

PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

A series of case studies demonstrating the power of place-based approaches and the unique role of backbone organisations



Place Matters works in partnership with organisations and communities to create community-centred place-based change. They aim to enable progress, support learning, and influence change.

Their work involves facilitating and supporting the learning of cross-sector, collaborative initiatives working to address the barriers faced by those dealing with poverty, exclusion and disadvantage.

This work was produced by Place Matters and members of their Place-based Early Years Community of Practice.

November 2025



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

The whole of Blackpool and now being commissioned in other geographies across England.

- Between 2015 and 2018 the service was targeted in seven of the most deprived wards in Blackpool.
- From 2018 services started to scale up across Blackpool, the first of these being the Baby Steps Antenatal Services.

CHILDREN AND FAMILILES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

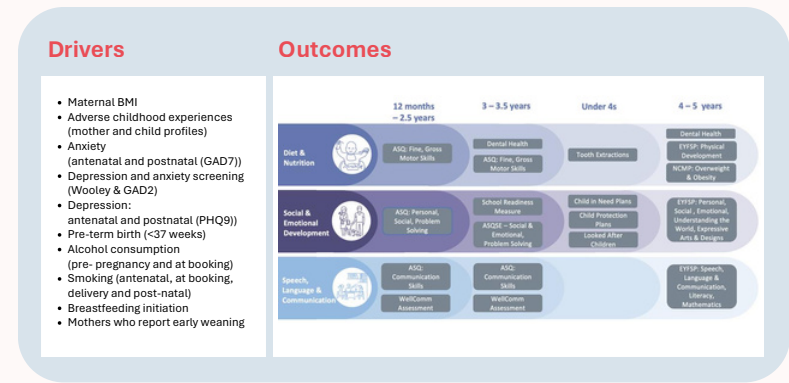
13,010 (2,394 Pregnant Women & 10,615 0-5 years) average per annum between 2015-2025

Support has been designed according to the principle of progressive universalism, ensuring a tiered portfolio of services. It is weighted towards universal services to enable prevention and early identification of need for early help or specialist support. The portfolio of work is then targeted to those living in the most challenging circumstances and co-designed to optimise progress towards the three outcome domains of physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development.

KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

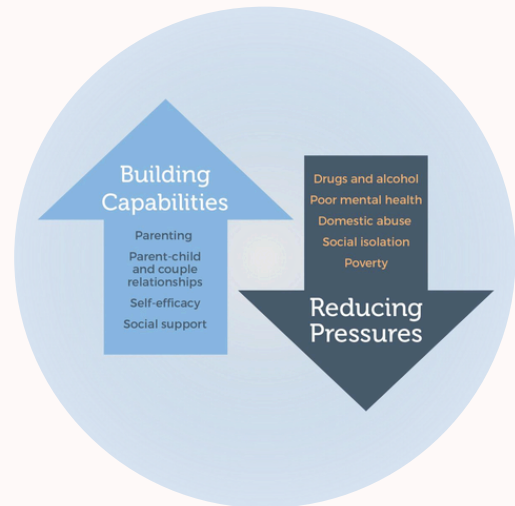
Better Start's ambition is to bring together senior leaders, commissioners and service providers alongside local communities to transform and build early years systems that give all children the best possible start to life, from conception to Reception.

- Better Start established a 'data warehouse' hosted by the local Hospital Trust to track outcomes and other data across multiple sectors. It uses NHS Numbers to link NHS, LA social care, education, Better Start and community data for anyone participating in Better Start services and events. Over time this will provide population level metrics at cohort and programme levels.



THEORY OF CHANGE

Blackpool Better Start is based on a simple Model of Change which focusses all energies relentlessly on 1) building parents' own capabilities; and 2) reducing the pressures families face. It breaks down the barriers between public services and communities through more effective and meaningful community involvement and more accessible delivery. While the focus of work is systems change, Better Start also provide targeted delivery to fill gaps in the system, including Family Connectors and EY quality assurance.



POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Family involvement underpins Better Start at three levels:

- empowering parents to build resilience
- co-designing services to improve uptake and reduce inequalities
- shaping strategy to ensure legitimacy and sustainability

Trust-building is key, especially for families with less confidence in services. Programmes like Community Connectors help remove barriers and embed inclusive, relational ways of working. Parents trust Community Connectors because they understand first-hand the challenges local families face and they are not represented by statutory services. Connectors ensure the right people are getting the right help, in the right way, at the right time for them, and in turn help local services better understand family challenges and contexts.

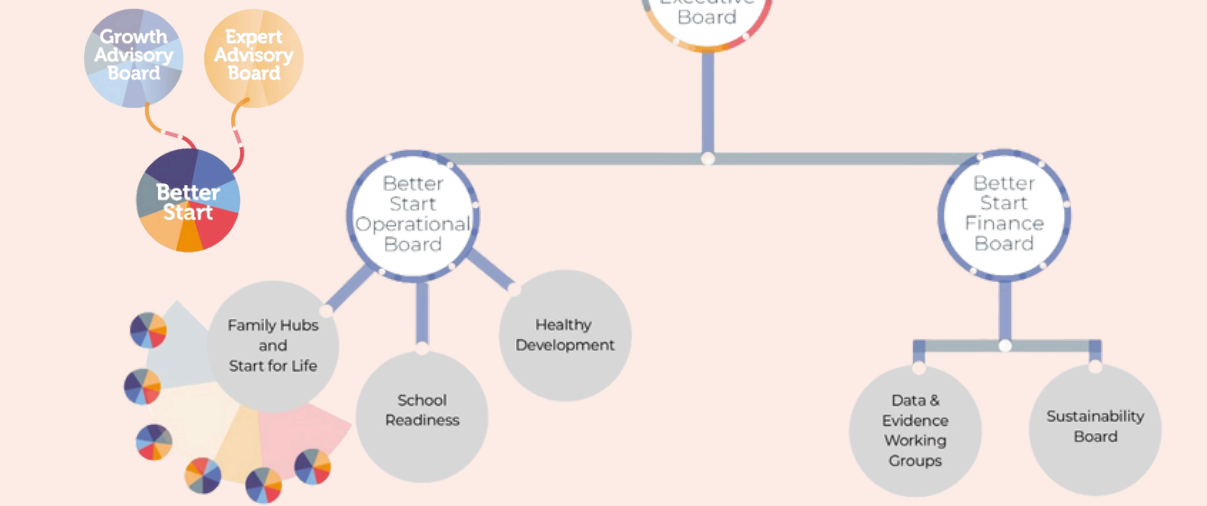
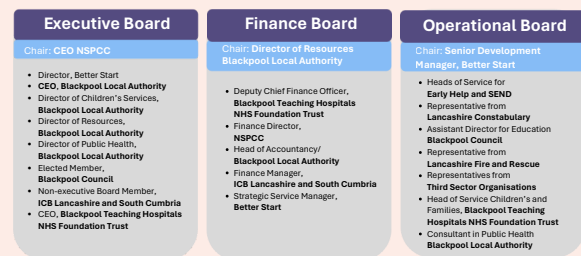
GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

Collaborative governance and systems change have always been a fundamental and a core part of Better Start's ambition. They've established formal multi-agency governance structures which provides a dedicated forum for collective leadership and decision-making. It keeps early childhood high on the agenda of senior leaders and enables collective accountability for delivery of the shared strategy. This breaks down silos, creates opportunities for more integrated working such as data sharing, joint commissioning, pooling of skills and resources, integrated models of delivery, and embedding innovation into routine service pathways

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance is underpinned by the values of meaningful and true co-production with families and the workforce. Integration of lived experience is an essential part of thinking and decision making at all levels.



BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

CORE TEAM STAFF:

- Strategic Staff: 21
- Delivery Arm: 10

ANNUAL BUDGET

- Management and Core Team Costs £1.5 Million
- Direct Delivery through Better Start and Partners £2 Million

SOURCES OF INCOME

The £3.5 Million is currently 70% funded through the National Lottery Community Fund.

The additional operational costs are met through NSPCC core funding and commissioned activity from other local authorities.

Over 10 years fewer children living in the most deprived wards under 5 have been taken into Local Authority Care, compared to those over 5. Continued rates of placements would have seen £6 Million additional cost.

