

Strengthening families

SUSTAINING CHANGE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



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Foreword

SARAH GOFF – Acting Deputy Director, Child Protection and Safeguarding Unit
Department for Education

As Acting Deputy Director for the Child Protection and Safeguarding Unit, I am delighted to have the opportunity to write the foreword for this sixth and final Strengthening Families learning journal.

In her foreword to the first journal, published in December 2020 at the height of the Covid-19 outbreak, Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families described how the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) programme was scaling and spreading three of the most successful and 'transformational in nature' innovations from the Innovation Programme. Three years later, the programme has worked with 17 local authorities across the country to strengthen and improve their local practice systems, supported hundreds of social workers and other practitioners to work relationally and restoratively with children and families, and, where possible, enabled children to remain safely at home or to return home from care.

It is a testament to all those involved in the development and delivery of the three models that their practice principles remain as valid as ever and are an integral part of the Government's reform programme for children's social care going forward. Family Valued was highlighted in the Care Review as an exemplary model of practice, with particular emphasis on the model's approach to family help and family led decision making. Family Safeguarding is referenced in relation to the benefits of Family Help services being delivered by local multidisciplinary teams including education, health and probation services working alongside social workers. And No Wrong Door has particular relevance in relation to recommendations from the review on support for teenagers, including

those exhibiting high-risk behaviours, criminal activity or at risk of care, support for kinship carers and reducing care-leaver homelessness. All these principles have been incorporated within the design specification for the Families First for Children pathfinders.

Going forward, and in line with this journal's focus on sustainability, we have been working hard to secure the legacy of the SFPC programme. I am delighted that the departments Regions Group Children's Social Care National Programme will be taking forward the relationship which has been established through SFPC with Hertfordshire, Leeds, and North Yorkshire. This will enable them to support further implementation of the three SFPC practice models as part of the department's wider children's social care improvement and intervention offer to local authorities and in line with the reforms set out in Stable Homes, Built on Love. We are exploring how best the learning resources created as part of the programme and currently hosted on the SCIE website can remain accessible to the wider sector. Finally, Foundations will continue with the formal evaluation of the programme, reporting in 2026-27.

It only remains to me to thank all those involved in the delivery of the programme over the past five years - to the innovator and adopter local authorities, to our project support partners Mutual Ventures, Innovation Unit and SCIE, our evaluators Foundations, and to Department for Education (DfE) colleagues past and present.



Welcome

HEATHER ROLINSON - Director of Children & Families Innovation, Innovation Unit

The Strengthening Families learning journal's sixth and final issue is dedicated to sharing the learning and successes of the SFPC programme.

SFPC is a five-year (2019 - 24) DfE programme supporting local authorities to improve their work with families and safely reduce the number of children entering care. It features three sector designed and evidence based models which are being implemented in 17 local authority areas across England: Hertfordshire's Family Safeguarding, Leeds' Family Valued, and North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door.

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

This final issue of the Strengthening Families learning journal focuses on sustaining change for children and families. As the programme comes to an end, we reflect on how its legacy can have a lasting and positive impact on children and families. In this journal, we explore how the programme's innovations offer more than

momentary shifts in our work with children and families. Instead, they provide enduring positive transformation in our systems that lead to more positive outcomes for children and families.

We reflect back on the SFPC programme journey and look forward to programme evaluations. We explore the essential role of leadership, training and development opportunities, and peer-to-peer learning in sustaining the change we create. We also hear from adopter authorities, Wandsworth, Rochdale and Coventry, on elements of their work which has enabled long-term change for the children and families they work with.

You can find previous editions of the Strengthening Families learning journal and the newsletter on the SFPC website.



Reflections on the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme



DAVID FAIRHURST - Executive Chair, Mutual Ventures

Since March 2020, Mutual Ventures and Innovation Unit have been engaged by the DfE to provide support (and challenge) to all the local authorities involved with SFPC. As we approach the end of our tenure and deliver this final learning journal, we look back and reflect on some of the experiences and lessons we have learned as support provider.

Throughout, our role has been to provide support in dispersing and embedding innovative practices, deliver capability and capacity to complement the skills and knowledge of the local authorities, and, importantly, facilitate the sharing of learning and best practice between participants and across the wider children's social care (CSC) sector.

Ultimately, we have been here to help. Sometimes providing welcome advice or technical support. Sometimes delivering difficult messages, challenging the appropriateness of a proposed approach, or advising a course of action that takes the recipient out of their comfort zone. Sometimes our help is well received and sometimes not! Our support has always been offered with the common goal of delivering the best outcome for the children, young people, and families across England that the programme is here to help. This unifying aim is an irrefutable touchstone that all stakeholders in a programme such as SFPC can hold true to.

One of the major learning points for us from this work is the importance and impact of good quality relationships. I know that's not rocket science, but too often it's overlooked. We have learnt a lot from the SFPC innovations through this experience. Each innovation is underpinned by a drive for better relationships, between social worker, child, young person and their family and carers. We've been so taken by the

transformational impact on practice and culture that we've embraced a "relational approach" ourselves in the way we practice consultancy. Simple things, like picking up the phone, talking and listening to someone rather than sitting behind a chain of emails can dramatically improve the chances of getting things done well, and quickly.

This journal and the library of other learning materials from the programme are part of a legacy that hopefully the sector will find helpful for years to come. It has been a privilege to work alongside colleagues from DfE, Leeds, Hertfordshire and North Yorkshire and the adopter authorities. We wish them every success in sustaining, continuing to develop and disseminating the learning from the programme for the benefit of the wider CSC sector.

Happy reading!

