



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

Introduction

In Sunderland, we are united in our belief that early support for families is one of the most important investments for the future. For many of us, family is an integral part of our lives and a key source of financial, social and emotional support. Families offer love, security and a sense of identity; they socialise and educate children from the earliest years, helping them develop the skills they need to succeed; they care for those who are unable to look after themselves, enabling people to remain independent and retain a sense of control over their lives. This profound influence of the family on every aspect of life makes clear the importance of a family-centred approach to service design and delivery. When it comes to outcomes and life chances, we know that a strong and supportive family network can make all the difference – not just for children but for people of all ages.

This framework recognises and celebrates the diversity of family life in Sunderland and seeks to strengthen families in the city whatever their shape or size. When we refer to families, we do not simply mean the traditional mother and father living in the same household as their children. Our definition is intended to be broad and inclusive, recognising families of all ages and diversity, those with or without children, and those with connections across more than one household, in more than one community.

There is much to celebrate about family life in Sunderland: the vast majority of families are leading healthy, prosperous, and fulfilling lives, making a valuable contribution to their communities and the city as a whole. Some of our families, however, need support to do this and a small number need a lot of help from different services to overcome the multiple and complex challenges they are facing. This is reflected in poorer than national outcomes in areas such as child poverty, life expectancy, and educational attainment.

Sunderland City Council and its partners want to ensure that our city and our communities are places where all families can thrive. We have engaged families and practitioners who work with families to understand the different issues and challenges that families in Sunderland are facing, and to understand how services and processes could be improved to help families better manage and overcome these. This engagement has highlighted some of the excellent work with families in the city. Voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations in particular are recognised for their early intervention and preventative work, meaning that many vulnerable or potentially vulnerable families never come into contact with statutory services. Despite the good practice taking place in Sunderland, too many families continue to experience poor outcomes and fail to reach their full potential. In developing this framework for strengthening families, we aim to lay the foundation for a new integrated service delivery model to address the factors that can hinder or prevent a family from living the kind of life they aspire to.

This framework reflects our Community Leadership role and our commitment to achieving transformational change for the benefit of Sunderland's families and communities. It builds on our existing work to strengthen community resilience and puts families and communities firmly in the centre of a multi-agency approach to

improving outcomes. In the context of diminishing public resources and rising demand for costly statutory services, it sets out how we will achieve a step change in the way partners work together, efficiently and effectively, to ensure the best possible future for families and their communities. We are not seeking to implement a single large scale approach but instead to recognise and build upon existing good practice, such as Family Focus and Improving Futures. The aim is to establish clear, co-ordinated and integrated support pathways for families across all levels of need, providing a common framework for the seamless delivery of services.

The ethos of co-production is central to our approach. The context in which we are delivering services is changing rapidly; we know there will be further reforms to how services are managed and delivered, and the level of resource is expected to fall in the next few years. We want to challenge ourselves and other service providers to consider how local provision might be reconfigured to make best use of all resources available to us, including the existing but often untapped capacity and potential within communities, to achieve better outcomes for families. This means more effectively distinguishing between those needs that families can meet themselves, with support from their community; those best met by communities working in partnership with public services and VCS organisations, and those that can only be met by statutory agencies. This in turn will involve redefining the boundaries between personal and family responsibility, community support, and the public sector offer.

Our ambition is to create a more sustainable and socially valuable approach to meeting local needs; one which encourages and enables people to develop a strong network of family, friends and acquaintances and to connect with their communities – all of which are essential to a person's overall sense of happiness and wellbeing.

Improving Outcomes for Families

An inclusive definition of families

In the context of strengthening families, the term 'family' refers to *the bond between people brought together through birth, legally recognised relationships, or kinship based on a close connection*. This includes, but is not limited to, the following family types:

- a married or co-habiting couple with or without children;
- same-sex families;
- single parent families;
- adoptive and foster families;
- children living with step-parents, and joint-custody families where children live with parents who are separated or divorced;
- children living with a relative, such as a grandparent;
- extended families living in more than one household; and
- people of no relation who are living in the same household and who consider themselves a family.

It is important to appreciate the diversity of families in the city and recognise that our approach to strengthening families applies to families both with and without children.

Building family strengths

Every family situation is unique; families have different strengths and experiences, and they face different challenges in various combinations throughout their lives. We know that the forces that impact on families are multiple and complex, but there is much evidence to suggest that certain 'protective' factors make positive outcomes more likely and enable families to thrive. These are the building blocks of healthy, happy and resilient families and the foundation of our approach. In developing this framework we are seeking to galvanise the resources of partners, communities and families to build these protective factors while at the same time reducing the harmful aspects of life. As well as nurturing strengths, our approach also involves minimising the 'risk' factors that can negatively impact on a family's wellbeing. These include life stressors such as homelessness, unemployment, and poor health, as well as damaging individual behaviours such as domestic violence and alcohol/substance misuse – all of which may reduce the family's resilience and increase the risk of poor outcomes.

