What is Families First?

Families First Leeds is an initiative funded through the Government’s national Troubled Families programme. Its aim is to help families with a number of complex problems by working with them to help turn their lives around, improving outcomes for the whole family and thereby reducing the need for more intensive and costly interventions.

Leeds was an early adopter of the programme, welcoming the opportunity to put families first and help them to make positive changes to their lives. Partnership working is an important part of the Leeds programme, which is not just a children’s services priority - a crucial part of the programme is to help parents to enter the world of work, for example.

Troubled Families is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). They announced a five-year extension to the programme in 2014, and Leeds started to deliver the expanded programme from September 2014. The expanded programme has more of an emphasis on early help than it has had previously, and has a greater focus on transformation and how we can work differently and in a more integrated way with families.

The programme uses a payment-by-results model where local authorities receive some funding up front, and a further percentage is awarded when local authorities can demonstrate that the family has made sustained progress against the agreed outcome measures in their Families First outcomes plan.

Which families are we talking about?

There are a number of criteria for families to be considered in the Families First cohort:

- Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion, or young people at risk of worklessness
- Children who need help - who are identified as a child in need, or children/ families who are on or are being considered for an Early Help plan
- Children or young people with poor school attendance
- Parents or young people involved in offending or anti-social behaviour
- Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
- Parents or children with a range of health problems. In Leeds, our priorities are substance misuse and/ or mental health difficulties.

Any families which meet two or more of these criteria can be considered for the programme, and in Leeds we are focusing particularly on our local priorities of children in need, children and families who are on or being considered for an Early Help plan, children with poor school attendance, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), and families affected by domestic violence and abuse.

The Families First programme uses a flexible approach with families, according to their individual needs and it is not ‘one size fits all’. Families within the Families First cohort have a diverse range of needs and many of them are already engaged with services and making good progress.
How does Families First operate in Leeds?

Leeds has developed the Families First programme through building on our existing local cluster arrangements and partner relationships (guide), rather than establishing separate Families First delivery teams. The programme brings together agencies which are already working in communities, to ensure that their work is focused on improving outcomes for the whole family, in line with the principles of our Think Family protocol. The approach is restorative, working with rather than ‘to’ or ‘for’ families, and offering high support and high challenge to help families address multiple and complex problems.

Families First has funded a number of Targeted Services Leaders (TSL) posts in children’s services, working with partners in clusters to co-ordinate the local support offer and ensure families get the best support at the right time. The programme has also helped develop additional capacity within existing local services, for example Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), intensive family support services, and partnerships with the third sector.

The Leeds model is based on national research about how to achieve better outcomes for families, which recommends: having a single dedicated worker (e.g. lead professional/ practitioner) for each family; addressing the needs of the whole family; setting a common purpose and having agreed outcomes; providing practical, hands-on support; and practitioners adopting an assertive and persistent approach. These principles are further summarised in Leeds as: ‘one family, one plan, one worker’. In the expanded programme that we are currently delivering, each family has a Families First Outcome Plan with agreed measures of outcomes and progress. The format of the plan has been agreed by the Families First Board and approved by the DCLG.

The city-wide programme is coordinated at a strategic level by a small multi-agency team, which includes seconded staff from West Yorkshire Police and Jobcentre Plus alongside children’s services staff.

What progress have we made so far?

Leeds is regarded as a leading authority as a result of our Families First programme, and we work with and advise other local authorities on how they can learn from our experience and practice.

We have seen sustained improvements on key outcomes including improving school attendance, reducing anti-social and criminal behaviour, reducing incidents of domestic violence, and supporting people into employment.

Where can I find further information?

Contact the Families First team on 0113 39 52613, or families.first@leeds.gov.uk. There is more information on the national programme available here.