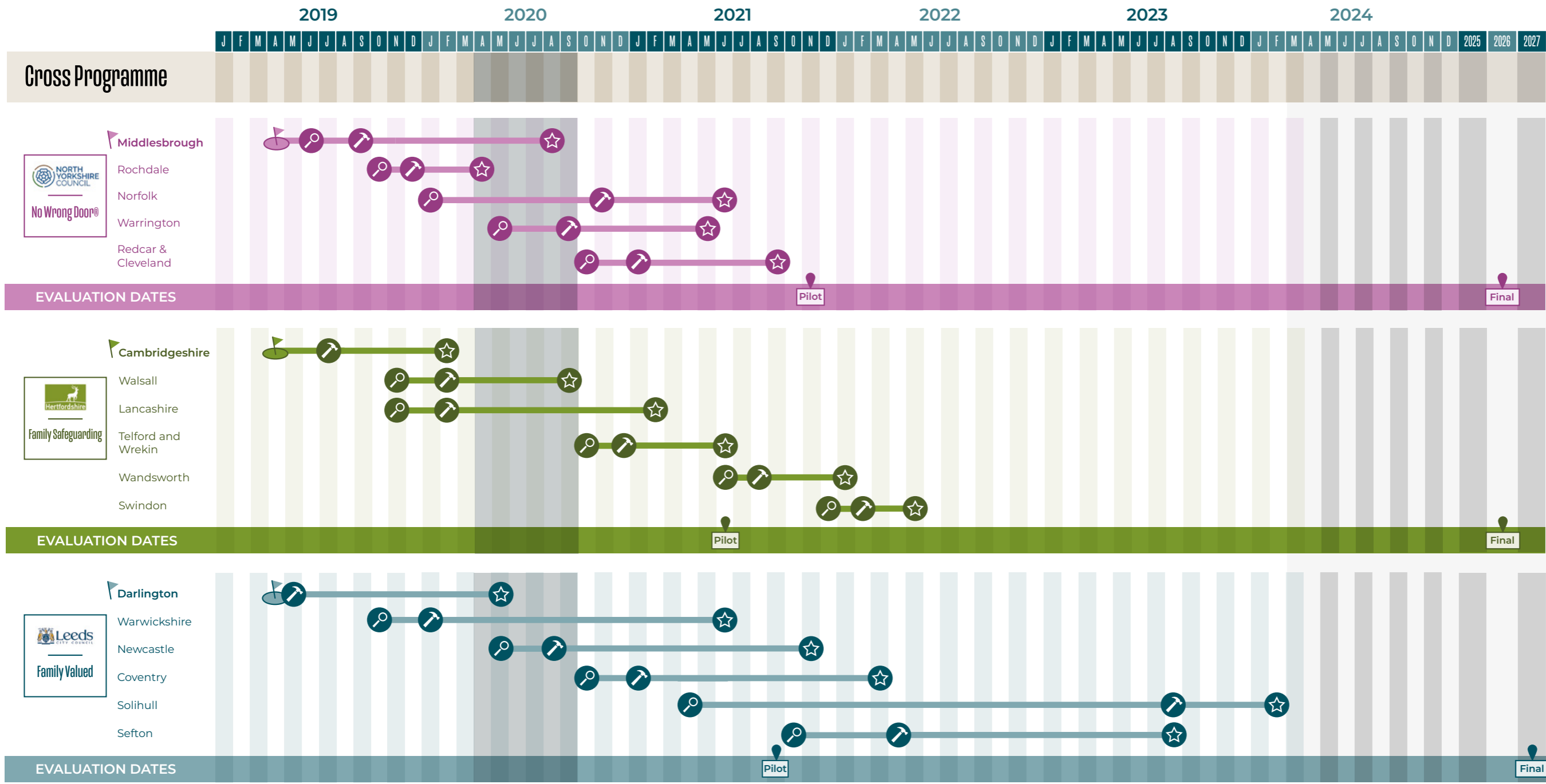
David



Programme Timeline

Timeline Key

- Trailblazer
- Diagnostic and discovery phase
- Go live date
- Trailblazer announced
- Implementation phase
- Planned evaluation date



17
All 17 adopters are now 'operationally live'

3

interim evaluation reports have now been published by the Foundations (formerly WWC)



The full evaluation will be published in **2026 & 2027**



Leadership in Children's Social Care: Core Principles for Lasting Impact



Jahaan Abdurahman – Innovation Consultant, Innovation Unit

Sue Williams – Programme Director at The Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice, Hertfordshire County Council

Sal Tariq – Director of Strengthening Families Programme and the Leeds Relational Practice Centre, Leeds City Council

Stuart Carlton – Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service, North Yorkshire Council



This article delves into reflections from the leadership journeys of three exemplary leaders—Stuart, Sue, and Sal. We explore the themes emerging from their experiences, focusing on values-driven leadership, prioritising the voices of children and families, and the dynamic interplay of receiving feedback and translating it into action for sustained positive change.

LEADERSHIP IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE: CORE PRINCIPLES FOR LASTING IMPACT

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF VALUES-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

Stuart, Sue, and Sal have all identified the significance of a values-driven approach in sustaining positive change for children and families. They noted that this is the essence of what unifies organisations from top to bottom, allowing the organisation to share a collective, purposeful commitment and 'moral compass'. Importantly, they shared that positive change is not solely about adopting new models or methodologies but, more profoundly, about embracing and sustaining a shared set of values.

In his work, Stuart emphasised the importance of unifying team members across the organisation under a common moral framework. This involves fostering a purposeful culture that places relationships and relational approaches at the forefront. By emphasising shared values, leaders create a cohesive identity that transcends hierarchical structures, ensuring that everyone within the organisation is aligned with the same moral principles and overarching purpose.

“At the beginning, it wasn't a strategy. It wasn't a vision. It wasn't anything to do with that - it was deeply about our moral purpose. The task of leadership was to talk about what we wanted to achieve, how we wanted to work, and what unified us from the top of the organisation to the bottom of the organisation. So, together, we created a practice model that placed relationships, and allowing them to flourish, at the heart of everything we do.”

STUART CARLTON

Throughout Sue's career, she has seen the pivotal role of leaders in ensuring lasting impact by fostering collaboration through shared values. In the realm of Family Safeguarding, periodic conversations about shared values serve as a compass, realigning the collective focus. The sustainability of models like Family Safeguarding, in Sue's experience, relies on rekindling existing values rather than introducing entirely new ones. This approach ensures that everyone involved, including politicians, chief executives, and other key stakeholders or partners, remain committed to a common set of values.

Sal's work has consistently highlighted the need for a visionary approach in leadership, where leaders articulate a clear vision and purpose for the organisation. Understanding why a particular change is being pursued forms the bedrock of this approach. By having a compelling vision, leaders guide their teams with a sense of purpose, fostering commitment and alignment towards achieving shared goals.

ELEVATING THE VOICES OF CHILDREN & FAMILIES TO SUSTAIN CHANGE

Stuart, Sue and Sal noted the pivotal role of leaders in ensuring the voices of children and families as a central focus in sustaining positive change. They unanimously emphasised the critical need to create conditions conducive to hearing and incorporating feedback from those directly impacted by their services.