In Sunderland, partners have adopted a standard tool for identifying families' strengths (protective factors) and vulnerabilities (risk factors) (see Appendix 1 – The Family Wheel). This tool helps services and the families they are working with understand where families are functioning well, as well as the areas where things are not going so well and support from others may be needed. Our goal is to help families progress towards and achieve the protective factors set out in this strengths framework:

Neighbourhood and Community:

- Family members feel positive about the area in which they live – for example, a sense of belonging, feelings of safety and security
- Family has good access to transport links, local shops and amenities
- Family is aware of where to go for support or advice
- Family is engaging with services available in the local community (i.e. children's centre, health clinic, leisure facilities, community association)

Drugs and Alcohol

- There are no concerns around alcohol consumption within the family
- There are no concerns around substance misuse within the family and no drug issues in the area

Learning and Education

- Adults have a positive attitude towards learning and set long term career and educational goals for themselves and their children
- Parents/carers are involved in their child's education and participate in school activities
- Children have a positive attitude towards education, reflected in good school attendance and punctuality
- Adults are engaged in life-long learning
- Any learning needs are identified and well supported

Life Skills

- Adults have good domestic skills and the ability to manage a household
- Financial capability – adults have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need in order to be able to manage household finances effectively
- Family members have good problem solving and communication skills

Health and Wellbeing

- All family members are registered with relevant medical care providers (GP, dentist, optician)
- Medical checks and immunisations are up to date
- Family members are making and encouraging healthy lifestyle choices – for example, family participates in exercise and physical activity, and maintains healthy eating habits
- Health and wellness needs are being met or managed appropriately

Housing

- Current and future accommodation is affordable, secure and of a decent standard, and meets the needs of all family members
- Family is satisfied with their housing and their local area

Employment

- At least one adult in the household is employed in a stable career of choice and/or enjoyment and feels confident in their ability to support the family unit
- Potential earners are motivated to work, have aspirations as well as confidence in their own skills and abilities

- Earners/potential earners take up opportunities for further training and personal/professional development
- Family members who are not in paid employment are contributing to their community through formal/informal volunteering activity

Family and Friendships

- Individuals have access to a close support network of friends and/or family members, including some who live locally
- Individuals feel confident in their ability to make new friends
- Relationships within the family are positive – for example, children do not witness family conflict

Money and Finances

- Family has sufficient income to meet basic needs and save money for ‘extras’
- Family has a reliable source of income
- Bills are consistently paid on time and the family is not in debt (or debt is manageable)
- Family members are aware of all benefit entitlements

Offending Behaviour

- Family members have no or limited experience of crime as a victim (i.e. burglary, antisocial behaviour in area)
- Family members are not involved in criminal activity and do not undertake risky behaviour
- Wider family and friends are not involved in crime

Parenting and Caring

- Parents/carers are confident in their ability and enjoy their parenting/caring role
- Good parenting skills – for example, parents/carers set clear boundaries, routines and appropriate discipline strategies
- Family members understand and fulfil each other’s needs
- Family members demonstrate love and affection for one another
- Carers feel they receive adequate support in their caring duties

Individuals and families are likely to be in different states of readiness to change, which will have a considerable impact on practice. Many individuals and families are able to achieve these positive outcomes with minimal support from their community and public agencies, drawing on their own resources to overcome any challenges they face. Some families may be struggling with one or two key issues but are otherwise managing well; without early help from services, however, there is a risk that these needs could escalate into more serious problems later on. A small number of families, specifically those who are dealing with multiple and complex issues, will require intensive support from professionals. Whilst this cohort of families is clearly a priority area of focus for commissioners and service providers, we know that there are other families in the city who, though their needs may not be as acute, are ‘just coping’ and would benefit from earlier access to joined-up support from local agencies. Strengthening families is about improving the way that services work with each other, with families and their communities to ensure that all families with potential and emerging needs are able to address these needs at an early stage.

Strengthening families requires involvement and commitment from the city's multiple strategic partnerships that will both benefit from and contribute to improved outcomes for families. Sunderland's Clinical Commissioning Group, Health and Wellbeing Board, Economic Leadership Board, Education Leadership Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership each have a critical role to play in this agenda.

Our Approach

What do we mean by Strengthening Families?

Strengthening families means securing better outcomes for people of all ages by increasing the ability of their family and community to provide the care and support they need. It is about helping families do more for themselves and their communities, empowering people to improve their own lives and the lives of others whilst driving down demand on services. Where families do need additional support from professionals – for example, in the form of information and advice, targeted and specialist services, or more intensive one-to-one support from a key worker – we want to ensure that this support is timely, flexible and accessible, and that it is delivered in a seamless way.

Strengthening families means listening to families to understand the kind of services they need and want from the public sector and VCS, but also understanding and valuing their own strengths and capabilities whilst drawing on the support of their local community. It requires whole family services that are both person-centred and designed around the needs and aspirations of all family members, where families are involved in decisions that affect them, and local people are contributing to improved outcomes.

Responsibility for strengthening families in Sunderland does not lie solely with public sector or VCS organisations. The principal responsibility for strengthening families belongs to those families, as well as their communities. There is growing recognition of existing but often untapped assets and potential within families and communities that can enhance and complement the public sector's offering. For example, many of our current and retired employees are also residents, who can make a valuable contribution to their community through their skills, knowledge and social networks. As well as helping families to do more for themselves, we want to encourage and enable local communities to do more for families in their area, promoting a culture of shared responsibility where everyone – from residents and schools to local businesses and employers, VCS organisations and the public sector – plays a role in creating a better future for all families in the city.

This transformational behaviour change demands a new way of working with local people – having honest and respectful conversations with individuals and families about what they can do for themselves, the support they could access from the community, and what we as service providers can achieve collaboratively with them. All services will need to adopt a strengths based approach to every interaction with families, to help families recognise and make the most of what they already have. System-wide workforce development is an important part of strengthening families, to ensure a consistent and effective approach across agencies and disciplines. Anyone who has contact with a family must have the skills and ability to provide them with respectful support in a way that builds on their strengths and reduces their dependency on services.

