

Strengthening families

WORKING WITH FAMILIES IN NEW WAYS



Contents

4

Foreword

6

Welcome

7

Key Messages & Learning

8

A Stepping Stone to a Transformed System

12

Transforming relationships with families

20

Wandsworth: Family Safeguarding

24

The Lighthouse, Warrington

28

Darlington: Family Valued

32

Attributes of a values-driven leader

36

Tapping into values and motivation

40

Implementing a Strengthening Families, Protecting Children model

46

Steve Walker — Farewell

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.





Foreword

JENNIFER BENJAMIN – Deputy Director, Child Protection and Safeguarding,
Department for Education

This is the fourth edition of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) Learning Journal and I have the privilege of writing the foreword.

It follows the hugely successful [SFPC programme national online event](#) in June and continues some of its popular themes. In particular, how a values-driven approach to delivering new ways of working with families can impact all aspects of children’s social care including leadership, workforce and multi-disciplinary working.

The importance of trusted relationships struck me as a recurring theme. Some of the many examples cited in this year’s journal that illustrate this so well include “the concept of love” as an intentional form of practice observed as one of the core lessons in the implementation of Family Safeguarding, No Wrong Door, and Family Valued innovations; building connection in teams by “collapsing the distance between senior leaders and frontline staff” as cited by Sal Tariq when reflecting on leadership; the value of bringing in specialist teams to co-work and “create unique experiences” for families brilliantly brought to life from the insights of The Lighthouse in Warrington; Wandsworth’s journey with Family Safeguarding and in the success of Darlington’s Keeping Families Together Team.

This journal has been a fascinating read and it has expanded my understanding of the three models being delivered across 17 local authorities and the journeys that the local teams have been on. The positive changes that are captured here also reinforce the enormous value of the investment in the programme and to quote the National Audit Office’s report, Evaluating Innovation in Children’s Social Care (June 2022) will “build the evidence for local authorities to understand what can make the greatest difference to children and families”.

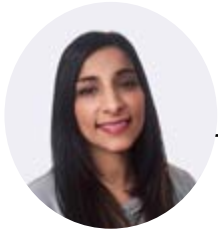
As we await the outcome of the What Works for Children Social Care evaluation, it helps to know what we can learn from the implementation of the SFPC programme so far. This includes the importance of committed and visionary leadership, the need for adequate time and resources, and the challenge of workforce supply and retention. Delivering the SFPC programme is hard work, and success is very much dependent on ensuring that the right conditions are in place to aid implementation.

This all has implications for future change programmes including the government's Implementation Strategy for Children's Social Care¹ which will significantly influence the future shape, nature and purpose of children's services. I was pleased to see that the Independent Review of Children's Social Care shone a spotlight on the SFPC programme and its models which are delivering tangible outcomes, including reducing the numbers of referrals to children's social care and keeping the numbers of children in care lower than comparative local authorities.

And to echo Steve Walker's fond farewell, this journal is a testament of the sheer dedication from all of you taking forward the SFPC programme which is showing early promises of transformative change for our care system and for the lives of children and their families.

Thank you and enjoy reading!

¹ The Implementation Strategy will incorporate the government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the National Child Safeguarding Panel Review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority Review of children's social care provision.



Welcome

TALLY DAPHU – SFPC Learning Lead, Innovation Unit

This is the fourth issue of the Strengthening Families Learning Journal — the regular publication dedicated to capturing learning from the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) programme.

SFPC 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 shares learning from the Programme, focusing on the changes to systems and practice taking place in local authorities across England, where teams are adopting three innovations in children's social care: Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding; Leeds' Family Valued and North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door.

This issue of the Strengthening Families Learning Journal looks at how we are working with families in new ways and what we have learnt from local authorities participating in the programme. Drawing on learning and case studies into the implementation of the models and their effectiveness, we focus on the attributes of values-driven leadership, how professionals are better equipped to work alongside families when working in specialist multi-disciplinary teams, and the fundamental

importance of working in partnership – across professional boundaries and most importantly with families themselves. We look at key insights on cross programme themes such as leadership, workforce and retention and the Independent Care Review of Children's Social Care, following the SFPC National Online Learning Event in June 2022.

We hope you enjoy the Strengthening Families Learning Journal and we welcome your feedback. Follow [this link](#) to complete a short survey where you can tell us what you think about this issue, and about things you'd like to see covered in future editions. You can also find all previous issues of the Learning Journal and the Newsletter on [our website](#).

Key Messages & Learning



Working with families in new ways as part of adapting and adopting one of the three SFPC innovative approaches means cultural change for the whole system:

1

Leaders are values driven across the programme, setting the tone for innovation

2

New ways of working taps into the values and motivations that bring people to the children social care workforce, and underpins creative approaches to recruitment

3

Working in partnership in multi-disciplinary teams, brings together specialist skills, resulting in new learning and ways of doing things

4

Developing strong relationships with families by getting alongside them and building on their strengths is a core feature of all three innovations

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTING CHILDREN (SFPC) PROGRAMME INFORMED THE CARE REVIEW

Isabelle Trowler talked about the importance of the SFPC programme.

“There is no doubt in my mind that the work that everyone has done on this programme has brought us to the point where we can march forward”.

