



Our approach to children's social work in Warrington
It's all about relationships!

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WARRINGTON
Borough Council

“ At its best, what social work can offer to people in need of help is a supportive and understanding relationship which will enable them to resolve their difficulties and to feel enhanced rather than undermined in the process. ”



Background

Most children in Warrington live in settled families that work and achieve well at school. Where specialist statutory social work interventions are required, we are confident that most children and their families benefit from good practice which helps families to build and maintain resilience.

However, for some families our response can sometimes be inconsistent. We are committed to improving the quality of all our practice, moving away from a compliance driven approach to develop a culture that recognises the importance of quality relationships and purposeful interventions with children and families.

To help us achieve this we are revising our approach to how we work with children and their families, which will be supported by a comprehensive workforce development plan.

Our vision for social work practice is for...

Children and their families to benefit from high quality and purposeful relationships with professionals that create opportunities for change so that everyone can reach their potential.

Our ambition is for...

Children and families to receive the help and protection they need when they need it.

Our core model – systemic based practice

To achieve our vision we will be taking a systemic approach developing the skills of our early help practitioners and social workers through an enhanced workforce development offer so that all our staff have the skills and expertise to support families to make and sustain the changes required of them.

We have adopted systemic based practice as our overarching practice approach. We believe this is the best approach to work together with families struggling with complex problems and fits with our core belief that that children are best cared for by their family wherever this is possible and safe to do so. To achieve this we must work alongside our families helping them to solve problems and create change for themselves.



Our values

We value the relationships that we have with children and their families

We treat everyone with dignity and respect.
We are open and honest about the expectations we have for children and young people and the changes that are needed.
We are clear about our offer of support and we stick to the commitments we make to children and their families.
We listen and respond to the concerns of everyone we work with.
We work in the best interests of children and their families.

We value good communication

We are approachable and accessible.
We communicate with each other in a professional and appropriate manner.
We trust the people we work with.
We share information with the appropriate people in a timely manner.

We value the people we work with

We take the time to support each other.
We have an open door policy.
We actively show appreciation of each other's work and contributions.
We value feedback and use it to improve the quality of our work.

Relationship based practice in Warrington

In Warrington Early Help Practitioners and Social Workers:

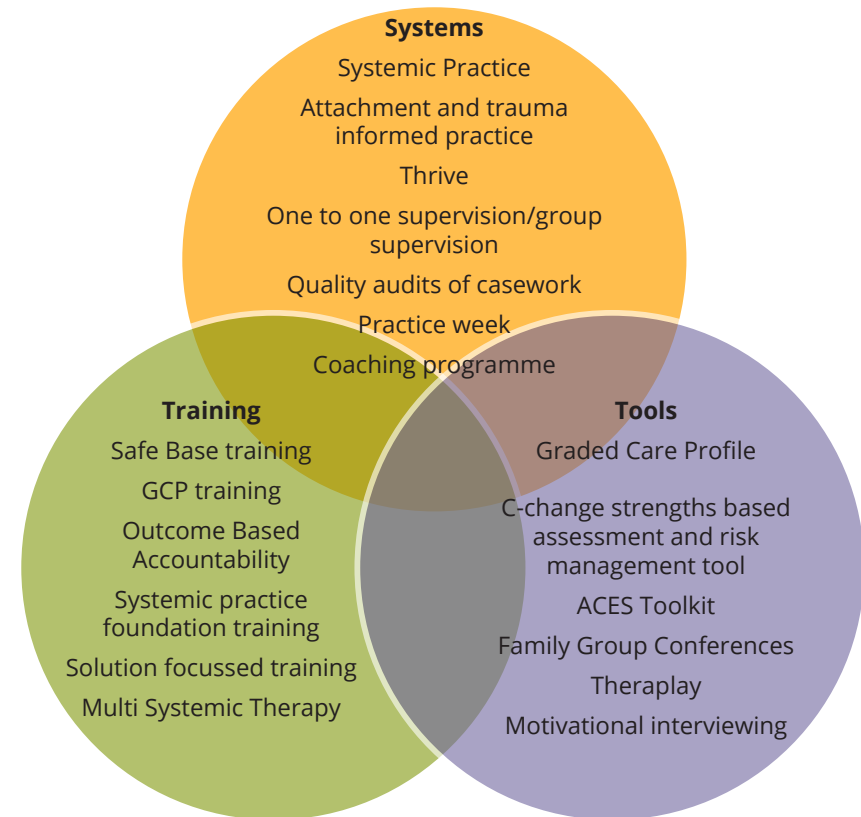
- Are curious and ask purposeful questions, with a focus on the root causes of the child and families difficulties
- Work alongside families helping them to solve problems and create change for themselves
- Approach families with empathy, compassion and creativity using relationships for positive change
- Are respectful and think about the situation from the child and families perspective taking a whole family system approach
- Intervene in a timely way and act decisively to achieve permanence for all children
- Are reflective and use critical thinking to evaluate and analyse the needs of the child and the family's capacity to change / meet the child's needs
- Use a range of direct work approaches to elicit the views of children and families, whose voices are heard and responded to
- Build skilful and influential working relationships with other professionals and agencies
- Make good use of supervision to reflect on their practice, planning and decision making skills
- Understand their legal and statutory responsibilities and execute these in children's best interests
- Take appropriate responsibility for their conduct, practice and learning.

