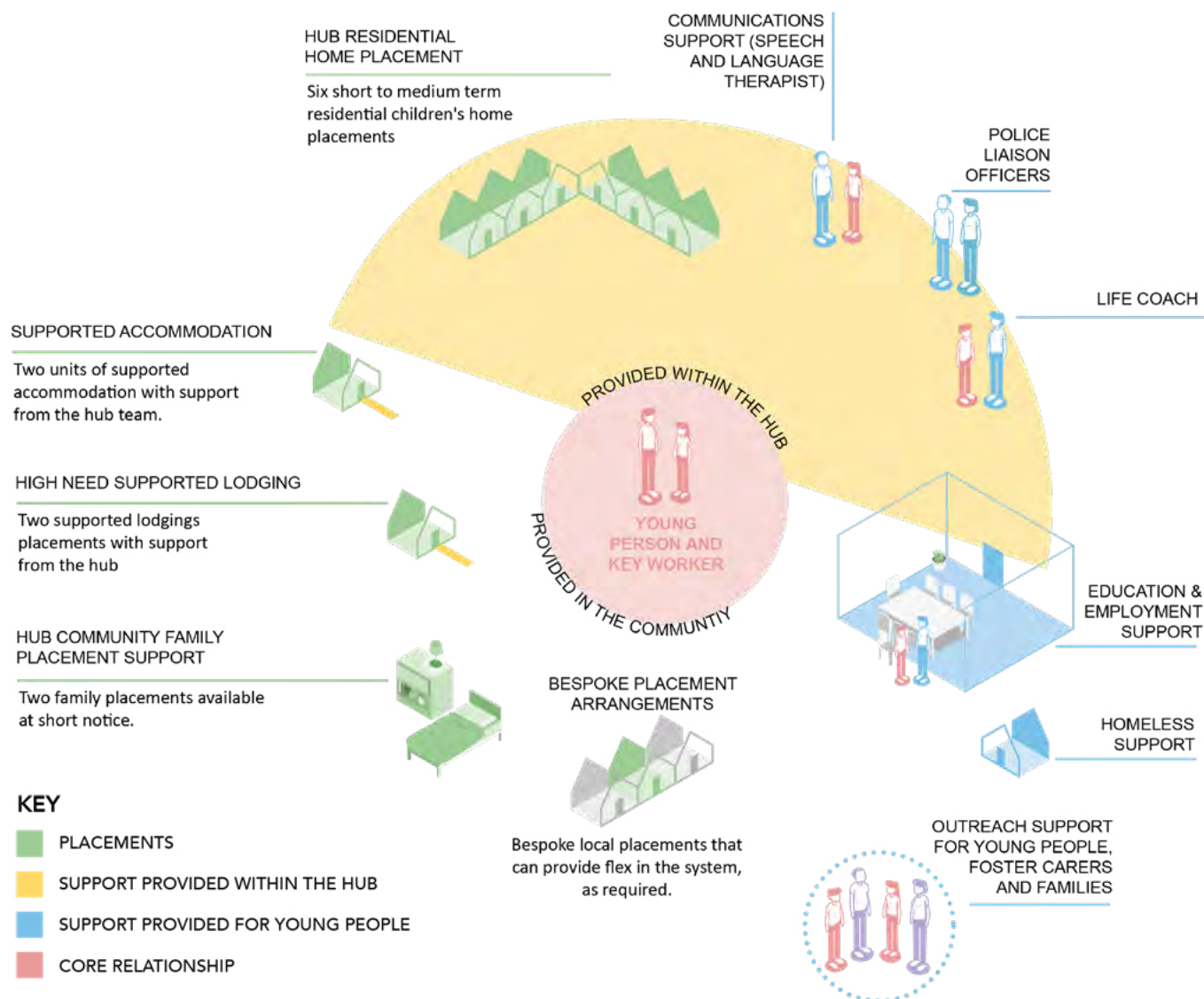
No Wrong Door® (NWD) is an integrated service and approach to supporting adolescents in or on the edge of care. The model combines a defined culture and practice with a range of services, support and accommodation options and a team of specialists working together through a shared practice framework. At the heart of the model is a residential Hub, which provides short-term placements and outreach (Edge of Care) support.

In North Yorkshire, NWD supports adolescents aged 12-25. The goal is to reduce the number of young people coming into care, and to support those in care to find permanence in a family setting through long-term foster care, reunification with their families or independence. Operating from two Hubs, NWD in North Yorkshire brings together a variety of accommodation options, a

range of services and outreach support under one management umbrella, addressing young people's needs within a single team. Each Hub works with around 40 young people at any one time.