She added:

“We now need to make some big decisions for national policy, taking stock of the Care Review, National Child Safeguarding Review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, the Competition & Markets Authority’s report looking at the placements market, but also the need for alignment with the Schools White Paper and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Green Paper. This is a major moment”.

CARE REVIEW OVERVIEW

A firm reset of children’s social care is needed, MacAlister explained.

“We need to tilt the system so that it is focused on getting alongside families to help them. We must reclaim this idea of ‘help’ within children’s social care. When care for children is necessary, we need to obsess about connecting children to lifelong loving relationships, and people around them who are going to stick with them for life”.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTING CHILDREN (SFPC) PROGRAMME INFORMED THE CARE REVIEW

MacAlister's view is that this will be a challenge to "business as usual", because this type of work is organic, it's messy, it's relational. He said:

"It's about intimate stuff - people's lives and their families, not the normal territory of services and the public sector".

SFPC AND THE CARE REVIEW

At the core of the SFPC programme is what really happens between practitioners and families when they move into that private space of family life, how people work alongside families and create meaningful change and growth for those families and their children. During the conversation, links were drawn between the recommendations of the Care Review and the existing SFPC programme.

There is a large degree of commonality between the aspiration of the Care Review and the work of the SFPC programme. For example, Josh MacAlister explained that: "Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding model helped shape the thinking on having a more expert-driven child protection response, which links to the new approach to family help. If we take a broader, more help-focused approach to families raising their children in adversity, we also need to not lose sight of child protection". The Care Review's recommendations also suggest giving more legal and financial confidence to local authorities to back family led solutions.

MacAlister also talked about how: "We need a system that is capable of planning out the types of care that children need in the future, the types of residential care and foster care, and the expertise to build or recruit those homes, configure them and make sure they're available for children when they need them... The model of No Wrong Door, and the ability through Regional

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROTECTING CHILDREN (SFPC) PROGRAMME INFORMED THE CARE REVIEW

Care Cooperatives to have a confident and visionary view of what homes for children in care could be, with the capability to build them, I think is really, really exciting.”

“The work that started in Family Valued in Leeds and Family Safeguarding in Hertfordshire is influential on thinking about family help and kinship. The multidisciplinary aspects of Family Help teams, allowing non-social workers to undertake some section 17 work confidently, could be transformational and help the Family Safeguarding model go much further.”

For young people leaving care, MacAlister’s aspiration is clear: “We need greater ambition for the quality of life of people with care experience, and protected characteristics for their care experience should underpin this. Public bodies should have a corporate parenting duty and state five clear missions: housing, employment, education, health, and most importantly, relationships, with every young person leaving care having at least two lifelong, loving relationships in their life”.

NEXT STEPS

MacAlister outlined that the Government has said that there is the roadmap for where the system should go next. And that they will produce a comprehensive and ambitious reform programme by the end of the year.



Transforming relationships with families: Lessons from implementing the 3 innovations

INTRODUCTION

Steph Gamauf – Innovation Consultant, Innovation Unit
Luke Bevir – Consultant, Mutual Ventures

There is a vast amount of learning about new ways of working across the different adopter local authorities. No innovation journey is the same, but, nonetheless, there are some key commonalities that are at the heart of each transformative process. In this article we home in on the journeys of the three trailblazing local authorities, implementing Family Safeguarding, No Wrong Door, and Family Valued. These are Cambridgeshire, Middlesbrough and Darlington.



TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTING THE 3 INNOVATIONS

These are the local authorities that started working with the innovators first, embedding one of the three whole-system change approaches in their local context before other local authorities followed. Working in new and collaborative ways with families, paying attention to language and strong partnerships have all been central to the approach taken in Cambridgeshire, Middlesbrough and Darlington.

What are the lessons from implementing the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children innovations in these areas? We explore their experiences, challenges and successes.

MIDDLESBROUGH: ADOPTING NO WRONG DOOR

Middlesbrough has been working on 'Futures for Families' (FFF), its own version of No Wrong Door (NWD), since 2019. Central to the NWD model is the residential Hub, where a multidisciplinary team works with young people to support them and their family in a holistic, flexible and supportive way.

A key worker can work with the family at home to tackle issues as they arise, and stop them escalating. Residential care is an option, but is not seen as the solution - the focus is always on what's best for the young person and their future. Permanence is the goal, whether with parents, wider family or a new foster family.

LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTATION

Early on, Middlesbrough found that the FFF model was not just a new way of working with adolescents; it is a **whole-system approach** that changes culture and language at every level in the local authority. The FFF provocations have challenged thinking, making staff across services ask: "As a parent, would I be happy with this for my child?".

Partnership working has led to new attitudes, with professionals from social workers, to police and health colleagues considering together the question: "Are we managing risk for the child or for us?".

TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTING THE 3 INNOVATIONS

In the Hub team, multidisciplinary working has led to **new, shared knowledge** about the effect of trauma on mental health, and about the communication issues of many young people, through the expertise of the clinical psychologist and speech and language therapists.

POSITIVE CHANGE

“Since you have started working with us, we feel as a family things are improving progressively. Having you available to support N and ourselves we have been able to concentrate on building relationships with N whilst feeling confident you are available to tackle the smaller issues we have faced. As a result, we believe N, R and myself are feeling more positive and happy. The small changes you have suggested have helped greatly. Knowing that you have reinforced these with N has been instrumental to the success of the intervention.”