Empowering families to take greater control over their own lives is a pre-requisite for a prosperous city with strong and resilient communities. Strengthening families is

also about encouraging families to do more for their communities, but we understand that this cannot occur unless families and their individual members are in a position to meet their own needs with confidence. By supporting individuals and families to look after themselves wherever possible, we will build a critical mass of resilient citizens who can come together to support one another through adversity and change.

Our Vision

Sunderland is a city with strong and resilient families who, by supporting themselves and others, make a positive contribution to their community

Our vision is of a city with strong and resilient families and communities. This framework sets out a new way of working to realise this vision. We want Sunderland to be a place where families thrive, supporting themselves wherever possible and making a positive contribution to their community.

Our Priorities

Four priorities underpin our vision and form the pillars of our approach. These reflect where we believe the most substantial change is needed, based on research evidence and best practice, as well as consultation with local families and communities. These priorities will be central to the future development and delivery of services for children, young people, adults and their families, and serve as a set of design and operating principles for commissioners and providers alike.

- **Priority 1: Empowering families to do more for themselves** – ensuring support for families is given in a way that recognises and builds on their own strengths and capabilities, increasing their independence and ultimately reducing the need for further support
- **Priority 2: Encouraging the community to do more for families** – building capacity and resilience in communities; identifying and drawing on the wealth of skills, knowledge and resources that exist in our different communities to improve outcomes for others
- **Priority 3: Investing in prevention and early action** – actively identifying and tackling issues at the earliest opportunity throughout people's lives to prevent them developing into more problematic and complex needs
- **Priority 4: Providing integrated whole family services** – service providers responding in a holistic and joined-up way to the individual and combined needs

What does this mean for services?

All types of services – statutory, voluntary and private sector – may come into contact with families at risk of poor outcomes. The implications of our approach are far reaching and extend to universal, targeted and specialist services – from adult and children’s social care, to hospital trusts and libraries, to local schools, businesses and community groups.

Achieving transformational change requires a system-wide shift in mind-set, behaviour and ways of working together – with families, with communities and with each other.

Priority 1: Empowering families to do more for themselves

It is important to recognise that some interventions actually promote dependence on services rather than build individual and family resilience. Traditional ways of working often focus only on what is going wrong within a family and look to professional interventions and external expertise to ‘fix’ these problems, with little input from families themselves. Not only can this lead to negative self-perceptions and poor self-esteem, but it also overlooks families’ abilities and resources, such as the support available to them in their communities. People can feel disempowered and dependent on public agencies, and as a result, they often turn to services in the first instance rather than developing their own solutions with the support of their family and community.

We know that sustainable change is unlikely to happen unless people feel they are the ‘authors’ of their own lives, and the role of services should be reoriented towards helping people to support themselves and others wherever possible. A strengths-based (or asset-based) approach operates on the assumption that all families, even if they are experiencing problems, have some strengths and resources from which they can draw upon to make positive change. Adopting a strengths-based approach will mean identifying and building on the existing skills, knowledge and capacity within families and communities, and recognising the abilities of families and communities as valuable resources. By listening to the concerns and aspirations of family members, involving them in decisions about the support they receive, and strengthening their own capabilities, we can enable people to exercise greater control over their own lives. In addition to providing services to meet identified needs, the role of partner organisations will become one of enabling and facilitating ‘self-authored’ change within families.

The benefits of empowering families to make positive changes in their own lives are far-reaching and will extend to the wider community. We want to encourage families to become more involved in making their community a great place to live, but we recognise that this cannot happen unless they are in a position of strength themselves. By fostering resilience in individuals and families, we can ultimately

enable people to become more outward looking and engaged in promoting the welfare of others.

What does this mean in practice?

- Using empowering language when working with and supporting families
- Identifying the strengths and capabilities of the family as well as assessing needs and risk factors, and involving families in decisions that affect them
- Recognising the importance of individual resilience, mental health and emotional wellbeing and helping family members build their self-confidence and self-esteem
- Building the skills, capacity and confidence of family members to meet each other's needs
- Tackling child and family poverty: working in partnership with families to help them move themselves permanently out of poverty
- Developing trusting relationships with families, treating each person with respect and dignity and adopting a non-judgemental approach
- Working together with partners to train and develop our workforce – both commissioners and practitioners – in a strengths-based approach

Priority 2: Encouraging the community to do more for families

We believe that strengthening families goes hand in hand with strengthening communities, that the two are inextricably linked. Just as strong families are at the heart of resilient communities, families are more likely to thrive in a nurturing and supportive community environment, where neighbours are encouraged to get to know and help one another. People belong to many different communities, defined by a shared geography, interest, or identity. For individuals who lack a family network – for whatever reason – community members can be a vital source of care and support. Strong communities can also have a positive influence on individual behaviours by collectively supporting people to make healthy choices, raising aspirations, and making it clear that violence, abuse or anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated. There is significant opportunity for community members to become more involved in providing innovative local solutions to develop early preventative work in areas such as tackling social isolation or building self-esteem. We want to work with communities to consider how the time, energy and skills of local people can be better utilised to help individuals and families in need of support.

What does this mean in practice?