At the heart of the approach is the key worker's relationship with the young person. First and foremost the key worker gets to know the young person and works with them to develop and deliver a plan of support. This is based on the young person's needs and aspirations, whilst also allowing for areas they may need to develop. With the support of the multidisciplinary team, the worker draws on a range of accommodation options, services and outreach support to meet the young person's needs and support them to achieve their goals. 50% of young people with a NWD worker said they would go to them first in a time of crisis.

NWD has had a positive impact on a wide variety of areas in young people's lives, notably a reduced number of young people entering the care system, and for those in the system, less time spent in care and increased placement stability. Alongside a reduction in high risk behaviours and criminal activity, NWD has resulted in an increase in those remaining or entering education, employment or training. These positive outcomes correlate with an overall improved level of wellbeing, resilience and mental health.³





Scaling Innovation

Learning from the Innovators



“

The team, partners and the children's social care system have made real and lasting impacts in the lives of young people in their community.”

IAIN KIRKUP

TEAM MANAGER, NO WRONG DOOR®
CENTRAL DELIVERY TEAM, NORTH
YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Building Relationships: A Remote, Restorative, and Relational Approach

LEEDS FAMILY VALUED



Andy Lloyd – Head of Workforce Development and Change
Leeds Children and Family Services

RESTORATIVE AND RELATIONAL PRACTICE AT THE HEART

The [Leeds Family Valued Model](#) has, at its heart, the principles of **restorative** and **relational practice**, including the notion that we work **with** people, rather than do things to them or for them.

This is important; as an innovator local authority in the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme, Leeds is committed to working with adopter authorities in a spirit of real partnership. **Alongside the core parts of the Programme, which make sure Family Valued improves local outcomes in the way it has in Leeds, we aim to develop our overall approach alongside adopter partners: we always try to work *with*.**

Social work is all about relationships. As Wilson et al. (2018) notes, “relationship-based practice is not a new phenomenon”. In 1982, the Barclay Report noted that “clients ... should share in the plans made for them” a task impossible to ensure without a professional working relationship between the social worker (or family support worker, youth justice worker etc) and the individual or family involved. Equally, as early as the mid-1800s, the philanthropist Mary Carpenter argued that “change required the cooperation of the child” and that “without active participation ‘change would not be forthcoming.’”⁴

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

A central part of this approach is to begin with a team from Leeds travelling to the adopter authority and spending time with colleagues there. We meet and discuss Leeds Family Valued and learn about local issues, challenges and concerns relevant to the programme.

Many conversations take place during coffee breaks and more informal meetings, which help to develop good and effective working relationships with colleagues and help us better understand the situation “on the ground”. In our experience, this creates a harmonious and effective working relationship where we can support and challenge our colleagues to bring about real change and improvement.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS REMOTELY

Since mid-March, this core part of our work has been severely limited. The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that it has not been possible for a group of people from Leeds to spend time in adopter authorities, meeting and mixing with different people and developing those relationships. While some of the relationship building has happened, it has been very much more limited and foreshortened.

Instead, we have all been **learning how to use the various online meeting platforms**; how to share screens and split off into different rooms, alongside the new etiquette of muting (and then forgetting to unmute!), the debate about cameras on or cameras off... and of course the inevitable slow or bad connection, making the speaker sound like a robot!

Over time, we have all become quite good at this way of working and have had many **high-quality meetings** where effective plans have been made. The Leeds Family Valued team have delivered **online training** for hundreds of people on a whole variety of different topics and have had dozens of meetings with groups of practitioners, managers and politicians.

Given our commitment to restorative and relationship-based working, we have had to be even more intentional about this in this virtual meeting world.⁵ We have sought to develop these relationships using simple **restorative tools**, like **check ins and check outs**. We have tried to ensure that our meetings are not simply transactional but have a strong element of relational practice.

This is not an ideal way of working; we would much prefer to be in and amongst our colleagues in adopter authorities. Importantly, though, despite the challenges, there are also benefits which we must not ignore.