FOSTER CARER’S MESSAGE TO CHRIS, FFF PORTFOLIO LEAD

Middlesbrough learned that adopting NWD, requires ongoing commitment to working in new ways, having honest and sometimes difficult conversations, and staying focused on the best outcomes for young people. It is challenging work, but deeply rewarding, and once started on the journey, there is no going back.

DARLINGTON: FAMILY VALUED

Darlington was the first adopter local authority to implement Family Valued. It has taken time to shift relationships with families and partners and ensure buy-in from staff and practitioners at all levels. The success of this work, however, can be seen across Darlington children's services where they have applied the relational and restorative approach at the heart of Family Valued, emphasising the strengths and importance of strong relationships within families.

LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTATION

Part of that transformation was a change to Darlington's front door service. Families and partners including teachers and other professionals will make initial contact with the front door gateway seeking advice or support for a child.

Implementing Family Valued's relational and human-centred approach has involved making practical changes. Referrers to the front door are now encouraged to make referrals via telephone conversations, rather than email. This has allowed front door practitioners to have focused conversations with individual referrers to understand why they are making contact in more detail. It involves getting underneath the high-level presenting issues and worries, which enables the team to get a much better contextual understanding of a family's circumstances.

POSITIVE CHANGE

Reflecting on the impact that this change has had, Chris Bell, Assistant Director for Children's Services, said

"the ultimate achievement of this is that it allows us to better understand the family's need and better match the right service for that family."

TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTING THE 3 INNOVATIONS

Chris explained that these changes have allowed more children and young people to be supported earlier with an increase in the number of children open to an early help pathway plan, and internal data shows a reduction in the percentage of re-referrals to the front door. This indicates that professionals and families are receiving the right support at the first referral and assessment.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE: FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

Cambridgeshire County Council embarked on their journey as Family Safeguarding Trailblazer in 2020, shortly before the first national Covid-19 lockdown. As aligned local authorities, the team had introduced the model to Peterborough previously. Establishing new ways of working with families was therefore not new to them and there was learning and success to draw on when adopting and adapting Family Safeguarding in Cambridgeshire. Nonetheless, lockdown restrictions meant that training had to be delivered online, requiring a revised approach and rewriting of the materials. Central to the implementation process was a systemwide culture change, enabling the team to move away from a traditional approach to child protection and embracing working alongside the families in need of support.

LEARNING FROM IMPLEMENTATION

The results of this work can be seen across Cambridgeshire. Social workers have been able to invest more time and skills for direct work with families. This has involved partnership working, listening to families' voices, and focusing on their strengths to empower parents to make and sustain change. Motivational Interviewing practice has been central to this, in particular the use of open questions, recognising strengths and applying tools such as the 'Cycle of Change'.

TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTING THE 3 INNOVATIONS

A particular success of Cambridgeshire's implementation was embedding multidisciplinary teams, a core feature of Family Safeguarding, that sees specialists working together to address parental domestic abuse, substance misuse and/or mental health. Anecdotal evidence suggests that drug and alcohol support provided to families as part of this has meant that parents are a lot less likely to access services in the future than those not involved in Family Safeguarding. Families who have had a child taken into care may also be more likely to be caring for other children at home. Building capacity within families has been key.

POSITIVE CHANGE

Family feedback is consistent in that families welcome a joint approach. It has reduced the need to tell their story to numerous professionals. Families feel listened to and are more confident about the support offered and received.



TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTING THE 3 INNOVATIONS

REFLECTIONS FROM PARENTS:

“The professionals worked together to support me. I was worried my daughter would be removed and didn’t initially accept the support and didn’t think there was a problem. I worked with mental health support first, then engaged with the Safer Us programme and CGL who worked together to support me to address my underlying problems. They listened and helped me make changes, changes I didn’t originally think were needed but I am in a much better place now for myself and my daughter.”

‘I feel happy with what social care has provided me with. The visits are always respectful, and the workers have built a relationship with me and R (child). I feel the most benefit I have had is the support that has been put in place, to allow me to find solutions to my problems and make changes. It’s all been really positive’

“I think that I have had the support that I need, I feel better within myself. I feel more confident in my parenting and feel like I have learnt to trust services more. I think I built a trusting relationship with my worker and that opened me up to receiving support that I didn’t know about. I feel that the service was very accommodating to my anxiety.’

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the lessons from implementing Family Valued, No Wrong Door, and Family Safeguarding, adopters' experience is clearly highlighting the impact of lasting and trusting relationships.

Truly doing things differently and conceptualising the innovation as a whole-system approach has been key to the successes achieved across Darlington, Cambridgeshire, and Middlesbrough. At the same time, adapting the model so that it can be fully owned and meet families' needs in each context is important.

Central to this work is seeing families and children as part of the solutions and as equal partners, shaping the thinking and decision making of practitioners. It is about strengthening families' skills, and opportunities to identify and take ownership of solutions wherever this is possible.

