

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 (SCIE) - partners in the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme - would like to thank the innovators, adopters and What Works in Children's Social Care (WWCSC) for their excellent contributions to this edition of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Learning Journal.



Department for Education



Foreword

DAWN TAYLOR

Deputy Director for Innovation, Learning and Digital

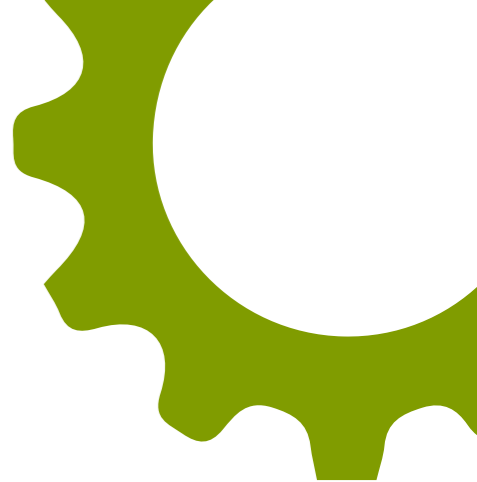
Hello again. Before writing this introduction I looked back to see what I had written previously. My last (and first) introduction was written not long after I took on responsibility for the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme. While then I was a newcomer, a year later I feel like an old hand. I have learned so much more about the three different models, and everything I've learned has impressed me.

You might think my job begins and ends with agreeing what money goes out to the LAs on the programme, perhaps looking occasionally at reports about how they're spending or clearing proposals from new LAs joining the programme. (Or you might not have thought even that far – I wouldn't blame you.) But beyond these basics I am always really interested in the detail, in hearing about what is happening on the ground, and understanding the impact of the fantastic work you are doing on children's lives.

You can imagine therefore how much I have loved reading this Journal – and I know you will too. It is stuffed full of fabulous examples and it's invidious to pick out favourites. But I was particularly struck by the tips from parents from the Lancashire Family Safeguarding team, and Shirley's story from Norfolk's No Wrong Door.

There is also a reminder of some of the key learning points from September's learning event. That was a highlight of the year for me. I was particularly thrilled by how many colleagues I heard saying that they were excited by their work. That sense of energy, enthusiasm and commitment was palpable even over zoom.

So my job is also to communicate that to my colleagues back at the Department for Education. To make sure everyone knows about the great work you are doing. And to understand how much we are already learning about the impact of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme on the lives of the most vulnerable children. Do keep sharing with us!



Welcome

This is the third issue of the Strengthening Families Learning Journal – the regular publication dedicated to capturing learning from the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) Programme.

The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme is a five-year Department for Education programme supporting 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 models.

The Strengthening Families Learning Journal features learning and case studies from both Innovators and Adopters. The Journal captures the latest insight coming from the three models on the programme: Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding; Leeds' Family Valued, and North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door.

The theme of this issue is 'Working with families to protect children'. It explores related topics such as: providing support for the whole family as a way of supporting the child; and the importance of the language used when engaging with families and how it can be a tool in developing and strengthening relationships with those families to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

The Journal also provides insight into early emerging data showing the impact of these models on the adopter local authorities, as well as some key insights from the September 2021 Strengthening Families event.

As always, we appreciate any feedback you may have on the Journal and suggestions for content in future issues. A link to a feedback survey can be found [here](#). You can also find all previous issues of the Learning Journal and the Newsletter on our [website](#).

We hope you enjoy this issue of the Strengthening Families Learning Journal.



How Family Valued has helped us reshape practice around families

DARLINGTON FAMILY VALUED



James Stroyan - Director of Children's Services
Leeds Children and Family Services



In this article James explains what a greater focus on working with family has meant for the way social work is delivered in Darlington.

HOW FAMILY VALUED HAS HELPED US RESHAPE PRACTICE AROUND FAMILIES

Since becoming a Strengthening Families 'trailblazer', our relationships with families have moved from an important part of what we do to the very centre of all our work in children's services.

Leeds' Family Valued approach has given our leaders, managers and practitioners the permission to think differently, and the courage to put families in the driving seat. Through its central focus on relationships, Family Valued has allowed staff more time to reflect and talk to each other and families. There has been a shift from 'doing to' to 'working with' families and giving families real ownership over their plans.

NEW TOOLS AND METHODS

We use a range of new tools and approaches to embed our work with families. Perhaps most prominent is Family Group Conferences, in which families come together, supported by an independent facilitator, to make a plan for a child, which they can 'own'. We also use solution circles and formulation circles, where groups of professionals work together to reflect on a family, challenge each other's thinking and jointly identify the right solution.

RELATIONAL LANGUAGE

There has been a huge change in the language we use, and we are very conscious of how important this is to our engagement with families.

We no longer describe our work in terms of 'cases' – they are 'children' and 'families'.

Rather than describing someone as a 'bad mum,' we contextualise and humanise, using language that explains the circumstances. This shift has helped staff to reframe their thinking and put the family at the centre of their solutions, rather than as a problem to be solved.

HOW OUR APPROACH TO RISK HAS CHANGED

Understanding and managing risk will always be critical for protecting children, but we don't want our practice to be entirely risk-driven. Family Valued has helped us to move away from linear thinking and relying on thresholds to make decisions, and look instead at what works for the family and child. Where possible, we now discuss risk with families so that we can work together on solutions. For example, our social workers are now building better relationships with extended families, such as grandparents, aunties and uncles, friends and neighbours, thereby providing the chance for a whole-family solution to issues.



Through these changes and others, Darlington children's services is in a different place from where it was two years ago. Reflecting on our experience, it is hard to think about what we did before as much of what we have learnt has become second nature.

We can now proudly say that families are at the centre of our practice and the changes have become an indelible part of our culture in Darlington.

To learn more about the implementation of Family Valued, Darlington Borough Council has shared its experience in a report and series of video resources on the SFPC website <https://www.scie.org.uk/strengthening-families/leeds-family-valued/darlington>

Darlington

39%

reduction in the rate of entries to care between November 2019 and September 2021.