ON THE UPSIDE - SOME BENEFITS OF ONLINE WORKING

Online working hugely reduces the problems and **costs of travel time, reduces our carbon footprint, and offers new flexibilities for managing work and home life.** It also offers **new ways of communicating and building working relationships.**⁶ Online working opens up new opportunities for learning about each other as humans, through the daily window into the home lives of our cats, children and Amazon deliveries, and can offer new ways to interact in a new medium: the raised hand icon, the breakout room, the virtual background, the chat in the sidebar for questions and comments.

What seems to be lost in many ways is the informal, quotidian interactions of office life in the kitchen, as you walk around the office. Homeworking and the regimen of online meetings does not allow for this and so **we need to consider how we make time for the informal** and often tangential discussions that are rarely put in diaries but are vital to ensuring we keep supporting each other, building trust and relationships and helping each other to think and collaborate in new ways.

Restorative and relational practice is possible in our current situation, and while it is not the best, we are making it work. We do, though, look forward to a day when we can go back to how we prefer: to meet in person.



Responding to Need: Revisiting the Children Act 1989

HERTS FAMILY SAFEGUARDING



Sue Williams - Programme Director Strengthening
Families/Family Safeguarding
Hertfordshire County Council



The Family Safeguarding team at Hertfordshire County Council is working as part of the national Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme with local authorities across the country who want to adopt the [Family Safeguarding model](#) into their support for children and families. There's a lot of work for our team and the adopting authorities to do together to **adapt and implement Family Safeguarding** so that it works brilliantly in the new context. Some of this work is technical and detailed, but there are also **critical cultural shifts** that social work teams need to make, which are fundamental to the Family Safeguarding approach. Perhaps the most significant shift comes as teams realise they must **move from monitoring risks to responding to need**.

To help adopting authorities to make this shift and to understand how critical it is to successful implementation of Family Safeguarding, we have noticed how valuable teams find it to go back to **considering the Children Act 1989** which sets out the **legal purpose of social work and social workers' responsibilities**.

Going back to first principles and revisiting the Children Act and, as a result, rethinking risk and the needs of children and families, was critical to us developing Family Safeguarding, and is proving an important foundation for Authorities who want to understand, adopt and adapt the model.

UNDERSTANDING THE ACT

In Children and Families social work in England, local authorities listen hard to the findings from Serious Case Reviews, DfE guidance, Ofsted and research, to try to improve systems and practice and better protect children. In Hertfordshire, in addition to all these things, we also listened to children, trained our staff, wrote new procedures and audited our compliance, but our practice didn't improve.

We had to be bolder and do something radically different.

We found inspiration in the Children Act 1989. It gave us the **social worker's job description, thresholds for families we should work with and values to underpin our professional role.**

17(1) of the Act makes it the duty of every Local Authority:

- (a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are **in need**; and
- (b) so far as is consistent with that duty, to **promote the upbringing of such children by their families**.

Any service provided by an authority in the exercise of these functions may be provided for a **particular child in need** or for any member of his/her family, if it is provided with a view to safeguarding or promoting the child's welfare.

THRESHOLD FOR INVOLVEMENT

- A CHILD IN NEED

The Family Safeguarding team works with families where there is a child or children in need.

A child in need is defined in the Act as one who:

- (a) is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a **reasonable standard of health or development** without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority;
- (b) his/her health or **development** is likely to be **significantly impaired**, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
- (c) s/he is **disabled**.

It can be challenging to differentiate the impact of significant impairment to a child's health and development, from significant harm, particularly in relation to neglect and emotional abuse.

Developing a good **understanding of the difference** gives us our job description for social workers.

UNDERPINNING VALUES

For our values, we looked to the underlying principles of the Act, which are based on:

- working in **partnership with parents**; and
- listening to what **children want to happen** in their families before we provide any services or take any protective measures (s17(4a)).

“An improved understanding of how we use the Children Act 1989 has resulted in improved partnership collaboration across the safeguarding partnership and family led decision making has been safely promoted. This had an immediate impact on our performance data, reducing number of referrals, S47 enquiries and Initial Child Protection Conferences. We have seen a reduction in numbers of children subject to a Child Protection Plan and children subject to a Child in Need Plan.”

DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK,
CHILDREN’S SERVICES, WALSALL COUNCIL



MANAGING RISK BY MEETING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES

The biggest risks to children arise from **parental mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse**. The families we work with also often experience complex, interconnected and at times structural or intergenerational issues like poverty. Just focusing on the child and services for the child does not do much to change the outcomes for children.

Family Safeguarding works to understand families by using a **strengths-based model** of practice - **Motivational Interviewing** - which is simple in concept and does not require years of training to perfect.