In Stuart's experience, sustaining positive change necessitates a departure from defensive practices and a commitment to understanding and valuing the experiences and perspectives of children and families. Leaders must actively create the right conditions for teams to embrace a learning culture, acknowledging mistakes, and continuously working towards refining their approaches. In doing so, they not only elevate the voices of those they serve but also foster an environment conducive to continual improvement and sustained positive change.



Throughout his work, Sal has observed the importance of ensuring that staff are in the right space to receive feedback, by cultivating an environment that enables and is receptive to constructive input from children and families. This insight is essential in acknowledging that effective leadership involves not only valuing the voices of children and families but also creating a team culture that is open to feedback, fostering an atmosphere of continuous improvement.

Building on this, Sue highlighted the transformative power of a learning culture in encouraging openness to acknowledge mistakes and collaboratively working towards improvement. By creating an open culture for receiving feedback, Sue was able to encourage the growth of individual practitioners and wider institutional learning, which allowed the team to continually adapt services to better meet the needs of children and families over time.

“In my experience, the openness to acknowledging mistakes and working collaboratively for improvement is crucial. Defensiveness, which can stop teams from acknowledging or understanding where their work falls short of objectives, needs to be replaced by a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation.”

SUE WILLIAMS

MOVING FROM VOICE TO ACTION FOR SUSTAINED POSITIVE CHANGE

A resounding theme from Sal, Stuart and Sue's experiences as leaders is the dynamic interplay between receiving feedback from children and families, respecting its significance, and incorporating it into the organisational fabric. They encourage leaders to not only hear the voices of children and families but also to act on them in constructive and innovative ways. Doing so paves the way for sustained positive change, ensuring that the services provided are responsive to the evolving needs and experiences of those they aim to serve.

Sal's approach has been to remain respectful in understanding the feedback received by ensuring that it is translated into tangible changes. That means moving beyond mere acknowledgment; it means a commitment to being true to what is heard - which requires a leadership approach that values feedback not as a static commentary but as a dynamic force for improvement. Leaders, according to Sal, must not only listen but act on the insights gleaned from the experiences of children and families.

“Embracing a relational approach lies at the heart of Family Valued. So informal approaches like sitting in ‘circles’ with children or family members who’ve experienced our services and talking to them fosters a connection that allows us to truly understand their experiences. In our ‘Let’s Talk’ initiative, 35 family members shared their experiences with us. As a senior leader, I facilitated the conversation, actively listening to their concerns and then collaborated closely with them to address the areas they wished to change.”

SAL TARIQ

Stuart, while acknowledging the importance of children and young people's voices in the decision-making process, emphasised the need to pair it with various other elements, including research, to create a comprehensive approach. The integration of voices with evidence-based practices ensures a well-rounded understanding and an informed strategy for change. Stuart's insights highlight the multifaceted nature of incorporating feedback into the broader framework of decision-making, as a leader.

Throughout Sue's career, she has used a learning culture to reinforce the idea that acting on feedback is a collaborative and ongoing process. This openness to acknowledging mistakes and commitment to working collaboratively for improvement requires a leadership approach that doesn't merely stop at listening but actively engages in a continuous cycle of learning and adaptation.

In the complex world of children's social care leadership, the experiences of Stuart, Sue, and Sal have highlighted three key principles for leaders seeking to sustain positive change. Values-driven leadership is crucial, providing organisations with a moral purpose and guiding all involved. Elevating the voices of children and families is essential, encouraging leaders to truly listen and foster a culture of learning. Acting on feedback is vital, transforming it into a force for improvement. These themes pave the way for resilient, impactful, and lasting change. As leaders face challenges, these insights guide them towards a future where values, voices, and actions align for the well-being of children and families, making a lasting impact.



Chloe's story: How relationships based on trust reunited a family

CHLOE* – PARENT,
FAMILY VALUED, COVENTRY

Chloe spent two years without her children at home after they were taken into care. Reflecting on this time, Chloe explained that the two years were difficult, but the support from her social worker, Sam, as part of the reunification plan was crucial to Chloe's children being able to move back home.

"Sam was amazing, she was so easy to talk to and she wasn't judgemental. She was actually amazing. If all the social workers were like Sam, we would have a happy place out there."

Sam and her colleague Jane worked with Chloe bit by bit to build her capacity, encourage her, and support her without overwhelming her or her children.

The focus on creating trusting relationships with parents, children, and families is central to the Family Valued approach and is



underpinned by a belief in families' strengths and supporting them to find solutions. *"I felt like I could trust them, and with me being able to trust them I was able to be open and honest. I could speak to them about anything, and I knew I wasn't being judged."*

Following the success of the reunification plan and her children moving back home and the support of those around her, Chloe is excited and optimistic for the future.

"We're going to have an amazing future. I have had two years without the boys and so we have a lot of making up to do. Our future is very bright."

**For confidentiality purposes, the name Chloe is a pseudonym.*

"Sam was amazing, she was so easy to talk to and she wasn't judgemental. She was actually amazing. If all the social workers were like Sam, we would have a happy place out there."

Building the conditions for children's social care work to flourish

Transforming approaches to training and development



Steph Gamauf - Innovation Consultant,
Innovation Unit



In June 2023, the [SFPC Workforce Learning Report](#) outlined the SFPC local authorities' approaches to learning and development. This article highlights three crucial capabilities sought by SFPC local authorities in their staff and outlining strategies for building them.

Effective children's social care relies on a skilled workforce capable of forming transformative relationships with families and establishing impactful partnerships with local stakeholders. Developing these unique skills is a fundamental aspect of SFPC local authorities' workforce strategies.

CREATING EFFECTIVE CHANGE

Children's social care's critical task is creating effective change in children's and families' lives. This involves specific behaviours and people skills enabling social workers to provide meaningful family support. When making tough decisions, like whether or not to make an application for care, a social worker's judgement is not solely based on their knowledge of child development. Instead, it is influenced by their analysis, attitude towards children's social care, and their values.

Family Safeguarding innovator Hertfordshire emphasises the role of systemic leads and practice specialists, encouraging staff to think differently about situations. Tools like cultural genograms help social workers gain sensitivity and varied perspectives.

Redcar and Cleveland's No Wrong Door staff enhance capabilities through strengths-based skill-matching and mentoring. Portfolio leads with specific relationship-based skills, such as setting boundaries with young people in a kind and clear manner, are paired with practitioners seeking to develop those aspects of their practice.