16%

reduction in the average number of children on Child Protection Plans between November 2019 and September 2021.

8.5%

reduction in looked after children, which has stabilised the LA's budget situation.



Families with problems, not problem families – the language and behaviours of Family Safeguarding

HERTFORDSHIRE FAMILY SAFEGUARDING



Angela Clarke - Deputy Programme Director,
The Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice
Hertfordshire County Council



In this article, Angela explains how important language can be in working with families, and outlines how inclusive language can bring about change.

FAMILIES WITH PROBLEMS, NOT PROBLEM FAMILIES – THE LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOURS OF FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

There is a huge amount of learning that flows from being involved in developing innovative, whole system change like Family Safeguarding. As the model is implemented in more and more areas (16 and counting), we in the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice gain greater insights into what works - this helps enhance our approach and we can share this rich learning with others.

OUR APPROACH TO FAMILIES

A core element of Family Safeguarding is changing the way that we work **with** families – moving away from telling parents what they must do and threatening to “escalate” if they don’t do what we say, towards a more collaborative, ethical approach that motivates people to make changes for themselves and their family. We have learnt that the language and behaviours we use as practitioners, leaders, organisations, and systems are integral to whether we are going to make a positive difference for families and, crucially, whether they want to accept our offers of help.

Therefore, in the early stages of our team’s involvement in implementing the model with a local authority, we take people back to the principles and language of the Children Act 1989. It’s surprising to find out how many experienced practitioners and leaders believe that Section 47 refers to children who are at risk of significant harm, rather than knowing that the legislation describes children that are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm. That small word, risk, has become an integrated part of the child protection lexicon, and yet in Family Safeguarding, we think that using it simplistically (as is often the case) does not support practitioners and decision-makers to understand whether a child is likely to be harmed in their family, or not. We think it’s more useful to consider and analyse the *likelihood* of harm rather than *risk*.

OUR VISION

Some of the fundamental values underpinning Family Safeguarding are that we should show care, respect, uphold family rights, and empathise with parents, even when we might disapprove of some of their actions or behaviour, or when we have doubts about whether what we're being told is the truth.

Learning Motivational Interviewing techniques supports practitioners to have open and respectful conversations, including by becoming skilled at techniques like 'developing discrepancy' and 'rolling with resistance'. Sadly, there are a small minority of adults who are prepared to inflict harm and cruelty on children. A Family Safeguarding approach aims to identify these people through a multi-disciplinary team of specialist professionals that take decisive action where this is needed. However, we must not allow our fear of the consequences of getting things wrong to shake our belief that almost all families can be supported to meet their children's needs with the right kind of help.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Key to successfully engaging families and working in collaboration with them is that the language we use is inclusive, everyday language rather than professional words and concepts that may intimidate, exclude, and make it less likely that families will know what is being asked of them.

As professionals who want to help families, we must consistently hold ourselves to account and check that our language and behaviours reflect the values that are important to us.

The great feedback we have seen from families in Family Safeguarding adopter authorities shows that when we get this right it can be truly transformational.

Some of the fundamental values underpinning Family Safeguarding are that we should show care, respect, uphold family rights, and empathise with parents.

“Rosie has made me feel a lot less worried about social services. I do still worry but I know that she is able to bring people helping together. She asks them things like what are you doing and what can you do to help, like with mental health services. She is really nice and she acts like she really does actually care.”

FEEDBACK FROM A PARENT IN LANCASHIRE





‘Being Family Safeguarding’ Lancashire Family Safeguarding: working with and alongside families

LANCASHIRE FAMILY SAFEGUARDING



Mandy Williams - Head of Lancashire
Family Safeguarding



Mandy highlights the positive impact Family Safeguarding is having on families in Lancashire, with some practical examples and real world feedback from families.

‘BEING FAMILY SAFEGUARDING’ LANCASHIRE FAMILY SAFEGUARDING: WORKING WITH AND ALONGSIDE FAMILIES

I am privileged to be the Head of Family Safeguarding at Lancashire County Council. I get to see first-hand the difference that Family Safeguarding is making for our families. We have really embraced the changes because they demonstrate our social work values in practice. We see that working in a strengths-based way, using motivational interviewing, and working in multi-disciplinary team is helping parents to change for themselves, so that children can safely remain within their families.

When we began planning for the implementation of Family Safeguarding we thought about what working with and alongside families really meant - How can children, young people, parents, and their wider family shape and influence the service they receive?

OUR APPROACH AND STRATEGY

We devised a strategy that would help drive the work, which was overseen by the Family Safeguarding Participation Engagement and Co-production Group. This is made up of people with shared values who really understand participation and have the drive, energy and commitment to put things into practice. We identified six pillars which underpin our work.

- 1 All family meetings are strength based with children increasingly attending or being represented in them
- 2 Children and young people can readily access support from their Social Worker using technology
- 3 Children and young people's voice/views are visible and meaningfully recorded and responded to
- 4 Quality assurance processes to ensure that children and families are at the heart of everything we do
- 5 Children and families are involved in the shaping and development of services
- 6 Children, Parents/Carers involved in the recruitment process of staff

Our first focus was recruitment. We ensured that children and young people were part of all our recruitment for social worker staff. People with lived experience supported our recruitment of 'adult' workers, either by being part of the recruitment panel, or by setting questions and scenarios.

Next, we set up a parents' forum to feedback to us about their direct experience of Family Safeguarding implementation and to advise us. They have advised us on the development of a template for core groups and CiN reviews and challenged us to think about our process for moving children from care to home. Our parents have given us 'tips from parents', and we have shared this with our staff and partners.

We ensured that our new strength-based Child Protection Conferences were developed with parents and children, as well as partners, really thinking about how it felt to attend, and real ways we could make the meetings better for families. Parents tell us that they now can feel the difference, they feel more valued and heard.