By being rooted in the values of the Act, and working to understand families, we come to understand that we cannot 'manage' risks to children by simply creating a checklist of risks and monitoring them. The way to reduce risk is by **meeting the needs of family members**, as required by the Act, and by helping practitioners to develop the skills to **help family members to choose change**.

SHARING RISK IN A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM

Social Workers have for years accepted the responsibility for the 'management of risks' related to substance misuse, domestic abuse or mental health conditions, yet have been taught little about how to help parents to address these, and haven't had easy ways to get help from partner agencies.

As these are issues that **no single profession has the expertise to resolve alone**, Family Safeguarding is delivered through multi-disciplinary teams, with expertise 'under one roof'. This helps us meet our shared aspiration to improve outcomes for children and families, and our duty to keep more children safely within their families.

RESPONDING TO NEED
- HERTS FAMILY SAFEGUARDING



'Building the plane while flying it': Rochdale's Adoption of No Wrong Door

NORTH YORKSHIRE NO WRONG DOOR



Iain Kirkup - Team Manager, No Wrong Door®
Central Delivery Team, North Yorkshire County Council



"A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step."
– Chinese Proverb, Lao Tzu

Rochdale Borough Council took a significant step on its journey to implementing the [No Wrong Door model](#) within their locality by opening their residential Hub 'Our Place' in April 2020.

The timing was less than perfect as the world was engulfed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the country locked down trying to weather the storm of Covid. The Hub didn't have all the components in place, but opening Our Place was the next step on Rochdale's journey, which they have described as 'building the plane while flying it'.

BUILDING THE PLANE

- NO WRONG DOOR

Rochdale could have been forgiven for delaying or re-considering their position on Our Place and consolidating their resources into tried and tested services to support through, what was a very turbulent time.

To their enormous credit they didn't and went ahead with launching and delivering the new service. It was anticipated that it was going to be a difficult journey to bed in the No Wrong Door methodology within 'Our Place', and continue the work of **spreading the ethos and culture** wider across the children's social care system. Their expectations have been realised and the journey of Our Place to date has been anything but smooth,⁷ however the whole service has rolled it's sleeves up and worked together to stay faithful to the No Wrong Door principles.

Given the inherent challenges being faced by Our Place, it is reasonable to ask why Rochdale continued with their plans to roll out the service when they did, instead of battening down the hatches. The answer is simple, but profound, they did it because it's the **right thing to do for the young people of Rochdale**.

Leadership within the Local Authority recognised the positive impact that operating Our Place could have for their young people and never lost sight of who they were doing this for. They were able therefore to set aside the understandable apprehension around launching the service, and backed themselves to deal with any and all challenges that they would face together for the benefit of their young people. Their courage and convictions have been repaid and Our Place, through the herculean efforts of the team, partners and the children's social care system, have made **real and lasting impacts in the lives of young people in their community**.

BUILDING THE PLANE

- NO WRONG DOOR

This has included seeing young people **return home from care with a package of support** and they have been able to bring young people back home to Rochdale from external residential placements. Our Place are also supporting young people to make the **transition to adulthood and independence**.

Our Place is a story of **resilience, courage, teamwork, leadership** and never losing sight of the reason why we do what we do. As the country begins its journey back to normality, Our Place finds itself emerging and becoming stronger by being able to recruit the full staff team and have nearly all aspects of the No Wrong Door model available.

They have been through adversity and are coming out the other end a little bit battered and bruised in places, but with no dampening of spirits or no less commitment to their aims of caring for the young people of Rochdale.

It has been a privilege to have been part of the Our Place journey so far, and there are exciting times ahead as hopefully the road flattens out a bit, there is a fair wind at their backs and the sun shines warmly on their faces.



Summary of Research from What Works for Children's Social Care 2020



As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and associated lockdown, one key challenge for those in leadership roles is how best to support and manage their teams when working remotely.

A review of the evidence identified the following facilitators and barriers:⁸

Five facilitators

Leadership style – leaders need to be flexible, and provide task-oriented and relationship-based support

Communication – must be regular and allow for the sharing of ideas

Team organisation – leaders need to pay special attention to team coordination and set specific goals for team members

Team cohesion – leaders need to be visible to all team members, facilitating (non-mandatory) social as well as work-related activities and focusing on team performance

Goals – leaders need to set clear goals, provide regular feedback and allow more time and flexibility around task completion

Four barriers

Diluted and unequal leadership – the impact of the leader is likely to be diluted and previous work methods may not be as effective

Communication – there will be an absence of opportunities for informal discussions

Team cohesion – conflict or fault-lines between team members may emerge

Team performance – individuals will find it harder to collaborate and overall team performance may be less productive than normal.