In this context, embedding the concept of love has consistently featured across trailblazer and adopter authorities and has shaped language and practice within all three innovations. During the Strengthening Families Protecting Children Learning Event in June 2022 and reflecting on lessons from implementation, Sue Butcher, Director of Children's Services in Middlesbrough phrased this as:

'It is very brave to talk about love. When I started becoming involved with this work it felt like a bit of an odd word to use. Ten years ago we did not use the word love when speaking about our children. Now, that concept of love does really bottom us out in our provocations and in everything we do because we are asking: Is this good enough for my child? We need to keep saying the word love because this will ensure it keeps going into all of our practice.'

Pioneering innovation in the capital - Wandsworth's journey with Family Safeguarding

WANDSWORTH: FAMILY SAFEGUARDING.



Nick Pendry – Deputy Director of Children's Services
Sheleena Powtoo – Strategic Lead for Transformation –
Childrens Services, at Wandsworth Borough Council



.....

We are proud to be the first London Borough to have launched Family Safeguarding. Not just because we are pioneering innovation in the capital, but because of the fantastic difference it makes to the lives of our children and families.

PIONEERING INNOVATION IN THE CAPITAL WANDSWORTH'S JOURNEY WITH FAMILY SAFEGUARDING

Family Safeguarding has been a journey, and as with any worthwhile trip, it has been eventful. Delivering change and transformation during the pandemic has been a challenge, but with the support of our colleagues at the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice, the Department for Education, our partners, our staff, and most instrumentally our leaders, we managed to successfully launch in January 2022.

We are now about 7 months into our journey, and it is remarkable to see how far we have come in that time. We have adult multi-agency workers in each of the specialisms of domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health, working alongside children's practitioners. We have relentlessly delivered training and workshops to our staff and expanded this to our wider teams, partners, and schools. This work is facilitating a shared understanding of Family Safeguarding values and practice, which emphasises that children should and can be supported to stay safely at home.

COMMUNICATION IS VITAL

We have learnt from our predecessors that embedding change takes time. Communication is a vital element of doing this successfully and we have and continue to prioritise this at every stage. We have sent out weekly updates to staff, newsletter to partners, delivered presentations at department-wide broadcasts, and held regular drop-in sessions. This has helped us sustain momentum, keeping everyone engaged and excited during the period of implementation.



CELEBRATING A NEW WAY OF WORKING

We wanted to celebrate the arrival of Family Safeguarding and in March we held a hybrid celebration event. The event was attended by our Family Safeguarding teams, specialist workers, partner agencies, Centre for Safeguarding Practice, the Department for Education, the Chief Social Worker for England and children and young people. This celebration event solidified the arrival of Family Safeguarding in Wandsworth. It sent out a positive message of appreciation for all the work that had been undertaken and will continue as we move ahead on the journey.



THE POWER OF CONVERSATION

The feedback from families that have been supported by the multidisciplinary teams is already highlighting the positive impact that the Family Safeguarding approach can have.

One young person spoke about the work that one of the children's practitioners had undertaken with her. She said that she feels as if she has a future now and that she had not felt like this before. She reflected that she had not realised the power of a conversation and how this could achieve change.

Another example was a mother who has struggled for many years with addiction difficulties.

Her previous experience of social workers had left her feeling confused about what they would do, that they judged her, and she was fearful they would take her children away. Speaking about the Family Safeguarding Team, she feels that they are genuinely interested to understand her and her children's lives, that the practitioners involved want to know what is going well and to encourage her to see why there are worries and provide support which would result in real change. As a result, she has felt that she could be honest and has trusted the team to share her difficulties.

Although we are still in the early days, fewer children are becoming looked after or being subject to a Child Protection Plan. Feedback from our staff about using this whole family approach has been overwhelmingly positive. More importantly, evidence of positive impact on the lives of our children and families and the difference to make real, lasting change is emerging.

Insights from The Lighthouse - How a coordinated approach is keeping families together in Warrington

THE LIGHTHOUSE, WARRINGTON: ADOPTING NO WRONG DOOR

WARRINGTON
Borough Council 

Chantelle Williams – Hub Manager at The Lighthouse

Iain Kirkup – Strategic Lead for No Wrong Door
SFPC Programme



In 2021, The Lighthouse team were asked to support Dan (not his real name) and his Mum who were experiencing difficulties within their relationship. Their issues would often result in conflict and the police were called on a regular basis.

INSIGHTS FROM THE LIGHTHOUSE: HOW A COORDINATED APPROACH IS KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER IN WARRINGTON

Dan had spent several years not in his Mum's care, living for an extended period with his Nan and then in care when he could no longer live with his Nan. Dan had moved home with his Mum in late 2020. Initially this transition had gone well, however things had begun to deteriorate and Dan was at risk of having to re-enter care.

The accompanying video shows The Lighthouse team undertaking a reflective discussion about the family, considering what we did and what difference we made.

FULLY COORDINATED SUPPORT

The Lighthouse is the name given to the No Wrong Door service in Warrington. Like other No Wrong Door services, it contains a **multi-disciplinary team** all working together to the same culture and with a single set of aims and objectives. In supporting Dan and his Mum, the full breadth of the team were needed to provide the right support at the right time. We fully co-ordinated this support within the team and wrapped around the family to create positive relationships and deliver a range of interventions and support.

