

Good Practice Guide

Reviewing good practice from relevant programmes
in relation to the DFJ Trailblazer pilot



Introduction

The DFJ Trailblazer pilot is a Department for Education-funded programme supporting five Trailblazer DFJ areas throughout England to identify drivers of delay across the family justice system and develop and deliver solutions.

The Good Practice Guide was created to highlight examples of good practices throughout England, which could help participating areas develop solutions during the early phase of the pilot and refer back to throughout the programme.

The document includes both innovative ideas and important considerations in executing standard practices effectively.

The inclusion of these initiatives is not to provide definitive or prescriptive answers to the challenges that DFJ areas face. Its purpose was to inform the solution development process for Trailblazer areas, to inspire, and to stimulate discussion both within the programme and across the wider sector.

This version of the guide is a combination of four previously published editions, with additional insights from initiatives delivered by Trailblazer areas.

How to use

The initiatives included in this guide have been organised into the following themes:

- ▼ Workforce and training initiatives
- ▼ Court processes
- ▼ Collaborative and system-wide initiatives
- ▼ Approaches to pre-proceedings
- ▼ Family and community support

Where initiatives would fit into multiple themes, they have been placed according to their primary objective.

Each section of the guide begins with a map illustrating which of the drivers of delay are tackled by a specific initiative.

If you have any questions about using this guide, please contact yannick.mitchell@mutualventures.co.uk.

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Workforce and training initiatives

Mapping to Trailblazer intervention themes



Key drivers of delay	Cross-System Workforce Training Plans – DFJ Trailblazer Areas	London Joint Workforce Initiatives	Bournemouth Court-Based Social Worker Training	One Adoption West Yorkshire – Early Permanence Placement Practice Development	AI Policy Buddy – North Yorkshire	Working with Children Affected by Parental Imprisonment – Lancashire VRN
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Cross-System Workforce Training Plans – DFJ Trailblazer Areas



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OVERVIEW

- ▼ Developing court skills in the workforce has been a priority for all areas. This was due to a perceived lack of trust in social worker assessments and low confidence in staff carrying out court work. Training was delivered both through internal capacity and external commissioning.
- ▼ **ParentAssess training:** Trailblazers have prioritised commissioning ParentAssess training to increase the quality of social worker assessments. This framework is specifically designed for working with parents who have additional needs but is flexible and the learning can be applied to all assessments. ParentAssess has also been delivered for local authority legal teams and support workers.
- ▼ **One Minute Guides:** Areas have produced accompanying guides with trainings to ensure that the learning can be reviewed regularly and new joiners are able to benefit.
- ▼ **Collaboration with the judiciary:** Some Trailblazers have delivered effective training alongside their DFJ and other members of the judiciary. One DFJ has delivered training to social workers and solicitors. Another has worked alongside the local authority and a local university to deliver court skill training to ASYE social workers.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Areas were not expecting to see immediate impacts on delay however, some impacts are beginning to emerge.
- ▼ In Wolverhampton, there has been a noted reduction in the commissioning of external, independent assessments due to the increased quality of those carried out by social workers.
- ▼ Other areas have experienced positive feedback on assessment quality from members of the judiciary.
- ▼ For more information on workforce initiatives developed by Trailblazers, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Ensuring trainings were accessible to staff beyond the point of delivery has been a key principle. Acknowledging that some local authorities do experience a high turnover of staff, it's essential that social workers are able to benefit from previously delivered training, making workforce development a sustainable solution to tackling court delays.
- ▼ Trailblazers have either employed training leads or merged this responsibility with existing roles to ensure that the learning from training is embedded in practice.
- ▼ Where applicable, Trailblazers used peer learning forums to share ideas and learning materials that they had developed with other DFJ areas.
- ▼ Some Trailblazers have created dedicated webpages accessible to staff across the region to enable easy access to materials and overcome some of the typical challenges of sharing files between organisations.

HELPFUL LINKS



ParentAssess brochure



Essex, Suffolk, thend-on-Sea, Thu



One Minute Guide

- ▼ Information for organisations on ParentAssess

- ▼ Principles in Public Law guide – Essex, Suffolk, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock

- ▼ One Minute Guide on Case Management Hearings produced by Surrey

Joint Workforce Initiatives across London Councils



OVERVIEW

- ▼ **The London Pledge (2022):** a shared commitment by London's Directors of Children's Services to address increasing agency reliance together. This includes introducing agreements to not outcompete each other on pay and cap what LAs can pay for agency workers, to reduce social worker turnover.
- ▼ **The Big Listen (2023):** survey research in collaboration with the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme to collect social worker feedback (n = 1000+) to inform regional workforce strategies.
- ▼ **London Social Work for Children:** a web-based platform that aims to provide employment and professional development opportunities across London, to both practicing and prospective social workers, including local and regional recruitment campaigns as well as professional development resources.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ 32 London Boroughs have signed the London Pledge.
- ▼ They anticipate that the initiative will help to create a stable and high-performing workforce of social workers in London.
- ▼ The published findings from The Big Listen survey are being used to shape regional workforce priorities.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Inter-council collaboration, transparency, and information sharing.
- ▼ Dedicated efforts to collect workforce feedback and insight.
- ▼ Emphasis on targeted trainings to develop current and future social workers.
- ▼ Centralised source of recruitment campaigns for social work positions across a region.
- ▼ Non-compete element among local authorities to improve social worker retention.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [The Big Listen final report](#)
- [London Social Work for Children website](#)
- [The London Pledge Commitment Document](#)
- [London boroughs collaborate to end "bidding wars" over social workers](#)

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Bournemouth Court-Based Social Worker Training



OVERVIEW

- ▼ In Bournemouth, the judiciary works alongside Bournemouth University and invites social work students to come to Court for tours and conversations.
- ▼ Social workers engage in training co-arranged by legal and the local authorities. As part of the training, they use the Court space for a day and work alongside the DFJ.
- ▼ In his involvement with the Court talks, the Judge aims to:
 - 1) Clearly articulate the Court's expectations of social workers
 - 2) Demystify what happens in Court
 - 3) Explain that even when the Judge disagrees in Court, it does not mean that the social worker was necessarily wrong
 - 4) Discuss what to consider and how to proceed when things go wrong in Court
 - 5) Highlight his respect for social workers and the importance of their jobs
 - 6) Make Court a less scary place for social workers, and emphasise that although it is hard, social workers are able and qualified to attend

OUTCOMES

- ▼ This initiative serves as a valuable example of system-wide commitment to workforce training and relationship building.
- ▼ The programme has not collected formal outcomes data, but the DFJ's feedback is that social workers seem more confident to raise concerns and have more open conversations.
- ▼ If the programme functions as intended, potential outcomes will include improved social worker confidence and competence in Court, improved trust in social work quality, and thus reduced use of external social work assessors.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Building social workers' confidence in Court.
- ▼ Strong engagement from the Judge.
- ▼ Collaboration among judiciary and local university.
- ▼ Focus on strengthening system-wide relationships.
- ▼ Effort to validate social workers' invaluable roles in the system.
- ▼ Emphasis on clarifying specific expectations on social workers.

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ Since the Trailblazers programme began, the DFJ area in Guildford have taken a similar approach to deliver training alongside the judiciary and Cafcass to ASYE social workers.
- ▼ For more information about this, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.

