

Good Practice Guide

Reviewing good practice from relevant programmes in relation to the DFJ Trailblazer pilot

Quarter 2:

2024/25

Purpose and structure of this document

Purpose

The DFJ Trailblazer pilot is a DfE-funded programme supporting 5 Trailblazer DFJ areas throughout England to 1) identify drivers of delay across the family justice system, and 2) develop and deliver solutions.

The Good Practice Guide is a quarterly publication developed as part of the DFJ Trailblazer pilot Learning Programme. The purpose of this document is to highlight examples of good practice in care proceedings throughout England. The document includes both innovative ideas and important considerations to execute standard practices effectively. Cases are not intended to be seen as prescriptive solutions to challenges in Trailblazer areas. Rather, it seeks to inspire, and to stimulate discussion.

This document will be updated on a quarterly basis with a final version bringing together practice from each of the iterations.

Structure overview

- Slide 4 A matrix mapping the cases to key drivers of delays raised in diagnostic sessions
- Slides 6-12 A high-level overview of the models and programmes
- Slide 13 A preview of future content for the next issue of this guide



Overview of case studies and presented initiatives

Introduction to this issue

Welcome to this thematic issue of our care proceedings Good Practice Guide, where we delve into initiatives designed to support and engage parents and young people throughout the care proceedings process.

Effective communication, collaboration and holistic support are vital in ensuring the well-being and best outcomes for children and families involved in care proceedings. This guide aims to highlight successful strategies and practices that foster a supportive environment, empowering parents and young people to actively participate and have their voices heard.

We hope this issue provides valuable insights for professionals dedicated to improving the care proceedings experience for all parties involved.

Mapping to the Trailblazer pilot

| Key drivers of delay: | Dandelions – Telford & Wrekin’s Parents with Experience Group | Mpower (Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) | Blackpool Co-production | NEST (Nurture Empower Safe Together) Team - Rochdale | Lancaster Hope Boxes | Adolescent Participation Pathway Pilots (APPP) | Little Minds Matter – Bradford Infant Mental Health Service |
|--|---|--|-------------------------|--|----------------------|--|---|
| Late presentation of family members | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Workforce capacity | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Court capacity | | | | | | | |
| PLO tracking issues | | | | | | | |
| Low PLO assessment quality | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Use of external assessors | | | | | | | |
| Availability and frequency of expert assessments usage | | | | | | | |
| Lack of trust in LA assessments | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Changes in plan | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| Lack of information sharing among partners | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Dandelions – Telford & Wrekin’s Parents with Experience Group

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- The Dandelions are a group of parents with lived experience of services in Telford & Wrekin. Since March 2022, the Group has worked with the local authority to coproduce and develop systems, practice and processes across children’s services.
- In addition to the Co-production Group, three parents have been trained as Peer Parent Advocates, offering peer support, advocacy for parents and working with families in Family Group Conferences.
- The Dandelions support the local authority with the delivery of training to practitioners and social workers.
- Dandelions participate in the recruitment process supporting the local authority vision of co-production and “building a service with our parents, for our parents”.
- Dandelions co-delivered drop-in sessions alongside professionals for parents who need support.

OUTCOMES

- Feedback from parents who worked with the Advocates has been positive, particularly advice offered to families to help them better navigate services.
- Families have access to information that aids their understanding of care proceedings and processes, resulting in greater engagement and the chance to improve outcomes for their children.
- Enables practitioners to consider the correlation between the experience of the parent with the experience of the child.

KEY FEATURES

- New parent-focused feedback form for child protection conferences
- Co-produced leaflets for comprehensive parent information.
- Collaboration with Chester University’s social work apprenticeship scheme.
- Developed Parent Reports to balance power at conferences, reflect their meeting experience, and shape family plans.
- Delivered training to regional IRO conference.

Helpful links:

- The attached poster provides an overview of the vision Telford & Wrekin have for families, co-produced between the local authority and Dandelions



Parent Carer
Poster

DELAY DRIVER MAPPING

Late family presentation

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Mpower (Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire)

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- Mpower is a service delivered by Ormiston Families that aims to support parents who have had children removed from their care.
- The service was set up in response to the overrepresentation of care experienced mothers having children removed because of the same issues.
- Practitioners have expertise in working with adults with complex needs and usually have a background in mental health or care services.
- Staff are trained in trauma, addiction, mental health and care proceedings and have a specialism they're able to consult on.
- More than half of referrals come through children's services meaning the parents being supported are either going through proceedings or have recently completed proceedings. Mpower works with mothers at highest risk of pregnancy and further removal.

KEY FEATURES

- Practical support to help mothers or couples secure housing, clear debt and access benefits.
- Assistance with navigating children's services including helping parents to make contact arrangements.
- Information on sexual and reproductive health.
- Supports parents to understand and process the reasons as to why their child was removed into care.