A majority of SFPC local authorities employ diverse, flexible mixed-methods approaches, such as practice observations, appreciative inquiry panels, structured training programmes, and informal peer learning, to support social workers' learning journeys. A focus on practice and taking into account different learning styles and preferences are central to building success.

CONFIDENT MULTI-AGENCY WAYS OF WORKING

Whole-system approaches like No Wrong Door, Family Valued, and Family Safeguarding rely on effective multi-agency partnerships. Social workers need to demonstrate relationship management and build trusted connections.

Darlington adopts a shared approach to training and development involving various organisations, teams, and sectors. Training is shared with multi-agency partners, with the expectation that the same organisations will reciprocate by

offering training spots for social work staff. This collaborative effort addresses learning gaps and contributes to building a solid foundation for future partnerships.

Collaboration with multi-agency partners requires confidence and the ability to challenge opposing views. In Lancashire, social workers test responses through face-to-face training involving roleplays and exposure to different perspectives. The focus is on practice and providing a safe environment for staff to test their responses.

DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL NEED AND CONTEXT

Effectively assessing families' needs within their specific context is crucial. Understanding inequalities, their intersections and applying this knowledge to support and engage with a family's circumstances is essential. To develop this local understanding, Leeds co-designs training programmes in collaboration with local partners, gathering evidence of current issues and place-based needs, such as workforce leads talking to headteachers about challenges in schools. Learning programmes are built on local data, allowing practitioners to adapt and develop skills across various areas.

Darlington's Experts in Practice project enables staff to become researchers in partnership with Newcastle University. Their research informs local training plans, using innovative methods like podcasts for training delivery led by the Experts in Practice.

In essence, creating environments for children's social care to flourish depends on robust and engaging training offerings. The innovative approaches across SFPC local authorities, grounded in constant reflective practice, curiosity, and openness, are pivotal. Embedding these values not only fosters the development and growth of staff but also enables them to apply their learning to contribute significantly to the overarching goal of thriving communities, children, and families.



Naomi's story: Breaking down silos – co-locating professionals in Warrington

NAOMI – CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST,
NO WRONG DOOR, WARRINGTON

Naomi trained as a Clinical Associate in Applied Psychology (CAAP) at Edinburgh University, after which she worked in Fife as a CAAP across both child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and looked after children services. She finished her doctorate in clinical psychology at Bath University, and then started in Warrington as part of the No Wrong Door service.

“One of the major issues I have seen everywhere I have worked is the lack of relationship between social services and CAMHS.”

Too often organisations fall into working in silos as a direct result of their rigid boundaries and processes.

This challenge of managing traditional organisational boundaries is something that No Wrong Door is actively trying to improve by co-locating professionals within residential hubs. Naomi works closely with the hub staff, social workers, the police, and a speech and language therapist.



Being co-located with other professionals has fostered a learning culture between them based upon trust and Naomi feels it has given her the space to bring her expertise to make a difference to children and young people. Importantly, this learning goes both ways and benefits all involved in the system.

Naomi is convinced that greater collaboration between organisations is needed to improve how services are provided and outcomes for children and young people.

She feels that being co-located at the No Wrong Door Hub is a step in the right direction towards achieving that collaboration:

“You get to know people so well and you can see their perspective when you trust their opinions and their intentions. I think a solution is for more co-locating of services and seeing how each other work.”

“You get to know people so well and you can see their perspective when you trust their opinions and their intentions. I think a solution is for more co-locating of services and seeing how each other work.”



Peer-to-Peer Learning: Driving Sustainable Change in Children’s Social Care



Tally Daphu – Senior Innovation Consultant,
Innovation unit



Within the SFPC programme, Communities of Practice have emerged as transformative spaces for professionals to collaboratively tackle complex challenges and learn from each other.

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING: DRIVING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN CHILDREN’S SOCIAL CARE

TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of Practice bring together diverse stakeholders such as social workers, directors, VCSEs, police, health, education, and housing professionals, each contributing a unique viewpoint shaped by their specific roles and experiences. These communities serve as platforms for open dialogue, trust-building and fostering a sense of belonging. Through shared experiences and collaborative problem-solving, Communities of Practice contribute to sustainable change by developing innovative solutions to challenges like instilling a values-led culture, building partnerships, and addressing workforce retention.

The collaborative nature of these communities is instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by children’s social care practitioners. As professionals engage in dynamic learning, the combination of perspectives ensures a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced in children’s social care. The collaborative exploration of questions such as “How do we create a values-led culture and explore values-based leadership?” becomes a collective effort, drawing on the varied experiences and insights of practitioners from different backgrounds.

DYNAMIC LEARNING AND COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

Within Communities of Practice, professionals engage in a dynamic exchange of experiences, case studies, and best practices. This collaborative learning process ensures that the collective wisdom of seasoned practitioners informs the practices of newer members, resulting in a continuous cycle of improvement. The models developed within these communities are not static but reflect the evolving needs of the field, driven by the diversity of perspectives and the dynamic nature of the learning environment.

Moreover, the supportive networks fostered by Communities of Practice extend beyond professional development. These communities create a space for individuals to share challenges, seek advice, and receive encouragement from peers who understand the intricacies of their work. This emotional support significantly contributes to the well-being of professionals, enhancing their resilience and capacity to navigate the demanding landscape of children's social care.

FACILITATING A RESPONSIVE SYSTEM

Embedded within the fabric of Communities of Practice are the guiding questions that move professionals towards a more responsive system that is adapted to the emerging needs of children and families. For example, Communities of Practice might explore the question "How do we build strong partnerships to better support children and families?" In response, professionals, with a dynamic range of experiences, collectively explore solutions to this challenge, which becomes a catalyst for innovative thinking.

When delving into the challenges of workforce retention, the Community of Practice might consider "How do we sustain capacity and explore different forms of sustainability?" This question then becomes an integral part of the ongoing dialogue within the community, sparking discussions that lead to actionable strategies over time. Similarly, the question, "How do we create a values-led culture and explore values-based leadership?" becomes a focal point for shared experiences and collaborative exploration within Communities of Practice. Through these discussions, professionals not only address the question at hand but also contribute to the ongoing evolution of best practices within the field.

Communities of Practice are not confined to frontline workers, and can involve leaders, policymakers, and business teams. This inclusive approach ensures that insights gained from direct practice inform the development of local policies and decision-making. Communities of Practice often act as bridges between those implementing services and those shaping overarching

frameworks, facilitating the creation of a responsive and innovative system tailored to the emerging needs of the communities they serve.