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One Adoption West Yorkshire – Early Permanence Place Practice Development



OVERVIEW

The aim of an Early Permanence Placement (EPP) is to reduce the number of placement moves a young child may experience through care proceedings. This is achieved by placing young children who cannot be cared for within their own families with a foster carer. The foster carer would then adopt the child(ren) should the parents be unable to make the changes required for them to be able to return to their care. The practice development initiative aimed to:

- ▼ Increase the number of EPP opportunities for children in West Yorkshire;
- ▼ Improve understanding and awareness of EPP placements;
- ▼ Focus on the partnership between the foster carers, birth parents and the local authority to enable fully informed decisions to be made and there to be realistic expectations around potential outcomes;
- ▼ Reduce delay for children finding a permanent placement;
- ▼ Review practice to identify areas for development and improvement;
- ▼ Improve support for EPP foster carers; and
- ▼ Engage with birth parents to better understand their experiences.

OUTCOMES

The anticipated outcomes of this practice development are:

- ▼ Increased numbers of EPP carers in West Yorkshire.
- ▼ Increased awareness and upskilling of social workers in identifying families and most suitable referrals.
- ▼ Introduction of a mandatory training module for adopters.
- ▼ A further fuller EPP training opportunity is available that incorporates views of experienced EPP carers.
- ▼ Creation of a Peer Mentoring service for EPP carers and built-in informal information sessions.
- ▼ A three-episode podcast series on Adopting through Early Permanence.
- ▼ Identified areas of further practice development e.g. wider family support.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ A designated member of staff leading on the practice development.
- ▼ Increased education and training on EPP placements for parents, foster carers and professionals.
- ▼ A focus on the partnership working with foster carers and their allocated social workers.
- ▼ Peer support networks.
- ▼ Adjusted terminology to ensure the focus is on the best outcomes for the child.
- ▼ Supporting the system to share consistent messages.
- ▼ Supporting realistic expectations.

HELPFUL LINKS

[One Adoption West Yorkshire Podcast - Episodes 1-3 on adopting through Early Permanence](#)

[Early Permanence Planning Practice Guide](#)

[The legal framework of Early Permanence](#)

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AI Policy Buddy – North Yorkshire



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Policy Buddy is an AI tool developed by engine-ai.co.uk which provides guidance and advice to the children’s social care team in North Yorkshire.
- ▼ Policy Buddy uses RAG (Retrieval Augmented Generation) trained with knowledge of local and national legislation, procedures and guidance relating to children’s services.
- ▼ The tool allows social workers to ask questions and seek guidance on a wide range of things. One example in the webinar (linked below) was: **“A family whose child is subject to a child protection plan wants to them out of the country on holiday. What needs to happen?”** The tool then provides some suggested next steps for the social worker.
- ▼ The service enables staff to check the sources of the response.
- ▼ This tool was created to address challenges with staff workloads enabling them to spend more time working directly with families and children.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ This tool has only been in use for three months at the time of writing but early feedback has been promising with staff finding that Policy Buddy increases efficiency.
- ▼ Almost 1,000 staff have been trained on the platform. Feedback from frontline staff and managers has been universally positive.
- ▼ Anecdotally, staff also feel more confident in the ability of technology to support them.
- ▼ Staff also report feeling more connected with legislation, policies and procedures

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ The Policy Buddy is trained to only look at internal policy documentation and national legislation. This reduces the risk of hallucination – a term used in AI to describe a response returned by an AI tool presented as fact when it is actually false or misleading.
- ▼ The tool can provide guidance in over 50 different languages or tailored to specific audiences. For example, you might ask it to explain something technical as if you were eight years old.
- ▼ The tool has an accessible front end which allows staff to find information and crucially, check the sources of results. It also works on a phone and can use speech-to-text functions.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Blog post - Transforming Children's Services in North Yorkshire](#)
- [The tool was demonstrated in this webinar](#)

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Lancashire Violence Reduction Network – Toolkit



OVERVIEW

- ▼ This toolkit is designed to support professionals working with the approximately 300,000 children impacted each year by parental imprisonment. Where that parent is their primary carer (most likely their mother), 95% of children are forced to leave their home.
- ▼ Data on these children is scarce with an exact figure unknown. Many of these children are likely in private fostering arrangements with people known to their parents.
- ▼ It aims to raise awareness among professionals, improve their skills in addressing the needs of these children, and promote multi-agency collaboration to ensure timely support and positive outcomes.
- ▼ The toolkit includes a Child Impact Assessment which is not recommended as a statutory procedure, but a tool that statutory or non-statutory professionals can use to better understand the needs of a child. This assessment was co-created with the Prison Reform Trust, the Merseyside Women's Services Alliance, Time-Matters UK and staff from Wirral safeguarding Children Partnership's Family Matters.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ There is no evaluation to confirm outcomes from the use of this toolkit.
- ▼ The anticipated outcomes from the use of the toolkit are:
 - ▼ Improved experiences for children affected by parental imprisonment
 - ▼ Better understanding of the needs of these children from professionals
- ▼ Outcomes for children with imprisoned parents is also limited as there are no requirements for data to be collected either in the court or when a parent arrives in custody.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Information and guidance on processes of key stages including arrest, prison and release and how a child might be impacted by this.
- ▼ The Child Impact Assessment can be completed with a child to better understand their network and what they've experienced through the process of having a parent incarcerated.
- ▼ A support wheel can form part of the Child Impact Assessment to help children map out their network and identify where their support is.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Impact on children of parental custody – toolkit](#)
- [Mia's story - book to support children with a parent in prison](#)
- [7-minute briefing - Impact of parental incarceration](#)

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Mapping to Trailblazer intervention themes



Key drivers of delay	Worcester DFJ area	Teesside Floating Case List	Dorset DFJ area	Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC)	Pre-Case Management Hearing Pilot	Writing to Children – A Toolkit for Judges
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Worcester DFJ area



OVERVIEW

- ▼ In response to a poor Ofsted inspection outcome in 2016, a partnership including a newly formed Children's Trust, a new DCS and a new DFJ acted to improve timeliness.
- ▼ The LA developed a Liquid Logic workspace for legal planning meetings.
- ▼ A legal case tracker provides an overview of workloads by case type and by lead solicitor. The legal case tracker RAG-rates each case for delay and risk.
- ▼ Legal and children's services teams meet every six weeks to resolve issues, provide updates and reflect on recurring themes.
- ▼ The Trust employs three Case Progression Officers who provide specialist support on 'stuck' cases, track private law activity and support the wider social work teams to QA and develop practice.
- ▼ Final hearings are listed within 6 weeks.
- ▼ Expert assessments are used rarely; the DFJ trusts conclusions from LA social workers.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Worcester ranks the lowest for average case duration at 24 weeks despite a high number of applications per 10,000 children (ranking 11th nationwide).
- ▼ The local partnership worked to improve timeliness, reducing from 50-70 weeks in 2016 to 24 weeks in January 2024.
- ▼ Worcester is considered an area with consistently strong performance.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Worcester DFJ implemented an internal 'charter' covering blocking time for listing.
- ▼ Strict limits on each case's elements and time in the courtroom.
- ▼ Increased judicial caseloads.
- ▼ Case management hearings run like seminars which are more participatory, and discussion based and less adversarial.
- ▼ Consistency in judicial decision-making.
- ▼ Case tracking enabled by robust data collection and advanced audit tool.