- Building community capacity and resilience: increasing the ability of local people to identify and support vulnerable and potentially vulnerable individuals and families in their community.
- Developing opportunities for co-production: involving local people in shaping and delivering services for families
- Identifying and raising awareness of the skills, knowledge and resources within communities that families can draw upon to meet their needs
- Strengthening mentoring, coaching and befriending schemes in the city

- Helping individuals and families to participate in their community and develop their social networks
- Embedding social value into commissioning and procurement practice

Priority 3: Investing in prevention and early action

Families tell us that current service arrangements can make it difficult for them to receive the help they need at a time when they need it. Families seeking help from services can sometimes find that they do not qualify for support because they do not meet a particular threshold of need. These families may not be eligible for support until their situation has deteriorated to 'crisis point', at which point their needs have become more complex, making them more difficult to deal with and recover from. By actively identifying and tackling issues early and as soon as possible, we can prevent family needs from escalating to the point where costly services are needed. This requires a shift in focus onto the underlying causes rather than the symptoms of problems, moving away from the reactive and crisis-led interventions that are currently in place.

Ideally we want to reduce the risk of problems developing in the first place, using the right combination of universal and targeted services. When issues do arise, however, we need to become better at identifying and responding to these at a much earlier stage. Early intervention means investing in the early years (including pre-natal interventions), but it also means intervening at the best possible time – early in the development of a problem (for people of any age) or at certain points in the lifecourse when people are more receptive and willing to change. It requires a shift in focus onto the underlying causes rather than the symptoms of problems, moving away from the reactive and crisis-led interventions that are currently in place.

We recognise that increasing our investment in preventative and early intervention services will necessarily require disinvestment in other areas, given the limited financial resources available to public sector agencies. We acknowledge that our approach will involve difficult decisions, which must be made in collaboration with partners and communities.

What does this mean in practice?

- Increasing investment in children's earliest years, with particular emphasis on pre-birth to 2 years of age, and improving understanding of early child development within families, communities and our workforce.
- Establishing clear pathways to provision of early help, ensuring that families are appropriately supported at key transition points throughout their lives.
- Becoming more intelligent: improving our access to and use of accurate information on local needs and strengths, evidence of what works, and cost-benefit analysis to enable smarter investments.
- Recognising and harnessing the ability of VCS organisations to creatively engage with families to provide early and preventative support.
- Making better use of universal services, not just in supporting vulnerable families but also in identifying potential issues early on.

- Supporting self-management: providing information, advice and guidance that is accurate, relevant and accessible so that people can remain living independently for as long as possible.

Priority 4: Providing integrated whole family services

A focus on the whole person and the whole family

We appreciate that people and the circumstances in which they find themselves are considerably complex and affected by a broad range of personal, relationship and social factors. Rather than providing holistic support, however, services are frequently designed to work with an individual and to address a single presenting issue. Working in this way can prevent agencies from seeing the whole picture: the broader range of social, emotional, and physical needs a person might have and how these are impacted by – and impact on – their wider family and community environment. People do not exist in isolation from one another and interventions with one person in a family will likely fail if they are not backed by support for other family members. Similarly, dealing with issues in isolation from each other can result in some or all of a person's needs being overlooked and ultimately hinder efforts to improve outcomes. Instead a holistic approach is required where the individual and the family are very much at the heart of everything we do. The different but interrelated needs of a person should be understood and services should be tailored to needs so that issues are addressed in a coordinated way across agencies.

Working in this way requires a highly skilled and engaged workforce with a consistent approach across all agencies to support the whole person and the whole family rather than just a discrete part. 'Thinking family' should become the norm for both practitioners and strategic decision makers, so that families are given due consideration in everything we do.

What does this mean in practice?

- Always considering the potential impact of our decisions and actions on families – for example, incorporating families within our equality impact assessments
- Services taking the responsibility for identifying the wider needs and strengths of an individual/family which extend beyond the issue/person they are supporting
- Involving all family members, including resident and non-resident members, in identifying issues and concerns and developing solutions
- Providing families with a holistic package of support built around their needs, capabilities and aspirations, with clear goals of how independence will be achieved
- Multidisciplinary case management

Seamless provision

Families tend to have a range of needs which cut across existing professional or organisational boundaries; as a result, multiple agencies can be involved in planning and delivering different services for a single family. Despite the best intentions of

professionals, families can sometimes find themselves feeling passed from one service to the next because services are not joined up. In some instances, families come into contact with a number of services offering the same or very similar support, which can be overwhelming. Barriers to information sharing and a lack of communication between services may also result in a family being repeatedly asked for the same information, leading to unnecessary duplication and inefficient use of resources. It also means that opportunities to provide a comprehensive, coordinated and timely response to emerging needs or risks within families can be missed because the relevant organisations do not have a complete picture of the family's circumstances.

Strengthening the workforce by developing a coherent and consistent approach through training, key messages and reflective supervision is critical to ensure that professionals across all agencies are equipped to provide individuals and families with support that is well co-ordinated or integrated. Evidence shows that this leads to better outcomes for individuals, and more efficient use of resources.

New and emerging models of multi-agency working, such as community budgets and family intervention, are proving that effective collaboration changes lives. Sunderland has a long history of partnership working but we recognise that a step change is required in the way that local services work together. We must now build on good practice to move towards a more ambitious system that, with individuals and/or families' consent, brings practitioners from different sectors and professions together to provide an integrated package of support for families, based on respect, information sharing, joint decision making and coordinated intervention.

What does this mean in practice?