Peer-to-peer learning within Communities of Practice has played a pivotal role in the sustainable development of change in the SFPC programme. By fostering collaboration, encouraging cross-disciplinary approaches, and creating inclusive spaces, Communities of Practice contribute to the resilience and capacity of professionals while driving positive change in the field. As practitioners continue to grapple with the complexities of their work, the peer-driven dynamics within Communities of Practice promise to guide the way toward sustained positive change for children and families.



Pascal's story: giving control back to families and recognising that they know best

PASCALLE, FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCE
FACILITATOR, FAMILY VALUED, NEWCASTLE

Pascal Hatfield is a Family Group Conference (FGC) facilitator in Darlington children's services, having joined from a background in the voluntary sector.

Pascal sees FGCs as indicative of a new way of working with families. "Every FGC session is totally different, because every family is different", she says. In Darlington, FGC professionals are called 'facilitators' because their job is to support families to find solutions – not to tell them what to do. Pascal explains: *"I say to families: I'm not a social worker, I'm a facilitator... I say to families that this is for them. It is their opportunity. It makes them feel empowered."*

FGCs are a key part of Family Valued's emphasis on families taking a lead role in the decision-making process, where it is safe to do so. As Pascal and her colleagues demonstrate, this requires a commitment to trusting families, putting them in control and believing in their ability to solve problems for themselves.



Working with families – not doing to them – is what Family Valued and FGC is all about. This means having an ability to build relationships. As an FGC facilitator, Pascal is an advocate for the approach and has to be able to 'sell' it to families.

FGCs, including Pascal's work over the last 4 years, has made a significant difference to families. Data from 2020-21 based on 12 months of FGCs in Darlington showed that 17 children were returned to their family from a care placement, 15 children were prevented from going into care, 37 avoided or de-escalated a child protection plan, and 44 families avoided or de-escalated a statutory intervention.

"The best part of the job is when a family leaves the FGC with a clear plan that I know everyone buys into and will keep the child with his or her family", says Pascal. "I feel very humbled and grateful to have facilitated change in people's lives. It's an amazing thing to be part of and it makes me feel proud."

"The best part of the job is when a family leaves the FGC with a clear plan that I know everyone buys into and will keep the child with his or her family."

How to ensure the success of an innovation is here to stay - insights from Adopters on sustainability, culture, and partnerships

HOW TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF AN INNOVATION IS HERE TO STAY - INSIGHTS FROM ADOPTERS ON SUSTAINABILITY, CULTURE, AND PARTNERSHIPS

SUSTAINABILITY

Foundations for sustainable models

How the model will be embedded and sustained must be built into planning from the very start of your change programme. All of these models require an up-front investment and there must be a clear, early strategy on how the model will be sustained and resourced once the model is embedded. Being able to demonstrate good outcomes early on is vital to ensuring buy-in to the model for the long-term.

Don't reinvent the wheel

There is no need to replace good practice that already exists. A Director of Children's Services (DCS) who had implemented No Wrong Door said that it was imperative to add to what was already in place to increase the prospects of sustainability.

"Enhancing sustainability involves having an understanding that not all aspects need to be replaced. If we want No Wrong Door to be sustainable, we have to make it work with what is already in place and working".

No innovation is its own island

It is important to remember the big picture and see the model as a catalyst to inform wider thinking. This must be at the forefront when considering other aspects of the practice model and it must be embedded into the wider system.

"The trick to sustainability is not seeing any project as a standalone, it has to be fully integrated within our practice system and Family Safeguarding fits in with what we are trying to do like hand in glove."

CULTURE

Speaking the same language

The language and practice that are core to each model must be spread further than children's teams in each local authority and into the wider children and families partnership. The innovations



Essack Miah - Consultant, Mutual Ventures



Adopters from the SFPC programme share what they have learnt about embedding their innovations into their culture and practice and how they are planning for a sustainable future.

provide a vision for how local authorities want to move forward, a consistent way of talking about their work, and a common language that is central to culture change.

“Some of the No Wrong Door provocations have seeped out into the wider service, which is positive as it ensures the entire service is aligned. In some police protocols, we have seen some of the wording used in the model, in their communications.”

Buy in from the top-down

Senior Leadership Teams need to be engaged and fully supportive of the innovation. Consistency in leadership is important but if new leaders join, their desires and ambitions must align with the innovation to ensure that the culture of the service is not disrupted. This buy-in needs to be modelled across our organisations in our actions; leaders expressed the importance of good inductions when new staff join that connect new people into the workforce culture.

“The DCS changed during the programme but they were selected because they are a supporter of Family Valued ways of working.”

PARTNERSHIPS

Making things business as usual

Implementing the innovations requires engaging in new ways with partners, creating new ways of working, consistent communications, and introducing or adapting governance structures. Considering how these new structures and ways of working can be strengthened and sustained is a key part of long-term planning.

“Before Family Valued, we didn’t have a strategic board of partners. That is in place now and they link in with other groups (i.e. SEND and the voluntary and community sector). This board will remain beyond the programme and will allow for conversations for our partnerships to develop.”

Relational approach to practice

Relationships are the foundation of the three innovations on the SFPC programme. This is no different when applied to working with partners and building meaningful partnerships that last.

“Systematic practice is key for me, and a relational way of working with colleagues, partners and families becomes an all-encompassing framework which you cannot deviate from. This is something which will drive sustainability more than anything else. Having everyone understand that relationships are the bedrock of anything will ensure that an operating model such as Family Safeguarding can be effective. Otherwise, you are ‘doing to’ and our whole philosophy is about ‘doing with’. We want our practitioners to make meaningful relationships.”

Successfully implementing and sustaining innovation demands a comprehensive and forward-thinking strategy. The insights shared by adopters from the SFPC programme highlight the critical nature of strategic sustainability planning, the value of adding to existing good practices, and the necessity of cultivating a culture that permeates every level of the organisation. Embracing a relational approach to practice and forging meaningful partnerships is a pivotal step in not only effectively embedding innovations but also ensuring their sustained success. By incorporating these principles, organisations can not only create positive change for children and families, but also sustain and improve it over time.



STORIES OF SUCCESS

Sue's story:

"We give people the wings to fly" – helping families to make sustainable changes

SUE – SOCIAL WORKER,
FAMILY SAFEGUARDING, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Sue has worked for the Cambridgeshire local authority for 18 years in several different roles. "I have always held on to the hope that people can change."

