One minute guide
Family Valued—Innovation Programme
No. 98, Month 2015

What is it?
In Leeds we believe that families are our most important resource. Children live in families, families create communities and communities create cities, so by investing in strong and stable families we can create the conditions for a more successful city. An important part of doing this is ensuring that when families are experiencing difficulties and a child within the family is vulnerable, the support that is put in place works with the family to find sustainable solutions and empowers that family to find the strength to change.

‘Family Valued’ is an innovative programme of investment that aims to embed this family centred way of working across services in Leeds and particularly in the relationship between the children’s social work service (guide) and the most vulnerable children and young people. It is underpinned by investment of £4.85m from the Department for Education’s Innovation Fund, which was established to support innovation in the children’s social care system.

What are we doing?
Family Valued is about both practice and culture change for multi-agency practitioners working with families across the city. It aims to create a consistently restorative approach to how we work with families, so that practitioners have the skills, techniques and confidence to hold difficult conversations and raise concerns at the right time. Where more significant intervention is necessary, we seek to find more family centred solutions, often involving the wider family and friends network. This prevents the need for children to be taken into care and reduces the risk of other damaging situations and behaviours developing.

Specifically the programme has three key elements. Firstly, Leeds is training up to 6,000 multi-agency practitioners in restorative practice (guide) so that restorative approaches can be used to change the way that frontline staff work with families. A dedicated team is in place to provide the training, which ranges from introductory restorative practice training, to more in-depth bespoke training to enable practitioners and organisations to work restoratively with each other and with vulnerable families.

Secondly, Leeds is building on the success of its family group conferencing service (FGC) (guide) expansion to take the approach into more areas where it can be used positively, for example with families experiencing domestic violence. FGC is a restorative technique, where trained co-ordinators bring extended family and friends together to find solutions to issues that affect children and young people and support them to implement those solutions themselves. Used in the right way, there is already evidence that FGCs in Leeds are helping to safely and appropriately reduce the need for children and young people to be taken into care.

Thirdly, Leeds has commissioned more services particularly for families experiencing domestic violence or who have had a child taken into care. When the outcome of earlier interventions and /or FGC is that some additional support is required, that support will be in place and able to make a difference quickly and effectively.
How will we know if this work has been a success?

In Leeds we have set out some key policy intentions to guide our roll-out of a more restorative approach. These have been agreed by the Children and Families Trust Board (guide), and the Family Valued programme aims to bring them closer to reality across all our work in Leeds. They are that:

The default behaviour of children’s services in all its dealings with local citizens/partners and organisations will be restorative - high support with high challenge.

Children’s Services in Leeds will ensure that families, whose children might otherwise be removed from their homes, are supported to meet and develop an alternative plan before such action is taken.

In all other cases where there are concerns about the safeguarding or welfare of a child or children, we will work safely and appropriately with the family to support them in helping to decide what needs to happen.

To measure our progress as this work develops, the Family Valued programme has an independent evaluation team. Between spring 2015 and spring 2016 that team is working closely with those leading the programme in Leeds to gather both quantitative (how much we are doing) and qualitative (how well we are doing it) evidence of how the experience of practitioners and families, patterns of decision-making, outcomes (is anyone better off) and spending patterns around vulnerable families change as a result of this work.

How can practitioners and organisations get more involved?

You can access places on restorative practice training, or arrange for a bespoke session for your service or team. Just email restorative.practice@leeds.gov.uk.

If you want to be kept informed about events or other opportunities send your details through to family.valued@leeds.gov.uk and you will be added to a database.

Key contacts and for more information

The Family Valued Programme Manager is Catherine O’Melia
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You can also read what Nigel Richardson Director of Children's Services (guide) had to say about Family Valued on the Child Friendly Leeds (guide) website.

The national innovation programme is being delivered in partnership with the Spring Consortium. You can get further information and updates their website.