- Integrated commissioning arrangements and/or integrated locality-based working across services and organisations
- A single data sharing protocol or a multi-agency information sharing hub for local service providers
- A joined-up family assessment process leading to a single integrated multi-agency support plan
- Initiating cultural change within organisations through collaborative workforce training and development activities
- Ensuring the right skills, referral arrangements and service protocols are in place and operating effectively
- Collaborative training and development activities

Accessible and responsive services

The array of services available to families in the city is complex and not always well coordinated, meaning that families can struggle to navigate their way to the appropriate support. Many families are unaware of what help is available to them or how to access the support they need, particularly when they are dealing with multiple issues or a crisis. For many reasons, families may be reluctant to approach public sector organisations for help: people sometimes feel intimidated or overwhelmed, or

perhaps have a distrust of services due to a previous experience, or may even fear they could be judged or stigmatised by professionals and their communities. Location or opening hours can also render some services inaccessible to families, particularly those in work or reliant on public transport. In order to address some of these issues, many organisations are planning and delivering services to families through locality based working. We recognise that local flexibility is often required in the way services are delivered, to ensure they reflect the needs and priorities of local people rather than the organisation. We are encouraging all partners to rethink the way they provide support to families, so that all families – no matter where they live in the city – receive the help they need when they need it.

What does this mean in practice?

- Listening to families, communities and frontline employees: harnessing their views to inform, challenge and continuously improve service provision
- Adopting a localised approach to planning and delivering services – for example, delivering services out of community venues
- Implementing a no wrong door policy
- Co-locating services
- Engaging with families through a wide range of channels, whether through traditional engagement routes or through the use of new technologies and social media
- A portfolio of interventions coordinated by a key worker, with clear escalation/de-escalation procedures

Strategic Outcomes

In transforming the way services support families in the city, we are seeking to achieve a number of significant outcomes for families, communities and organisations. These are:

- (i) Improved quality of life for individuals, families and their communities** as a result of:
- Increased confidence, self-esteem and aspirations of individuals
 - Improved life chances for children and young people who are likely to experience difficulties, breaking the intergenerational cycle of problems that exists in some families and communities
 - Improved skills and educational attainment
 - Improved access and support to employment opportunities and positive job outcomes
 - Greater financial security and poverty reduction
 - Improved health and wellbeing throughout individuals' lives
 - Improved relationships between family members and greater levels of family resilience
 - Increased access to social support and reduced social isolation
 - Stronger, more resilient communities

- (ii) Reduced demand on services** as a result of:
- Increased family capacity, resilience and independence so that families are able to meet their own needs and solve their own problems with less dependence on service providers
 - Families feel a greater sense of responsibility for their own welfare and the welfare of others in their community
 - Communities play a greater role in supporting vulnerable individuals and families
- (iii) More effective and efficient use of resources** as a result of:
- Better coordination of services and smarter ways of working within and between organisations, including the sharing of information
 - Earlier intervention and prevention within universal and targeted services, thereby reducing demand on more costly specialist and intensive services
 - Co-production and more socially productive relationships between service providers and individuals, families and communities
 - Locality working which allows for a better understanding of family needs, preferences and aspirations
 - An evidence-based approach, with robust outcome measures and management of performance
- (iv) Greater trust in and satisfaction with the public sector and service providers as a result of:**
- Integrated and seamless service delivery, which improves a family's experience of accessing and using services
 - All family members are listened to and involved in decisions that affect them
 - A skilled, knowledgeable, empowered, consistent and empowering workforce

The Family Assessment Wheel

Overview

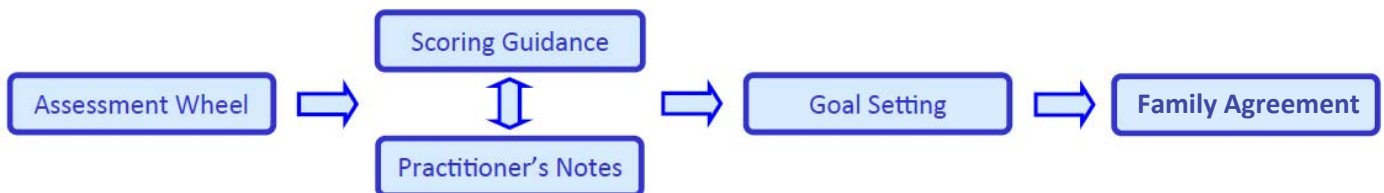
The Family Assessment Wheel is the family assessment tool being used with families participating in Sunderland’s Family Focus programme. It is designed to provide key workers with a simple yet effective way of monitoring family change and the measurement of outcomes.

It provides a systematic way of analysing, understanding and recording what is happening to families and the wider context of the community in which they live.

The collaborative nature of the Family Assessment Wheel and its ability to track progress and change across multiple and inter-linked needs and issues makes it particularly suited to engaging and supporting families with multiple and complex disadvantages.

The scores from the Wheel can be recorded when a key worker starts to work with a family and then regularly reviewed in order to generate ‘real-time’ progress reports for an individual family whilst also allowing the Strengthening Families Board to have aggregated performance information.

Completing the Family Assessment Wheel is comprised of five parts:



Before using the Family Assessment Wheel, all key workers must make sure they have received the appropriate training and guidance to ensure they follow the correct methodology when supporting families.

Risk and Protective Factors

Many parents and families are able to deal with the stresses of everyday life as well as the occasional larger problems that crop up; they have the resilience to 'bounce back' when things go wrong.

Protective factors are the elements that support this resilience and could include: problem solving skills, positive learnt behaviour, and support networks (i.e. extended family, positive friendships or both).

Risk factors are the multiple life stressors such as homelessness, unemployment, debt, domestic violence, and health problems; all of which may reduce the family's resilience.






The Family Assessment Wheel enables a key worker and the family to identify both Risk and Protective factors within and around the family unit.

The Assessment Wheel allows both identification of areas where families, parents, and children are functioning well, have no issues and are positive (protective) as well as the specific areas where things are not going so well and need attention (risk).