"If people could do it themselves, they would have done, they wouldn't need us, some people just need support in understanding how they have got to where they are, how they can do things differently, and then support to do it. It's about working alongside families and working with them not doing to them."

Sue worked with a family who had moved from another area where they had been known to that local authority for several years. Older children had been previously removed, the mother was now pregnant with a new child and there were professional concerns for the welfare of that child.

Sue wanted to make sure that she worked differently with this family. She wanted to make



sure that she would do everything she could to support positive change and keep the new child at home.

The mother was glowing in her feedback to Sue, "It's been an absolute pleasure working with you, you have given me such confidence as a mother and I thank you for it... you're everything a social worker should be, and any family you work with in the future is lucky to have you to help them with their struggles."

For Sue, her role as a social worker is to support families, to build upon the strengths that are already there and encourage positive change.

"We give people the wings to fly. Sometimes people don't have the confidence to parent, and we are there to tell them they can do it. People can do it you just need to give them the right tools. If you give someone a set of flippers they can't fly, but if you give them a set of wings they can fly."

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Values at the Heart of Sustainability

FAMILY SAFEGUARDING – WANDSWORTH



Rasheed Pendry – Deputy Director of Children’s Services

Louise Jones – Principal Social Worker



Through embedding our values of working with and for families we have built a foundation for the Family Safeguarding model in Wandsworth that will sustain into the future.

VALUES AT THE HEART OF SUSTAINABILITY

Embedding Family Safeguarding in Wandsworth has been a journey. Since our launch date in January 2022 we have learnt a lot, but one thing has been clear from the very start: how we work with families will only be successful if it directly follows from our values.

Our values are the foundation for everything we do, and it is no different when it comes to sustaining Family Safeguarding in Wandsworth beyond the end of the SFPC programme.

At Wandsworth we have a clear vision of how we want to work with and for families. Our systemic practice is ingrained in us as an organisation, and it has become an all encompassing framework that affects all aspects of our work. We want our practitioners to make meaningful relationships with families where they can be supported to change, where their autonomy is encouraged, and their strengths are utilised.

Family Safeguarding works with our approach and how we want to work with families. The ‘trick’ to sustainability is to not see an innovation as an add on, instead it must be fully integrated with everything we do.

LIVING OUT OUR VALUES

We are seeing that when new people join, they pick up on the culture and our values really quickly because everyone embodies it. When our values become something we live out every day, it is easier for people to learn how we work because they see it in action all the time.

We are beginning to find that our culture and practice has become a key attraction for new staff. Social workers want to join us in Wandsworth because of the culture and our ways of working with families. It is something that social workers find exciting about working here.

As a result of this, our workforce is more stable than it’s been for a long time with far fewer locums and better retention. In this regard, we’re an outlier compared to many other London boroughs.

SEEING THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

We are seeing significant reductions in the number of children who become the subject of child protection plans and come into care, and increases in the number of children who are coming out of care and being reunited with their families.

This great work is reflected in the feedback we receive from parents and partners. Last year, we had a father come in and present his story at a service meeting, where he shared how the support he received from the multi-disciplinary team changed his relationship.

“We’ve been together for the best part of 10 years. We saw Family Safeguarding as a really good opportunity at cracking the issues in our relationship. There are still ups and downs because we’re humans and that’s life. Every day seems to be a little bit better than the last day in terms of how we communicate with each other and how we deal with things. But Family Safeguarding is different; it feels different and there’s intent there. It’s a good thing and it made us stronger. Wandsworth Family Safeguarding played a really big part in our lives for a very long time.”

The success and sustainability of Family Safeguarding in Wandsworth are deeply rooted in our values of working with and for families. Our commitment to these values has not only shaped our approach but has also attracted new staff who resonate with our culture. This alignment has led to a more stable workforce, improved retention rates, and ultimately, positive outcomes for families. The significant reductions in children entering the child protection system and the heartwarming stories of families reunited highlight the tangible impact of our work. Moving forward, we remain dedicated to upholding our values and driving real, long-lasting change for the families we serve.



Claire's story: Supporting Families in Conditions of Adversity

*CLAIRE, PARENT,
FAMILY SAFEGUARDING, TELFORD AND WREKIN

Claire's two children first became known to the local authority in July 2021. The children were 13 & 11 at the time and had been exposed to their mother's problematic substance use, which she had been having difficulties with for over 30 years. Claire's substance use had increased and become more chaotic, and she was struggling to engage with her treatment, all of which was having an increasingly negative effect on her children.

Following a significant relapse, Claire was quickly allocated an alcohol and drugs recovery worker, although engagement continued to be a challenge with repeated missed appointments. It was at this point that a decision was made by the family's social worker to move into pre-proceedings due to the significant harm that the substance use was having on the children.

Through the Family Safeguarding multidisciplinary team, the social worker worked with and alongside a recovery worker. This was groundbreaking for Claire who was supported by "a team of professionals all working closely together and in constant communication with one another."



Working closely together over many months ensured that the multidisciplinary team understood the recovery journey and the impact this can have on parenting capacity. This enabled the team to create and safely deliver a plan that was appropriate for Claire and her family. It was this cross discipline understanding of the family's context that enabled them to provide the support Claire needed to make positive changes where previous attempts had failed.

As a result of this support Claire demonstrated remarkable change and the decision was made to step the children out of pre-proceedings and eventually the Child Protection Plan as well.

Reflecting on the role of the social worker in particular, the children's father, Steve, identified the "hard work and dedication" shown in the work "with his daughters and that she [the social worker] has made a difference and has changed the life of this family".

**For confidentiality the names Claire and Steve are pseudonyms.*

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Keep doing the right things

NO WRONG DOOR – ROCHDALE

John Briggs – Practice Manager



Rochdale’s No Wrong Door hub, Our Place, has not had a smooth journey, but the dedication and passion of the team, their focus on culture change and doing the best for the young people has resulted in a transformed service that is positively impacting the lives of children, young people, and their families.

KEEP DOING THE RIGHT THINGS

Our Place was opened in Rochdale in April 2020, amongst the challenging circumstances of a global pandemic. The service has matured through Covid-19, a cost-of-living crisis, and unprecedented demand on services. With the addition of recruitment and retention issues and a very tough Ofsted judgement in January 2021, the fact that the service has survived is truly remarkable.