AMBITIONS TO SCALE

AMBITION

- To share the strategic model of systems building developed in Blackpool with other authorities in the UK.
- Develop a sustainable model which ensures continued work in Blackpool to test & learn whilst scaling up & sharing insight nationally.
- To generate more learning & insight through research.

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring Better Start continue to balance local innovation alongside national scale up work
- Scaling up impact in other local areas when funding is known to be limited
- Obtaining long term strategic investment from funders

MITIGATION

- Developing an associate model of consultants to support new areas of work.
- Undertaking policy influencing work with national government to increase funding allocation to strategic early years innovation & prevention.
- Work with academic partners to support applications for grants.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Better Start operates both as a backbone and focused delivery organisation. It is the engine room of the cross-sector partnership, actively driving innovation, delivery, and system change. It brings together insight, evidence, and lived experience to fuel strategic direction, mobilise resources, and maintain momentum. This dual coordination and delivery role ensures that the vision for early years is not only held, but continually advanced through collaborative action and adaptive leadership.

The delivery work focuses on connectivity and quality gaps that are not being provided elsewhere, through:

- Community Connectors to improve family access to services
- EY Team focusing on quality improvement in EY settings



WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

Better Start's work with Family Hubs in Blackpool is multi-layered and multifaceted. Better Start worked hand in hand with the local authority to bid for Family Hub investment for Blackpool in 2022 and co-wrote the initial delivery plan. This ensured it was built upon the foundations laid by Better Start, complemented any existing work and prioritised the voices of the community and the workforce.

Better Start and Family Hubs continue to lead work together; with joint commissioning arrangements, practice improvement work, shared delivery and joint design making. Representatives from both teams play a key part in each other's governance resulting in a protected space and strategy within the Early Years system.

REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

The focus of this case study is 50 Things to Do Before You're Five, a family-facing initiative designed to give children the best start in life, that is co-designed with and brings together a wide range of partners across the early years, education, health, and cultural sectors - within a place.

- It supports early language development, learning, and health through and follows a model of proportionate universalism:
- A universal offer, free and accessible to all families with young children.

- Additional support and tailored adaptations for:
- Families in areas of high deprivation
 - Families who experience barriers to engagement with services
 - Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

This infrastructure model launched in 2018 from St Edmund's Nursery School, an Ofsted-judged Outstanding early years setting in Gillingham, Bradford, one of the most deprived areas of the city, and has since expanded across Bradford, the West Yorkshire region, and into many other parts of the country through a place-based, locally-led model. This case study will focus on Bradford.

The total annual Bradford reach is estimated at 25,000 children, 65% of all children.



KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

The key aim of the initiative is for every child to reach their important health, learning, and wellbeing milestones through a play-filled childhood. 50 Things to Do Before You're Five supports a wide range of positive outcomes for children in their earliest years:

- It strengthens parent-child relationships, fostering emotional security and improved wellbeing.
- It enhances school readiness by supporting development across key areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), including personal, social and emotional development, and physical development.
- It promotes strong foundations in language and communication, helping children develop the vocabulary, listening, and interaction skills critical for later literacy and learning.



THEORY OF CHANGE

At the heart of 50 Things to Do Before You're Five is the belief that everyday experiences, when enriched through purposeful play and strong adult-child interaction, can significantly improve children's early development:

When parents use the activities at home, they are better equipped to support their child's learning in meaningful, age-appropriate ways, leading to stronger relationships, improved confidence, and enriched home learning environments.

When Family Hubs, early years settings, and community services actively embed 50 Things into their work, families receive coordinated, consistent messages and support across settings, helping to bridge gaps in service access and increase parental engagement, particularly among families who may face social or economic barriers. See the overarching Theory of Change diagram to the left.

POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

1

50 Things to Do was shaped by parents to ensure the activities reflect real-life experiences, interests, and cultural relevance, recognising that empowering families as active participants in their children's early learning and building ownership and connection to the resource.

2

50 Things to Do encourages parents to take an active role in their child's learning and to connect with local opportunities and services. Many families become more confident in navigating their community, accessing support, and participating in local life.

3

Parents participate in local steering groups, bringing together partners from culture, voluntary & community, health, education, and the local authority. These cross-sector groups help to shape local delivery, align 50 Things to Do with other early childhood priorities, ensuring the diverse needs of local families are met.

GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

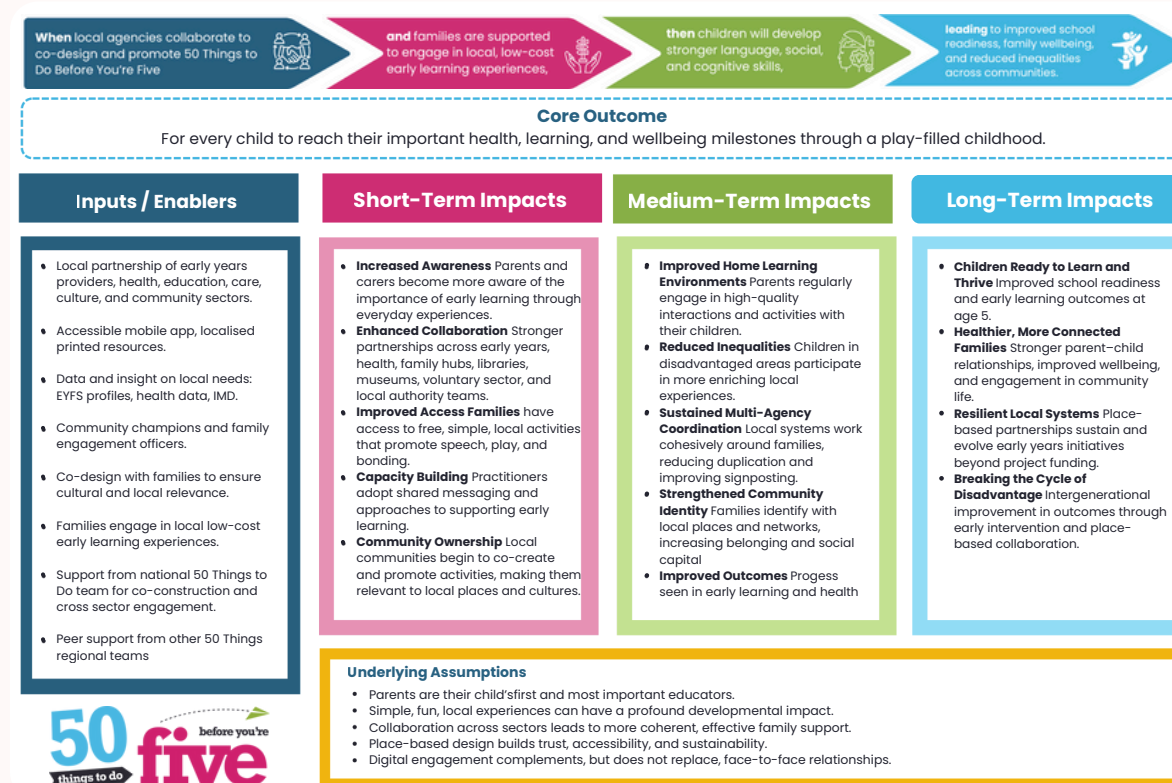
Birth to 19 collaborates with a wide range of partners across the education, health, voluntary and cultural sectors, and so far, accountability for outcomes relating to 50 Things to Do has been primarily rooted in the education sector. Family Hubs are becoming a key partner and while Birth to 19 have established links with the health sector, including GP practices, NHS trusts, and public health teams, shared accountability is still developing. They also partner with a wide range of cultural and community organisations, including museums, galleries, libraries, parks, and other local assets, to co-deliver accessible, enriching experiences for families.

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance of 50 Things to Do Before You're Five is led by Birth to 19, but supported further by a multi-agency model at both strategic (national) and operational (local) levels. At the local level, implementation is typically guided by a local steering or advisory group, bringing together representatives from:

- Local authority early years and education teams
- Family Hubs
- Maintained schools and MATs
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Libraries, museums, and cultural partners
- Public health or health visiting teams

THEORY OF CHANGE CONTINUED



STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

The Birth to 19 team provides the core national backbone function overseeing strategy, resource development, training, and data. At the local level, the backbone role is typically shared between the local authority lead (often from Early Years or Family Hubs), Family Hubs, and local steering groups, who coordinate delivery, align the initiative with local priorities, and engage partners across sectors.

