**Practice Note for all Practitioners,** Managers ***a*nd Staff:**

**The Child’s Journey**

Understanding the Child’s Journey is the first principle within Sandwell’s Practice Framework and Model. It is a principle that represents the importance of practitioners reflecting upon what this journey looks like for the child/ren now in the context of any previous involvement with the family. As it is a principle, it needs to underpin all the work with our families. In Sandwell, children and practitioners have developed the ‘Child’s Journey’ into a map which provides a pictorial representation of the child and family’s involvement through services such as, Early Help, Front Door, Care Management, Children in Care and Leaving Care Service. At the heart of this principle, is the yellow heart (see diagram below) which represents the objective of achieving permanence for children and young people within their timescales.

This practice note will support practitioners in understanding what the Child’s Journey is and why it is a principle within Sandwell’s Practice Framework and Model. This note will help practitioners to reflect and apply their understanding of the Child’s Journey throughout their practice particularly as a direct work tool illustrating ways in which it can strengthen our work with families. Finally, the note concludes with ways that the Child’s Journey can be used within reflective spaces such as supervision, evidenced on children and young people’s case files, good practice points, and further reading.

**What is the Child’s Journey?**

The ‘Child’s Journey’ (as pictured below) is a principle in our Practice Framework as it helps us to think about their journey through services and supports practitioners in applying this to the assessment, decision making and planning. It is important for practitioners to understand the journey before making contact and whilst providing help and support.

This principle sits alongside Children’s Participation (Principle 2) and Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS Principle 3) (See Practice Note on Practice Framework and Model). Children, young people and families will be known to other services such as Education and Health and others such Youth Offending Service (YOS).

All services are linked to the yellow heart which represents our key objective of providing a permanent family providing safe, loving care for the child and young person. Reading the information held on their files (LCS), paper files, previous systems (ICS, SWIFT) and Early Help (ECAF) to discuss any previous involvement within Sandwell or any other authority such as Dudley or Wolverhampton is important.

In Sandwell, there are several process maps linked to the Child’s Journey which are available on TRI-X (See Further Reading). These detailed process maps help practitioners, managers and staff to understand what needs to be completed, by whom and when. These process maps also act as a framework that assists with the timeliness of our work with children, young people and young adults. The process maps mean that we have a consistent approach to our work and a common understanding about each other’s roles.

**Why is the Child’s Journey an important part of our Practice Framework and Model?**

Each child and young person’s journey through our service is unique even if they are part of a sibling group and understanding it is important. Using the ‘Child’s Journey’ in this way, helps us to think about the risks and needs of each child whilst evaluating the quality of the previous support to strengthen our current intervention. This helps us to think about whether the help and support provided addressed both the root cause as well as the presenting concerns. By also considering the journey of older siblings, means that we develop a better understanding of how long there might have been difficulties in the family and what might have worked well previously.

Using this principle within the Practice Framework and Model means that we are more likely to achieve a more holistic assessment which considers this journey. It also means that we think about whether we have got the balance right between the processes we need to follow such as assessments and the quality of the intervention provided. In doing so, it helps us to make sure that we provide the right type of support at the right time and at the right level which is more likely to make a difference to the child and young person in timescales appropriate for them.

For example, Sara is 5 years old and lives in Oldbury. She has previously been subject to a Child in Need and Child Protection Plan in Dudley due to neglect concerns. She has recently been made subject to another Child Protection plan in Sandwell.

This is the third time that Sara and her family have been provided help and support, so we need to carefully consider what her journey now means for our current involvement.

By using the ‘Child Journey’ as part of a direct work session we can develop a better understanding of her journey from the family’s perspective whilst also making enquiries with Dudley. Building a relationship with the family, explaining that we will work together to provide the help and support required whilst thinking with them about other possible options to enable her to achieve permanence if this is unsuccessful.

Focusing on our permanence and the yellow heart means that we are clear when working with the family and professionals that this is always our objective. At the same time, we are planning with the family and their network what needs to happen if increased support needs or risks are identified, which might mean that care might need to be provided by others within their network. Using process maps to think about the other steps needed to secure permanence can help us to parallel plan with families and their networks. Working with families in this way, including their perspective, provides more transparency, supports a shared understanding about the reasons for involvement whilst focusing on strengths and relationship building.

The Child’s Journey supports practitioners in asking things such as:

* What needs to happen for us to no longer be involved?
* What should happen if things get worse and concerns and risks escalate?
* What should happen if there are improvements?

By using the Child’s Journey to focus on the strengths, relationships, the child’s participation as well as the difficulties ensures that we understand how this can influence and shape the right interventions provided, through direct work, assessments, plans, updating the plan and review.