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

In Lancashire, we use an app called 'Mind of My Own' which allows children and young people to communicate with their social worker, and helps them to prepare for meetings, it also has a safety feature that can be used to raise concerns if children do not feel safe. We use a tool called 'shout' to ask questions about children and young people's experience of child protection conferences.

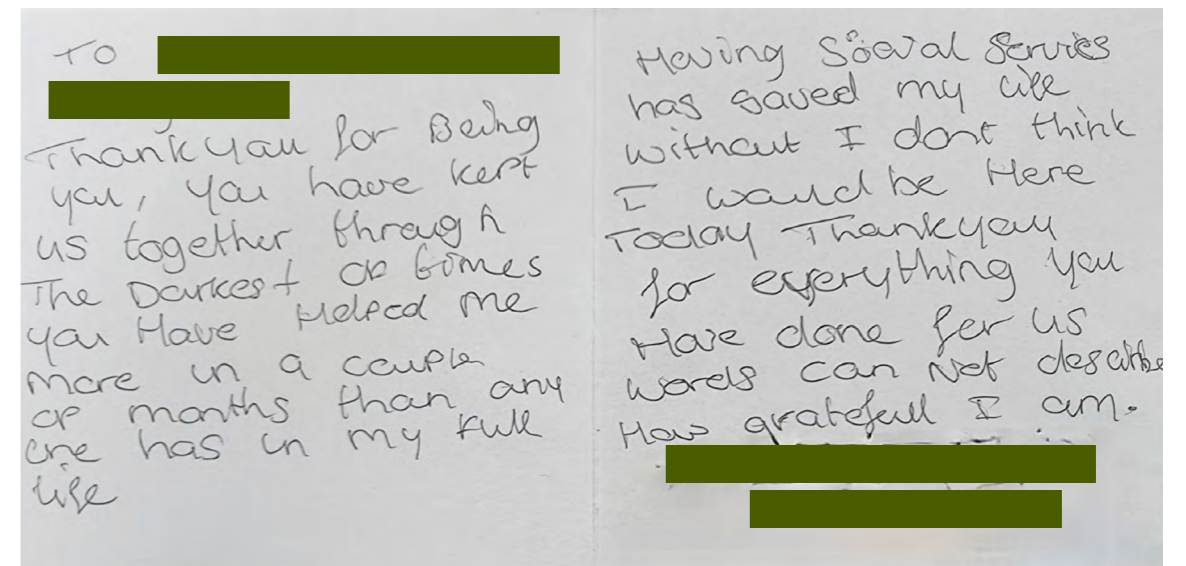
We have developed and collected direct work tools so that the voice of children and young people is heard and shapes their assessment and plans, and we have three children and young people family safeguarding groups who shape the wider service and have fun as well. It is good to have groups of children who are children in need or subject to a child protection plan in these groups.

What does all this mean for Lancashire families? Our parents group tell us about the positive changes that have taken place since we introduced Family Safeguarding. They tell us they:

- *Feel listened to*
- *Are treated as equals*
- *Are getting the right support when they need it*
- *Feel respected*
- *Want to work with services*

Every week we receive positive feedback from parents, children, IRO's, the courts and professionals. It demonstrates what we are trying to achieve in Family Safeguarding and how strength-based practice working with and alongside parents, building relationships rather than doing things to them really feels different and better for families. Our whole approach is Family Safeguarding' I call it – being Family Safeguarding.

The outcomes and impact of Family Safeguarding for families in Lancashire so far has been amazing, more children are at home with their families and fewer children have come into care. Best of all, Lancashire families have felt listened to, respected and valued.





Tips from Parents

- 1 Be a Normal Human Being! Show care, concern and congratulate people when good things happen, like new babies!
- 2 Listen to both sides and don't always accept professionals' reports as gospel truth, there are always two sides and record both sides each time including both parents' views.
- 3 Don't spring things on people. Explain what is going to happen at meetings, what the meetings are for, and give people time and space to ask questions.
- 4 Ask people who can't read or write if they would like reports reading out to them and/or explained. Don't leave it up to lawyers or that person's partner. Stand up for your work and have the courtesy to go through it face to face.
- 5 When you are visiting, make sure that the person feels like there is no time limit and have a bit of normal person conversation with them.
- 6 Don't judge us as people but you can call us out on our behaviour.

I have to say this in a text message because I'll probably start crying if I say it to your face 😭 but thank you so much for everything you have done for me and [redacted] we both truly appreciate every last thing you have done and sticking your neck on the line for us and trusting and believing in us ❤️ You are an amazing social worker and I'm sure you're an amazing mum and friend ❤️ people are very lucky to have you as their social worker and to have someone like you help them and understand. Thank you so much ❤️

Since February 2021, Lancashire have reported:

<p>134</p> <p>fewer children in care (all ages)</p>	<p>621 to 458</p> <p>Reduction in number of CPPs</p>	<p>Significant cost avoided</p> <p>as a result of these reductions</p>
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"Family Safeguarding to me is the best thing that has happened to Lancashire. We're achieving better outcomes for families, children and young people than we ever have done before, and it is so rewarding! This way of working is why I wanted to become a social worker to help support families and keep them together."

FRONT LINE STAFF MEMBER

SEPTEMBER 2021 EVENT

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION THEMES

In September 2021, leaders and practitioners from authorities across the three SFPC models came together for a week of learning conversations under the title “Balancing protecting children with support for families”. Attendees deepened their knowledge of the fundamental values and features of the SFPC models, and shared learning on the event topic based on their experience of working with the models. Here we aim to give you an overview of some of the key themes discussed.

3 IMPORTANT MODELS OF PRACTICE



Family Safeguarding is a whole family, strengths-based approach to child protection.



Family Valued is an approach that seeks to promote relational (restorative) practice underpinned by the principle of working with children and families, rather than doing things to or for them.



No Wrong Door is an integrated service and approach to supporting adolescents in or on the edge of care.

REUNDERSTANDING FAMILIES

FOCUSING ON STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

Taking time to listen and understand parents' and young peoples' strengths.