- ✓ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ✓ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ✓ Engage, empower and connect communities
- ✓ Data gathering and analysis
- ✓ Deliver services for Children/Families
- ✓ Support delivery of services
- ✓ Facilitate learning
- ✓ External Communications
- ✓ Fundraising



AMBITIONS TO SCALE

50 Things to Do Before You're Five is already scaling nationally and has grown from a local programme rooted in Bradford to a local offer in 23 localities across the British Isles. Birth to 19 now has the ambition and capacity to scale 50 Things to Do across the whole of England, as an integral element of the Best Start in Life initiative.

Alongside expansion into new areas, the team is also focused on deepening the impact of the programme in both existing and new localities, particularly targeting improved outcomes for children most at risk of not having the best start in life. This deeper work includes:

- Supporting early years settings to strengthen parental engagement through initiatives such as 'Friends of 50 Things' and 'Parents and Partners'.
- Developing a socially prescribed 'Wellbeing Playgroup' programme to support families where one or more parents are experiencing mental health challenges.
- Delivering transformational workforce development training for Family Hubs and Best Start in Life teams.
- Enabling early years settings to offer targeted parenting programmes for families from disadvantaged backgrounds, often running over 6-12 weeks.

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

The Birth to 19 team is delivering training for Family Navigators and Family Support Workers within Family Hubs, with the aim of embedding 50 Things to Do Before You're Five as a core part of joining up their practices and meaningfully integrated it into family support and engagement. The training is also about practice development - strengthening practitioner-family relationships, increasing strengths-based support to parents, and improving access to enriching early learning experiences in everyday life.

BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

NUMBER OF STAFF

The Birth to 19 team includes 25 staff spread across leadership, administration, finance, and marketing and communications - national and local.

The core team supporting 50 Things delivery in Bradford consists of 4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, who are responsible for local coordination, partnership working, practitioner training, and community engagement.

ANNUAL BUDGET

Budget levels vary between other local authority areas depending on the scale of implementation, commissioning arrangements, and whether additional outreach or adaptation is planned for specific communities.

Within a mature local offer such as Bradford, 50 Things to Do costs typically £100,000 annually which includes the work of engagement officer, marketing and delivery resources, and the support of leadership and backbone teams.



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

The original pilot was in one community of around 2500 people in Mansfield (anchored around Oak Tree Primary School). Promising outcomes from this pilot resulted in a successful bid to scale up the initiative across the district of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire.

CHILDREN AND FAMILILES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

50 families (Oak Tree) Target 250 (Mansfield)

Equity is built into the design. Activity will focus on high priority children and families, the needs of whom will inform the focus of the initiative.

KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

The ambition of Mansfield Getting School Ready is to ensure every child in Mansfield starts school ready to learn and thrive, by bringing families, services, and communities together through a collective impact approach — using systems thinking to align efforts, address root causes, and create lasting change.

Metrics were developed for the following indicators in Oak Tree and measured through surveys:

- Connections between services
- Trust between families and services
- Access and availability of support
- System leadership
- Community cohesion
- Funding

A shared measurement system is being co-produced to be used to monitor the development of school readiness in Mansfield. This is in line with the 'Better Start in Life' target, The summative success indicator will be Good Level of Development.

POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

The project gives power and agency to the families they work with through a variety of ways:

Parents sit on the Steering Group and working groups, helping to shape the shared agenda, priorities, and measures of success. Their lived experience informs policy decisions and service design, ensuring the system reflects real family needs. Parents go through a leadership journey with the Steering group, alongside other members

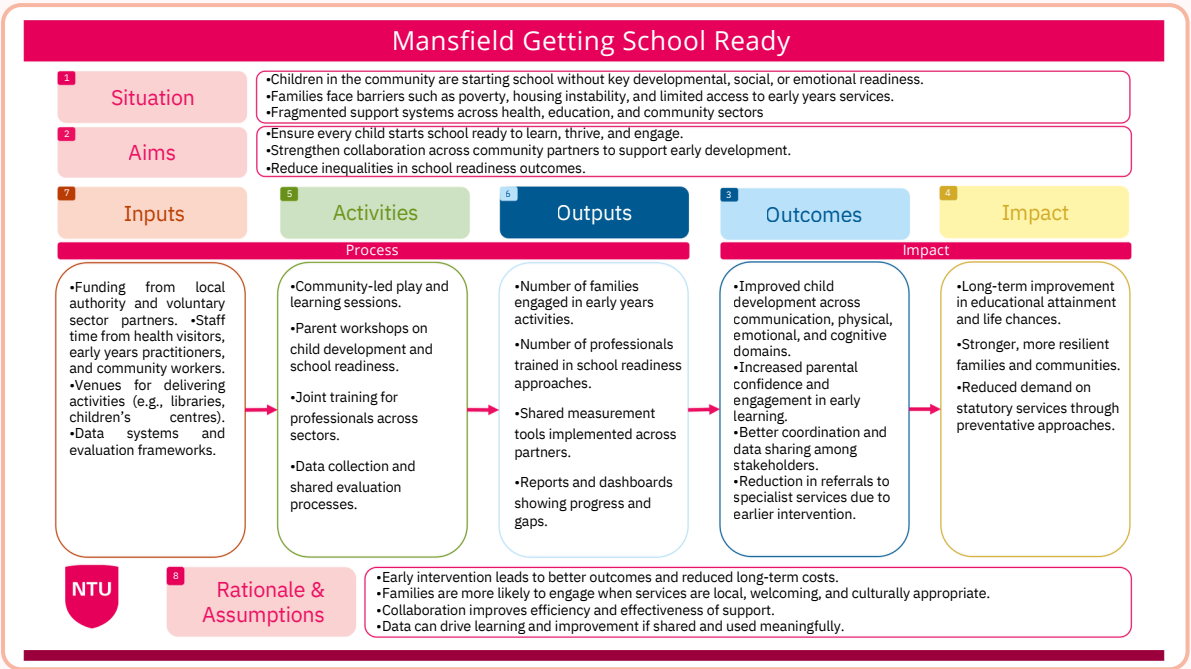
Ongoing listening workshops, family forums, and participatory activities gather insights directly from children and families. Families help lead and deliver local activities, becoming active agents of change.

Unlocking agency of residents: A parent partner participated in the Universities for Nottingham Co(l)laboratory Citizen Scientist programme. With the support of an academic supervisory team, she undertook a 10 week placement which contributed to the 'building community cohesion' strand of the initiative.

The project enabled her to research the history of the Oak Tree Lane Estate and build a positive counter-narrative of pride and resilience. She is currently working with NTU students to develop classroom resources to share that history for use by Oak Tree Primary School teachers.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The initiative aims to create the five conditions of Collective Impact in order to deliver sustainable change at the population level. These include a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforced activities, continuous communication, and backbone support.



GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

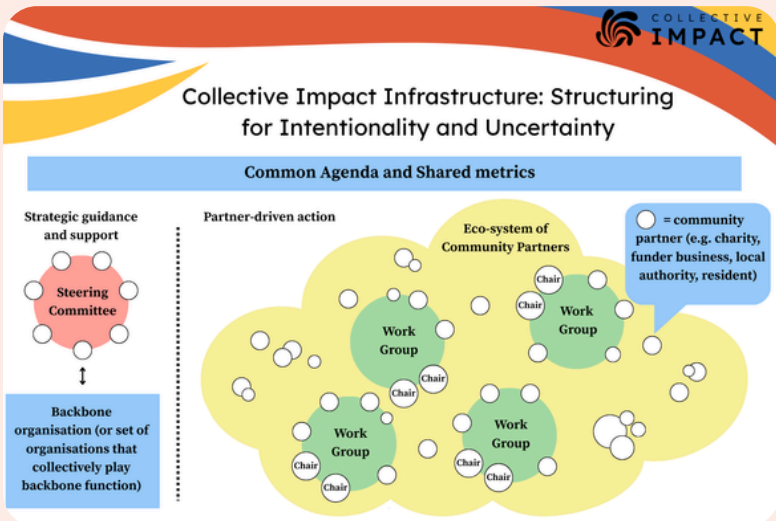
COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

The project brings together a wide range of partners, including early years, early education, primary schools, family hubs, the health family team, educational psychologists, midwives, local authorities, community and voluntary sector organisations, community groups, and individual parents and carers.