We are fortunate to have an eclectic team within The Lighthouse who bring a range of skills and experiences which can be used to support families. Initially the support for Dan was delivered by Paul, our **Police Liaison Officer**, who knew him previously. This was a positive start as they knew and trusted Paul. This gave us the ability to work with them to understand what was really going on within the family.

Quickly it was identified that working with Dan on his own wasn't going to be enough, so we introduced Naomi to the family. Naomi is our **Clinical Psychologist (Life Coach)** and she is able to deliver therapeutic parenting. Dan's Mum hadn't parented him for much of his life and had her own issues with respect to her own trauma and emotional health. Direct work to explore this helped, however there were other more practical parenting issues that she struggled with. We

INSIGHTS FROM THE LIGHTHOUSE: HOW A COORDINATED APPROACH IS KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER IN WARRINGTON

therefore introduced Sally, who is the **Portfolio Lead for Building Relationships** who was able to offer practical parenting support to compliment the therapeutic support that was being provided.

Neil, the **Speech and Language Therapist (Communications Support Worker)** was able to pick up on work already completed with Dan regarding communication and guided the team as to how best to communicate with him and his family, making the support they received truly bespoke.

CREATING UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

The family working with the whole team and guiding the support they needed has made a huge difference for them, and their life together has improved massively. Dan is still at home, where he wants to be, and Mum feels more able to parent Dan.

Having the range of specialisms in one team, has created unique experiences for families supported by The Lighthouse and enabled us to work with them in new ways. We have seen some great results, to date **we have supported 69 children to remain at home with their families who would likely have entered care without the support of The Lighthouse.**

The team were able to take the time to understand the family and meet their needs which made a big difference for Dan and his Mum. They didn't need to fit into the service, we went to them and met them where they were. We're sticking with them as they continue to build their lives together as a family – as it should be!

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/RLIJN-wymbY>







Putting 'family' into our decision-making: Darlington's use of FGCs

DARLINGTON: FAMILY VALUED



Joseph Robb – Service Manager at Darlington Borough Council

Joseph Robb, Service Manager of Darlington Borough Council's Looked After Children Resources explains the value of Family Group Conferencing.

PUTTING 'FAMILY' INTO OUR DECISION-MAKING: DARLINGTON'S USE OF FGCS

Despite the many challenges families face, for almost all children and young people being around their family is the best way for them to thrive and be safe.

In Darlington, we know that overcoming the challenges experienced by children, we need to work with their families. To do this requires the belief and knowledge that, with the right support, families can find their own solutions and achieve a positive and sustainable outcome.

One of the tools we use to do this is **Family Group Conferencing (FGC)**. A Family Group Conference is a family-led meeting in which the family and friends network comes together to make a plan for a child. In Darlington, this process is supported by our dedicated FGC 'facilitators'. Independent of social workers, their role is critical for helping to steer conversations whilst making sure families are in control.

"I loved working with FGC and it helps a lot... [it] made me feel involved as I got to contribute... I felt like I can open up."

FEEDBACK FROM A YOUNG PERSON ON AN FGC

"I feel a lot could have been resolved [earlier] by having help from you and your team. You have definitely made a great impact in our situation and I'm very grateful for everything you have done for me"

FEEDBACK FROM A MOTHER ON AN FGC

PUTTING 'FAMILY' INTO OUR DECISION-MAKING: DARLINGTON'S USE OF FGCS

In 2019, Darlington employed one FGC facilitator. This increased to six in 2020 as part of our work embedding Family Valued. Since then, the service has gone from strength-to-strength.

Our most recent data, based on findings 12 months on from 148 FGCs held in 2021, shows:

17

children were returned to their family from a care placement

15

were prevented from going into care

37

did not need a child protection plan or were de-escalated

44

families did not need statutory intervention or were de-escalated

On top of this, family feedback shows additional positive outcomes of improved family relationships and confidence to seek help helping to keep children safe from harm.

PUTTING 'FAMILY' INTO OUR DECISION-MAKING: DARLINGTON'S USE OF FGCS

In recognition of our success, Darlington's Keeping Families Together Team was a gold award winner in the Team of the Year category at the Social Worker of the Year awards at the end of 2021. I like to think this reflects our impact and ambition for families, which would not be possible without the dedication, courage and talent of our team.

We feel our results speak for themselves and, as a consequence, FGCS have become core to our approach. However, we also know that FGCS do not succeed on their own and need to be seen as part of a programme of culture change. This is where the Family Valued model comes in and its wider emphasis on families, relationships and 'relational practice'. FGCS are a powerful tool but only one part of a whole-system commitment to working with families.

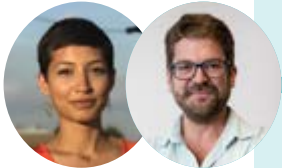


Attributes of a values-driven leader

INTRODUCTION

Jahaan Abdurahman – Innovation Consultant, Innovation Unit

Matthew Horne – Deputy Chief Executive, Innovation Unit



At the recent [SFPC national learning event](#), we gathered representatives from Family Valued, Family Safeguarding, and No Wrong Door for a [panel discussion](#) on leadership. Angela Clarke, Deputy Programme Director of the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice based in Hertfordshire, Saleem Tariq, Director of Children and Families at Leeds City Council, and Janice Nicholson, Strategic Lead in North Yorkshire County Council joined us to discuss the five attributes of effective leadership on the SFPC programme. These are identified in a recently released [learning report](#).