Using methods such as Motivational Interviewing (used in Family Safeguarding).

Understanding and appreciating the importance of family.



SHOWING LOVE AND RESPECT

Relationships as key to healing - “the most powerful therapy is human love”

Reframing social worker interactions with families as a two-way relationship, based on respect.



UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT AND EXPERIENCE

The models all involve frontline staff taking time to listen and get to know each families' unique context and experiences.

The pressure on families living in poverty is at times unmanageable, and can have an impact on health, employment, mental health and education.

Understanding that family may look different for a child in care, and that they still deserve to be connected to a network that loves and supports them.



WORKING TOGETHER

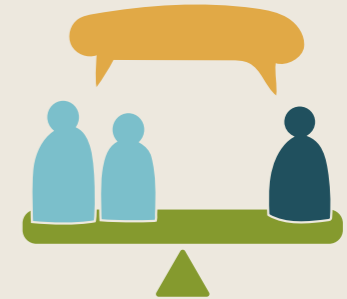
DONE WITH AND NOT TO

No Wrong Door involves listening to what the child is trying to say, rather than seeing them as a problem to fix, and families and young people are included as active partners.

Family Safeguarding offers help and support rather than intervention. Support and respect enables parents to develop towards goals they identify.

Family Valued gives families both support and agency, and Family Group Conferencing (FGCs) are family led.

The importance of language. Thinking carefully about how we talk about families and about practice as this has an impact on the relationship between the social worker and the family.



SUPPORTING AND LEADING RELATIONAL AND RESTORATIVE CULTURE AND PRACTICE

Leaders have a role in modelling a relational approach, curiosity and using language based on understanding and meeting needs, rather than blame.

It is important to ensure time is given for everyone to 'retrain' how they see and work with families. The social care

system is not static and knowledge and skills must be updated.

Creating shared language, values, vision and outcomes across partners helps to create conditions for success.



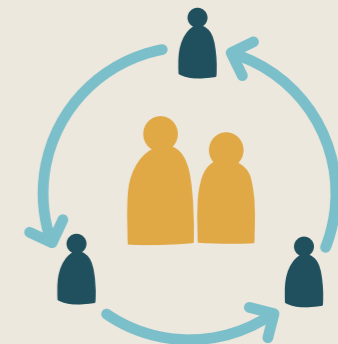
PARTNERSHIP

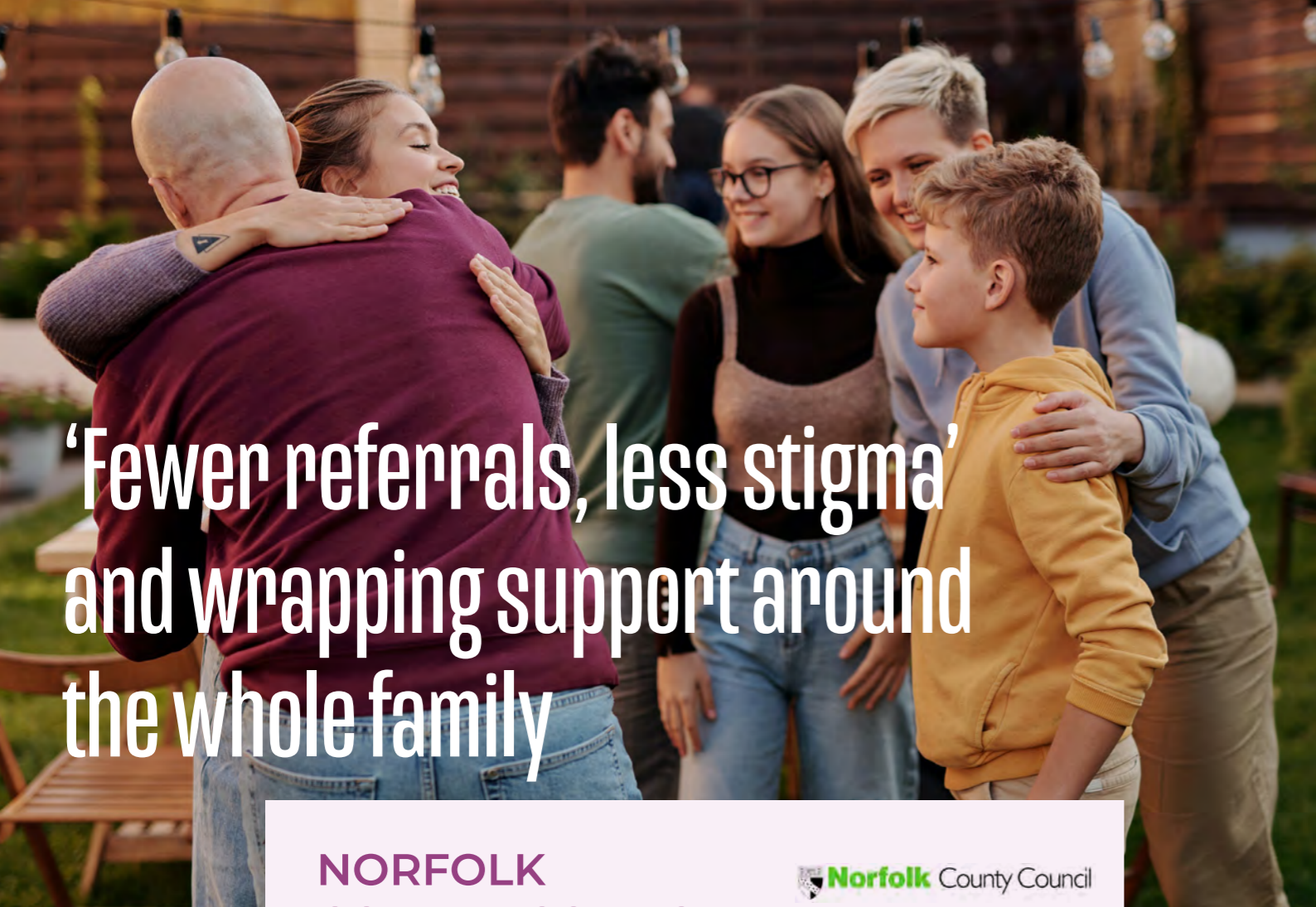
Working in multi-disciplinary teams and pooling practice and insight across the team helps to understand and meet the different needs families may have.