OUTCOMES

- In 2022-23, Mpower worked with 122 women who had at least one child removed into care.
- A 2021-22 impact report shows that 92% of women in the service did not have a further pregnancy.
- 100% of women reported an improvement in their emotional stability.
- 87% improved their support networks.

Helpful links:

- [Centre for Justice Innovation - Mpower overview](#)
- [Research - Examining mothers' own histories in the context of repeat removal of children: informing a prevention agenda](#)
- [Mpower homepage](#)

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Blackpool Co-production

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- Blackpool's co-production team brings partners across the system together including social workers, Early Help, midwifery, sector consultants, private legal, public legal, drug and alcohol services, HMCTS, Better Start, NSPCC, and parents. Their programmes include:
- **Born into Care:** following Blackpool's involvement in the national Born into Care study, Blackpool decided to co-produce local next steps. With parents at the centre of co-production, Blackpool identified 8 principles and 12 workstreams to prioritise supporting parents and unborn babies at risk of separation at birth. These workstreams are currently underway. Blackpool also co-produced a MAP guide, which helps families to understand the pathways through social care.
- **Blackpool Families Rock:** Blackpool has worked to co-produce a Model of Practice for social work, underpinned by Head, Heart, and Hands. The Model of Practice articulates values of co-production, listening, empathy, and prioritising families' needs.

OUTCOMES

- Blackpool has seen higher staff retention since the co-production work began.
- The success of Blackpool Families Rock was a key reason that DfE ceased its intervention with Blackpool Children's Services.
- Social workers have provided positive feedback on the MAP, noting that it makes the processes clearer and creates a good culture of accountability.

KEY FEATURES

- Placing relationships at the foundation of meaningful co-production. Cross-system partnership and collaboration is essential.
- Emphasis on lived experiences of parents, children, and the workforce.
- Focus on career development opportunities for people with lived experience by offering paid employment within the co-production team.

Helpful links:

- [Blackpool Co-Production - Born into Care](#)
- [Born into Care: Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)
- [Blackpool MAP - Family's Journey](#)
- [Blackpool Co-Production - Blackpool Families Rock](#)
- If you'd like to learn more about Blackpool co-production, you can reach out to their team at coproduction@blackpool.gov.uk

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NEST (Nurture Empower Safe Together) Team - Rochdale

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- The NEST service empowers parents who have faced recurrent care proceedings to provide safe and consistent care for their children.
- The team consists of a Practice Manager, two lead social workers, two family support workers, and a midwife. Through their trauma-informed approach, they work to build trusting relationships with parents by visiting frequently and being honest and available.
- The service has 3 Pathways, depending on the support needed:
- **Pathway A** is voluntary and available to parents who have had a child removed from their care within the past 2 years. It provides support and resources related to housing, mental health, domestic abuse, and contraception, giving parents the chance to make positive changes to avoid future recurrent care proceedings.
- **Pathway B** focuses on the prenatal stage for parents who have previously had a child removed through care proceedings. The team conducts an early pre-birth assessment, allowing enough time for the mother to prepare for the assessment's recommendations.
- In **Pathway C**, the team works with mental health teams, drug and alcohol services, early years providers, and early attachment services to support parents to sustain positive changes through the time their child turns 5.

OUTCOMES

- In the service's first three years, they had 60+ referrals across the three pathways, resulting in 20 babies living at home with their parents. Most cases working with NEST have been de-escalated.
- The team plans to undertake additional ParentAssess training. The team aspires to further expand NEST to care experienced young people experiencing teenage pregnancy.

KEY FEATURES

- The model was developed via operational groups with mothers who had experienced having a child removed from their care.
- Emphasis on the fundamental belief in people's ability to change
- Focus on trauma-informed approaches and relationship building

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Helpful links:

- [NEST Team Rochdale | Centre for Justice Innovation](#)
- [Our Rochdale | NEST Team](#)

Lancaster HOPE Boxes

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- HOPE Boxes, in partnership with the University of Lancaster, supports women separated from their babies at birth due to safeguarding concerns.
- The initiative is developed with women who have lived experience, building on findings from the "Born into Care" research project.
- Mothers facing multiple adversities and complex trauma often find safeguarding processes overwhelming, leading to poor communication and support. HOPE Boxes are designed to promote sensitive communication, help reduce trauma and build mothers' confidence in professionals.
- These boxes include items to capture memories and maintain a connection with the baby during court proceedings. If the baby is permanently placed out of the mother's care, the boxes support long-term grief and identity work.

OUTCOMES

Feedback from mothers and professionals:

- Supports motivation and keeps families engaged.
- Supports mothers' wellbeing, helping them feel less alone and reduces the stigma felt.
- Builds trust in professionals and relationships with foster carer and social care.
- Family Tree discussions from the Hope Box can support parallel planning.
- Supports babies through compassionate messages, which as they grow older, helps promote their identity and understanding of their birth story.