From	To
Assessments for and identification of eligibility of care	Identifying strengths, assets and resources that can contribute to care
Seeing the world through divides like adults'/children's services	Adopting a holistic approach and appreciating whole lives and households
Fixing people	Getting alongside people and co-producing
Negative attitude to how risks impact on professionals and organisations	Positive attitude to risk
Limited multi-agency working and commissioning third-sector organisations for a narrow set of tasks	Involvement of a wider range of agencies and third-sector organisations
Management of people in need of care	Communicating with and listening to children and young people and their families

Supporting staff to be the best they can be

We invest in all of our staff including front line workers, supervisors and managers so that they have the skills and expertise to work purposefully with children and families.

Our practitioners have available, and are trained to use, a number of key tools that support relationship based approaches that focus on the strengths of the children and families we work with as set out below.



Workforce development

Warrington's aim is to enhance the current offer of support for staff and promote a learning culture which supports continuous development and improvement.

Recruitment and Retention Strategy - supports manageable caseloads through a simplified progression programme alongside a retention payment scheme to reward long service. We will continue to work with Step up to Social Work, and plan to collaborate with Frontline to attract the best possible candidates to social work.

ASYE Programme – a dedicated social work qualified coordinator to provide support to all ASYEs, protected caseloads and training provided by the Greater Merseyside Social Work Partnership.

Critical Reflection and Analysis Training – delivered by one of the Higher Education Institutions from within the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Education Partnership. It is expected that Social workers who have gained their initial 12 months post qualifying experience are eligible for this training.

Frontline practitioners and managers' base line programme - reinforcing our approach and expectations so all staff are clear of our ambition and our approach led by our Heads of Service and available to all staff, with a focus on those in their induction period.

Managers' development programme – bespoke manager programme enhancing our management grip and oversight, equipping managers with the skill to offer high support and high challenge to drive great practice and improved outcomes.

Our priorities for the workforce are:

Core training in systemic practice – this will be made available to all staff as core training, embedding relationship based practice as the core of our practice model.

Strengthening of our reflective supervision processes – this includes the use of learning circles and peer supervision/ challenge sessions.

Investing in effective and efficient IT systems – reviewing how we maximise the capacity of Mosaic as our recording database.

Strengthening our approach to Quality Assurance - introducing direct observations and practice weeks, alongside close the loop approach to our learning and development from audit activity, complaints and compliments.

Strengths based case conferences and focus on seriously successful case work as a learning vehicle.

Social work practice based career pathway – embedding of the Knowledge and Skills System (KSS), all practitioners are experts and can progress to advanced (linked to Child and Family Practitioner award when KSS rolled out).

Developing our organisational structure - ensuring practitioners are close to managers and managers are close to practice - more teams with managers having less spans of influence and less hierarchy. Reducing hand offs in our 'processes' to enable social workers to retain cases for longer periods, from assessment through to permanency being confirmed.

Practice Supervisor Programme – in partnership with Research in Practice, with a focus on relationship based practice.