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ For more information on these initiatives, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.

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Teesside's Floating Case List



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Teesside listing team maintains a list of 'floating', less complex cases that judges can take on if their scheduled hearings conclude ahead of time.
- ▼ The list is around three to four cases, compiled by the listings team and shared with judges and their clerks on a daily basis.
- ▼ Judges take a collaborative approach where everybody does what they can i.e. judges who are currently managing complex trials will sign off orders when they can, whilst those with more time will take contested hearings.
- ▼ Cases are listed for three rather than five days (but this tends to reduce to 1.5 days). There is a commitment from judges to fit reading time and judgement writing around their hearings.
- ▼ At the same time, there is a commitment to allocate sufficient time to the management of complex cases that require more than 26 weeks to resolve.
- ▼ New judges joining the court have focused training to adapt to this approach.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Fitting cases into the schedule via the floating list has led to a significant reduction in waiting times for court hearings.
- ▼ This has contributed to the average duration of care proceedings in the DFJ area (Cleveland and South Durham) consistently staying under 30 weeks in FY 2023-24 and trending positively.
- ▼ Pre-proceedings work has improved, with a good rehabilitative focus as key issues are identified before proceedings and can be acted on.
- ▼ Staff resilience has been maintained through the 'pacing' of the approach.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Commitment to schedule hearings with the best outcomes for children in mind, not around barristers' schedules.
- ▼ An experienced listing team that manages both civil and family cases.
- ▼ A collaborative environment where judges and clerks work closely together.
- ▼ A strong, collaborative culture across the partnership led by the LFJB.
- ▼ A commitment from advocates to distil issues down to their essentials.
- ▼ Use of a floating list strongly mirrors the approach taken with criminal courts to manage court capacity and caseloads.
- ▼ The listing team provides comprehensive training in the approach to new joiners to ensure continuity.

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ For more information on this initiative, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.

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Dorset DFJ Area



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Dorset's approach to public and private law proceedings have seen significant reform over the past few years.
- ▼ Children's services moved to a locality model in 2020, which brings together social care, early help and education teams together to work collaboratively to meet the needs of children and families. This approach has increased management oversight through locality based 'line of sight' meetings.
- ▼ In November 2022 Dorset implemented a whole family approach to safeguarding. This has had a positive impact and will be rolled out across the county moving forward as part of the DfE Families First for Children Pathfinder.
- ▼ Dorset have increased work with local Family Rights Group to further improve pre-proceedings practice.
- ▼ Dorset has also been involved in the Pathfinder for private law proceedings, which promotes a less adversarial approach and has reduced delay in private law and increased capacity for the judiciary to work on public law cases.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ These changes have prompted a decrease of the number of children in care from 470 in 2021 to 390 in 2024.
- ▼ A reduction in the number of children in care proceedings from 97 children (49 families) to 64 children (35 families).
- ▼ Over the last six months 55% of Dorset's children have had care proceedings conclude within 26 weeks, 41% have concluded between 27 and 38 weeks and 36% have concluded over 38 weeks (national average) – with the longest at 65 weeks.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ More extensive pre-proceedings work.
- ▼ Increased court confidence in the quality of Dorset's assessments and care plans.
- ▼ Whole family approach to safeguarding.
- ▼ The Dorset Public Law Charter, which focuses on system culture change and strict splits of permanent judicial responsibilities.
- ▼ Few police interventions and Emergency Protection Orders.

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ For more information on this initiative, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.

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Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ FDAC is an alternative family court for care proceedings.
- ▼ It is specifically designed to work with parents who struggle with drug and alcohol misuse.
- ▼ It is all about trying to solve the problems that have led the local authority to bring the parent to court. To do this, the same judge reviews the case every fortnight in an informal hearing with each parent.
- ▼ In these meetings, known as Non-Lawyer Reviews, parents get to speak directly to the judge.
- ▼ A specialist multi-disciplinary FDAC team works closely with the judge and other professionals to provide intensive treatment and support for parents wishing to turn their lives around.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Cases are resolved with 52% fewer hearings.
- ▼ Cases are 82% less likely to feature contested final hearings.
- ▼ Children are 4 times more likely to return to their parents at the end of proceedings.
- ▼ Children returned home are 14% less likely to return to court.
- ▼ Parents are 4 times more likely to stop using drugs and alcohol.
- ▼ For every £1 spent on an FDAC team, £3.20 of net savings are returned to the taxpayer (source: FDAC case for investment).

KEY FEATURES

Outside of the court process

- ▼ Multidisciplinary specialist FDAC team
- ▼ The use of dynamic assessments and access to evidence-based interventions
- ▼ Trauma-informed practice
- ▼ Regular drug testing

Court process changes

- ▼ Judicial continuity
- ▼ Non-lawyer reviews
- ▼ Pre-court briefings which improve information sharing
- ▼ Adapted courtroom layout

HELPFUL LINKS

[FDAC website](#) – holds information for parents and for practitioners

[FDAC cost-benefit analysis](#) – The Centre for Justice Innovation produced a financial analysis of FDAC which evidenced significant savings.

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Pre-Case Management Hearing Pilot



OVERVIEW

- ▼ A national pilot, with 57 Local Authorities, establishing an information sharing meeting between the allocated Guardian and Social Worker after care proceedings are issued, and prior to the Case Management Hearing (CMH).
- ▼ The information sharing meeting aims to ensure a more effective CMH, by enabling the Guardian to understand the pre-proceedings work and journey to-date.
- ▼ It also enables the Social Worker to understand the Guardian's perspectives, and in particular to identify any further work, investigations or assessments that could be undertaken prior to the CMH.
- ▼ The meeting is for information-sharing and not decision-making, and is in keeping with historic best practice. By front-loading some of the work, the meeting should contribute to reductions in delay by making the subsequent stages more effective.

OUTCOMES

The pilot is subject to a formal evaluation which will report in March 2026 and determine any impacts on delay.

In the meantime, the meeting has had positive take-up across the 57 participant authorities and positive feedback includes:

- ▼ Strengthening local partnership working and relationships
- ▼ Helping social worker and Guardian preparations for court
- ▼ Identifying additional lines of enquiry to be considered in some cases

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Meeting occurs post-application, pre-CMH (ideally between days 12 and 18).
- ▼ The meeting is not statutory and is not a decision-making meeting.
- ▼ A record of the meeting is captured in the form of a "family friendly" note.
- ▼ Participating authorities have developed local approaches with CAFCASS to streamline scheduling and production of the note.

HELPFUL LINKS

A dedicated Knowledge Hub site has been established with key materials. The link can be found here:

<https://khub.net/group/pre-case-management-hearing-meeting-pilot>

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Writing to Children – A Toolkit for Judges



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane, has published guidance for family judges on writing to children involved in family court proceedings. This guidance was developed with input from the Family Justice Young People’s Board.
- ▼ The guidance aims to help judges communicate effectively with children, explaining decisions made in their cases.
- ▼ Highlights the various purposes of judicial letters, such as explaining decisions, acknowledging children’s views, and supporting their understanding and acceptance of court decisions.
- ▼ Letters from judges can serve as important records for children to refer to later in life, helping them understand their life stories and the role of the family court.