KEY FEATURES

The initiative is underpinned by 5 core principles:

- Reducing trauma
- Supporting identity
- Promoting connection
- Recognising grief
- Giving hope

Helpful links:

- [Giving Hope Project](#) (includes links to clips where mothers give their views on the value of Hope Boxes)
- [Born into Care research project](#) – Developing best practice guidelines for when the state intervenes at birth

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Adolescent Participation Pathway Pilots (APPP)

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- The APPP is a planned intervention in partnership with participating local authorities and CAFCASS which involves a series of engagements between a young person, a judge, a social worker, a guardian and a support person.
- These engagements are agreed with the young person throughout the proceedings, without the presence of lawyers and are focussed on encouraging the young person's participation in the court process and other decision-making forums they're involved in. These meetings are not about evidence gathering.
- The focus of the intervention is to identify achievable goals and issues the young person wants to address to make a positive change in their life through the development of a 'My Plan'.
- This approach is being piloted at Teesside Family Court and Manchester Civil Justice Centre.

OUTCOMES

- The pilots will be evaluated by a team from Cardiff University and will focus on the experience of those who implement, deliver and participate in the pilot.
- An early iteration of the pathway was delivered in Coventry and Warwickshire Family, Drug and Alcohol Court. 52 young people took part over a 3-year period and reported feeling better supported and listened to.
- The young people looked at the court process has something that they participated in and supported them to make changes.
- Social workers reported an improvement in their relationship with the young person as well as better engagement with services.
- Judges reported that young people they met with gained confidence and were better able to communicate their ambitions.

KEY FEATURES

The Participation Pathway is underpinned by 8 non-negotiables:

1. Aspirational
2. Inspirational
3. Direct participation
4. Agency and control
5. Early identification
6. Relational stability
7. Strengths-based
8. Trauma informed

Helpful links:

- [Seen but not Heard: The Child's Voice in the Family Court System](#)
- Relates specifically to private law proceedings
- [National Charter for Child Inclusive Family Justice](#)
- [Family Justice Young People's Board - top tips for professionals](#)

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Little Minds Matter – Bradford Infant Mental Health Service

WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE?

- Little Minds Matter: Bradford Infant Mental Health Service (LMM) is a specialised parent-infant relationship service working with infants, their families, and associated professional networks during the 1001 Critical Days (conception to two years).
- Responsive caregiving is the most important factor to enable children to survive and thrive; investment and support in the early months/years is key (WHO, 2018).
- LMM supports early relationships between babies and their carers. They seek to reduce the inequalities, including lifelong social, cognitive, physical and emotional health, that are linked to insecure parent-infant attachment relationships.

OUTCOMES

- LMM’s ambition is to address these inequalities with early intervention, from conception, to give children the best start and encourage strong parent-infant relationships.
- Through supporting Bradford families over the past 6 years, the team have started to understand the complexity within the community. Many families have intergenerational trauma and parents need support to sensitively understand they did not receive the responsive caregiving they needed as children and they need to do more to support the emotional development of their babies.
- LMM’s work with babies, families and professionals alike is regarded as a great example of the significant impact that can be made on the quality of parent-infant relationships, ultimately improving the future trajectory of a child’s life.

KEY FEATURES

- Little Minds Matter work collaboratively across four strands to support and promote healthy parent-infant relationships:
 1. Direct support to families
 2. Training
 3. Consultation
 4. Community engagement

Helpful links:

- [Little Minds Matter - Bradford Infant Mental Health service - BDCT](#)
- [Understand the Moments that Matter with your child – YouTube](#)
- [Thematic review \(saferbradford.co.uk\)](http://saferbradford.co.uk)

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Upcoming Good Practice Guide content (Q3)

London Infant and Family Team

- ▼ Infant and Family Teams bring together specialists in infant mental health and social care and work with a family over a 9-15 month period.

Positive Choices

- ▼ Funded by Calderdale Council, Positive Choices is a single point of access to support and advice during pregnancy and early years for care experienced and other vulnerable young people.

Family Drug and Alcohol Court

- ▼ FDAC is a therapeutic, problem-solving court model which aims to provide parents with intensive support to help them to address their drug and alcohol issues, and reduce the numbers of children in care.

Teesside 'Floating' Case Management System

- ▼ Teesside Family Court proactively maximises judicial time in court by creating a daily 'floating' list of cases (e.g. short cases or where sign-off is needed) alongside its usual fixed list. If a judge finishes a case earlier than expected and has available court time, they will take a case off the daily floating list to process it.

If you have any suggestions for initiatives to feature in future issues of this guide, please contact yannick.mitchell@mutualventures.co.uk.