This in turn enables the parent, carer or family to develop a 'family centred' action plan which, with the key worker's support, will reduce risk and increase resilience.

The Family Assessment Wheel | Scoring Guidance

Community and Where You Live

- 5  Area of choice, family feel safe in area. Access to transport links and can walk to local shops and amenities. Engages with services in the local community (i.e. children's centre, health clinic, church). Would know where to go for support.
- 4  Likes area and feels fairly safe. Accessible transport links and local shops and amenities. Occasionally engages with some services in the local community (children's centre, health clinic, church). Would know where to go for some types support.
- 3  Have no strong feelings about the area but feel relatively safe most of the time. Access to transport links but cannot walk to all shops and amenities. Aware of services in local community but doesn't always want to engage. Unclear on where to go for support.
- 2  Doesn't really like area and doesn't really feel safe. Access to transport links is limited. Is aware of some local services (or limited services available) but chooses not to engage at this present time. Unclear where to go for support or advice.
- 1  Dislikes area (may have problems with neighbours or ASB) and feels unsafe. Chooses not to engage with the local community and may prefer to stay at home. Does not know where to go for support or advice. May feel at risk from the community.

Drugs and Alcohol

- 5  No concerns around alcohol consumption within the family. No drug use or issues. No concerns around children and substance misuse. May partake in social drinking occasionally (monthly or less). No drug issues in area.
- 4  No concerns around alcohol consumption within the family. No drug use or issues. Minor concerns around children and substance misuse but fears not based on evidence or experience. May partake in social drinking (twice per week). Minor drug use concerns in area.
- 3  No concerns around alcohol consumption within the family. No recent drug use (may have tried recreational drugs in the past) or issues. Some fears concerning children and substance misuse and would like advice on how to advise children in the future. May drink occasionally either socially or when stressed (three times per week). Minor concerns of drug use in area.
- 2  Concerns about substance or alcohol misuse with the parent/carer or the family. Recent drug or alcohol use (may be in 'maintenance' stage). Friendships with others involved with alcohol or substance misuse. Alcohol use of four times per week or more. Concerns around children and drug/alcohol misuse. Access to drugs in area. Seeks help and support/signposting.
- 1  Drug and alcohol use parent/carer, family member and or friends. Neutralises addictions and behaviour. Reduced inhibitions and participates in risky behaviour. Addiction could be linked to crime. Children could be at risk of neglect. Not engaged with support services.

The Family Assessment Wheel | Scoring Guidance

Learning and Education

5 

Parents have positive attitude towards learning. Sets children and themselves long range career and educational goals. Children have good school attendance and punctuality record. Parents participate in school/education activities. Children enjoy school and the learning environment. Work set is complete and up to date. Any learning needs identified and supported well. Parents want to engage in life long learning.

4 

Family understand the importance of education. Want children to attend regularly, on time and engage in the learning process. Children have good school attendance and punctuality. Children enjoy school most of the time and complete work set with support of parents. Any learning needs are identified and supported. Parents willing to engage in life long learning.

3 

Parents ensure that children attend school but evidence of occasional unauthorised absence. Engage with school when necessary. Can set and pursue goals with assistance. Children will attend school and enjoy it sometimes. Need guidance on work set. May have some behavioural/concentration issues.

2 

Parents have little or no formal education. Resists communicating with school but will if pushed. Children's attendance is sporadic and some issues with truancy. Children not meeting educational potential. Behaviour issues evident.

1 

Parent has very negative experience of own school days. See no value in formal education. There is not evidence of learning support in the home. Do not engage with school at any level. Children have poor attendance (below 85%). Numerous unauthorised absence and truancy. Behaviour issues that are raising concerns. Unsure where children are during the day.

Life Skills

5 

Cooks and prepares meals for self and family. Handles finances well. Knows how to budget. Has bank account. Possesses problem solving skills.

4 

Cook and prepares meal for self and family. Deals with financial issues but not always sure how to budget. Has bank account. Possess some problem solving skills.

3 

Is able to cook and prepare meals for self and family but is not always sure of healthy options. Has some difficulty with financial issues (credit, budgeting, and debt). Is able to open bank account and seek advice on financial issues. Recognises when things are becoming a problem.

2 

Prefers the 'easy option' when deciding what to feed the family (i.e. ready made or takeaway) but has very little idea or regard for what is the healthy choice. Financial difficulties (debt, credit and budgeting). Could open a bank account. Limited problem solving skills.

1 

Lacks the ability or interest to cook for either self or family. No idea or regard for healthy choices. Serious financial difficulties (increased debt, loans, credit) without the knowledge to budget. Lacks any problem solving skills.

The Family Assessment Wheel | Scoring Guidance

Health and Wellbeing

5 

Registered with GP, dentist (and optician). Children's medical checks and immunisations up to date. No health issues or concerns. Family aware of healthy lifestyles and encourage exercise and physical activity. Wellness needs are being met and there seems to be preventative care.

4 

Adequate medical and physical care provided. Registered with GP, dentist (and optician). Children's medical checks and immunisations up to date. Health needs are being met as they occur. Any medical problems are being addressed. Family participate in physical activities.

3 

Family is not registered with either GP or dentist (or both). Health needs not always met in a timely manner. Health issues noted, some of which are not being addressed at this present time.

2 

Family is not registered with either GP or dentist (or both). Minimal attention to health needs. Unclear if children's checks and immunisations are up to date. Medical problems noted are severe, potentially harmful and not adequately supported.