OUTCOMES

Anticipated outcomes of this toolkit are:

- ▼ To address that children often feel “left in the dark” about court proceedings, leading to distress, uncertainty, and confusion. Children report feeling “done to” rather than “worked with” during court processes.
- ▼ Direct communication from judges can help children feel valued and ensure they understand the court’s decisions.

KEY FEATURES

The toolkit provides:

- ▼ Step-by-step instructions, examples, and templates to help judges overcome the challenges of writing to children.
- ▼ Suggestions for content and structure to ensure clarity and appropriateness
- ▼ Practical advice on tailoring letters to individual needs, using professional support, and presenting letters in an accessible format.
- ▼ Sample letters for different scenarios and age groups.

HELPFUL LINKS

[President of the Family Division publishes guidance on writing to children, developed with the Family Justice Young People’s Board - Courts and Tribunals Judiciary](#) – Introduction to the toolkit

[Writing to Children - A Judges Toolkit V1.7](#)

[The care files: Exploring the experiences of teenagers entering the care system - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

[Cafcass emphasises the importance of explaining decision making to children in new animated film | Cafcass](#)

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Collaborative and system-wide initiatives

West Yorkshire LFJB and Teesside LFJB



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Local Family Justice Board in West Yorkshire and in Teesside have been identified as examples of good governance.
- ▼ Both areas have a committed Chairperson. In West Yorkshire, that person is from a local authority legal team, and in Teesside, a local barrister.
- ▼ Meetings focus on productivity and ensuring that it doesn't become a space for airing complaints.
- ▼ Problem-solving is collective. Chairs are visible, communicate regularly with stakeholders, and understand their strengths and areas of interest. This promotes shared responsibility of actions rather than tasks sitting with a small number of people.
- ▼ Emphasis is on relationship building, both through national conference but also in less formal settings.
- ▼ LFJBs actively use data insights as a basis for future direction and action.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Strong LFJB governance creates an ethos of problem-solving in an area and fosters a shared responsibility for tackling problems.
- ▼ Involving stakeholders and ensuring members feel part of decision making facilitates greater information sharing among partners and a recognition that problems often require a system-wide response.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Agreed Terms of Reference and Statement of Expectations.
- ▼ Strong cross-sector buy-in from CAFCASS and Judiciary.
- ▼ Secretariat support from HMCTS.
- ▼ Joint training, sharing of good practice, and coming together to prepare protocols, discuss themes, and ensure that they have a good network of contacts across the area which supports partnership working.
- ▼ In Teesside, sub-groups link in with the LFJB by having the Chair or Vice Chair attend.

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ We are collaborating with the Ministry of Justice team to share learning on effective LFJB practice and support the work they are doing in this area. An updated version of the LFJB Chair handbook is being developed.
- ▼ For more information on these initiatives, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.

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Tri-borough Care Proceedings Pilot



OVERVIEW

- ▼ From 2012-2013, the Tri-Borough local authorities (Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster) ran a pilot that aimed to reduce court delays by lowering the average number of hearings per case from 8.8 to 4. Elements of the pilot included:
 - ▼ A newly appointed **Case Manager to work directly with social workers** and managers to improve the quality of social work assessments and statements presented to court.
 - ▼ Emphasis on **judicial continuity** in cases, and improved case management of timescales from the court for the child.
 - ▼ **Cafcass' earlier assignment** of Guardians and solicitors to cases.
 - ▼ **Redesign of parenting and fostering/adoption assessments** to be proportional to the case complexity, meaning that some will be less than previously standard 12-16 weeks.
 - ▼ Development of a project learning program, which tracks cases, processes, costs, and outcomes for children throughout the pilot.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ The pilot reduced the average court time from 49 weeks to 27 weeks.
- ▼ Approximately half of the pilot cases had completed within 26 weeks. It also reduced the median duration of pre-proceedings.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Dedicated Case Manager role.
- ▼ Emphasis on improving social work assessments and statements in court.
- ▼ Frontloading assignment of workers to cases.
- ▼ Strategic redesigning of assessments to reflect cases and reduce delays.

HELPFUL LINKS

[Pilot final report](#)

[Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Children and Families Bill: Written evidence from the Tri-borough Care Proceedings Pilot](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

Dandelions – Telford & Wrekin’s Parents with Experience Group



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Dandelions are a group of parents with lived experience of services in Telford & Wrekin. Since March 2022, the Group has worked with the local authority to coproduce and develop systems, practice and processes across children’s services.
- ▼ In addition to the Co-production Group, three parents have been trained as Peer Parent Advocates, offering peer support, advocacy for parents and working with families in Family Group Conferences.
- ▼ The Dandelions support the local authority with the delivery of training to practitioners and social workers.
- ▼ Dandelions participate in the recruitment process supporting the local authority vision of co-production and “building a service with our parents, for our parents”.
- ▼ Dandelions co-delivered drop-in sessions alongside professionals for parents who need support.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Feedback from parents who worked with the Advocates has been positive, particularly advice offered to families to help them better navigate services.
- ▼ Families have access to information that aids their understanding of care proceedings and processes, resulting in greater engagement and the chance to improve outcomes for their children.
- ▼ Enables practitioners to consider the correlation between the experience of the parent with the experience of the child.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ New parent-focused feedback form for child protection conferences.
- ▼ Co-produced leaflets for comprehensive parent information.
- ▼ Collaboration with Chester University's social work apprenticeship scheme.
- ▼ Developed Parent Reports to balance power at conferences, reflect their meeting experience, and shape family plans.
- ▼ Delivered training to regional IRO conference.

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ The attached poster provides an overview of the vision Telford & Wrekin have for families, co-produced between the local authority and Dandelions.



Parent Carer
Poster

Delay driver mapping

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Adolescent Participation Pathway Pilots (APPP)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The APPP is a planned intervention in partnership with participating local authorities and CAFCASS which involves a series of engagements between a young person, a judge, a social worker, a guardian and a support person.
- ▼ These engagements are agreed with the young person throughout the proceedings, without the presence of lawyers and are focused on encouraging the young person's participation in the court process and other decision-making forums they're involved in. These meetings are not about evidence gathering.
- ▼ The focus of the intervention is to identify achievable goals and issues the young person wants to address to make a positive change in their life through the development of a 'My Plan'.
- ▼ This approach is being piloted at Teesside Family Court and Manchester Civil Justice Centre.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ The pilots will be evaluated by a team from Cardiff University and will focus on the experience of those who implement, deliver and participate in the pilot.
- ▼ An early iteration of the pathway was delivered in Coventry and Warwickshire Family, Drug and Alcohol Court. 52 young people took part over a 3-year period and reported feeling better supported and listened to.
- ▼ The young people looked at the court process has something that they participated in and supported them to make changes.
- ▼ Social workers reported an improvement in their relationship with the young person as well as better engagement with services.
- ▼ Judges reported that young people they met with gained confidence and were better able to communicate their ambitions.