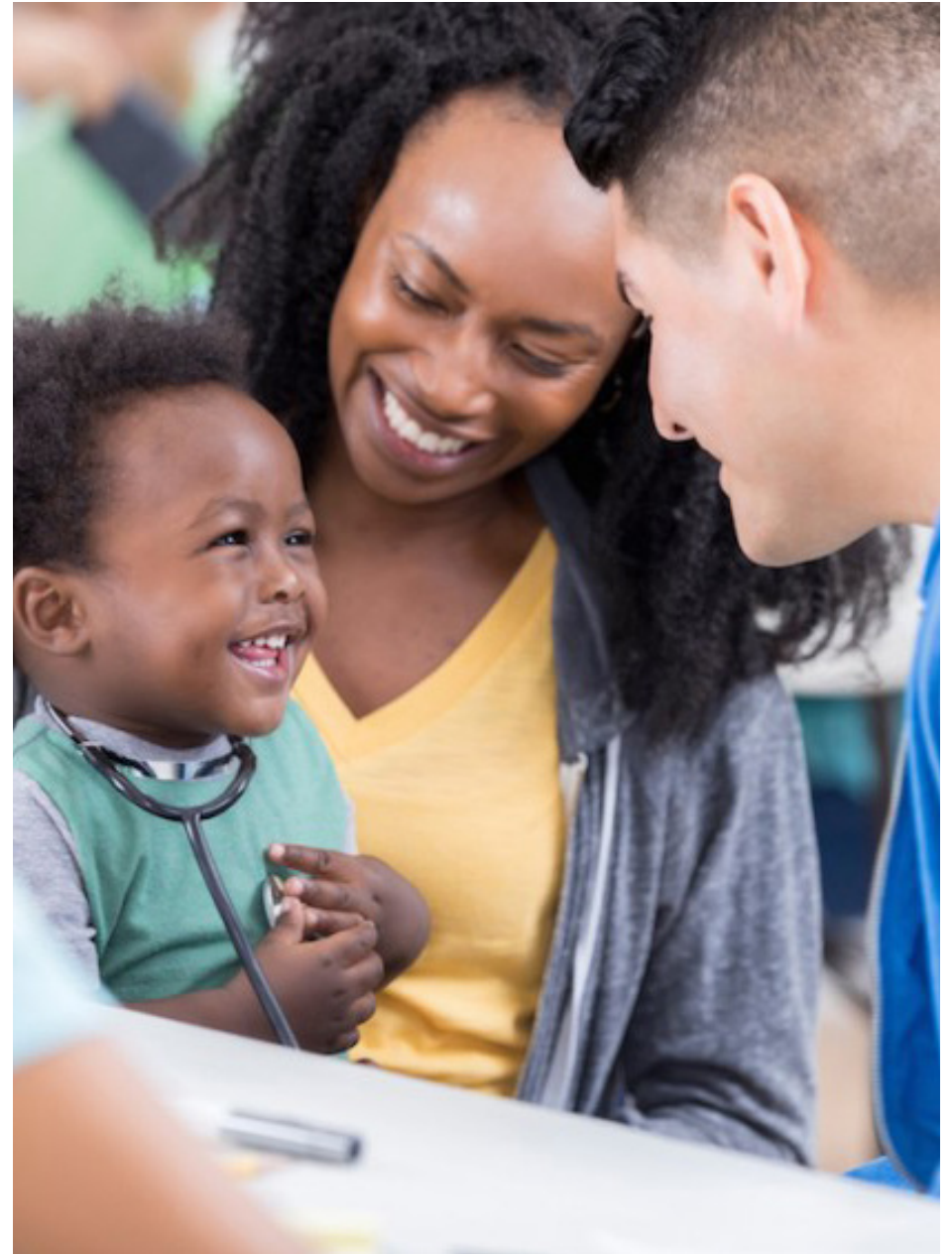
Centre for Systemic Practice - train and develop our Head of Service and Operational Director as 'Practice Leaders'.

Restorative Leadership Approaches through a partnership with Stockport Council

Our offer to children and their families

Our approach includes:

- Effective universal services – strong school and health partnerships and neighbourhood services
- Effective early help, early identification of need and providing timely services to target emerging needs proactively
- Effective step up and step down processes where needs are escalating
- Strong partnerships in at the 'front door', integrated services within our MASH that is evolving into a contextual/complex Safeguarding Hub
- Based on feedback from children and families we are designing an end to end process for our child in need and child protection services, and strengthening our approach to permanency for children in long term care and our care leavers service.



Measures of success

We are redesigning our approach to performance management, with a focus on quality rather than compliance.

Using the principles of Outcomes Based Accountability we will use the following key indicators to understand the impact of our work.

Obsession	Key indicators	Impact
Improve workforce stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of agency workers • Number of social work vacancies • Average length of time in post • Job satisfaction 	The turnover of staff reduces
Improve the quality of social work practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of assessments • Number of cases judged as good/outstanding • Complaints / compliments 	Children and families benefit from consistent and high quality support
Help children to live in safe and supportive families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children in care • Number of children on a Special Guardianship Order • Number of children adopted • Number of children placed with parents on a CO/ICO • Number of children discharged from care back to their families • Number of children at risk of CSE • Number of children going missing from home/care • Number of children experiencing domestic abuse 	Children and young people are safe from harm
Improve the stability of children's placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of children in care placed with Warrington foster carers • % of children in care placed in residential care • % of children experiencing two or more placement moves • % of children in care experiencing at least one school move 	Children and young people live in settled families