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The project is comprised of a Steering Group of local strategic leaders, with a representative resident voice, Working Groups focused on priority themes, and a network of supporters and partners.

The Collective Impact Infrastructure Diagram, referenced from Tamarack Institute, shows how the governance is structured, transitioning from Oak Tree Primary School to a Mansfield-wide Steering group.



Adapted from Collaborative Governance Framework by the Tamarack Institute 2017

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Nottingham Trent University function as a backbone for the initiative. They amplify the impact of the initiative because strengthening the partnership, and developing and sharing a deep understanding of the school readiness system more broadly, are their sole focus.

They are not trying to do this complex work off the edge of their desk while delivering a programme or service to families like other partners are required to do.

- ☒ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ☒ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ☒ Engage, empower & connect communities
- ☒ Data gathering and analysis
- ☐ Deliver services for Children/Families
- ☒ Support delivery of services
- ☒ Facilitate learning
- ☒ External Communications
- ☒ Fundraising

AMBITIONS TO SCALE

Mansfield Getting School Ready has just expanded and are looking to embed the work at this new higher district level. The current ambition is to acquire more funding to continue beyond the current two year time period.



WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

The initiative has close connections with Family Hub service managers and activity coordinators, and The Director of Children's Services is a representative on the initiative Steering Group. During the initiative's pilot a community-led stay and play was developed with the Family Hub. They worked with the Family Hub to conduct community-based post-graduate research on the impact of school readiness policy on parents, carers and professionals. Family Hubs hosted the steering group meetings and the community-led parent support network that started up through the initiative. In addition systems leadership training was delivered with and for Family Hub staff.

BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

NUMBER OF STAFF

The team has four members of staff, including: a Project Coordinator, a Community Engagement Coordinator, a Data and Evaluation Coordinator and an Initiative Lead.

ANNUAL BUDGET

Nottingham Trent University received £250,000 'Levelling Up' funding over 2 years for the core backbone project team of 2.8FTE from September 2025 to September 2027. Nottingham Trent University covers additional costs including overheads, management time and project support.

SOURCES OF INCOME

75% of the funding is provided from Mansfield District Council Levelling Up Fund. The additional 25% is provided by Nottingham Trent University.



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

The boundaries of work were loosely defined as the West locality in Hounslow borough, which comprises of 5 wards - 3 of which intersect in the centre of Feltham, hence why the collective impact initiative was called the Feltham Early Learning Community.

CHILDREN AND FAMILILES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

3900 Children and 2845 Families over 2018-23

The model was based on principles of targeted universalism: the universal offer was critical for being able to identify and signpost families with greatest need into appropriate targeted support e.g. a closed therapeutic parent-toddler group, 1:1 Baby Talk & Play sessions, and a play group for children with SEND and their families.



KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

Established in partnership with Save the Children UK, the Feltham Early Learning Community was a collective impact initiative to achieve long-term systems change. The key ambition of the initiative was to improve early learning outcomes for children growing up in Feltham. Population level EY outcomes were used as proxies for measuring success, however these weren't always available at ward-level so the data was compared to borough and national statistics. For individual work streams, a range of qualitative evaluation were used (e.g. self-reported pre/post changes), tracking participation, impact, and engagement to capture reach.

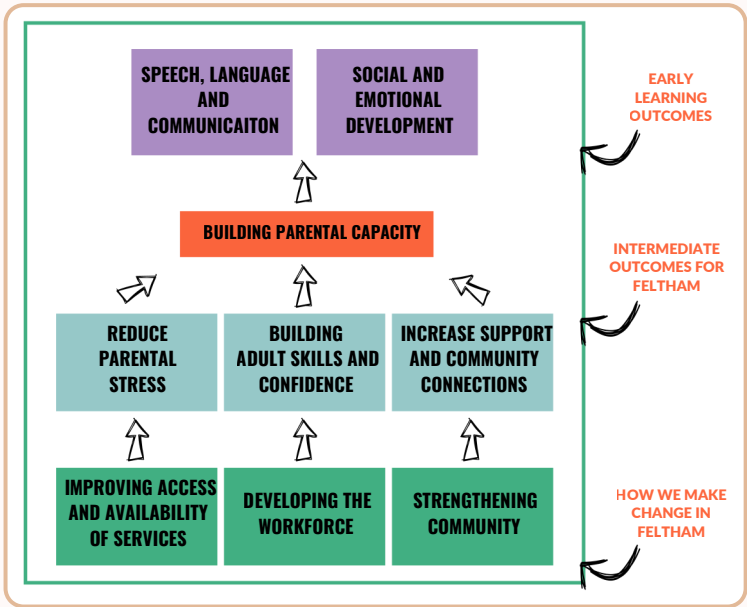
For the systemic changes, the long-term impact and legacy of the work continues to be seen through the Feltham Convening Partnership; a national Cradle-to-Career and place-based leadership programmes; and the design and implementation of the Family Hub model in Hounslow.



THEORY OF CHANGE

The main focus of the work was increasing parental capacity by reducing parental stress, building the capabilities of all adults in caregiving roles for babies and children, and creating strong peer support networks and connections.

For example, the local EY workforce was developed in partnership with Kingston University, which created change at an individual, institutional and systemic level.



POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Valuing parents and centring their experience was a core part of how the Early Learning Community operated. The initiative supported many parents along their development journey, providing training for community organising, co-designing and delivering services, and volunteering. Many went on to gain qualifications in childcare, become parent leaders, peer support leads or representatives on Family Hub Parent Carer Panels. See diagram below for examples.



GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

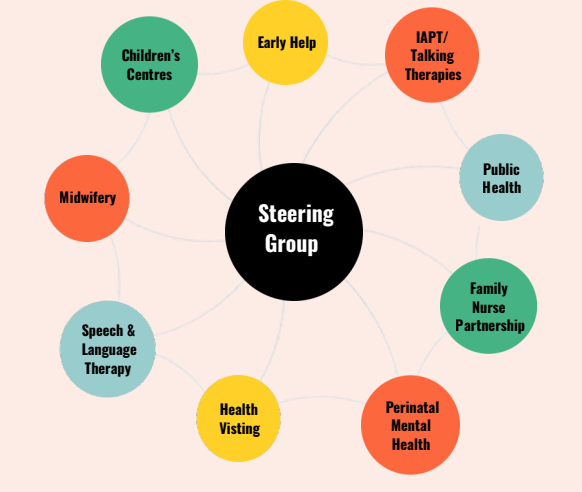
The initiative actively collaborated with the LA, health visitors, midwifery, Early Help, Public Health, Perinatal Mental Health, Family Nurse Partnership, Speech & Language, VCSEs, schools, EY settings, Family Links. However, Save the Children UK were the only partner who shared accountability for outcomes, given their role as the core funder; and Kingston University also shared accountability for the degree outcomes of their students.

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Perinatal Steering Group was a core element of the ELC. It was set up by the Perinatal Lead to support greater connection and collaboration between 0-2 services. By bringing these services together regularly and establishing trusting relationships, the Steering Group enabled practitioners to share information, collaborate, and provide better services and experiences for babies, infants and their families. For many practitioners, it was the only time they came together with cross-sector partners to tackle the systemic challenges they were all facing.

The Perinatal Steering Group established by the ELC evolved into the official Hounslow Family Hubs Parent and Infant Relationship Service Advisory Group.

Representation of the Perinatal Steering Group is below:



STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

The Reach Foundation provided this function for the duration of the initiative:

- ☒ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ☒ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ☒ Engage, empower and connect communities
- ☒ Data gathering and analysis
- ☒ Deliver services for Children/Families
- ☒ Support delivery of services
- ☒ Facilitate learning
- ☒ External Communications
- ☐ Fundraising



BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

NUMBER OF STAFF

The team was split roughly into 2-3 FTE providing the backbone functions (including an individual for data analysis) and 3-4 FTE for Delivery of services.