KEY FEATURES

The Participation Pathway is underpinned by 8 non-negotiables:

- ▼ Aspirational
- ▼ Inspirational
- ▼ Direct participation
- ▼ Agency and control
- ▼ Early identification
- ▼ Relational stability
- ▼ Strengths-based
- ▼ Trauma informed

HELPFUL LINKS

[Seen but not Heard: The Child's Voice in the Family Court System](#)

- Relates specifically to private law proceedings

[National Charter for Child Inclusive Family Justice](#)

[Family Justice Young People's Board - top tips for professionals](#)

Delay driver mapping

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Blackpool Co-production



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Blackpool's co-production team brings partners across the system together including social workers, Early Help, midwifery, sector consultants, private legal, public legal, drug and alcohol services, HMCTS, Better Start, NSPCC, and parents. Their programmes include:
- ▼ Born into Care: following Blackpool's involvement in the national Born into Care study, Blackpool decided to co-produce local next steps. With parents at the centre of co-production, Blackpool identified 8 principles and 12 workstreams to prioritise supporting parents and unborn babies at risk of separation at birth. These workstreams are currently underway. Blackpool also co-produced a MAP guide, which helps families to understand the pathways through social care.
- ▼ Blackpool Families Rock: Blackpool has worked to co-produce a Model of Practice for social work, underpinned by Head, Heart, and Hands. The Model of Practice articulates values of co-production, listening, empathy, and prioritising families' needs.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Blackpool has seen higher staff retention since the co-production work began.
- ▼ The success of Blackpool Families Rock was a key reason that DfE ceased its intervention with Blackpool Children's Services.
- ▼ Social workers have provided positive feedback on the MAP, noting that it makes the processes clearer and creates a good culture of accountability.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Placing relationships at the foundation of meaningful co-production. Cross-system partnership and collaboration is essential.
- ▼ Emphasis on lived experiences of parents, children, and the workforce.
- ▼ Focus on career development opportunities for people with lived experience by offering paid employment within the co-production team.

HELPFUL LINKS

[Blackpool Co-Production - Born into Care](#)

[Born into Care: Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

[Blackpool MAP - Family's Journey](#)

[Blackpool Co-Production - Blackpool Families Rock](#)

If you'd like to learn more about Blackpool co-production, you can reach out to their team at coproduction@blackpool.gov.uk

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London Infant and Family Team (LIFT)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The London Infant and Family Team (LIFT), helps social workers and judges decide whether a child on a care plan should live with their birth family or enter care permanently.
- ▼ LIFT brings together specialists in infant mental health and social care and works with a family over a 9-15-month period. Within this period, the team assesses the parent's health and wellbeing, including any addiction, mental health, or trauma.
- ▼ They establish treatment goals and offer tailored support to strengthen the parent-child relationship. Decisions about whether the child should be placed in care permanently are made following the treatment programme and are based on the parent's capacity to strengthen their caregiving relationship. Where parents can achieve significant change, children are rehabilitated back into their birth family. If nothing changes, adoption is recommended.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ King's College London's (KCL) research in East London with the LIFT teams is currently underway, so no confirmed outcomes have been reported.
- ▼ However, KCL expect to see that a service model that focuses on infant mental health brings benefits to children who enter care at a young age as they grow older – in terms of their social, emotional and mental wellbeing – compared to the existing social work model.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ The LIFT assessment is relationship-focused, with the practitioners looking at the interaction between parent and child to understand how the child's needs are being met.
- ▼ Strengthening the caregiver-child relationship is crucial to the programme.
- ▼ The infant's mental health is a core part of the approach.
- ▼ LIFT teams are multidisciplinary comprising of social workers, psychiatrists and psychologists.

HELPFUL LINKS

[NSPCC overview of Infant and Family Teams](#)

[How is this being evaluated?](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

Cheshire & Merseyside – Independent Assessment Hub (part of the DFJ Trailblazers pilot programme)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Independent Assessment Hub in Cheshire & Merseyside was created through the DFJ Trailblazers pilot programme to address challenges around Independent Social Worker assessments.
- ▼ The purpose of the hub was to complete good quality and timely independent fostering and ParentAssess assessments.
- ▼ The Cheshire & Merseyside DFJ area covers nine local authorities, four of which were able to identify social workers for release into the hub.
- ▼ Cases eligible for referral to the hub would include:
 - ▼ Challenge of previous assessments, gaps in evidence or flawed/biased evidence
 - ▼ Where not having an ISW would affect the court's timetabling and cause delay for the child
 - ▼ An update of a previous fostering assessment or disagreement with previous assessment
 - ▼ Several viability assessments are required impacting the timeline
 - ▼ Late presentation of a connected person requiring assessment

OUTCOMES

- ▼ The hub was fully operational for 5 months by the time the pilot ended.
- ▼ Impact is being measured through:
 - ▼ Reduced timelines for assessments;
 - ▼ Judicial feedback on evidence submitted;
 - ▼ Feedback from family members and other professionals via surveys.
- ▼ Regular quality assurance reports were produced by the Service Manager. These include: reason for the assessment request, type and timeliness of assessments, feedback themes.
- ▼ The hub is also being evaluated as part of the wider DFJ Trailblazers programme evaluation led by Verian.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ The hub took referrals through a Letter of Instruction which laid out the eligibility criteria and made the purpose of the hub clear.
- ▼ Eligible parenting assessments were completed within 8 weeks, fostering assessments within 10 and viabilities within 2 weeks.
- ▼ To ensure independence, assessments were not allocated to a social worker seconded from the same Local Authority that referred the assessment at hand.
- ▼ The hub was not intended to replace routine assessments that should be carried out by LAs in pre-proceedings or court-directed assessments where a case had been presented directly to court in an emergency.
- ▼ The hub was developed alongside an intensive workforce development initiative to upskill social workers and improve the quality of assessments across the DFJ area. The pilot provided ParentAssess, CoramBAAF Kinship Assessment, Lucy Faithfull Foundation and Theraplay training.

HELPFUL LINKS

For more information about the hub, please contact us:
DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

Regional data collection – Central London (part of the DFJ Trailblazers pilot programme)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The 12 local authorities that form the Central London DFJ area wanted to better understand areas of delay and pressure across the region and support anecdotal evidence with clear data that could be shared with system leaders.
- ▼ To support with the design of the data collection template and the analysis, the area worked alongside Data to Insight, a sector-led service supporting local authorities to better understand their data.
- ▼ The collection was based in part on a previous initiative that took place in Warrington. This was a Department for Education funded pilot to analyse the effectiveness of pre-proceedings.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ The twelve local authorities were able to consistently meet the requirements of this new data collection.
- ▼ A regional data collection gave the area a much clearer view of the challenges affecting the region and increased collaboration and information sharing between participating local authorities.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ The template collects data on:
 - ▼ Demand – number of cases and children in care proceedings
 - ▼ Pre-proceedings – duration of cases in pre-proceedings and exit pathways from pre-proceedings
 - ▼ Application pathway i.e via PLO or not via PLO
 - ▼ Numbers and types of assessments completed during pre-proceedings
 - ▼ Characteristics of children in care proceedings
 - ▼ Case duration
 - ▼ Outcomes of cases
 - ▼ Reasons for cases running beyond 26 weeks

HELPFUL LINKS

- ▼ Mutual Ventures hosted a webinar on effective pre-proceedings practice alongside Sarah Henry, PLO Data Lead Service Manager from Warrington Borough Council - [Catch up on our learning event: Effective pre-proceedings](#)
- ▼ For further information about the data collection and subsequent analysis, please contact us: DFJTrailblazers@mutualventures.co.uk.