**How can we use the Child’s Journey when working with families?**

Working with the family to support them to understand their Child’s Journey may reduce some anxieties for families when we become involved. In other families, our involvement might trigger feelings linked to previous involvement. Acknowledging how families might feel when providing help and support enables us to work in a relationship based and trauma informed way. Using the Child’s Journey can help us to also focus on the strengths, particularly the changes made by parents and the wider family that led to our involvement ceasing.

**Below are some points to consider when using the Child’s Journey in practice:**

* Using the map of the ‘Child’s Journey’ is a visual and inclusive direct work tool that supports practitioners to have conversations with children, young people and their families.
* As it is a visual tool, it can be helpful to explain what can be a complex map of different parts of the service to families with a range of learning styles, for people who might not understand our services or where English might not be their first language.
* Use alongside Cultural Genograms and Impact Chronologies to support an understanding of the Child’s Journey. This will evidence the impact of any previous and current work with the family and support planning for next steps.
* It is a useful tool to be used within reflective supervision to think about our intervention and permanence. This can support us when we are planning our intervention with the child/young person/young adult, to explain and explore how the child, young person/young adult and their family will achieve the ultimate goal of a permanent, loving and caring family.
* Using the ‘Child’s Journey’ helps us to parallel plan, which involves thinking at the same time we are providing support, what other options and process maps might we need to consider with the family if we need to think about alternative care options such as extended family, special guardianship, connected carer arrangements or foster care?

Information from a range of sources such as other professionals and partner agencies will also inform our understanding of the Child’s Journey in addition to the Impact Chronology. These strengthen our assessments, analysis and plans. Understanding children and family’s perspectives about the previous and current support helps us to be clear on what we are hoping to achieve through various stages of their journey as well as how this will impact on them and their current circumstances. This will include ensuring parents and children are aware of their rights as well as access to complaints procedures and advocacy.

**Using the ‘Child’s Journey’ within reflective spaces such as supervision**

Reflecting upon the ‘Child’s Journey’ in supervision as part of your assessment, decision making and planning supports us to think about how we can achieve safe, permanent care for children and young people. Linked to this principle, there are a several reflective questions that can be used when considering your work as a practitioner and within supervision to support workers in applying critical thinking and analysis to our interventions. These can be found within pages 44-45 of the Practice Framework and Model Booklet. These reflective questions are amongst several others included in the Booklet.

Using the Child’s Journey to reflect upon our work within supervision can help us to consistently think about their past and current experiences and what is needed to support them in the future whilst reducing any drift and delay. This means that we can work with the family and their network, as we make important decisions to determine how we can improve children and young people’s life chances and secure the best possible outcomes.

* Where is the child/young person on the Child’s Journey?
* Do we fully understand how they got there?
* Is the threshold right for children/young people?
* When we look at the Child’s Journey map, where is the next stage of the children/young person’s journey?
* How will they get there?
* What timescales do we need to consider and what will the checkpoints be?
* How will we know when we are at the end?

**Good Practice Points**

* Practitioners should use the map of the Child’s Journey as a tool to planning for direct work with families and professionals. This can be used a visual guide for practitioners and parents to help understand the Child’s Journey and considering the most appropriate intervention for the family.
* Use the Child’s Journey to understand (at different points) the progress and impact of the work completed with the family and look at where we currently are within their journey.
* Regularly referencing the process maps linked to the Child’s Journey supports us to think about how we parallel plan with families.
* Be creative with how we plan for direct work, use communicative tools in line with family’s language and learning styles/needs.
* Reflecting on the Child’s Journey within supervision, focusing on permanency for children and young people, and making a difference within the timescales for the child and young person.
* Supervision discussions should include parallel planning as a key focus whilst also, thinking about continuing support needs for the children or young person.

**How can I evidence this work on the child/young person/young adults file?**

* When completing assessments, these should include tools such as the Child’s Journey you have used to support any interventions and direct work. Evidencing these within the assessment makes it clear to the interventions used as part of this process.
* When completing direct work with children and parents, this can be evidenced by attaching images of this onto the case note and into the documents.
* Specifically referencing the Child’s Journey throughout the work you complete with families and begin to use this as part of everyday language when working with children young people and families.
* Use of the Child’s Journey can also be evidenced with the Impact Chronology and Cultural Genograms which inform the assessment and planning.

**Further information and reading**

* Practice notes relating to The Practice Framework and Model, Relationship Based Practice, Cultural Genograms, Impact Chronologies are available on Tri-X.
* Process Maps on TRI-X:https://www.proceduresonline.com/sandwell/cs/local\_resources.html
* The Practice Framework and Model Booklet - Information relating to the reflective questions linked to the Child’s Journey can be found on pages 44-45.
* Workshops regarding Voice of the Child, Cultural Genograms and Impact Chronologies will support this area of learning.
* Access to Community Care Inform and Research in Practice to access a range of tools, research and information.

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**Appendix**