Making a Difference: The Impact on Children, Young People and Families

In the end, the best measure of impact is the difference the innovations make for children and families. In this section we hear from families and young people whose lives have been changed by Family Safeguarding or No Wrong Door.

FAMILY SAFEGUARDING:

John has a long term alcohol addiction, has experienced repeated failed reduction attempts and has a second baby on the way. The family has child protection status. These are John's reflections on Family Safeguarding:

JOHN: FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

"It's all different, all the family are open about it (my drinking) ... it's made me feel better cos I haven't got to hide it now... Before I started working with the [Family Safeguarding] team, I'd give myself around about a 3 and now an 8 or 9... I do feel a hell of lot better I really really do. I would give them 10/10... they really pushed me forward. And I have pushed myself forward at the same time cos they let me do it my own way."

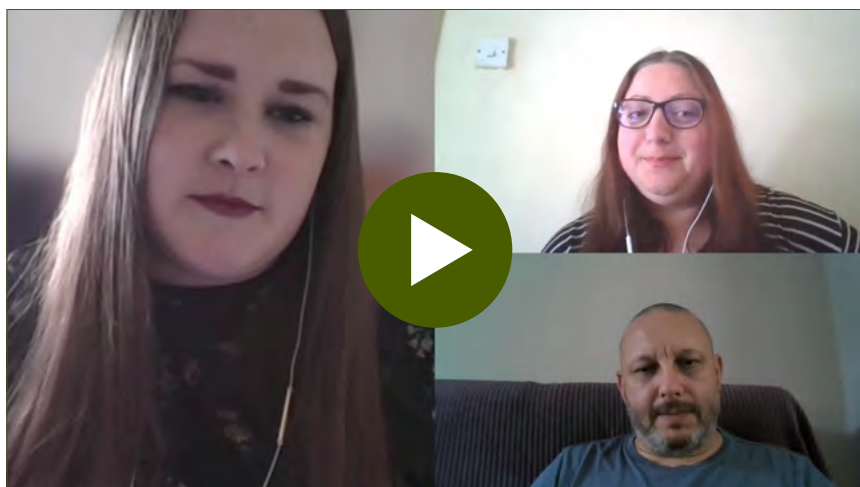
MARY: FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

“All the support – the social worker, the mental health worker and domestic violence worker – all came together. They made their plans and they’ve worked for me. Without the support I’ve had... I wouldn’t have her today. She’s my little miracle. I’d like to thank everyone for what they’ve done. I have a new life and a new beginning. I want to get her into school. Never go into an abusive relationship. Do all the things she needs. I am on cloud nine.”

Mary has had previous children removed. She is in an abusive relationship and using drink and drugs. The family has Public Law Outline status. Family Safeguarding has supported Mary to look after her new baby.

MARY’S SOCIAL WORKER: FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

“We held her and the unborn baby at the focus of all the interventions and made her feel safe. It worked well. Mum was ready to engage. She empowered herself to move on.”



CHARLOTTE, CARE LEAVER: NO WRONG DOOR

“It gives the young person more choice in what they want to do. When I was 16 I wanted to be out living by myself in my own accommodation, whereas some people don’t want that they need the extra support that the NWD does give them. Having the same worker who knows your story, who knows what you want it definitely makes it a lot better.”

WALSALL CASE STUDY

Having gone live with Family Safeguarding on 1 September, Walsall Council held a virtual launch event in October for frontline staff and senior managers. The event focused on the strategic context and practical experiences. It included a panel session with a team manager, social worker and substance misuse worker who discussed a case study of support they had provided to a family via the Family Safeguarding model.

EMMA, CARE LEAVER: NO WRONG DOOR

“Leaving care can be very difficult to meet people in and out. But when you’ve got one person there through the whole time it’s a lot easier; someone to talk to and trust.”⁹



Programme Insights: Adopters' survey

HERTS FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

Alissa Davies - Coach for Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding
Mutual Ventures



CONTINUING TO DELIVER FAMILY SAFEGUARDING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

In this article, Strengthening Families Programme coach Alissa Davies (Mutual Ventures) shares insights gathered via an online survey of local authority teams who have previously adopted Hertfordshire County Council's Family Safeguarding model.