Data collection template

- ▼ Blank copy of the Central London data collection template

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Approaches to pre-proceedings

Mapping to Trailblazer intervention themes



Key drivers of delay	Lifelong Links – Family Rights Groups	SWIFT – East Sussex	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Pre-Birth Protocol	Family Group Conferencing	North Somerset Pre-Proceedings Approach	Warrington Pre-Proceedings Practice
Late presentation of family members	Present	Absent	Absent	Present	Present	Present
Workforce capacity	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
Court capacity	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Present
PLO tracking issues	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present
Low PLO assessment quality	Absent	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Present
Use of external assessors	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Absent
Availability and frequency of expert assessments usage	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Absent	Absent
Lack of trust in LA assessments	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present	Present	Present
Changes in plan	Absent	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Absent
Lack of information sharing among partners	Present	Present	Present	Present	Absent	Present

Lifelong Links – Family Rights Group



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Lifelong Links is a programme that aims to address the fragmentation of family networks that often occurs when children are looked after away from their parents.
- ▼ It aims to improve the sense of identity and belonging in looked after children that will support young people while they're in care, and also as they transition into adulthood.
- ▼ This model was developed by the Family Rights Group in collaboration with key stakeholders including children and young people in care and care leavers, as a result of the 2013 Care Inquiry which found that the care system too often broke relationships for children, rather than built them.
- ▼ Through working with a Lifelong Links coordinator, a young person will be supported to map their support network and identify who is important to them. The coordinator will then make contact with these people and bring them together in a Lifelong Links family group conference.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Increased supportive relationships: The number of family and friend connections for young people in care increased significantly, from an average of 7 to 26 connections
- ▼ Improved placement stability: Young people who participated in Lifelong Links were more likely to remain in the same foster care or children's home a year later compared to those who did not participate.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ A trained independent coordinator works with the child to identify important people in their lives, such as family members, former foster carers, teachers, and other significant adults.
- ▼ During the conference, a plan of support is created with and for the child. This plan is then integrated into the child's care or pathway plan.
- ▼ A new app-based tool called 'Circles' supports young people and professionals to explore who in a child's life is most important to them.

HELPFUL LINKS

[Lifelong Links - Family Rights Group](#)

[Family Rights Group Lifelong Links portrait – Sadie's story](#)

Delay driver mapping

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PLO tracking issues

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Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

SWIFT – East Sussex



OVERVIEW

- ▼ SWIFT is a jointly commissioned, multidisciplinary provider of specialist assessment and intervention. The service receives referrals only from Social Care services or Peri Natal units.
- ▼ Teams are structured by thematic risk presentation with a solid and stable workforce. SWIFT provide mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, learning disability, sexual risk and domestic abuse support services.
- ▼ SWIFT assessments are based around clear and transparent guidelines which are developed by practitioners but can be tweaked by judiciary and lawyers involved in cases.
- ▼ It promotes less reliance on psychological or psychiatric assessments and more focus on interventions for parents. Parents are encouraged to tell their story to one practitioner, rather than having to repeat their story to many different people across multiple services.
- ▼ Within pre-proceedings and proceedings, SWIFT practitioners can assist in the planning of assessments and interventions to support parents.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ For adult mental health provision, 144 assessments were completed (2018/19) leading to 62 interventions and only 13 referrals to other services.
- ▼ Only 15 disengagements from the service (less than 10%).
- ▼ For Drug and Alcohol prevention, 156 assessments leading to 100 interventions and 20 referrals to other services.
- ▼ 13 disengagements from 74 discharges from alcohol service.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Truly multidisciplinary, including management and reporting structures.
- ▼ Structure based on parental risk presentation.
- ▼ Experts supplement and add value to social work evidence.
- ▼ Pre-proceedings is an opportunity to multi-disciplinary assessment and intervention.
- ▼ A strength-based model;
- ▼ It has taken 5 years to develop the model which is now fully supported by Cafcass and the judiciary. Feedback is very positive.

HELPFUL LINKS

[SWIFT Specialist Family Service – Nuffield overview](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

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Changes in plan

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Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Pre-Birth Protocol



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Pre-Birth Protocol is a publicly available document that clearly outlines the standard practice, expectations, and timescales involved in the area's prebirth work.
- ▼ The document provides guidance for identifying risk factors and working alongside parents to protect the unborn child from harm.
- ▼ The protocol aims to standardise early, comprehensive pre-birth assessments and to share plans of service/intervention with parents by week 35 of gestation.
- ▼ In its guidance, the document lays out expected areas of joint working in the pre-birth process. For example, it discusses joint visits to the prospective parent(s)' home by the social worker and the community midwife for information sharing.
- ▼ It also lays out the process and timelines for Multi-Agency Meetings and Discharge Planning Meetings, which involve relevant staff from the Leaving Care Service, Learning Disability Services, Drug and Alcohol Services, Housing colleagues, and other applicable groups.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ This emphasis on early work and assessments may reduce delay throughout the process.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Regional standardisation of practice and expectations.
- ▼ Emphasis on early pre-birth assessments to frontload work and preparation.
- ▼ Clearly defined timescales and areas for cross-system collaboration.
- ▼ Easily accessible guidance for scenarios involving complex factors, including learning disabilities, concealed or denied pregnancies, and prospective parents with care experience.
- ▼ Standardised templates for the Discharge Planning Meeting are linked within the Protocol, which creates a straightforward and user-friendly path to protocol compliance.

HELPFUL LINKS

[The Pre-Birth Protocol](#)

[Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's other multi-agency policies and procedures](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

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Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Family Group Conferencing (FGC) involves a mediated discussion among the child and their network to collaboratively create a plan for the child, generally during pre-proceedings or before.
- ▼ Although there is no legal requirement for an FGC, the practice has become increasingly standard, with 80% of LAs using them as of 2022.
- ▼ Many areas cite parents' lack of willingness/trust as a main barrier to their successful and consistent usage. Some specific considerations to maximise the effectiveness of FGCs include:
 - ▼ More work needs to be done to communicate FGCs' benefits to families so that FGCs can be used for a greater proportion of cases
 - ▼ There is a potential opportunity to promote FGCs with local private solicitors so that they can encourage their clients to participate
 - ▼ Active efforts to avoid paternalism and humiliation

OUTCOMES

- ▼ A randomised controlled trial (RCT) assessed the use of FGCs among 21 LAs throughout the country from 2020-2022. It concluded that, compared to cases without FGCs, the cases with FGCs:
 - ▼ were 8.6% less likely to go into care within 12 months
 - ▼ saved £960 per child saved in first 12 months
 - ▼ were 0.82x less likely to have care proceedings issued
- ▼ A 2017 evaluation of the Leeds Family Valued programme showed that expanding FGCs to more families, including those affected by domestic violence, led to reduced court proceedings, fewer looked-after children, £755 in savings per family, and a decline in Child Protection Plans.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Early family empowerment and engagement.
- ▼ Trust building among stakeholders.
- ▼ Focus on involvement of the child in plan development.
- ▼ Cost effective method providing a path toward alternatives to issuing care proceedings.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [RCT findings report](#)
- [Leeds Family Valued model](#)
- [North-east Lincolnshire Creating Strong Communities report](#)
- [2021 study on successes and failures of FGCs](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

North Somerset Innovative Approach to Pre-proceedings



OVERVIEW

The key priority is to propose creative support packages and therapeutic support to families with an aim to divert cases from court. This includes:

- ▼ Expectation of a family network meeting and a family-led plan for every child
- ▼ Parenting assessments that are therapeutically driven
- ▼ Cognitive assessments done early on to inform how social workers could best engage with parents
- ▼ Instead of costly psychological assessments, the LA prefers to fund therapeutic support (there is enough evidence to support that any therapeutic support benefits families, even if they do not have full psychological or psychiatric assessments; the LA is currently liaising with the judiciary on this approach to ensure it is not contested in court).
- ▼ Creative support packages (e.g. 24/7 support package to enable a child to stay with grandparents, daily childcare support for a mother of six that needs to separate from her partner)

OUTCOMES

- ▼ North Somerset's average duration of care proceedings was 31.8 weeks, as compared to 54 weeks in the entire Bristol County Court (based on CAFCASS data 1/4/2021 to 31/3/2022).