The success of Our Place is due to a range of factors; however, all have their origins in the culture of No Wrong Door within Rochdale and belief that this is the right thing to do for children and families. Scaffolded by No Wrong Door’s Distinguishers, Non-Negotiables and Provocations, this culture in the hands of dedicated, passionate and good people has been enough to sustain Our Place and resulted in its success. By asking honest, challenging questions and keeping doing the next right thing, Our Place has continuously grown and is now thriving. This growth was evidenced by a judgement of Outstanding from Ofsted in 2023.

When young people are in crisis, it is important that they are supported in a warm, welcoming, and calm environment, where there are clear structures, routines and high levels of predictability. At the start of our journey in 2020, we felt that this was not what the young people were experiencing in the residential hub. Equally, this was an environment where workers felt high levels of anxiety and where both they and the young people didn’t feel ‘safe’ and the building had become tired, ‘dark’, and ‘cold’.

It was important to give workers the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, so reflective practice sessions were introduced which highlighted that workers didn’t feel supported or ‘cared for’, and they felt there was a culture of criticism. Changes were introduced, management ‘sign off’s’ to incident forms changed to be both reflective and supportive. Team meetings which had previously been prescriptive and more of a forum for allocating tasks were changed to be an opportunity for reflection, support and team building. Both of these changes were quickly acknowledged and positively received by the team.

Through open discussions and our shared knowledge and experience as a team, we identified the need for a 'Model of Care' and practice. We agreed that this should be based on DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) and PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy).

Our new training focused on the young people and their early life experiences and how there are 'drivers' to their presenting 'needs and difficulties'. These skills are critical in creating a trusting and supportive relationship. For Therapeutic Parenting and PACE to be successful, there needs to be clear structure and routine and boundaries there needs to be 'predictability'. All these together, help the young people, and the adults around them, to feel safe. Additionally, we revamped our recruitment process and attended a number of recruitment events in the Greater Manchester area.

With the changes we introduced, we were successful in fully recruiting to all the vacancies we had at 'Our Place'.

When Ofsted inspected 'Our Place' in October 2023 they were really impressed with the work we were doing to keep young people on the Edge of Care at home with their families. They also recognised that our work clearly focused on returning young people who had been placed in the Residential Hub back home with their families.

The team are incredibly proud that 'Our Place' was judged as being 'Outstanding' and they could clearly see progress and positive outcomes that had been achieved for the young people and the 'relationships' they observed between the young people and adults.



Anne's story: "What good parents do"

ANNE
PROGRAMME MANAGER,
OUR PLACE, ROCHDALE

In 2020 and about to retire, Anne joined Our Place (as No Wrong Door is called in Rochdale) to help set up the service.

Looking back at her career, Anne reflected that elements of the No Wrong Door model have been used for many years. *"But the No Wrong Door Model is unique in the way that the provocations challenge the quality and purpose of the service we deliver across partnerships."*

"The provocations have been weaved through social work practice and partner practice. Our Assistant Director was in a high-level meeting with the police talking about Missing from Home. The police said that they have adopted the provocation 'Is this good enough for my child?' Our housing colleagues were in a difficult meeting with a family and said, 'Is this good enough for my child?' and 'What's this going to look like in 20 years' time?'"

"It's like dropping a stone in a pond – it rippled out to partners and that is powerful."

In Anne's view, the provocations have helped to re-frame partners' thinking when they're involved in keeping teenagers and young adults safe.



"The thing is, teenagers take up a lot of time and the response can be knee jerk, but when elected members or the police for instance reflect on whether the response taken today is improving the quality of the life for the young person, then we know it's about managing the risk for the child, not managing the risk for the organisation."

Anne goes on to explain that a shared approach to decision making for young people is supported by the way information is shared amongst partners. *"We're able to know what's going on for them today, make connections and think long-term."*

It is apparent that constant communication and negotiation is required amongst the professionals, but when a 'shared approach to parenting' succeeds everyone benefits.

"I think, having a shared approach to parenting and managing the risk for the child enables people to stop being so protective about their own professional role and work together in true partnership."

"I think, having a shared approach to parenting and managing the risk for the child enables people to stop being so protective about their own professional role and work together in true partnership."



Reunification – bringing families back together

FAMILY VALUED - COVENTRY



Hannah Bedford - Family Valued Programme Manager



Coventry's Reunification Project is working *with* looked after children and young people and their families to support reunification where there has been significant change in circumstances since the child or young person came into care.

REUNIFICATION – BRINGING FAMILIES BACK TOGETHER

Central to Coventry Family Valued is a belief that for most children and young people, their outcomes are better if they live at home with their family and within their community where it is safe to do so. Since we launched Coventry Family Valued in April 2021, we have seen a shift in culture in children's services, with an emphasis on families being part of the solution. We are committed to working *with* children, young people and their families; investing in our relationships with them, and enabling family-led decision making, wherever safe to do so.

The number of children in the care system nationally is rising. However against this backdrop, the number of children in care in Coventry (excluding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) has fallen, year-on-year, since our Coventry Family Valued launch.

	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024
Number of children who are looked after by the Local Authority (excluding UASC)	735	683	652	647

Not only have we seen a reduction in the number of children and young people entering care in Coventry, we are bringing families back together through our Reunification Project. The Reunification Project is about stopping to reflect on whether a child or young person should remain in care, recognising that families' situations change, and that for many children, being in care does not work for them. In Coventry, we decided to do something different by investing in the support we can offer children and young people in our care, and their families, in order to bring them back together. The Reunification Project works intensively *with* families, offering high-support alongside high-challenge, supporting reunification where there has been a significant change in circumstances since the child or young person came into our care.

Since our Reunification Project started in June 2021, 32 children and young people have returned home from care to live with their families, with 29 of these children and young people remaining at home with their families following reunification.

Working in this way has required a shift in our practice, working alongside families, trusting families, and gaining their trust so that our intervention is purposeful and tailored to that child or young person and their family and so that we support meaningful change alongside families. This means that children and young people can return home safely, and stay at home following reunification.

“The team was so supportive and took everything at our pace. They helped us reflect on our relationship, mediate tricky situations, and develop skills to navigate challenging times. I was able to message the team whenever I had a concern and they could tailor the level of support I received around our needs.”

“Now, Kyle and I are back at home together, he has just started school and I have started a college course. With the support I received from Coventry City Council, I feel equipped to manage our relationship independently – knowing that support is always a phone call away.”*

Quote from a parent who has worked with the Reunification Project to reunify her son to her, following two years in care.