The importance of working closely with partners and also elected members to ensure that every child and family receives a high standard of support.

Partners work together to share responsibility for supporting a child and their family, rather than seeking to simply reduce risk for themselves.

Social work is really about relationships, with children and their families, and also colleagues from all professional backgrounds- health, education etc. These interrelated relationships are essential to successful outcomes.





'Fewer referrals, less stigma' and wrapping support around the whole family

NORFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL



Emma Elsmere - Hub Manager at Norfolk New Roads



In this article, Emma tells Shirley's story. The New Roads team in Norfolk have been working with Shirley and her family since opening their doors in June 2021.

'FEWER REFERRALS, LESS STIGMA' AND WRAPPING SUPPORT AROUND THE WHOLE FAMILY

WHAT IS NO WRONG DOOR? A REMINDER

The NWD team includes several specialist embedded roles such as a Life Coach (Clinical Psychologist), Communication Support Worker (Speech and Language Therapist) and a Police Liaison role (Police Officer or Civilian Police Staff). Together they significantly widen the depth and breadth of expertise within the team. This allows us to better understand families within their context, creating a dynamic, bespoke and relational response to support them. The family do not have to tell their story repeatedly and do not require multiple referrals or multiple subsequent assessments to get the services and support they need. The importance of this was demonstrated recently in Norfolk.

The NWD innovation in Norfolk, which is called New Roads, opened its doors officially in June 2021. Shirley (anonymised name) and her family were one of the first families to receive the support of the new service.



Shirley's story

Things were difficult for everyone at home where Shirley was deemed to be on the 'edge of care' without support. A key worker from New Roads contacted the family and offered support to them, to help them to remain together as a family.

Over several months, the key worker consistently supported the family and was able to develop relationships with them and things initially began to settle. However, there was a significant incident within the home that resulted in Shirley needing to be cared for by the local authority. As New Roads had an existing relationship with Shirley it was felt better for her to spend some time in one of Norfolk's two residential hubs, with a plan of continuing to support the family to come back safely together.

The incident within the home had impacted the trust and relationships between Shirley, her Mother and her Stepfather. This was compounded by a lot of hurt, anger and trauma for everyone involved in her entering care - these feelings were recognised within the New Roads team. To empower and support them to reunite, it was clear that there needed to be a concerted effort to wrap around this family, creating an environment where relationships could be restored and the necessary healing could take place.

THE ROLE OF THE NEW ROADS HUB IN WORKING WITH THE FAMILY

Alongside the existing relationship of the keyworker, support was offered to the family by the New Roads Life Coach and Communication Support Worker. From the significant incident, there was also some outstanding Police involvement.

Through working 'with' the family, the Police Liaison role within the hub was able to work with the local constabulary to explain the restorative support and the ongoing shared, agreed family plan. This was more easily understood as it came from a Police role, giving the local officers confidence in what was being proposed for the family. This resulted in everyone agreeing that there could be an end to Police involvement.

It was clear that the family all loved each other and wanted to be together but found it difficult to manage their relationships. Somewhere along the line, they had forgotten how to communicate with each other or really listen to what each other was saying.

REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Shirley had also been estranged from her Father and now wanted to re-establish a relationship with him. Because of the trusted relationship that had been built with the team at New Roads, they were able to reach out to him and help both Father and Shirley begin to rebuild their relationship.

It was essential for healing and the reparation of relationships for the family to come together safely, to start to openly discuss their lives together and own a shared plan as to how to move forward.

'FEWER REFERRALS, LESS STIGMA' AND WRAPPING SUPPORT AROUND THE WHOLE FAMILY

Alongside the Social Worker, the New Roads team used their collective experiences of the family and their specialist expertise to establish what a safe, inclusive and healing environment would look like for this family. They were able to support each member of the family to come into this space, gather together and start to talk with each other again – as a family.

At the heart was Shirley telling her side of the story, feeling listened to and loved by her family, something that she felt had not happened for a long time.

THE OUTCOMES

Despite each family member at times finding it difficult talking to each other, they were able to 'see' each other again and look towards the future. They made their plan as to how Shirley could come back into their family and all were truly involved in thinking about what support they might need to make this happen. This was put in place.