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Early involvement and engagement with family members.
- ▼ Therapeutically driven assessments.
- ▼ Therapeutic support throughout pre-proceedings.
- ▼ Creative support packages to create avenues for children to remain within their community.
- ▼ Cost-effective means of providing support to families.

HELPFUL LINKS

['Why we're providing therapy for parents in pre-proceedings' - Community Care](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

Warrington Pre-Proceedings Practice



OVERVIEW

A 2022 project led by Warrington Borough Council and Salford City Council sought to:

- ▼ Encourage the effective use of pre-proceedings
- ▼ Limit issuing care proceedings when possible and appropriate
- ▼ Prioritise using family members or S20 instead of urgent applications
- ▼ Frontload planning and assessments
- ▼ Encourage each LA to craft their own digital PLO Toolkit to align staff with local processes and assessments, and create regular, targeted trainings in line with such toolkits.
- ▼ Introduce self-assessments and peer reviews to evaluate the PLO area of practice

OUTCOMES

- ▼ All 23 LAs in the North West have PLO Toolkits in place. Self-assessments of their PLO areas of practice are intended to continue into the future.
- ▼ CAFcASS delivers an annual, regional training programme, and PLO training programmes are delivered to diverse stakeholders.
- ▼ Establishment of quarterly practice hubs to regularly discuss PLO practice with all 23 LAs.
- ▼ There is growing collaboration among DFJs and CAFcASS to improve joined-up working.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Emphasis on inter-agency collaboration.
- ▼ Focus on diverting from issuing care proceedings.
- ▼ Focus on reducing urgent applications.
- ▼ Information sharing and documented standard best practices in each LA.
- ▼ Staff trainings and assessments to align staff with best practices.

HELPFUL LINKS

[Warrington Guidance, including the PLO Toolkit](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

Family and community support

Mapping to Trailblazer intervention themes



Key drivers of delay	Mpower (Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire)	NEST (Nurture Empower Safe Together) Team - Rochdale	Lancaster Hope Boxes	Little Minds Matter – Bradford Infant Mental Health Service	Family Hubs – Essex	Positive Choices	Pause
Late presentation of family members							
Workforce capacity							
Court capacity							
PLO tracking issues							
Low PLO assessment quality							
Use of external assessors							
Availability and frequency of expert assessments usage							
Lack of trust in LA assessments							
Changes in plan							
Lack of information sharing among partners							

Mpower (Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Mpower is a service delivered by Ormiston Families that aims to support parents who have had children removed from their care.
- ▼ The service was set up in response to the overrepresentation of care experienced mothers having children removed because of the same issues.
- ▼ Practitioners have expertise in working with adults with complex needs and usually have a background in mental health or care services.
- ▼ Staff are trained in trauma, addiction, mental health and care proceedings and have a specialism they're able to consult on.
- ▼ More than half of referrals come through children's services meaning the parents being supported are either going through proceedings or have recently completed proceedings. Mpower works with mothers at highest risk of pregnancy and further removal.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ In 2022-23, Mpower worked with 122 women who had at least one child removed into care.
- ▼ A 2021-22 impact report shows that 92% of women in the service did not have a further pregnancy.
- ▼ 100% of women reported an improvement in their emotional stability.
- ▼ 87% improved their support networks.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Practical support to help mothers or couples secure housing, clear debt and access benefits.
- ▼ Assistance with navigating children's services including helping parents to make contact arrangements.
- ▼ Information on sexual and reproductive health.
- ▼ Supports parents to understand and process the reasons as to why their child was removed into care.

HELPFUL LINKS

[Centre for Justice Innovation - Mpower overview](#)

[Research - Examining mothers' own histories in the context of repeat removal of children: informing a prevention agenda](#)

[Mpower homepage](#)

Delay driver mapping

Late family presentation

Workforce capacity

Court capacity

PLO tracking issues

Low PLO assessment quality

Use of external SW assessors

Availability and frequency of external experts usage

Lack of trust in LA assessments

Changes in plan

Lack of information sharing among partners

NEST (Nurture Empower Safe Together) Team - Rochdale



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The NEST service empowers parents who have faced recurrent care proceedings to provide safe and consistent care for their children.
- ▼ The service has 3 Pathways, depending on the support needed:
- ▼ Pathway A is voluntary and available to parents who have had a child removed from their care within the past 2 years. It provides support and resources related to housing, mental health, domestic abuse, and contraception, giving parents the chance to make positive changes to avoid future recurrent care proceedings.
- ▼ Pathway B focuses on the prenatal stage for parents who have previously had a child removed through care proceedings. The team conducts an early pre-birth assessment, allowing enough time for the mother to prepare for the assessment's recommendations.
- ▼ In Pathway C, the team works with mental health teams, drug and alcohol services, early years providers, and early attachment services to support parents to sustain positive changes through the time their child turns 5.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ In the service's first three years, they had 60+ referrals across the three pathways, resulting in 20 babies living at home with their parents. Most cases working with NEST have been de-escalated.
- ▼ The team plans to undertake additional ParentAssess training. The team aspires to further expand NEST to care experienced young people experiencing teenage pregnancy.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ The model was developed via operational groups with mothers who had experienced having a child removed from their care.
- ▼ Emphasis on the fundamental belief in people's ability to change
- ▼ Focus on trauma-informed approaches and relationship building
- ▼ The team consists of a Practice Manager, two lead social workers, two family support workers, and a midwife. Through their trauma-informed approach, they work to build trusting relationships with parents by visiting frequently and being honest and available.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [NEST Team Rochdale | Centre for Justice Innovation](#)
- [Our Rochdale | NEST Team](#)

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Lancaster HOPE Boxes



OVERVIEW

- ▼ HOPE Boxes, in partnership with the University of Lancaster, supports women separated from their babies at birth due to safeguarding concerns.
- ▼ The initiative is developed with women who have lived experience, building on findings from the "Born into Care" research project.
- ▼ Mothers facing multiple adversities and complex trauma often find safeguarding processes overwhelming, leading to poor communication and support. HOPE Boxes are designed to promote sensitive communication, help reduce trauma and build mothers' confidence in professionals.
- ▼ These boxes include items to capture memories and maintain a connection with the baby during court proceedings. If the baby is permanently placed out of the mother's care, the boxes support long-term grief and identity work.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Feedback from mothers and professionals:
- ▼ Supports motivation and keeps families engaged.
- ▼ Supports mothers' wellbeing, helping them feel less alone and reduces the stigma felt.
- ▼ Builds trust in professionals and relationships with foster carer and social care.
- ▼ Family Tree discussions from the Hope Box can support parallel planning.
- ▼ Supports babies through compassionate messages, which as they grow older, helps promote their identity and understanding of their birth story.