ANNUAL BUDGET

Total budget over 5 years was £2m for the Early Learning Community work.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Save the Children UK donors committed the full budget. They also received a small amount of income from the degree stream.

AMBITIONS TO SCALE

The initiative has been able to scale in a few ways : 1) through Family Hubs commissioning, which meant the Perinatal offer could be rolled out across the borough and develop a comprehensive Parent and Infant Relationship Service. 2) since Kingston have closed their foundation degree offer, the initiative has developed their own workforce development HE pathway and have recently launched the Centre for the Children's Workforce on 10th October, a local-regional model that will be rolled out across the country. And 3) the Feltham Early Learning Community continues to inspire the work of the Feltham Convening Partnership locally and nationally through their Cradle to Career partners (mostly MATs), who are developing their own EY offers as part of their backbone role in Cradle to Career collaborative models e.g. Strong Foundations at the Maritime Children's Foundation in Bligh.

The diagrams on this page have been sourced from Save the Children's FELC Impact and Findings 2018/23 Report - [Link Here](#)

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

Their contract with the Family Hub service came to an end Sept 2025 but it successfully delivered on its commission to:

- set up three FH Parent Carer Forums, one per locality;
- deliver a range of workforce development workshops and outputs;
- and develop and implement the Parent and Infant Relationship Service (PAIRS.)

Two members of staff were seconded directly to the FH team, one to lead the development and implementation of the PAIRS offer and the other to work within the team on delivery. Freelance team members were also employed including infant psychotherapists and other specialists. The ELC Perinatal Steering Group transitioned to become the PAIRS Advisory Board. Responsibility was also given for the initial scoping and strategic planning for Family Hubs in Hounslow, including conducting listening and co-design with key stakeholders and drafting a TOM.



LIVERPOOL: PARR AND LINACRE

REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Right to Succeed is a national 'backbone' organisation, currently operating in multiple hyper local places in Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, West Midlands, and Blackpool. This case study will focus on Linacre in Sefton and Parr in St Helens (both within Liverpool City Region) which are in their 2nd year of delivery with 'Next Chapter in life' focused on EY. This in turn sits within a broader Cradle to Career initiative in each community.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

64,000 in total this year across all locations, and on average 3,000+ (0-19 year olds) per Cradle to Career location

Right to Succeed responds to the priorities set by the community, but currently work with 0-19 year olds and their families, with different areas of focus in each community. St Helens, Parr and Speke wards were chosen based on IMD, and EY support will start with universal offer but become more targeted to families unable to access services, including those families working with Early link workers and Family Connectors. They have a case load of approx 20 families each in each place.

KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

To collectively define, deliver and sustain the change their communities need and want for their children, young people and families. The key ambition for Early Years in Linacre: Every child in Linacre is ready for their next step of development, and parents/carers feel empowered to support transitions. See EY specific TOC - Next Chapter in Life

The key outcomes and indicators vary by community due to different needs and priorities, but for EY in Linacre, outcomes include:

- Parents' enhanced skills, knowledge, and confidence to provide school readiness support
- Parents are empowered to access support where needed
- Parents' enhanced social support network.

- Parents & professionals have a common understanding of what it means to be school ready and have a common local framework regarding stages of development
- Improved professionals' capability to support needs and address gaps
- Children's improved level of foundational skills and confidence to start school - GLD and Wellcomm assessments

POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

In Early Years, the voice and power of parents is brought to the work through:

- 1

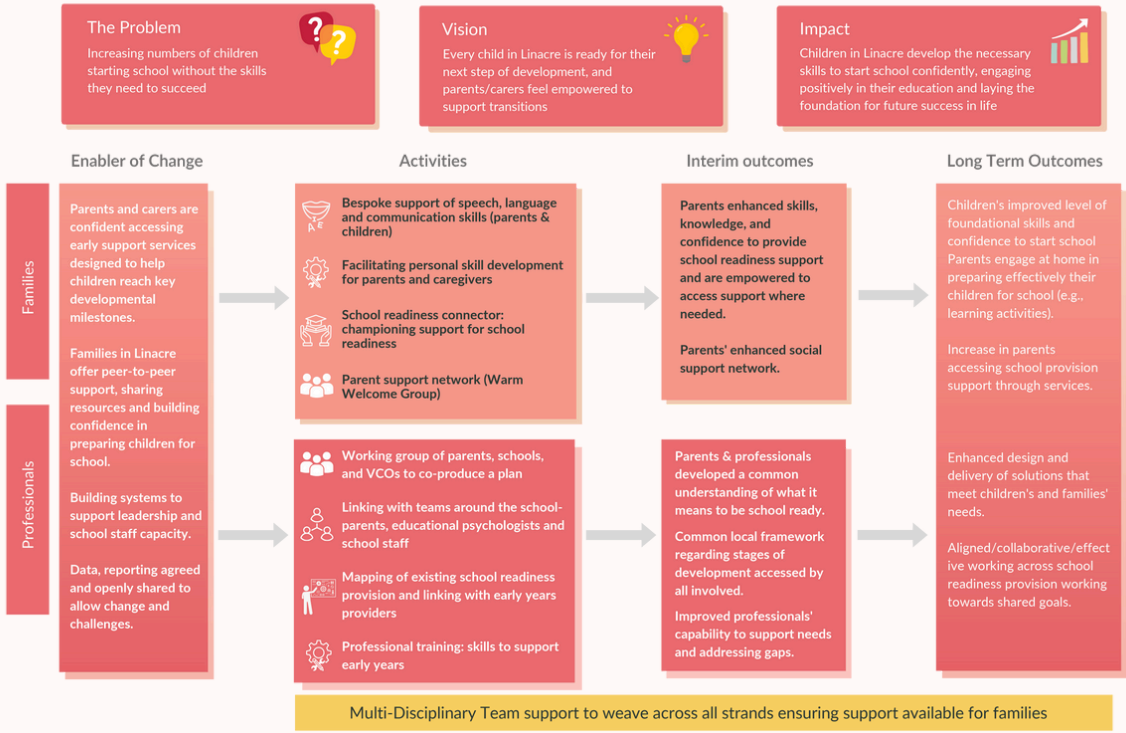
Early Development Link Worker understanding and advocating for parent needs.
- 2

Working group of parents, schools, VCOs, creating Warm Welcome parent groups led by parents and VSOs, delivering school readiness activities.
- 3

Parents and Ed Psych inputs feed into MDT teams and relationship with schools.

THEORY OF CHANGE

All delivery is via partners in the community, voluntary organisations, led often by early link workers, or in nursery and primary schools. Right to Succeed provides the backbone and coordination infrastructure to the overall Cradle to Career effort.



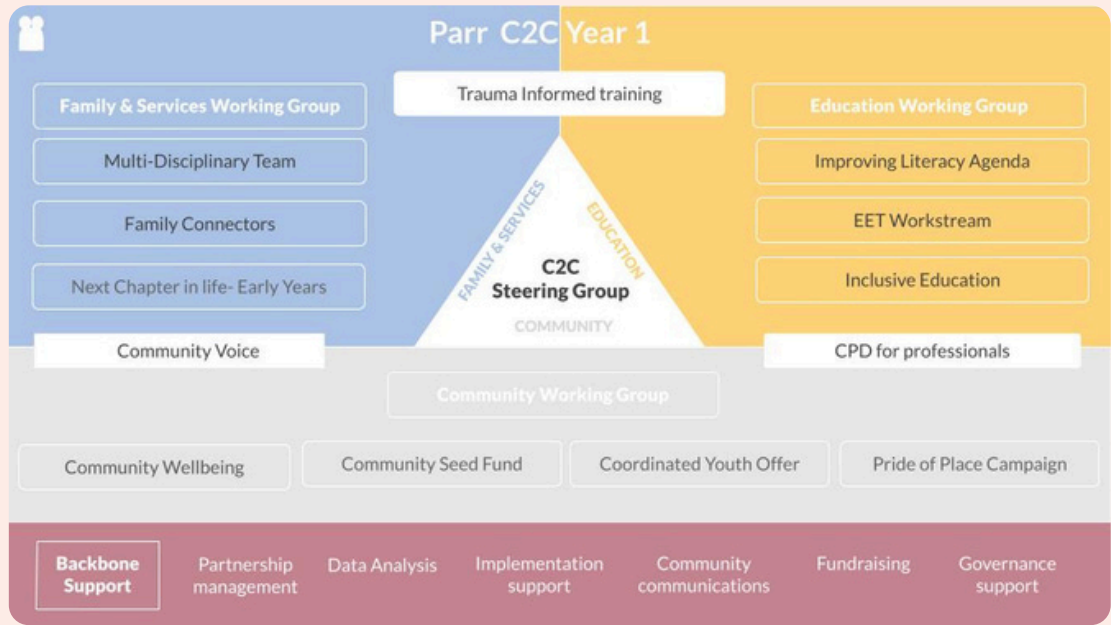
GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

- Early Years and Education settings
- Public Sector Services and Local Authority
- Community and Youth Organisations
- Resident Groups

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Each place has a steering group with all sectors represented. Within each steering group are 3 working groups focusing on Family & Services, Education or Community. The EY work in Parr and Linacre are within the Family and Services work stream. See example below.



ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Right to Succeed provides the backbone capability in order to:

- ✓ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ✓ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ✓ Engage, empower and connect communities
- ✓ Data gathering and analysis
- Deliver services for Children/Families
- ✓ Support delivery of services
- ✓ Facilitate learning
- ✓ External Communications
- ✓ Fundraising



BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

NUMBER OF STAFF

Typically 2.5-3 FTEs per Cradle to Career community:

- 1x director who oversees 2 locations
- 1x programme manager who focuses on 2 areas for this workstream
- 1x programme officer who spends 50% of hours on this workstream, and 25% in each area

ANNUAL BUDGET

Circa £1.3million pa of philanthropy, statutory funding, commissioning and co-commissioning - for the overall Cradle to Career initiative per place.

Early Years initiative budget pa per place is c£75-85k plus cost of backbone team

SOURCES OF INCOME

The most recent Cradle to Career programme (£4.5million spend over 1 year discovery and 3 years of delivery) has the following funding split: 16.4% Philanthropy 11.0% Statutory - LA spend from existing budgets 23.1% Commissioning - CA 49.6% Co-Commissioning - CA and philanthropy

AMBITIONS TO SCALE

Proposed ambition to scale to 5 new places each year over next 3 years. Key barriers to scale are:

1. The economics - the challenge of putting together the mix of philanthropy, statutory funding, commissioning and co-commissioning and genuinely putting this in the collective hands of the community is significant, and seriously limits our ability to grow and the ability of others to enter this space.
2. People - there are very few organisations doing this work so it takes us time to recruit, train and develop staff. Right to Succeed is growing quickly (30% growth per annum) but having to balance growth against not overstretching our people.

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

They work with Family Hubs wherever possible, and generally the multidisciplinary (public services) teams (MDT) in communities are hosted within family hubs, or build out the services offer from Family First Partnership Programmes, and Best Start Family Hubs.

Neither Right to Succeed nor their partner organisations currently deliver any early years services for or with Family Hubs, but they do work with families who don't engage with public services and our aim is to help these families access these in future.



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Sheffield's Early Learning Community (SELC) works in Sheffield - Locality B.

This area consists of Firvale and Firthpark, Shirecliffe and Burngreave, Shiregreen and Brightside

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

The project directly engages with 300 children.

The work focuses specifically on Early Years, families living in areas of disadvantage, and families with no recourse to public funds.



KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

The partnership of the Sheffield Early Learning Community, focuses on mainly three foundational principles for effective systems change:

- Trusted collaborative relationships
- Shared vision and purpose
- Shifting power to families

These three principles are from the building blocks for building sustainably stronger, more resilient communities and have been developed from the Systems Change Maturity Model, developed by Collaborate and NPC with Sheffield Early Learning Community. The project uses the Matrix, an extract of which is shown below, to jointly assess with partners, on at least an annual basis, how effectively the the principles are being applied and where improvements can be made.

Maturity	Emerging	Developing	Maturing	Thriving
System condition	Basic elements of the condition are understood and being developed in at least some parts of the system	Early progress has been made, and there is a commitment across the system to building the condition, with further planning underway	Substantial progress has been made to develop the condition, with all key partners in the system participating	The condition is embedded, and measures are in place or being developed to ensure future sustainability
Shared vision and purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A clear strategy, developed in partnership by different actors in the system, sets out the vision, purpose and outcomes the ELC is working towardsA shared understanding is developing of what current work in the local area relates to the outcomes in the ELC strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Partners understand and articulate the shared vision and purpose of the ELCPartners begin to identify strategies to create the long-term shifts required to deliver long-term change, not just short-term interventionsPartners can clearly explain how the work of the ELC fits with their other organisational strategies, and have secured appropriate buy-in from internal stakeholders to the ELC approachOpportunities are identified to adapt and build on existing work and short-term projects / interventions to better align them with the ELC's longer term plans and vision for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Partners understand and can articulate their role and contribution to the vision – what they are best placed to do, and what others are better placed to doConnections are made between the vision and strategy for the ELC and other place-based visions and strategiesPlanning for the future sustainability of the ELC is underway with a focus on building capabilityShort-term projects and that the ELC undertakes are aligned to a longer-term vision for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The ELC's strategy is integrated within other place-based plans, or they are integrated within itThe ELC influences the planning of projects and interventions outside of its direct sphere of control, to ensure where possible that they are aligned with the ELC's vision for changeThe ELC has developed clear plans for future sustainability and is making progress on delivering on these

Source: Adapted extract from A Systems Change Maturity Model for Early Learning Communities

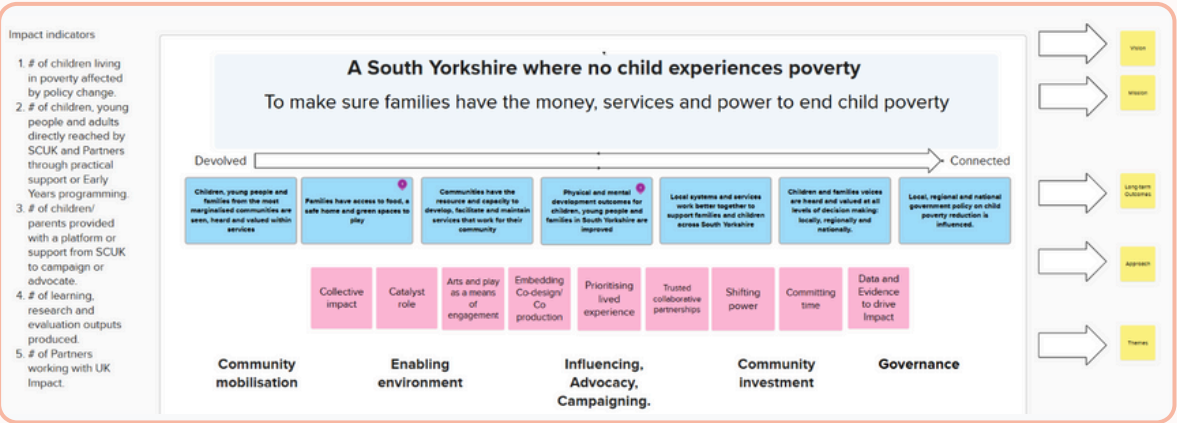
THEORY OF CHANGE

Their Theory of Change works towards a UK where no child experiences poverty and where:

- Children are happy, healthy and safe in their home and community: This is done by investing capacity and resource to build communities that care about children.
- Children live in places that allow them to thrive: The project influences at a local, regional and national level to prioritise children
- Children have a say in things that affect them: The voices of children and families voices are embedded within the initiatives work and priorities

To enable this, SELC focuses on five core themes:

- Community mobilisation: co-design, upskilling, training, work with parents, voice and power
- Enabling environment: sharing learning, convening, communities of practice, working groups
- Influencing, advocacy & campaigning: local and regional campaigning, voice and power, national influencing
- Community investment: innovation, fundraising
- Governance: Sustainability, systems change, governance board



POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

The Sheffield Early Learning Community works with children, families and professionals, acting as 'system stewards' to nurture healthier local early years systems, guided by a "listen, partner, evidence, influence" framework, new and innovative approaches are tested for families' most immediate challenges whether that is social isolation, mental health, poverty, or housing:

- The co-design of services has provided families with the starting point to make significant changes in their lives
- Innovation funding then enables the families to test out ideas and solutions for change
- Parents have now established a CIC, to sustain change in their community
- Parents have been trained as Community Researchers to empower them to be leaders and advocates in their community.

