

# Family Valued

Taking a restorative practice approach to put the family back at the heart of children's social care



Leeds City Council

## Challenge

Leeds has a clear aim: to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children unnecessarily coming into care. Our challenge is to create safe high-quality packages of support to extended family and kinship carers, working alongside families to prevent children being taken into care. A key part of this goal is changing services' response to domestic violence adopting restorative ways of working with the whole family.

## Innovation

Family Valued is embedding restorative practice across all council services, offering a common theory of practice for the whole workforce, at the same time as developing Family Group Conferencing as a core offer to families in a wide range of circumstances. Our aim is to create the conditions in which families can make decisions, repair relationships and make change for themselves.

## Partners Involved

- Family Valued is a cross-agency partnership led by Leeds City Council and including:
- Children's services
  - West Yorkshire Police
  - NHS Leeds; Leeds Community Healthcare; and public health teams
  - Adult mental health
  - Local schools
  - Drug and alcohol services
  - Leeds Safeguarding Children's Board
  - Domestic violence services
  - Housing
  - Probation
  - Family Judge for West Yorkshire
  - The Leeds Health and Wellbeing Board
  - Leeds Community Safety Partnership
  - Third sector providers
  - Leeds Children's Trust Board

## Our Innovation

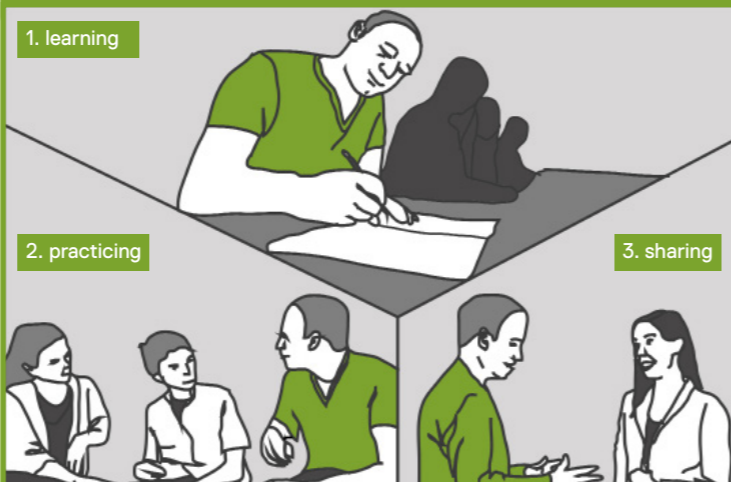
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### A new social contract: restorative practice as the default setting for all work with children and families



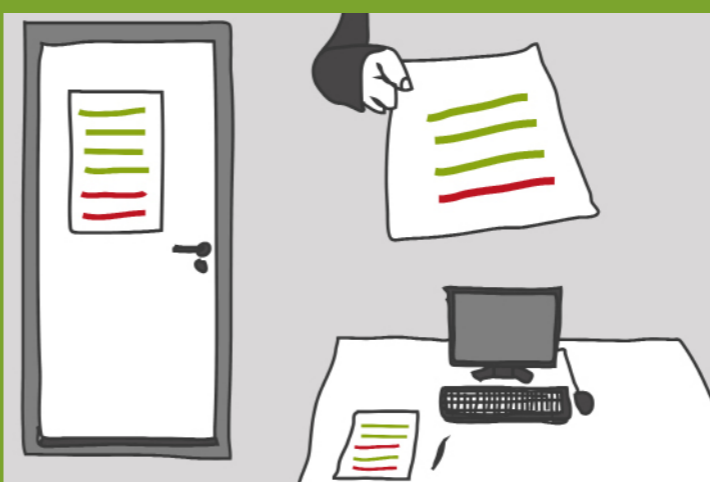
Leeds is using Family Group Conferencing (FGC) at scale, including exploring ways of extending the offer to families affected by domestic violence and commissioning additional support services according to what families say they need. All families who are subject to an Initial Child Protection Conference are now offered an FGC.

### A working culture of high support and high challenge, facilitated by action learning



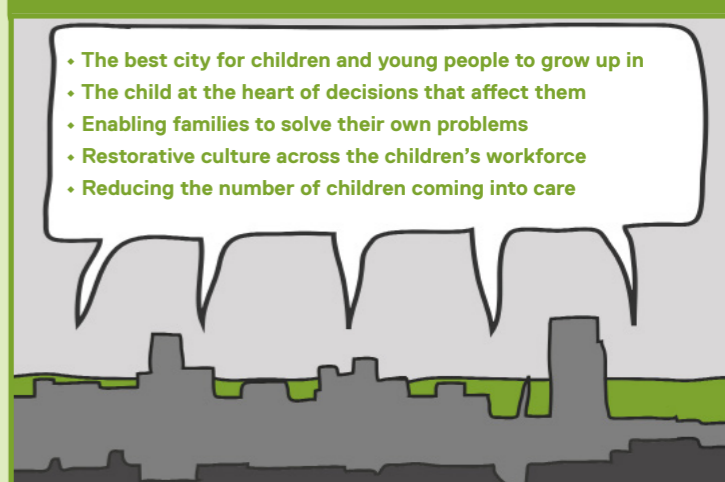
Leeds has a 75,000 strong workforce involved in lives of children in some way. The new approach to working with families is reflected in new ways of working with one another. Through large-scale training programmes, restorative practice is being embedded as the core ethos of working in Leeds.