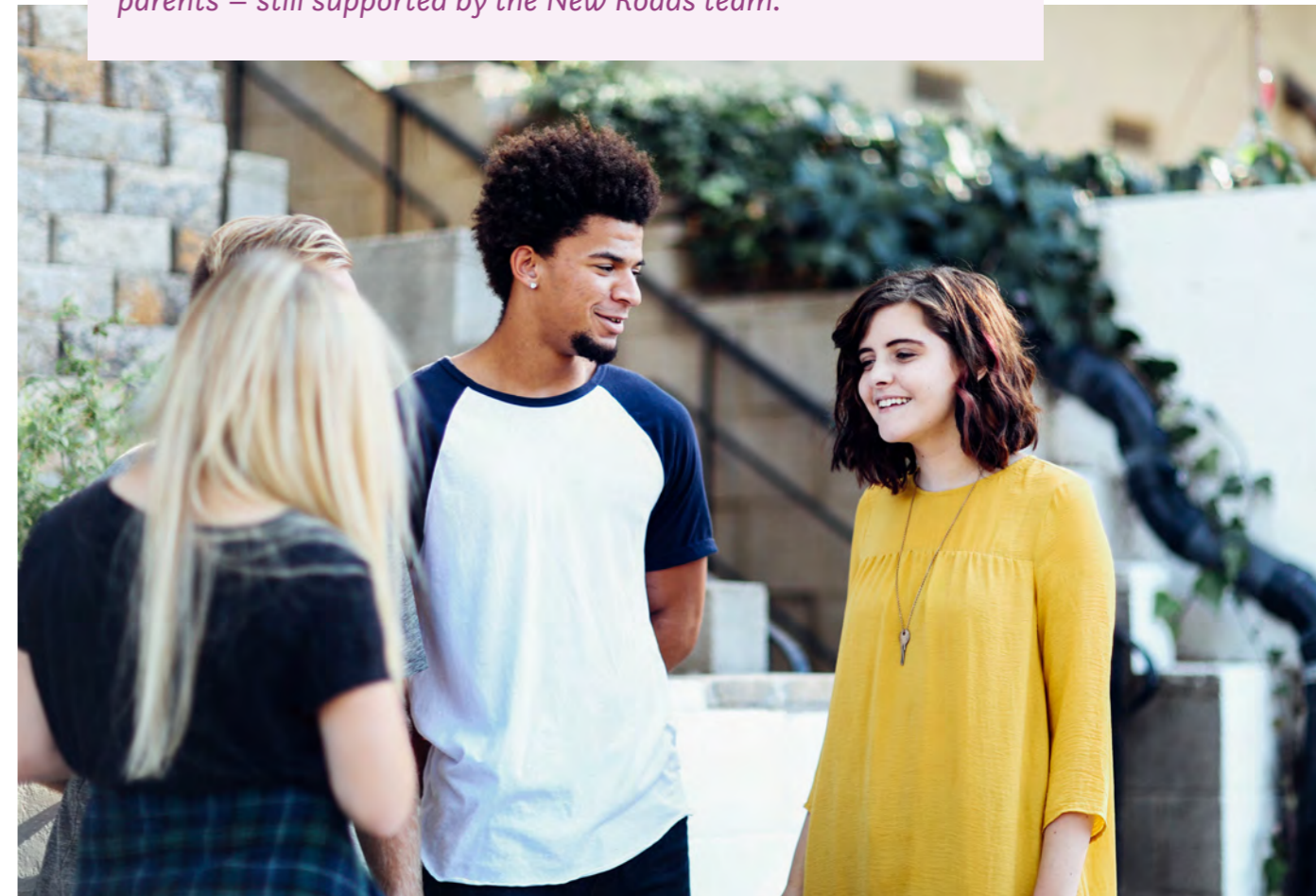
Because of the relational, strengths-based and restorative approach of the New Roads team, the family felt confident and comfortable in asking for some ongoing support.

The family had been hurting from Shirley having to leave and at times they had wanted to give up on each other. However, from the trusted relationships built within the New Roads approach the family could explore that they didn't want to be apart and in fact, it had been their collective trauma talking for them.

'FEWER REFERRALS, LESS STIGMA' AND WRAPPING SUPPORT AROUND THE WHOLE FAMILY

The New Roads team alongside Shirley's social worker, worked closely together in empowering the family with consistent messages of encouragement and support. This helped them to hold on through the difficult times, not lose sight of their family and not give up on each other.

Shirley went home and spends time living with both of her parents – still supported by the New Roads team.





Family Safeguarding - Interprofessional Working

MUTUAL VENTURES



David Goosey, qualified social worker and Mutual Ventures coach to the Family Safeguarding team



David draws on his experience working with the Hertfordshire Family Safeguarding team to talk through how interprofessional teams can best work together to help children and their families.

PROFESSIONALS WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT CHILDREN

The Family Safeguarding model requires different professions to work together. What does it mean to work in a multi-professional team? What are the implications for the way you do your work if you work alongside people from other professions? What are the implications for your professional identity that emerge from engaging with 'others'? When does a multi-professional team become an interprofessional team? Is it possible to have an interprofessional identity? These questions may arise when we are required to work with other professions. Although perhaps the question about identity is a little more difficult to contemplate since, for most of us, our identities are concealed by unconscious assumptions about who we are and the world around us. In other words, we don't tend to think about identity until we are challenged in some way about who we think we are.

The bureaucratic mandate for different professions to work together has never been enough, particularly in the context of safeguarding children. If interprofessional working is to be successful, exploring what makes it successful in a safeguarding context is important.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- » **The first key** to success is being able to define a common purpose for the team. In a Family Safeguarding context that would mean addressing the needs of children and young people where there is a probability that they will be significantly harmed.
- » **The second key** to success is recognizing and retaining the differences in roles for each member of the team. Whilst there is a common purpose, the roles of team members are different since the common purpose requires different types of contribution.
- » **The third key** is to find a way to enable those differences to flourish and be useful for the common purpose.

THE THEORY

Using concepts and ideas from Anne Edwards¹ and from systemic practice, one approach would be to think about an interprofessional identity which consists of a specific way of thinking about yourself in the role you have and the roles of other people in the team. Edwards refers to 'expanding the object of activity' by exploring the motives, statements of purpose, resources and values of each member of the team. That means explicitly 'recognising that another person may be a resource and that work needs to be done to elicit, recognise and negotiate the use of that resource to **align oneself in joint action**'.

Enquiring another professional's view about a family is easy when there is general agreement. Doing so when you suspect the other professional's view is opposed to your own is more difficult but that is what an interprofessional mindset requires.