This model has seen parents go on to engage in training courses, access volunteering opportunities and take up paid employment.

GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

Since 2019, Save the Children has worked with founding partners Watercliffe Meadow Primary School, Sheffield City Council (Family Hubs), Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust and Sheffield Hallam University's Early Years Community Research Centre in Burngreave, Brightside, Firth Park and Shiregreen to improve local support for families and children age 0-5.

There is not have formal shared accountability but progress is tracked against the Systems Change Maturity Model.

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Save the Children UK lead a Sheffield Early Learning Community Project Board, made up of a representative of each of the partners outlined above. The current project board is composed of members who collectively bring a robust blend of knowledge, skills, and experience essential for strategic leadership in Sheffield, have extensive backgrounds in overseeing services for children and families, and have influence within various systems and networks. Recently, a parent has been on-boarded as well as the Meadows Nursery Manager and SEND lead for Sheffield Council.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Save the Children UK bring extra capacity, resource, expertise and energy as the backbone function. There isn't one simple solution that addresses the challenge of ending child poverty, therefore the project works to advance children's rights by working alongside and building the power of children, communities, and local partners.

Save the Children UK act as the backbone in the Sheffield Early Learning Community. At the early stages of the Early Learning Community the organisation delivered the services, however it is now in Sustainability Phase and no longer delivers but supports local organisations to do the delivery.

- ☒ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ☒ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ☒ Engage, empower and connect communities
- ☒ Data gathering and analysis
- ☐ Deliver services for Children/Families
- ☒ Support delivery of services
- ☒ Facilitate learning
- ☐ External Communications
- ☐ Fundraising

BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

NUMBER OF STAFF

3.5 members of staff

SOURCES OF INCOME

65% - unrestricted funding
35% restricted donor funding

ANNUAL BUDGET

Circa £200,000

Staffing (with ICE/ICR) £150,000
Innovation and delivery - £45,000
Participation - £5000



AMBITIONS TO SCALE

Sheffield Early Learning Community aims to continue working in local areas and to deepen its relationships, whilst sharing learning nationally, and exploring the connections between the communities they've been working within. They aim to ensure that insights / voice from work in place are used to support policy influencing where there is opportunity to strengthen services at a regional & national level

Additionally, Save the Children UK are exploring strategic partnerships in new areas, with a focus on lighter touch resourcing, but more focus upon specific areas e.g. fundraising, influencing, networking or safeguarding. They are also defining a role in regional governance, especially at Mayoral Combined Authority level.

Barriers include resource constraints and navigating complex system structures

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

The Family Hub is one of Sheffield Early Learning Community's partners. Information is shared and used to coordinate activities where this makes sense.

Some examples of ways they work together are:

- Partnering on innovation test and learn projects around Immunisation strategies to improve vaccination rates in the Firvale area of Sheffield
- Jointly run some 0-5 activities, parent-infant relationships, early language and home learning environment activities with Family Hubs and work alongside them to introduce new activity ideas
- Host Family Hub professionals and services such as health visitors, tooth brushing, debt and welfare advice, housing advice in the nursery
- Recently funded 'Family Link Worker' within nursery actively works with Family Hubs to connect families to services
- Actively refer families to Family Hub teams eg for domestic abuse support



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

The project work focused in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, UK.

CHILDREN AND FAMILILES DIRECTLY ENGAGED

The initiative engages with 700-800 children per annum. Whilst the support offered is universal, the work is mostly focused on children aged 0-6 living in poverty.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Below is Save the Children UK's Theory of Change for this work:



KEY AMBITIONS AND OUTCOMES

The key aim is to improve early learning, development and play outcomes for young children (aged 0-6) living in poverty in Tower Hamlets. To elaborate more on the objective of this work, Save the Children in Tower Hamlets works to:

- Increase support and resources across the Tower Hamlets community to meet children's and families' needs, both in the short-term and long-term.
- Strengthen capacity and coordination across the Tower Hamlets community to identify and implement support for the holistic needs of children in their early years.
- Influence policy and practice change at local and national levels to further strengthen support for the holistic needs of children in their early years.



GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

The initiative has an extensive partner network in the borough made up of different parts of the early years system. This includes: VCS, Health, LA, Early years settings. Whilst these partners are collaborators, it is the advisory group that supports the sharing of accountability and outcomes.

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The advisory group meets every six weeks and is mix of local services and organisations.

This group provides strategic oversight and expert advice on the delivery of Save the Children's work in Tower Hamlets, with a particular focus on:

- Innovation Project Management
- Place-based Change
- Networking and Influencing

Current members in the group include three representatives from Save the Children UK, including: Senior Community Lead-London, Partnership Lead, and Head of England (when appropriate). There are also up to 10 representatives at middle management and practitioner level from local organisations, currently, this includes:

- The local authority (early years and childcare team)
- An early years setting (nursery)
- 2-3 x VCS organisations
- Health (health visitor)
- Public health
- Family Hubs (locality manager)

The governance of the work is structured as follows:

Tower Hamlets Advisory Group

- Strategic oversight of project delivery.
- Advises on innovation priorities and approves project applications.
- Supports alignment with local systems and networks.

Save the Children UK – Senior Community Lead-London & Head of England

- Accountable for overall progress and budget management of the Community Power and Power of Play projects.
- Ensures delivery aligns with organisational strategy and donor commitments.

Save the Children UK – Senior Community Lead - London & Partnership Lead

- Maintain regular engagement with the Advisory Group.
- Facilitate feedback loops and support implementation of agreed priorities.

POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

The work of Save the Children in Tower Hamlets meaningfully involves the parents and families of the children they aim to support. Typically, the initiative is carried out through partners, and a key part of the commissioned work involves co-design with families to help shape the programmes being delivered. This approach ensures the work is rooted in lived experience and responds meaningfully to what families say they need. At the time of this document, a significant amount of development work is focusing on how families are involved in the initiative's governance.

Over the next year, Save the Children Tower Hamlets aims to have parents actively contributing in the advisory group, as well as playing a role in reviewing innovation funding applications. The initiative has recently increased its capacity with the addition of a Participation Manager, whose role will be central in helping to shift this balance. The work of this role will focus on embedding meaningful family involvement across programmes and decision-making processes.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Save the Children Tower Hamlets plays the role of the backbone function, where it focuses on the following highlighted roles:

- ☐ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ☒ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ☒ Engage, empower and connect communities
- ☒ Data gathering and analysis
- ☐ Deliver services for Children/Families
- ☒ Support delivery of services
- ☒ Facilitate learning
- ☐ External Communications
- ☐ Fundraising

BACKBONE DELIVERY MODEL

ANNUAL BUDGET

Approximately 500K. This includes: Staff time, funding for innovation, funding for grants, comms story telling budget, events/venue hire costs, recognising family participation, desk hire, funding for influencing activities locally and nationally.

NUMBER OF STAFF

3.5 FTE members of staff are included in the backbone, but are part of a wider England and Westminster team within Save the Children UK.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Save the Children's work in Tower Hamlets is funded by Morgan Stanley and the Lego Foundation.



AMBITIONS TO SCALE

Save the Children UK has wider ambitions for pan-London work.

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

Save the Children UK are currently a member of the Family Hubs partnership where they attend locality meetings and feed into the strategy and development. A Family Hub locality manager is also a member of the advisory group so there are many ways the work feeds in to Save the Children Tower Hamlets.



REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Thrive at Five currently operate programmes in three locations: Stoke on Trent, Redcar & Cleveland and Middlesbrough. In Stoke-on-Trent, their work has been focused in the two wards of Abbey Hulton and Bentilee since 2023, with scoping underway with the Local Authority to expand into two new wards. They work across five wards in Redcar & Cleveland: Dormanstown, Eston, Grangetown, Kirkleatham and Southbank. Middlesbrough, their most recent programme, was launched in 2025 and will be operating in the wards of Newport and Central. They are also in the process of establishing a new programme in Scotland, with a site expected to be agreed in the next 3-6 months.