Nationally, Covid-19 has presented a significant challenge to social work. Practice is changing to address the challenge of keeping children safe and helping families make the changes they need to make, while acting in line with Covid-19 guidance and restrictions.

PROGRAMME INSIGHTS

- HERTS FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

Before the pandemic, Hertfordshire County Council's Family Safeguarding model had already been adopted by five local authorities: four via the Department for Education Funded Innovation Programme, and one from Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme (SFPC). The Hertfordshire Team are working alongside local teams and with programme partners to support a further five local authorities as part of the SFPC Programme to implement the model in their area.

Successful adoption of Family Safeguarding changes the way social workers and other professionals work with children, young people and their families. However, none of these changes were designed to operate within Covid-19 restrictions. Implementing Family Safeguarding is complex work, made even more challenging by the pandemic.

76% of social workers surveyed in May 2020 by Community Care rated the impact of pandemic operating conditions on the work of their service at 6 out of 10 or higher.¹⁰ They reported that relationship-based practice had been undermined by a steep reduction in direct contact with people they support, especially where they had not previously worked with that person.

Despite these additional challenges, local authorities have continued to operate the Family Safeguarding model throughout the initial lockdown and with local restrictions, which continue to evolve over time.

In July, the Strengthening Families coaching team surveyed local authority teams to find out what they have been doing and how they have kept going.



THE USE OF DIGITAL

Family visits, usually by social workers, have continued; some virtual and some face-to-face. Staff were given extra training and resources to help them make the most of virtual interactions, including learning how to maintain relationships online. They have found new and creative ways of engaging with children and families.

Working virtually has some advantages:

- Reduced travel time has created more capacity for staff to work with children and families.
- More assessments are being undertaken in a shorter time frame.
- Some older children are engaging more through virtual means like video calls than they did previously with more traditional methods like visits.
- New opportunities for staff to share tools and interventions with their colleagues and to learn from each other.

However, aspects of Family Safeguarding have proven more difficult to deliver. For example, some specialist assessments have not been completed due to ethical and logistical challenges. And it has been hard to start new therapeutic interventions, especially where there is no previous relationship with the child and their family. In some cases, families have needed extra time and support to stay engaged, or have not complied with requirements leading to escalation.

“All the changes made have shown that we can work innovatively and creatively whilst not impacting on the quality of the work with families and children.”

EXISTING FAMILY
SAFEGUARDING ADOPTER

“We have been able to see parents interacting with their children and this has meant that we have more clearly been able to observe aspects of their parenting (and control) that ordinarily we would not necessarily see in the home.”

EXISTING FAMILY
SAFEGUARDING ADOPTER



ONLINE GROUP WORK WITH ADULTS

A key feature of Family Safeguarding is providing support for adults in families to address issues like substance misuse, poor mental health and domestic abuse in a group setting. This has been challenging to deliver with Covid-19 restrictions in place.

Rising levels of domestic abuse, and its impact on children and families, have long been recognised nationally and locally, and the pandemic has only served to make things worse for some families.

In Hertfordshire, a well-established programme of one-to-one support and group work for victims and survivors of domestic abuse has been adapted to be delivered virtually by an experienced team of domestic abuse professionals, who thought creatively about what needed to change.

For example, while usually up to 15 people join the group programme over 12 weeks, the online group is for a maximum of 8 people over 8 weeks, with two groups running at the same time.

Safety is a big concern for the Hertfordshire team and a full risk assessment is done to check each individual is suitable to participate in the online group, taking into account factors like where they are on the cycle of domestic abuse and who lives in the home.

To date the changes have been received positively, with high levels of interest and commitment in the group sessions.

Other local authorities delivering and adopting Family Safeguarding are thinking carefully about how they can adapt group work with adults on substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse for online delivery. They are considering a range of issues, for example:

- Financial and technological barriers to equal access to online sessions.
- Adapting materials and activities so that participants can engage in different ways depending on their needs.
- Identifying when participants need extra support during or beyond virtual sessions to manage loneliness and anxiety.

PROGRAMME INSIGHTS

- HERTS FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

It is clear that Covid-19 will continue to drive changes in social work, at least until a vaccine arrives. We look forward to supporting Hertfordshire and the adopting authorities as they continue to deliver and implement Family Safeguarding, balancing fidelity to the model with meeting their local challenges in the context of Covid.