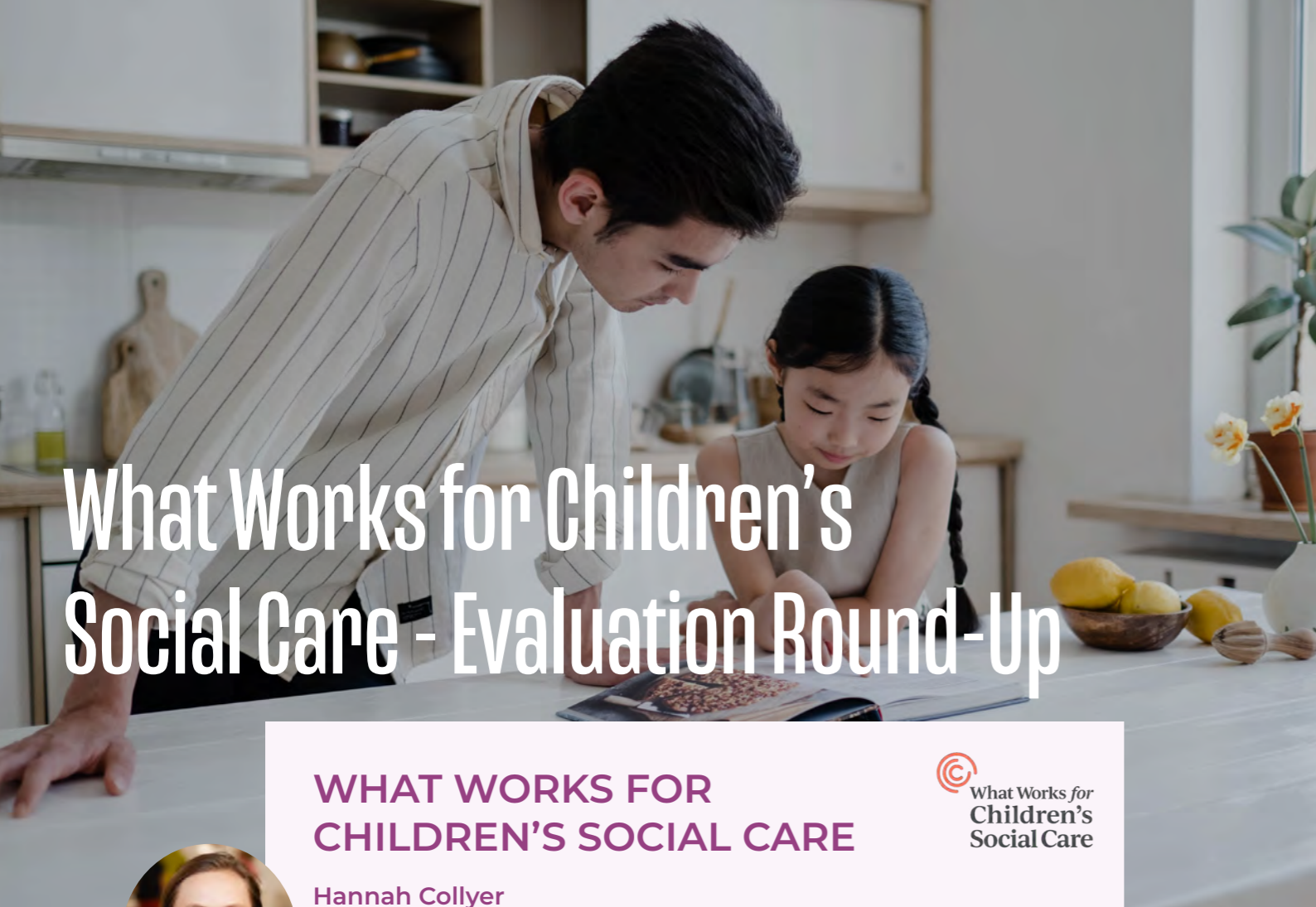
Safeguarding often provides situations where there are competing views about what should be done. By developing an interprofessional identity the specific desire to explore professional differences to expand understanding is what creates the potential for success and marks the shift from being multi-professional to being interprofessional.

¹ Edwards, A. (2005) *Relational agency: Learning to be a resourceful practitioner*. International Journal of Educational Research 43, 168-182

HOW THIS IMPACTS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

An interprofessional mindset is promoted when different professionals retain curiosity about a child and their family and all the different perspectives which might be expressed concerning them. In addition, a deep self-awareness of the impact of one's behaviour and language is also valuable since this allows the professional to alter their stance towards the 'other' in more useful ways than a fixed professional identity would suggest. This has been demonstrated in the Family Safeguarding model by the introduction of motivational interviewing which has shifted the behaviour and attitudes of social workers to take up a different stance with parents that is experienced by them as more helpful.





What Works for Children's Social Care - Evaluation Round-Up

WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE



Hannah Collyer



Discover how the findings from the Pilot Evaluation of No Wrong Door in Middlesbrough can help other local authorities during their implementation of the approach.

WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE - EVALUATION ROUND-UP

What Works for Children's Social Care published their No Wrong Door Pilot Evaluation report in November 2021. The report looks at how No Wrong Door was implemented in Middlesbrough as part of the Department for Education's Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme (SFPC), and provides recommendations for other local authorities implementing No Wrong Door.

No Wrong Door is known as Futures for Families (FFF) in Middlesbrough and is one of three models being evaluated through SFPC. Pilot evaluations for [Family Valued](#) and [Family Safeguarding](#) are also available on the WWCS website.

The purpose of the pilot evaluation was to provide key insights into the early roll-out of the approach and to support subsequent local authorities who are embarking on their own No Wrong Door journey. The report also informs the next stage of the evaluation - the final report, due in 2026, will examine the impact of No Wrong Door on the likelihood of children being looked after, as well as a number of other outcomes.

The recently published pilot report considers what worked well in Middlesbrough, as well as ways in which delivery could be improved.

WHAT WORKED WELL IN WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND NETWORKS TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

LISTENING TO THE YOUNG PERSON'S VOICE AND UNDERSTANDING NEED

Listening to the young person's voice, using referrals, deep dives and working closely with families to understand their specific needs, was reported as a key component of using No Wrong Door. Working with specialist roles such as the life coach, or their key worker, also seems to have been a positive experience for young people. Young people also valued the responsive nature of the support provided.

FAMILY NETWORKS

Many of the key principles of No Wrong Door highlight the importance of families and networks. Some family members shared that they had strong relationships with FFF staff and reported the benefits of experiencing intensive and flexible support. Staff were reported to work hard to build relationships with families. As well as this, activities, such as being able to take young people out, appear to have been a key part of relationship building. Family members describe support from FFF as addressing needs that had been left unmet for years.