Below, we share their insights on how the first attribute, values-driven leadership, is observed across the SFPC programme.

Which values motivate the leaders who work on Family Safeguarding?

Angela Clarke: The most important attribute of successful leadership on the programme is that leaders believe in and feel passionate about their innovation. This often means that their personal values align with those of the innovation, and that they are part of a system or organisation that is value-driven.

From my experience of observing Family Safeguarding leaders, their passion for making a difference and doing the right thing for children and families is reignited through the Family Safeguarding approach. This means that they have the rights of children and families prominently in their value base, which links to a strong moral purpose, with an emphasis on the principles of social justice and being fair.

At the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice, we are very clear that our values are fundamentally important. We make it clear that to successfully implement the model leaders have to demonstrate their commitment to those core values. We are yet to come across a single leader who does not want to uphold those values.



How do leaders on Family Valued embody or model their values in their work?

Saleem Tariq: Family Valued is about creating a whole system that very strongly believes that the best place for children to grow up is in their family or community network, apart from in a small number of circumstances where this would not be safe. We are absolutely explicit in our approach to working with families and not doing things for or to them. This means that leaders must believe and affirm this approach in their behaviour and decisions.

This involves spending a significant amount of time establishing the right culture and approach, so that the values can permeate all layers of the organisation. Leaders must continually be visible and engage with frontline staff. We work to collapse the distance between senior leaders and frontline staff with approaches like ‘time to talk’ sessions, where individuals at all levels meet in circles to discuss their challenges.

Leaders adopt a coaching style, encouraging staff to come up with solutions themselves and growing autonomy right throughout the organisation. This means that the approach and behaviour is then mirrored when those frontline practitioners work with children and families.

What does value driven behaviour look like in No Wrong Door? Can you describe it?

Janice Nicholson: It is really important for us as leaders in No Wrong Door to bring our values into what we're trying to do and why we're trying to do it. We have a shared vision and narrative, based around the core values of our work, which we can clearly articulate.

This also means getting our internal colleagues to see the vision of what we are trying to achieve. For example, early in our journey we brought along people in our legal, finance, and procurement departments so that they were part of the journey and developing the narrative. There were some lightbulb moments as we started to condense our vision to help us share a consistent story and narrative. These ended up being our ten distinguishers, eight non-negotiables and four provocations, all based on the values that underpinned the way that we want to work with our children. These allowed us to start articulating and sharing the values across the system, which then became the drumbeat of the culture change that drove decision making.

[Access the full webinar at this link.](#)

Tapping into values and motivation: How innovators and adopters are developing their social care workforce



Siobhan Edwards – Senior Associate, Innovation Unit

As the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme (SFPC) clearly demonstrates, children's social care is all about people and relationships: the children and families who need care and support for their relationships from local authorities, and the people who join the workforce in local authorities to provide this invaluable care and support.

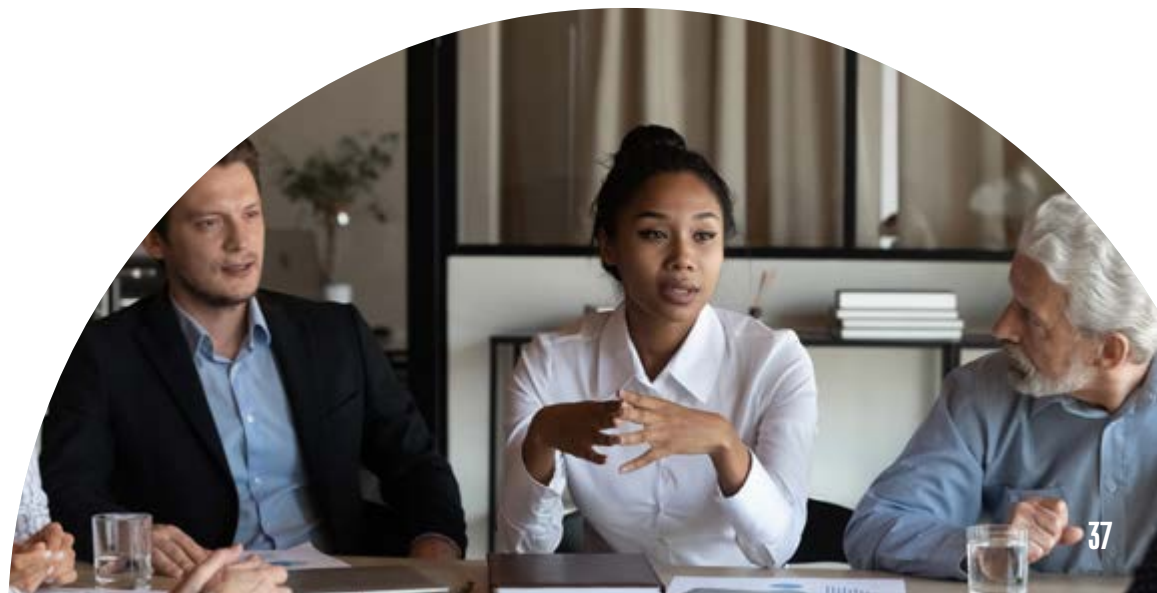
TAPPING INTO VALUES AND MOTIVATION: HOW INNOVATORS AND ADOPTERS ARE DEVELOPING THEIR SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE

The children's social care workforce is diverse and multidisciplinary, and includes social workers, residential and family support workers, mental health and other health professionals, as well as foster carers, all working in a wider system that stretches from early help to education, probation and police.