### An 'obsessive' focus on the things that matter



Leeds began by setting one clear aim: safely and appropriately reducing the number of children unnecessarily coming into care. Everything stems from this. We use Outcomes Based Accountability to track our progress towards our goals for children and families, and make this data visible to everyone.

### A clear vision from a cross-agency leadership team



The Leeds leadership team has set a clear and strong vision that means everyone understands what we are trying to achieve together. This extends across the cross-agency partnership and includes managers at the most senior level in addition to our elected members.

What we're doing

#### Targeted whole-family support

A daily multi-agency meeting now takes place at the 'front door' to provide a more co-ordinated response, both in actions and approach, for families experiencing domestic violence.

#### Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conferences are offered to more families, earlier in the lifetime of the issues they are experiencing. In the case of domestic violence, FGCs are conducted in a way that guards against re-victimising the victim. No arrangement is made without their consent, especially including who is invited to attend. The purpose is not necessarily to keep the family together, but to use the wider family to identify conditions of support. The perpetrator is only physically present at the request of the victim if he or she acknowledges the abuse and is willing to address it.

A Family Group Conference acts against the secrecy of the abuse by enhancing knowledge and the number of people who know what has been happening. It draws on the strength of the extended family and friendship network for support, information and resources. It brings together, at one place and at one time, agencies who can offer professional resources.

#### A common theory of practice across the whole workforce

Since April 2015 the restorative practice training team and expert partners have delivered training to over 5,000 people. We are spreading restorative practice across the children's workforce and beyond, including frontline professionals across the NHS, police, schools, youth offending teams, housing, social work and in voluntary and community organisations. This ensures a common theory of practice across multiple agencies.

#### Cascading learning

Making sure learning is sustainable means not just looking at training but how it's then embedded as a practice. A network of 'restorative champions' is in place and a comprehensive train the trainer programme is currently being rolled out.

#### Better decision-making between teams

Four FGC teams are linked to their local social work teams, the 'front door' and locality-based early help provision through clusters. This ensures the FGC service is both able to accept referrals and support partners' development and engagement with Family Group Conference.

#### A clear focus on the outcomes that matter

We want Leeds to be the best city in the UK to be a child. Our five outcomes for children are for them to:

- Be safe from harm
- Do well at all levels of learning and have the skills for life
- Choose healthy lifestyles
- Have fun growing up
- Be active citizens who feel they have voice and influence

#### These are measured through 14 priorities and 20 indicators, of which three are 'obsessions':

1. The number of looked after children
2. School attendance
3. 16-18 NEET rate

Our Outcomes Based Accountability approach gives us a focus on:

- How much are we doing?
- How well are we doing it?
- Is anyone better off?

Weekly data on how we're progressing is displayed visibly across the council to inspire and motivate staff (not to create performance anxiety).

#### Making leadership visible

Senior level engagement and visible, committed leadership have been a critical factor in gaining engagement from staff across the workforce. Our leadership has set a clear vision for children's services, backed up by a theory of practice and a strong project management capability.

#### Training for leadership

A wide range of senior leaders have had in-depth training in restorative practice, ensuring that this is not just seen as a practitioners' approach but is valued by and embedded through all levels of the organisation.

Training focuses not just on how we work with children and families but also how we work together. There is intensive restorative training in teams, with homework and robust challenge of colleagues regardless of hierarchy. This gives everyone a mandate to make change happen. When you look at the organisation, if what you find is not restorative then change it.

What's changed

## What we've learned

## Family Valued

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**“Building stronger families, however those families are defined, is at the very heart of our ambition to be the best city for children and young people to grow up in.”**

Nigel Richardson, Child Friendly Leeds Ambassador, Leeds City Council

## Fitting in with existing timescales

It takes 6-8 weeks to set up an FGC, and there's a challenge in being required to run CP conferences as well as FGC. This can be confusing for families. Permission to depart from existing ICPC timescales has been granted by the Children's Minister, Edward Timpson. Our ambition is to remove the initial CP conference where safe and appropriate, which is serviced and formal, and give families an entitlement of a family-led FGC. FGC enables swifter kinship assessments to be made as the wider family are already known and engaged with the FGC process.

## A need to join up data

The 'front door' daily meeting has required intelligence sharing and has massively opened up an understanding of the knowledge that sits in services across the city. Previously, a victim of domestic violence could have experienced up to 10 calls from a range of services.