1 

Child(ren)'s health is endangered. Medical problems and health needs are not being addressed; no care or support is being received. Home environment does not promote healthy living.

Housing

5 

Happy in home. Satisfied with housing and area. Tenancy is secure. House is safe and meets families needs.

4 

Lives in or has access to adequate housing. Rent or payment options can be met but are sometimes a concern. Family perceives the home and neighbourhood as safe.

3 

Payments for housing are difficult to make without financial support or assistance. Tenancy is secure for at least six months. Housing is not hazardous or unhealthy. Family feels neighbourhood is relatively safe.

2 

Lives in temporary or transitional housing. Uncertain of where family will live in the near future. Lives in unsafe, deteriorating, or overcrowded housing. Finances for housing support are not routinely available.

1 

Lives in dangerous conditions. Living in a hostel. Homeless or on the verge of homelessness. Has history of consistent homelessness. Unable to secure housing without extensive resources or help. Family's basic needs not being met.

The Family Assessment Wheel | Scoring Guidance

Employment

5 

At least one parent is employed in a stable career of choice and or enjoyment. Has confidence in own skills and abilities. Is motivated and has aspirations. Welcomes further training, personal and professional development. Feels confident in ability to support the family unit.

4 

At least one parent currently or recently employed or unemployed by choice (not needed or feasible). Has good marketable skills. Employment potential for advancement. Learning or willing to learn new skills as needed to secure job. Feels confident in attending interviews, interview techniques and preparing CV. Motivated to work.

3 

At least one parent working (or seeking employment) but would like to advance career. Has experience gained from voluntary or work placement. Learning or willing to learn new skills as needed. History of seasonal or temporary employment. Willing to attend interviews and apply for positions but may need guidance with interview techniques and preparing CV etc.

2 

Minimum job skills and experience. History of performance problems at work. No career plans, lacks motivation. Unsure of their own skills. Would need support applying for jobs and interview techniques including how to dress for an interview.

1 

Unemployed and not willing to looking for work. Is not looking to train or learn new skills to increase chances of finding work. No positive work history. Unable to work due to emotional/physical status.

Family and Friendships

5 

Can identify close support network of friends or family. Able to identify local support with easy access. Can name people to go to for support. Able to make friends and socialise (for both self and child). Children have friends home. Children do not experience family conflict.

4 

Can name friends or family but do not live locally. Could name people to go to for support. Feel that they would be able to make friends for self and children but may find it difficult initially (i.e. attending children's centre). Children have friends home. Children do not witness family conflict but may hear the occasional 'debate'.

3 

Finds it slightly difficult to identify a network of support. Finds it difficult to find somebody to babysit. Would not necessarily know how to make friends and would need support (to attend children's centre). Children occasionally have friends home and are invited to other children's homes. Children do not witness family conflict but may hear the occasional 'debate'.

2 

Cannot identify support network – limited contact with extended family but are able to name a few friends. Would not attend a centre to make friends for self or children alone. Wouldn't know who to contact for help if needed. Children are occasionally asked to play at another child's home but do not have friends home. Sometimes hears arguments.

1 

No support network apparent. Lacks family support or contact with extended family. Does not know where to go to make friends for self or children or to build support network. Possible conflict situations and arguments in home.

The Family Assessment Wheel | Scoring Guidance

Money and Finances

5 

Sufficient income to meet needs and allow for 'extras' and/or can save money. Keeps track of expenditures. Reliable source of income. Aware of all benefit entitlements. Consistently pays bills on time. Sufficient income to meet basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) No debt.

4 

Sufficient income to meet needs and allow attempts to save money for 'extras'. Effective budgeting. Reliable source of income. Aware of all benefit entitlements. Typically pays bills on time. Sufficient income to meet basic needs (food, clothing, shelter).

3 

Receives minimum adequate income via regular wage or benefit entitlement. Is not able to save money. Occasionally misses payment deadlines. No budget plans in place. Uses credit (i.e. catalogue, credit cards) to meet some needs. Evidence of debt.

2 

Occasionally able to meet basic needs. Income and or benefits entitlement not sufficient to cover mortgage/rent payments resulting in shortfall that cannot always be met. No credit or poor credit and or overwhelming debt. Relies on others for financial assistance. Outgoings exceed incomings. Is unclear how to budget money.

1 

Little or no money and cannot meet basic needs. Income and or benefits entitlement not sufficient to cover mortgage/rent payments resulting in shortfall that cannot be met - arrears are accruing. Has no idea how to manage money coming into the home. Is not able to pay bills and has escalating debt. Has had legal problems due to finances (i.e. CJs, fines and eviction).

Offending Behaviour

5 

Has no experience of crime either as perpetrator or victim. Family or friends have never been involved in crime. Children have not been affected in any way by crime. Does not undertake risky behaviour.

4 

Has limited experience of crime as a victim (i.e. burglary, anti social behaviour in area). Children have not been affected by crime. Does not undertake risky behaviour. Family and friends not involved in crime.

3 

Has some experience of crime as victim or have offended in the past. Doesn't undertake risky behaviour but have family members or friends that are either in prison or involved in minor criminal activity.

2 

Has experience of crime either as perpetrator or victim (including DV) in recent past. May still be known to police or probation services – orders, tags or licence. Occasionally undertakes risky behaviour. Has friends or family either in prison or known for criminal activity.

1 

Is currently a victim of crime or involved in offending behaviour. Friends or family in prison or have recent criminal involvement. Will be known to police and probation. Has limited or no victim awareness, neutralises own behaviour. Will undertake risky behaviour. Children may have been affected by crime.