Each local programme targets approximately 2,500 children from pregnancy to five, and their families. It is anticipated that they will be working with at least 12,000 children and parents by 2027, with the broader influence of work improving early years support across the whole of each of the four Local Authority areas.

Programme areas are targeted to places where:

- (a) a high proportion of children, particularly children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, are not reaching a Good Level of Development and;
- (b) where deprivation is strongly concentrated.

The Thrive at Five model aims to improve outcomes for children from pregnancy to five in these communities, with a particular focus on those children at most risk of not reaching developmental milestones.

In Stoke-on-Trent, the proportion of FSM eligible children in Thrive at Five wards achieving a GLD increased by 11.4 percentage points from 52.8 percent in 2024 to 64.2% in 2025. Across the city, 58 percent of FSM eligible children achieved a GLD in both 2024 and 2025.

KEY AMBITIONS AND APPROACH

Everything Thrive at Five does is to ensure that all children in their early years have the strong foundations they need for life and learning. They do this by bringing together local communities, families and a wide range of local partners, including health services, family hubs, schools and local charities, and by joining up and strengthening the early years system. They do this in two key ways:

- Unlocking the power of parents and carers to give their children the nurturing care and supportive environments they need.
- Enable collaboration across health, education, community and voluntary sectors, improve engagement with parents and carers and support the early years system to use evidence and data more effectively to create a stronger and more effective early years system.

Thrive at Five also supports their programme teams through the charity's central learning and evaluation function and with their trustees and advisors who connect local teams with best-in-class expertise in relation to early development, evidence-based practice, community engagement, implementation, evaluation, and systems change.

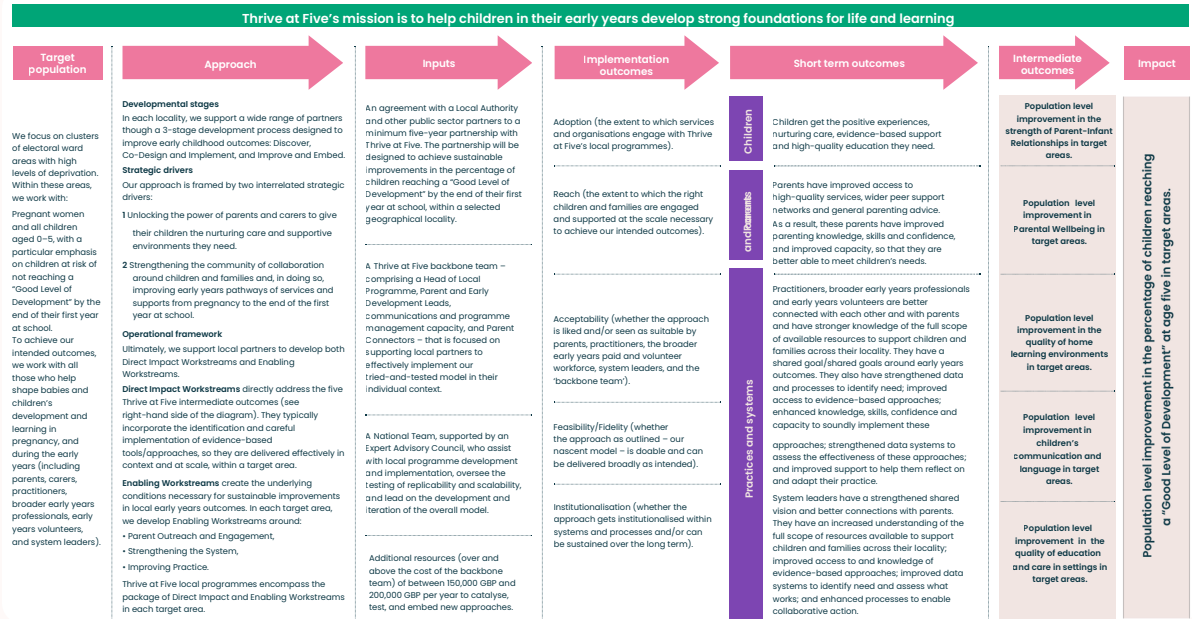
POWER AND AGENCY OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Thrive at Five involves parents, carers and community members in decision-making and priority setting from the outset to create strong relationships for their work. They do this by:

- 1 Being partners in their Discovery phase to share parents and families experiences and what help they need to support children's development
- 2 Involvement in their Co-design phase, identifying ways parents and carers can shape the initiatives being implemented
- 3 Upskilling and training parents and families with parenting knowledge and skills and at times, providing employability skills

THEORY OF CHANGE

The backbone teams support local partners to develop both Direct Impact Workstreams and Enabling Workstreams. Direct Impact Workstreams directly address the five Thrive at Five intermediate outcomes incorporating the identification and implementation of evidence-based tools and approaches, delivered effectively in context and at scale for each target area.



GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATIONS

COLLABORATION PARTNERS WHICH SHARE OUTCOME ACCOUNTABILITY

Key partners include:

- Local voluntary and community organisations
- Local faith groups
- Partners from across the private and public sectors, including:

- 1. Family Hubs
- 2. Nurseries and schools
- 3. Midwives, GPs, speech and language therapists, health visitors

COLLABORATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

To establish a programme, a partnership agreement is entered into with the Local Authority which sets out shared goals and expectations.

The programmes are developed with oversight from a senior leaders group, with director level representation spanning relevant public agencies. A wide range of senior local stakeholders are enlisted, from school leaders to local charity CEOs. The design and implementation of the programme is the responsibility of local working groups, which can include school foundation stage leaders, family hub workers, midwifery and health visiting team leads and representatives from local faith and other community organisations.

STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE BACKBONE FUNCTION

Thrive at Five recruit a local backbone team in each area they work. This consists of around four roles including a Programme director, roles that lead collaboration and co-design with schools and nurseries, health partners and the wider community, and a communications specialist. Capacity for parent outreach is provided through paid parent connectors and a community coordinator. The local team is supported by a central team who provide additional expertise, including communications, fundraising and back-office support.

- ✓ Coordinate shared vision and strategy
- ✓ Collaboration/Partnership management
- ✓ Engage, empower & connect communities
- ✓ Data gathering and analysis
- ✓ Deliver services for Children/Families
- ✓ Support delivery of services
- ✓ Facilitate learning
- ✓ External Communications
- ✓ Fundraising



ANNUAL BUDGET

Thrive at Five's annual budget for a programme varies depending on the phase of work (from discovery through to implementation of workstreams) and the availability of existing resources. Costs can include some or all the following:

- Local backbone team
- Local parent outreach team
- Resources for implementation of workstreams
- Central costs for comms and learning and evaluation

SOURCES OF INCOME

The model is designed to be sustainable and scalable. Local Authorities must co-invest with philanthropists to ensure shared ownership, investment and commitment.

AMBITIONS TO SCALE

Thrive at Five is currently committed to delivering and securing additional funding for four local programmes (three in England and one in Scotland) to (a) continue testing and refining the approach for several more years, (b) deepen the approach to reach more children who would benefit and (c) to embed long-term change. Their approach is showing promise, and they are open to working in more Local Authority areas.

WORK WITH FAMILY HUBS

Thrive at Five works with family hubs in a range of different ways depending on the commissioning structure, existing provision and needs identified in the Discovery phase. Ultimately, Thrive at Five aims to: support the expansion of provision of universal and evidence-based support within the hubs which makes use of existing local assets and local professionals; use their parent outreach model to build awareness and trust in the community of family hubs to encourage attendance; and support family hub staff to reach out to families in community settings.

Thrive at Five's experience of working with family hubs has varied significantly between programme areas and even between hubs in the same area but different wards. This has included:

- Using Thrive at Five's partner network to make the most of hub space, for example supporting the set up of health visitor baby clinics to allow for drop-in appointments and bringing in local voluntary local voluntary organisations to deliver groups and interventions
- Providing training to Early Years workers
- Supporting connections between the hubs and the community
- Making the best use of new birth data to support parental engagement