## Building momentum around culture change

Early findings from the evaluation show reported evidence of momentum-building around restorative practice, suggesting culture and practice change. Feedback from training sessions is overwhelmingly positive. FGC principles are seen by a wide group of stakeholders as having wider application to a range of family-based decision-making models.

## Supporting social workers

A radical change to practice can be unsettling if it feels as if your professional competence is challenged. The model requires social workers to relinquish some control, as they were previously the only people who could refer to FGC. It's been important to give safety to social workers to operate in the knowledge that they will be supported by managers.

## Communication crucial to learning

In addition to clarity of communication from the leadership, we have found that continuous communication and engagement over time is important in ensuring all partners are on board with the process as it develops and that learning is shared. This includes engagement with domestic violence services and links to the wider domestic violence strategy for the city, in addition to engagement with bodies such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the voluntary sector.

One method of engagement has been to use partnership events to launch elements of the work and reflect on progress around key themes (e.g. partnership working).

## Having everyone round the table

Daily meetings are not just about data sharing but actions. It's therefore crucial to have everyone round the table so things can happen quickly. This is made possible by genuine buy-in from every agency and a shared understanding of the need to do things together, quickly and with a focus firmly on the family.

## Using success stories to engage and champion

An Ofsted inspection at the beginning of the programme led to some delays in the initial stages of the plan, as senior managers were absorbed by these processes. The positive outcomes of the Ofsted inspection, however, have been used to engage more departments across the city, including transport, housing and customer facing teams as well as to engage with other councils and local authorities nationally.

## Building leadership in other agencies

Through coming on board, different agencies are seeing the benefit of restorative practice. The team sat down with partner agencies to work through a key question: what does restorative practice mean to you and your organisation? This 'translation' of the principles to different contexts has created leadership for the work across agencies, and given those leaders the ability to adapt the model to the ways their teams work best.

## Personal stories

## Michelle's story: a family's perspective

***“I was very sceptical when I was first contacted – I believed it was my family and I could sort things out. But I listened to Jane [the FGC co-ordinator] and got things off my chest. She was an absolute rock for me and my family. I realised, with Jane's help, that as a family we were just papering over the cracks and had not solved anything. Going through this process gave our family the best chance at working toward the future we want.”***

Michelle and her partner Dave have seven children. Their family were discussed at a 'front door' daily meeting following an incident in which Dave had assaulted Michelle. Despite open scepticism about any professional being involved in her family life, Michelle developed a good working relationship with the FGC co-ordinator. Dave received a custodial sentence of eight months, but Michelle wanted to stay together and for him to see the children on his release. The co-ordinator visited Dave in prison, working with the probation service to decide if an FGC would be suitable. It was agreed the FGC would focus on Michelle and Dave's communication.

Strict conditions were in place on Dave's release from custody to integrate him back into the family in a structured way. He was not to reside at the family home. Michelle and Dave were not happy about this as they had thought that they could go back to their normal lives. These issues were incorporated into the questions to be addressed at the FGC.

At the initial FGC, all the children were prepared and supported to read out their views and feelings about the situation, which had a big impact on Michelle and Dave. Though they planned for Dave to live with his parents, his wider family did not attend the initial conference as Michelle was not ready to have them there. However, during the FGC, Michelle came to see how and why they should have been there. Michelle asked the co-ordinator to contact Dave's family; a restorative conference took place and they will attend the review conference in a few weeks' time. The plan is working well and the whole family are really happy with how things are going.

## Annie's story: a social worker's perspective

***“Taking the family's perspective into account enables us to work more positively with them to achieve better outcomes.”***

I'm a social work team manager. My whole team have had 'deep dive' restorative practice training which we all found really helpful and informative. As a team the training gave us the time and space to gain a greater insight into the way we function, both individually and collectively, and we all feel this can only have a positive impact on the work we do with families in that we appreciate the impact of our involvement and the ability of families to engage with us dependent on the approach we take.

The training enabled us to build on our theoretical base and the team particularly benefited from applying particular restorative exercises to practice. We feel this has given us a better understanding of the responses of families with whom we work. It also enables workers to recognise that when they are met with abuse or distrust this is not necessarily directed personally at them but can be a reaction to the circumstances the family find themselves in.

As a manager I have also participated in the restorative leadership training. Participating in groups with manager colleagues from across the city has enabled positive working relationships to be built and for there to be a more unified management group. The training supported managers to be able to challenge issues that were affecting them and to do this in the knowledge that middle and senior managers would respond restoratively. Since the restorative practice training was undertaken across the whole management structure there has been a greater engagement of senior management within the localities and a much more open approach to consultation regarding change that affects the service. This enables us as managers and practitioners to respond more positively to new developments and we feel the whole organisation is working collectively to ensure the best outcomes for children and families.