*Kyle is not the child’s real name

The Reunification Project has made a real difference to many children, young people and their families, with the biggest success of this project being their improved outcomes by bringing families back together. Alongside this success the Reunification Project has supported considerable

financial savings. This has not only made our Reunification Project financially sustainable but enabled us to expand the Reunification Project in July 2022, meaning that we can now support even more looked after children and young people to return to their parents’ care.

The achievements of our Reunification Project have been recognised nationally, where we have been shortlisted for two national awards (Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022 and Frontline Awards 2023). In January 2024, one of the parents who has been part of the project attended the House of Commons, as part of the launch of ‘Home Again: understanding reunification practice in the children’s social care system in England’, a [report](#) commissioned by NSPCC and Action for Children (link to report), to share her experience.

We have also been pleased to have worked with other Family Valued adopter local authorities, as part of our growing Community of Practice. This has allowed us to share our learning from The Reunification Project, including the benefits to children, young people and their families, the financial savings we have made, and the staffing structure which supports the reunification work in Coventry.



Emily & Jason's Story: Coventry's Reunification Project

EMILY AND JASON*, DAUGHTER AND FATHER, FAMILY VALUED, COVENTRY



Emily is 11 years old and she first went into care when she was 6. Emily lived in eight different foster homes and her foster carers struggled with her behaviour, which left Emily feeling rejected. She came to expect that adults would eventually “give up” and she would need to move again.

Emily's Dad, Jason, worked hard to make changes in his lifestyle. He worked with drug and alcohol services, he completed parenting courses, and he accessed emotional support. Emily wanted to live with Jason and said that her life as a looked after child was “not normal”.

A reunification assessment was started, and alongside the assessment, the Reunification Project supported Emily and Jason to improve their relationship, increasing family time sessions as the assessment progressed. The assessment concluded that Jason could provide the safe and consistent care that Emily

required, and after a short period of transition, Emily went home to live with Jason.

As part of the family's reunification plan, a Family Group Conference took place, where the wider family were able to identify how they would support Emily and Jason. Reunification Project support was also offered in the transition from foster care to returning home, as well as family counselling.

Since Emily has returned home to live with Jason, she seems much happier, and school has said she appears settled and she is making really good progress.

**For confidentiality, the names Emily and Jason are pseudonyms.*



A Glimpse into the SFPC Impact Evaluation



Oana Gurau – Senior Evaluation Officer (Quantitative) Lead Researcher for the Impact Evaluation of SFPC, Foundations



SFPC, consisting of Hertfordshire’s Family Safeguarding, Leeds’ Family Valued, and North Yorkshire’s No Wrong Door models, has been under evaluation by the Foundations team since 2019. The evaluations involve an impact evaluation (which provides information on observed changes or the ‘impacts’ produced by the models) and an implementation and process evaluation (which provides information on the delivery during the rollout of the models). This article aims to unfold the layers of the impact evaluation, its design, and the anticipated outcomes, while keeping an eye on the future and its promise.

OUR EVALUATION

Our journey began in partnership with the DfE, embarking on a first-of-its-kind stepped-wedge randomised controlled trial (SW-RCT) in the sector. This approach allowed us to stagger each model’s implementation dates across local authorities over several months. This method enables comparisons across local authorities and allows us to assess changes over time within the same authority, providing a robust control group for our analysis. Each local authority acted as a control until they implemented the model.

The core of our evaluation focuses on several key metrics. The rate of children becoming looked after is our primary outcome, whereas the duration of time spent in care, the time spent on a child protection plan, placement stability, the likelihood of children not engaged in employment, education, or training post-care, and the probability of children returning to statutory services are some of the secondary outcomes. The secondary outcomes vary across models, providing a tailored insight into each model’s effectiveness.

Primary and secondary outcomes

Outcomes are variables monitored during a study to measure the impact that an intervention has on the population of interest. Typically, there is a distinction between primary and secondary outcomes which reveal both the direct impact of the intervention, as well as its broader, long-term effects, all grounded in the logic model. A logic model outlines the key components of the model, the mechanisms through which it works and the outcomes it hopes to achieve. Primary outcomes are the immediate, direct effects that an intervention aims to achieve. These are closely tied to the central objectives of the intervention and are directly influenced by its mechanisms. In the context of the SFPC models, the primary outcome is the likelihood of children becoming looked after.

Secondary outcomes are broader or more exploratory and help interpret the results of the primary outcome. They also provide insight into the long-term and systemic impacts of the intervention, extending beyond immediate family intervention to broader aspects of child welfare and social care system efficacy for SFPC. The secondary outcomes across the SFPC models evaluated are:

- the number of days children looked after spend in care
- the placement stability of children in care
- the likelihood of children who are or have been in care recently being not in employment education or training (NEET)
- the likelihood of returning to statutory services after a child protection plan (CPP)
- the time spent on CPPs
- the likelihood of a case progressing from pre-proceedings to care proceedings
- the likelihood of children being re-referred for parental substance misuse, domestic violence or parental mental health issues
- unauthorised school absence rates of children referred to children's social care

By evaluating both primary and secondary outcomes, the SFPC impact evaluation offers a nuanced understanding of the interventions' effectiveness, ensuring a comprehensive approach to enhancing children's social care.

The final stage of our evaluation, concluding in 2026, promises to be a comprehensive analysis of these data points, primarily investigating whether there are measurable benefits of the SFPC models. The design includes long-term follow-ups, essential for assessing the sustainability of the models' impacts on children, young people, and families. By collecting data 18 or 36 months after the trial period ended, the study can evaluate whether the benefits observed, if any, endure or if they diminish over time. This is particularly important in children's social care, where short-term gains must be balanced against long-term well-being.

In tandem with the stepped-wedge randomised controlled trial, we are conducting a cost-benefit analysis to understand the potential cost savings and benefits brought about by changes in the number of looked-after children and other relevant children's social care outcomes. This involves not only assessing the financial implications for children's services but also the broader societal impacts.

THE FUTURE OF THE EVALUATION

The goal of this evaluation is multifold. We aim to provide decision-makers with a clear financial and societal perspective on the SFPC models. This will empower them with the information necessary to make informed decisions that can profoundly affect children's lives and wellbeing.

As we process the collected data and await the final rounds of data collection, we look forward to the results that promise to offer valuable insights and guide future practices in children's social care.





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 focused 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 Foundations. Foundations 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.