The survey questions we asked adopters

1. What impact has the Covid-19 pandemic had on the way you deliver Family Safeguarding and work with children and their families?
2. Which aspects of Family Safeguarding have you been able to keep the same (as before Covid-19 pandemic) and why?
3. Which parts of Family Safeguarding have you needed to deliver differently (e.g. online, in person with personal protective equipment), how and why?
4. What emerging evidence is there of the impact of delivering parts of Family Safeguarding differently on outcomes for children and families?
5. How have you delivered group work for adults during the pandemic? If you have been able to deliver group work during the pandemic (e.g. online), please provide details of what worked best and what surprised you the most. If you are currently planning to reintroduce group work, please provide details of the approach you are planning to take.
6. Are there any changes you have made during the pandemic that you are considering reintroducing in the event of a second spike in the Autumn, or keeping for the long-term? Please provide details of your thinking.
7. Are there any differences between local authority and partner agencies in terms of their capacity to deliver differently (e.g. access to technology, access to PPE, ability to enter people's homes)? Please provide details of how you are managing differences between organisations, particularly as they 'reset' services in response to the lifting of restrictions.

Endnotes

- ¹ Department for Education (2017). Family Safeguarding Hertfordshire: Evaluation Report. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-safeguarding-hertfordshire-an-evaluation>
- ² Department for Education (2017). Leeds Family Valued: Evaluation report. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leeds-family-valued-programme>
- ³ Department for Education (2017). Evaluation of the No Wrong Door Innovation Programme: Research Report. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/625366/Evaluation_of_the_No_Wrong_Door_Innovation_Programme.pdf
- ⁴ Wilson, K., Ruch, G., Lynvery, M., Cooper, A. (2018). *Social Work an Introduction to Contemporary Practice*. Pearson Education.
- ⁵ What Works for Children's Social Care (2020). Rapid Review: Home Visits and Remote Social Work. Available at: https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC_Rapid_Review_Home_Visits_and_Remote_Social_Work_June_2020.pdf
- ⁶ SCIE (2020). Matching interventions and people: A decision-making tool to establish the best means of working with people. Available at: <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-Covid-19/social-workers/matching-interventions-with-people>
- ⁷ Martin, J., McBride, T., Masterman, T., Oprea, E., Sorgenfrei, M. (2020). Covid-19 and early intervention: Evidence, challenges and risks relating to virtual and digital delivery. Early Intervention Foundation. Available at: <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/covid-19-and-early-intervention-evidence-challenges-and-risks-relating-to-virtual-and-digital-delivery>
- ⁸ Wilkins, D., Thompson, S., Bezecsky, Z. (2020). Child and Family Social Work During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Rapid Review of The Evidence In Relation To Remote Leadership. What Works For Children's Social Care. Available at: https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC_Rapid_Review_Remote_Leadership_June_2020.pdf
- ⁹ North Yorkshire County Council (2015). No Wrong Door - Young People & Families. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm1OR-N8AITA&ab_channel=NorthYorkshireCountyCouncil
- ¹⁰ Community Care (2020). Most social workers say Covid-19 has negatively hit their work and the lives of those they support. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2020/05/28/social-workers-say-coronavirus-negatively-affected-services-people-they-support/>



The Department for Education (DfE) are overseeing and funding the Strengthening Families programme. The DfE are working closely with each of the Innovator authorities to support them.

Our role:

The DfE has commissioned a support partner for the programme - a partnership between Mutual Ventures, Innovation Unit and SCIE. This support will focus on providing coaching to the local authorities leading the innovations ('the Innovators') and those adopting the innovations ('the Adopters'), technical support and a learning programme.



MV are a specialist advisory firm working exclusively in the public sector to implement national policy programmes across devolved government. MV bring expertise in areas such as:

- Strategic planning
- Organisational design
- Change management
- Financial modelling
- Programme implementation



IU are innovation specialists - supporting the design and delivery of public services innovation in the UK and internationally. They bring expertise in:

- Design of innovation
- Scaling innovation in children's services, health, mental health
- System wide change
- Leadership development
- Learning design and delivery



SCIE is an innovative, not-for-profit organisation committed to improving thinking and practice in social care. SCIE:

- Has extensive reach and engagement with the sector
- Provides learning design and delivery
- Researches, produces and shares evidence
- Supports and scales changes in leadership and practice



The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme is being evaluated by What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC). WWCSC seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the children's social care sector.