



One minute guide

Families First

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What is Families First?

Families First Leeds is an initiative funded through the Government's national [Supporting Families](#) programme (formerly known as Troubled Families). The aim is to help families with a number of complex problems by working with them to help improve 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.

Supporting Families is funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the expanded programme has been running since 2015. The national programme uses a payment-by-results model where local authorities receive some funding up front, and further funding is awarded after local authorities demonstrate that a family has made sustained progress against the agreed outcome measures set out in the Families First outcomes plan.

In 2018, Leeds was one of 14 local authorities awarded Earned Autonomy, meaning the full funding was provided up front to support service transformation and development; in Leeds, this enabled us to create three [Early Help Hubs](#). This model of funding still requires the local authority to monitor families and evidence sustained progress and outcomes are achieved. Outcomes are validated through local auditing processes to ensure that they comply with national requirements.

Which families are we talking about?

For families to be considered on the Families First programme, they must have needs relating to two or more of the following criteria:

- **Improving children's life chances:** Children who need additional support, from the earliest years to adulthood;
- **Getting a good education and skills for life:** Children who have not been attending school regularly - this could relate to poor school attendance or multiple exclusions;
- **Staying safe in the community:** Parents or children involved in, or at risk of involvement in, crime or anti-social behaviour;
- **Staying safe in relationships:** Families affected by domestic violence and abuse;
- **Improving living standards:** Families experiencing or at risk of worklessness, homelessness or financial difficulties, or young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET);
- **Living well, improving physical and mental health & wellbeing:** Parents and children with health needs relating to mental health and/ or substance use.

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. The programme brings together agencies already working in our 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. [Early Help Hubs](#), hosting multi-agency teams (including police, domestic violence co-ordinators, mental health workers, early help practitioners and drug and alcohol specialists) have been created to support and develop [Early Help](#) practice in Leeds. 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'.

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?

You can contact the Families First team on 0113 378 1840, or families.first@leeds.gov.uk. There is more information on the national programme available [here](#).