Some recommendations for new areas introducing No Wrong Door are:

- Ensure you have enough staffing capacity to meet the needs of young people who are in NWD placements, as well as those who require outreach support. This should include sufficient capacity for foster care placements for teenagers which can be a particular challenge to recruit
- Provide clear guidance on using the model in conjunction with any existing practice models
- Ensure there is comprehensive training and guidance for referring practitioners and multi-agency partners to support referrals, partnership working and wider practice in children's social care
- Provide regular opportunities for the No Wrong Door multidisciplinary team to revisit the No Wrong Door principles (these are the Non-Negotiables, Distinguishers, and Provocations). More about what these are is included in our report.

There are many more areas to consider in the full report which you can read on the [What Works for Children's Social Care website](#).

In this short video, Hannah Collyer, the researcher leading the WWCSC evaluation, and Nimal Jude, Head of Practice Development at WWCSC discuss some of the key findings and recommendations.



Warwickshire County Council's Journey of Change

WARWICKSHIRE FAMILY VALUED



John Coleman - Children and Families Assistant Director



Read about Warwickshire County Council's ambitious plan, inspired by their adoption of Leeds Family Valued and supported by the Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, to embed new practices across children's services – and to make a real difference to the lives of young people.

Someone once said that one of the luckiest things that can happen to you in life is to have a happy childhood. It's not always a simple hope and one that can be complicated by the many unexpected challenges that children and families face. At Warwickshire's Children and Families service, we have begun a journey of change in the way we work as part of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme to ensure this county can be the best place in which to grow up.

We are working with communities, partners, families, children, and young people to make this happen. Fundamental to this change is relationships – from our key relationship with children and families to those between social work colleagues and colleagues from other organisations. This includes health, education, or any organisation which might touch the lives of children and families. These interrelated relationships – known as the **restorative approach** – are the foundations on which the changes we want to bring will stand. Across all areas, we are providing an extensive programme of events and training - helping colleagues to make restorative practices a natural part of the way they work.



Today we strive to provide an outstanding service – and we are already on the road to achieving this. The Department for Education (DfE) SFPC programme is funding a number of key areas – and we are already seeing the benefits of this. I want to share with you what these changes are and how they are happening:

1 Child Friendly Warwickshire

We are working towards making this county the best place it can be - under our Child Friendly Warwickshire programme. As part of the SFPC programme and with guidance from our friends at Leeds City Council – whose pioneering Family Valued programme is well known – we are building new creative working relationships with partners, local communities and businesses to make a difference in the lives of children and where they live. We want the children and young people to be at the heart of decision making – to ensure the best possible opportunities and services are there for them. A key first step has been an extensive survey of children and young people – to ensure we know how they feel about our county, and what their priorities for change are.

2 Different Futures

Our Different Futures service works with birth parents who are no longer able to care for their children due to adoption or kinship care. We offer a two-year support programme, with the option to access aftercare for an extra year. We are working to ensure Different Futures clients receive therapeutic intervention in a timely manner that compliments the ongoing work happening during their time with the Different Futures team.

3 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support

This service is unique through its ability to support special guardians with a combination of social work support and family support work. The SFPC programme means we have already increased support to special guardians by expanding the SGO Support Team, increasing support to those caring for children to keep them within their own extended family. The improved offer has led to a record number of children (37 during 2020/21) leaving care with an SGO. We are also working to reduce SGO breakdowns through earlier intervention.

4 Expand Family Group Conference

This is a family led process in which families and a wider network can come together to work out a plan that can help address any concerns regarding a child. We have recently increased the capacity in the team with an additional five Family Group Conference Coordinators/ Mediators to strengthen the team skill set so that families can expect quicker access to support.

5 Youth Workers

We value youth work in Warwickshire and the DfE SFPC programme investment has helped our youth service grow further. We have recruited four trainee youth workers and two youth workers, as we improve the way we work and create new opportunities for staff and young people. Together, this will increase access to youth workers for young people and improve outcomes.

6 Caring Dads

We have launched a programme to enable fathers to understand the impact of their abusive behaviour on their children, and to ultimately help children live safer lives. The programme is aimed at fathers who have at least weekly contact with their children, and have some, if limited, acknowledgement of their abusive behaviour.

7 Domestic Abuse Service

We have worked hard to expand the Domestic Abuse Service to provide a timelier response to families and increase the support we offer. Over the past year have provided domestic abuse training to colleagues in order to support families struggling during the COVID-19 lockdowns. And like all areas, the domestic abuse team has received training to ensure the restorative approach is now central to their activities, policies and procedures.

8 Adolescent Support

This team's focus is on working with children and young people who are potentially at risk of coming into care with focused intervention and prevention work. Family Support workers work closely with young people and their families so that they can remain together. If children are accommodated the focus moves to rehabilitating them home quickly and safely if possible.

9 Early Help

Early Help is the support we offer to potentially vulnerable children, young people and their families. The purpose of Early Help is to put in the right support at the right time so that problems are less likely to escalate to a point where the child becomes vulnerable or in need. Among the changes we have introduced, we have recruited dedicated headteacher coaches to work with headteachers or dedicated safeguarding leads in schools. This will help schools to be clear on the support available and when it is right to contact the Children and Families Froot Door - a partnership between Warwickshire County Council, Warwickshire Police, NHS and other key partner agencies.

Our plan is undoubtedly an ambitious one, but it is our ambition that will lead us to provide an outstanding service. To make sure we remain on course we will ask ourselves regularly, what have we achieved? How well did we achieve it? And what difference did it make?

And so, returning to that original vision of happy, healthy childhoods – this is the ultimate aim and test of our programme of change. Working together, through relationship strengthening and building, we will make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people across Warwickshire and do all we can to make this county the best place it can be to grow up in.



Department
for Education

The Department for Education (DfE) are overseeing and funding the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children 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:

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- 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



social care
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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



What Works for
Children's
Social Care

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.