Over the last few years, there have been many pressures on the children's social care system - not least the growing number of children in care in England (currently 80,000), the stresses caused and exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the increasing cost of living crisis. These are, undoubtedly, challenging times but, as ever, the innovators and adopters on the SFPC programme are finding creative ways to ensure they find and keep the workers needed to do the vital work of supporting young people and families.

CREATIVE WAYS TO DEVELOP THE WORKFORCE

It is important to point out that each of the local authorities in the SFPC programme is unique, and experiences different local challenges and opportunities in recruiting and retaining staff. Below are some examples of how three local authorities - each adopting and adapting a successful model to their local context - is finding creative ways to develop the social care workforce it needs.



Darlington - Adopting Family Valued.

This September, Darlington is putting extra effort into the recruitment side of the workforce equation, embarking on the 'Darlington Xtra - Recruitment Roadshow' which will go on tour of schools, colleges and to potential partner agencies. Martin Webster, Workforce Development Manager at Darlington talks about how the Roadshow will focus on "working with people" across a range of social care roles in the area, aiming to "paint a real picture of the sector from a practice perspective". The [Darlington Xtra website](#), launched to accompany the Roadshow, will not only provide information on work opportunities, but will also allow people interested in working in the sector to access training, accreditation, and career development opportunities.

Lancashire - Adopting Family Safeguarding.

Lancashire is working hard to both attract and retain its social care workforce by putting a particular focus on job satisfaction. Lancashire's Head of Service, Skills, Learning & Development, Rachel Rump, talks about getting buy-in and support from senior leaders in the local authority to a 'Human Resources' approach that works to ensure staff feel well-supported by line managers, well-being is prioritised, and social worker caseloads are manageable.

Norfolk - Adopting No Wrong Door.

In the No Wrong Door Hub model, teenagers and their families are supported by a multidisciplinary team including residential and outreach family workers, police, a speech and language therapist (known as a communication support worker) and a clinical psychologist (known as a life coach). Lee Napper, Head of Social Work in Norfolk shares that recruiting life coaches for the two Norfolk Hubs initially proved challenging; in response, the local authority adjusted the role requirements to attract newly qualified clinical psychologists, and added in a strong package of support and development for the new recruits.

Workers bring a broad range of professional and life-experiences to their roles in the sector, but many people feel a strong desire to work directly and 'relationally' with people, and to make a difference to their lives now and in the future.

Working with families in new ways as part of adapting and adopting one of the three SFPC innovative approaches, taps into the values and motivations that bring people to the children's social care workforce - as well as driving them to keep going, and keep doing better.

What you need to know before implementing a Strengthening Families, Protecting Children model

Ella Whelan - Research Associate

What Works for Children's Social Care -
Project Lead for Strengthening Families,
Protecting Children Implementation
and Process Evaluation



In 2019, the Department for Education asked What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) to undertake an independent evaluation of the three models of social work practice that make up the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) programme.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE IMPLEMENTING A STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, PROTECTING CHILDREN MODEL

THE CURRENT EVALUATION

The evaluation has two strands.

STRAND 1: IMPACT EVALUATION

What is the impact of each model on outcomes for children?

We will look at the impact on a range of outcomes tailored to each model, including the likelihood of children becoming looked after. This is set out in detail on our website: 'Protocols'.

STRAND 2: IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCESS EVALUATION

This will ask about:

Fidelity: How closely does delivery adhere to the model?

Differentiation: How far does the model differ from previous practice in each local authority?

We will also ask:

What are the number and characteristics of families reached by the intervention?

What is the experience of staff and families involved with the intervention; and perceived changes as a result of implementing the model, including unintended consequences?

FINDINGS FROM PILOT EVALUATION

The WWCS pilot evaluations of [Family Safeguarding](#), [Family Valued](#), and [No Wrong Door](#) provide early insight and learning into the implementation of these models, and will inform the next phase of the evaluation.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE IMPLEMENTING A STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, PROTECTING CHILDREN MODEL

The pilot evaluations examine the implementation and delivery through interviews and focus groups and a survey of staff across children's services; interviews with families; observations of social work practice; and collecting administrative data about intervention delivery. This article only sets out findings from these pilot evaluations, not from the wider (on-going) evaluation.

The pilot evaluations did not evaluate the causal impact of the models. We will be able to report on impact in 2026.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

There is emerging evidence (i.e. not causal evidence of impact) of some potential benefits to the SFPC models. For example, staff and families identified that de-escalation of statutory involvement is a potential benefit of the three models. The Family Safeguarding pilot identified greater momentum, i.e. less drift and delay in cases as a potential benefit. Further emerging evidence from the Family Valued pilot suggested a benefit of the model is better quality practice.

RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

In the light of national recruitment challenges during and after the pandemic, including shortages of specialist workers, hiring the right staff was a consistent theme across the three models. During the Family Safeguarding pilot for example, the trailblazer local authority (Cambridgeshire) found recruiting for the Mental Health Practitioner roles particularly challenging.

The No Wrong Door pilot in Middlesbrough pointed to staff turnover as a particular challenge. A suggested contributing factor to this staff turnover was the difficulties of balancing the competing demands of the outreach and residential work. The challenge of balancing competing demands and high caseloads will be familiar to the majority of professionals in the children's social care sector.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE IMPLEMENTING A STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, PROTECTING CHILDREN MODEL

TIME AND SUPPORT

Another key theme that emerged from the pilots was time given to the implementation and delivery of the model(s). For example, one recommendation of the Family Safeguarding pilot study was to ensure that staff have time to develop the new, and necessary skills to implement the model. For the Family Valued pilot in Darlington, the Covid-19 pandemic affected delivery of the initial training, including delays or training being delivered online.

The pilots of the three models also recognised the support that staff need to implement the models. The No Wrong Door pilot in Middlesbrough found that regular opportunities for teams to revisit the model's principles was important in supporting staff to embed the model in their practice. Inevitably such opportunities require support, time and planning from senior leadership in local authorities. The three pilot evaluations also highlighted the importance of support to staff from management and leadership to help embed the model in day-to-day practice.

ADAPTING TO LOCAL CONTEXT

Adaptations made to the model(s) to suit the local context were common in the three trailblazer local authorities. One of the recommendations made from the Family Safeguarding pilot was for local decision makers to work with partners on locally tailored and flexible strategies for recruitment of Adult Specialist Practitioners.

Adaptations were made to the No Wrong Door model in Middlesbrough, including changing the eligible age range to suit the local context² and the priorities of the local authority.

² 11-18 in Middlesbrough, and 12-25 in North Yorkshire where the model was originally developed

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE IMPLEMENTING A STRENGTHENING FAMILIES, PROTECTING CHILDREN MODEL

The Family Valued pilot led to recommendations for training in the Family Valued model to be tailored to the local context, and to staff specialisms. Adaptation is inevitable when complex interventions like Family Safeguarding, Family Valued, and No Wrong Door are implemented in a number of different authorities, across the country and over a period of time. However, this poses challenges to the evaluation as a degree of fidelity is required to ensure we know what we are evaluating. We continue to discuss this challenge with innovators, implementing local authorities and the Department for Education.

ON-GOING LEARNING & EVALUATION

There is still much to understand and learn about the three models that make the SFPC programme. WWCS's ongoing evaluation will ascertain the impact of the three models³ and seek to understand whether the models have been implemented as intended, as well as staff and service users' perceptions of the models.

The current evaluation continues until final reporting in 2026/2027.

To learn more about the key themes discussed [click here](#) to read the formal pilot evaluation reports and listen to the [podcast series](#).

³ See here for each of the trial protocols for the three models: [No Wrong Door](#); [Family Valued](#); [Family Safeguarding](#)





Farewell

STEVE WALKER

REFLECTIONS FROM STEVE WALKER, OUTGOING DIRECTOR OF LEEDS RELATIONAL PRACTICE CENTRE

This Autumn I will be stepping down as the Director of the Leeds Relational Practice Centre, and the day-to-day role of leading Family Valued.

I would like to thank colleagues in Darlington, Warwickshire, Newcastle and Coventry with whom I have had the privilege to work with to implement Family Valued for their commitment and dedication. Implementing a new approach, particularly one like Family Valued which is focused on whole system change, is never easy. Doing so whilst supporting families through a pandemic was incredibly challenging but the focus on value led practice and improving outcomes for children and young people was relentless in each of these authorities, and it was no surprise to me and the members of the Leeds Relational Practice Centre that the three authorities that had a full inspection, Warwickshire, Newcastle and Coventry, were all judged as 'Good' across the board. It was also great to see colleagues in Darlington receive a very positive Focused Visit. We were so pleased that the hard work of Children's Services and partners in these authorities recognised by Ofsted.

I am sorry that I will not have the opportunity to take forward implementation in Sefton and Solihull, but it is the right time for me to move on personally and I know that with Sal Tariq as

its new Director, Family Valued and the Leeds Relational Practice Centre will go from strength to strength.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care has highlighted the challenges facing Children's Services and, indeed, children, young people and families. It was pleasing to see that 'values', 'relationships', 'family' and 'help' were at the heart of the Review and that the Review recognised the problem and therefore the solution, was not located in one area of social care, such as child protection, but across the whole system. This requires a fundamental change in approach from doing to or for families to working with them, and indeed with partners and communities if we are to deliver the kind of outcomes that children and young people deserve.

The local authorities that we have had the privilege to work with have provided some fantastic examples of how this change can be achieved and the impact for children and young people.

Children's social care has never been more challenging, but we can and do make a real and positive difference every day for children, young people and families. We must never lose sight of that!

If you are interested in learning more about the SFPC innovations, including developing a programme in your area, you can contact:

No Wrong Door - North Yorkshire County Council at nowrongdoor@northyorks.gov.uk

Family Safeguarding - Hertfordshire County Council at FSProjectTeam@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Family Valued - Leeds City Council at LeedsRPC@leeds.gov.uk



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:

- 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.