KEY FEATURES

The initiative is underpinned by 5 core principles:

- ▼ Reducing trauma
- ▼ Supporting identity
- ▼ Promoting connection
- ▼ Recognising grief
- ▼ Giving hope

HELPFUL LINKS

[Giving Hope Project](#) (includes links to clips where mothers give their views on the value of Hope Boxes)

[Born into Care research project](#) – Developing best practice guidelines for when the state intervenes at birth

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Little Mind Matters – Bradford Infant Mental Health Service



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Little Minds Matter: Bradford Infant Mental Health Service (LMM) is a specialised parent-infant relationship service working with infants, their families, and associated professional networks during the 1001 Critical Days (conception to two years).
- ▼ Responsive caregiving is the most important factor to enable children to survive and thrive; investment and support in the early months/years is key (WHO, 2018).
- ▼ LMM supports early relationships between babies and their carers. They seek to reduce the inequalities, including lifelong social, cognitive, physical and emotional health, that are linked to insecure parent-infant attachment relationships.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ LMM's ambition is to address these inequalities with early intervention, from conception, to give children the best start and encourage strong parent-infant relationships.
- ▼ Through supporting Bradford families over the past 6 years, the team have started to understand the complexity within the community. Many families have intergenerational trauma and parents need support to sensitively understand they did not receive the responsive caregiving they needed as children and they need to do more to support the emotional development of their babies.
- ▼ LMM's work with babies, families and professionals alike is regarded as a great example of the significant impact that can be made on the quality of parent-infant relationships, ultimately improving the future trajectory of a child's life.

KEY FEATURES

Little Minds Matter work collaboratively across four strands to support and promote healthy parent-infant relationships:

- ▼ Direct support to families
- ▼ Training
- ▼ Consultation
- ▼ Community engagement

HELPFUL LINKS

[Little Minds Matter - Bradford Infant Mental Health service - BDCT](#)

[Understand the Moments that Matter with your child – YouTube](#)

[Thematic review \(saferbradford.co.uk\)](#)

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Essex – Family Hub Model



OVERVIEW

- ▼ The Essex Family Hub model is an integrated approach to providing support for families with children from pre-birth to 19 years old (or up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities)
- ▼ The services provided by the hub include:
 - ▼ 0-5 Healthy Child Programme,
 - ▼ Healthy Schools Programme,
 - ▼ 5-19 Healthy Child Programme,
 - ▼ Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support up to 25 years,
 - ▼ Children in Care,
 - ▼ Safeguarding Services.
- ▼ The Family Hub service is commissioned by Essex County Council and delivered by HCRG Care Group with Barnardo's.
- ▼ Although not directly linked to reducing delay in care proceedings, family hubs are a vital early intervention model supporting families dealing with substance misuse and resilience support for parents.

OUTCOMES

- Essex's partner in Family Hubs delivery report that:
- ▼ 99% of children and young people they work with through the Hubs model feel supported in reaching their goals.
 - ▼ 94% of risks removed following subsequent assessments.
 - ▼ 98% of young parents feel they are making more positive lifestyle choices.
 - ▼ 96% of mothers say their emotional wellbeing has improved.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ A Family Hub is located in each district across Essex in convenient areas accessible to the community.
- ▼ Services are managed and delivered based on four regions within Essex aligned to the local government districts (Mid, North, South and West).
- ▼ In addition to the Essex-wide offer, some regions have bespoke offers, for example, the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board commission a range of health-related services from physiotherapy to speech and language therapy.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Homepage for Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service](#)
- [Essex Council webpage - Family hubs](#)

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Positive Choices (Calderdale Council)



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Positive Choices is a single point of access for support and advice during pregnancy and early years for care experienced and other vulnerable young people.
- ▼ The service aims to support these young people to prevent their children from coming into care by improving their parenting skills and ability to work through their challenges.
- ▼ The service works with these young people both antenatally and postnatally, up to two years post-birth across three main areas: encouraging the parent to look introspectively by completing reflective work; educating the parent through programmes and courses provided by the practitioners which provide the parent with information on how to keep their child safe and happy; and practical support, like helping the parent access benefits, consider different childcare options and assisting with housing conditions.
- ▼ Following the birth of the baby, there is an 8-week post-birth programme which focuses on bonding, cues, and safe sleeping.

OUTCOMES

- ▼ Evaluation of the programme has found that this intervention before birth was influential in improving the quality of attachment between carers and their children.
- ▼ Between 2017-2021, 66% of parents supported by Positive Choices were able to keep their babies.
- ▼ A 2020 evaluation also found that after engaging with key workers, fewer children needed ongoing social care interventions. The estimated savings between 2017-20 have been quantified to be £781,744.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ Each family is provided with a key worker who will have a protected caseload to ensure they are consistent, which minimises stress for the parents and builds a trusting relationship.
- ▼ The practitioners encourage parents to shift their outlook from one of presumed failure to one of hope for lasting change.
- ▼ If the decision is made that the child will be removed at birth, Positive Choices continues to work with the parent, ensuring they are supported.

HELPFUL LINKS

- [Positive Choices | Calderdale Council](#)
- [Positive Choices leaflet](#)
- [Positive Choices Evaluation II Report Final Version 30 September 2021](#)

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Pause



OVERVIEW

- ▼ Pause is a national charity that works to improve the lives of women who have had – or are at risk of having – more than one child removed from their care. They engage with women who are part of this cohort and, following 16 weeks of engagement, support women who want to join the Pause Programme to commit to a pause in pregnancy for 18 months.
- ▼ Once the women have been supported to take this pause in pregnancy through working with a local sexual health service and a Pause Practitioner, the Practitioner will work with the woman through their Practice Model which is centred around an intensive and supportive relationship between a woman and their Practitioner who work together to build a better future over 18 months.
- ▼ Pause Practitioners tailor the programme of support to the woman's specific needs and hopes for the future. This includes providing advice and support across health needs, therapy, education & employment, self-reflection and more practical support, like accessing benefits.

OUTCOMES

- In 2022-23:
- ▼ Of those who completed the Pause Programme, 76% reported improved emotional wellbeing and resilience; 74% improved their physical and mental health; and 62% have an improved relationship with their children.
 - ▼ There was an average reduction of 14 infants entering care in those local authorities who ran a Pause practice.
 - ▼ For every £1 spent, it is estimated that £4.50 is saved rising to £7 after 7 years.

KEY FEATURES

- ▼ The Pause approach is trauma informed and is designed to work with women, rather than for them, and puts the women at the centre of this relationship-based approach.
- ▼ The Pause Programme works with women who have no children in their care and so can focus on their own needs.
- ▼ Pause Practitioners have small caseloads to ensure they can concentrate on the women they are working with and give them sufficient support.

HELPFUL LINKS

- <https://www.pause.org.uk/what-we-do/>
- <https://www.pause.org.uk/our-impact/>
- [DfE evaluation](#) of Pause.

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Thank you

Our thanks to all the organisations we worked with to produce this document including many of those featured.

If you have questions about any of the initiatives, please contact:

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