The Family Assessment Wheel | Scoring Guidance

Parenting and Child's Behaviour

5 

Consistent, observable, age appropriate parenting evident. Enjoys being a parent and seems confident. Understands children's needs and provides accordingly. Clear boundaries, routines and appropriate discipline strategies set for children. Children are loved and shown affection.

4 

Reasonably consistent, age appropriate parenting evident. Appears to understand of children's needs and attempts to meet them. Parent is able to set boundaries and practices discipline strategies. Children are loved and are shown affection. Some daily routines exist.

3 

Inconsistent or ineffective discipline methods with unclear boundaries. Sometimes unsure of parenting role. Some understanding of children's needs or development. May have some inappropriate expectations of children. A few routines in the home. Children are loved and shown affection.

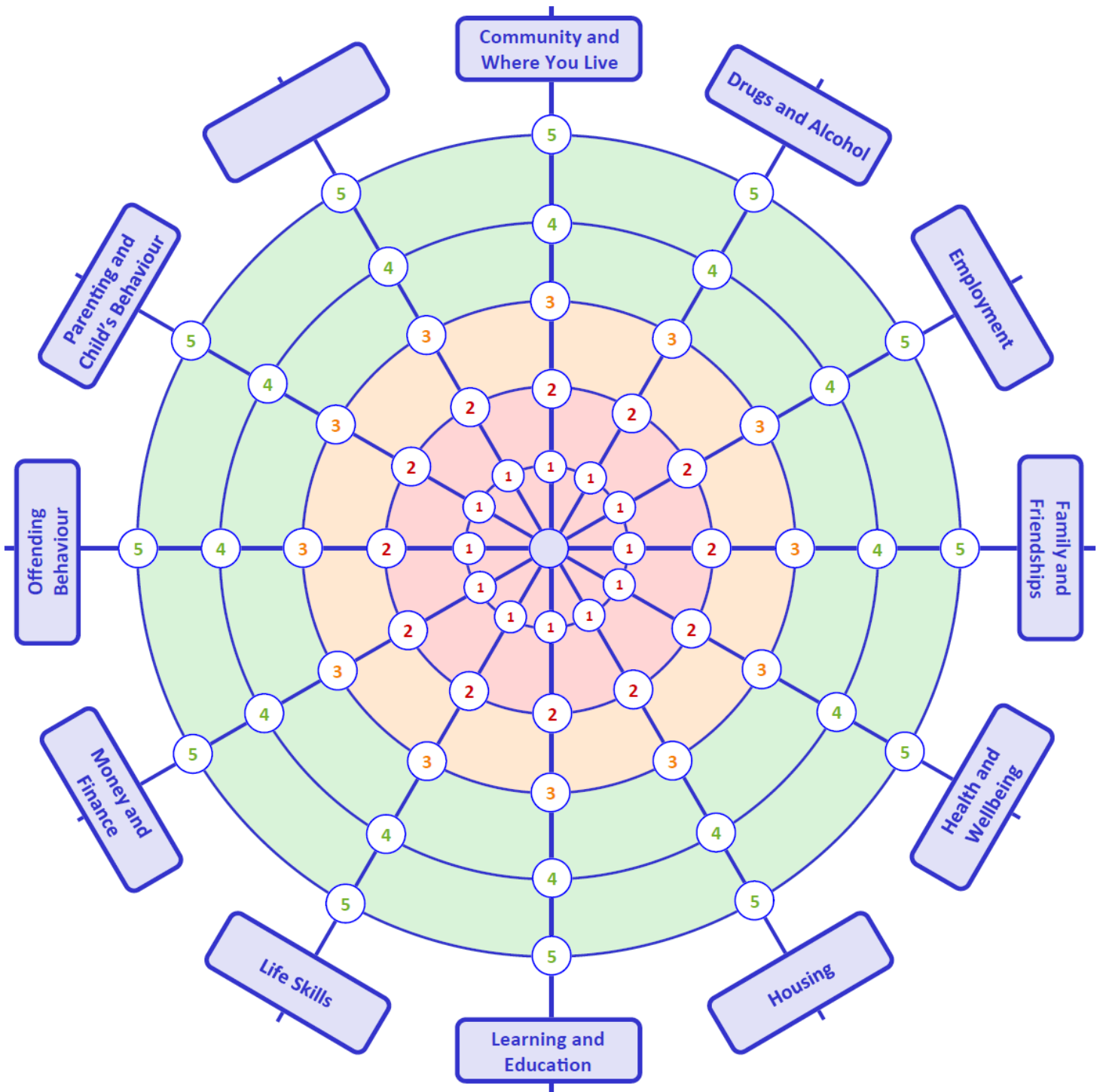
2 

Inappropriate discipline methods with limited boundaries or guidance. Little understanding of children's development needs. Sometimes finds the parenting role a struggle. Some history of parenting problems. No routine or consistency evident.

1 

History of serious parenting problems. Discipline is rigid, harsh or extremely permissive. No understanding of children's development or needs. No boundaries or guidance. Parent is struggling and appears not to enjoy being a parent.

The Family Assessment Wheel | My Assessment



The Family Assessment Wheel | Family Agreement

Goal No:		Life Area:		Current Score:		Target Score:		Review Date:	
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Where I am now (issues, barriers, concerns):

Goal (where I/we want to be - vision of the future):

Actions for me/my family to reach my goal:

Actions that others will do to help and support me/my family:

How I/we will measure my success:

Goal No:		Life Area:		Current Score:		Target Score:		Review Date:	
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How I/we will measure my success:

Full Name: Date:

Signed: