

Early Help and Prevention Strategy

2021 – 2024



Knowsley
**CHILDREN &
FAMILIES**
Board

LET'S TALK
2030

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Foreword | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Knowsley Now: Local Context | 5 |
| What is Early Help? | 8 |
| Knowsley's Early Help Approach | 9 |
| Making it Happen – Our Principles of Prevention | 10 |
| PRINCIPLE ONE Effective Partnerships | 12 |
| PRINCIPLE TWO Workforce Development | 14 |
| PRINCIPLE THREE Improving the use of data | 16 |
| PRINCIPLE FOUR Communication | 18 |
| How We Will Measure Success | 20 |

Foreword

Providing early help to children and families is a priority for the Knowsley Children and Families Board. Ensuring the right help and support is available at the right time helps families to thrive and promotes positive, productive, healthy and fulfilling lifestyles.

As the Chair of the Knowsley Children and Families Board I understand how important it is to have effective early help. In recognition of this, prevention is one of the priority areas within the recently refreshed Children's and Families Plan. This Early Help and Prevention Strategy 2021 – 2024 provides more detail on how this priority will be taken forward. It sets out four principles of prevention that will be the focus for the early help partnership over the next three years to ensure the delivery of even more effective preventative support.

This plan has been developed in what has been a truly challenging time for us all. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented global crisis of which the true impact is still yet to be fully understood and which has left few untouched by its consequences. Whilst most children will live a happy and healthy life, Knowsley has a higher proportion of children and young people who face inequalities, largely due to the high concentration of deprivation in the borough. Coupled with the additional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the disruption to the lives of children and families is likely to have wide-ranging and long-lasting consequences, whilst potentially exacerbating many of the challenges that they already face in their lives.

This strategy has been developed with all of this in mind. Building on the successful partnership approach to early help that already exists in Knowsley, the principles of prevention identified in it will strengthen this further – putting prevention at the heart of what we all do. We want our children to be safe and have the best start in life, we want them to achieve their full potential and we want our families to be able to access support that meets their needs to support them to go on to be independent and thrive.

This strategy provides the outline for activity over the next three years, but it is only the start – children, young people, families, local partners and the wider community will need to come together with a real focus on prevention if we are to be successful.

Cllr Margaret Harvey

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Chair of the Knowsley Children and Families Board

“Knowsley - a place where all our children have the best start in life, where every family thrives and where all our young people aim high and achieve their potential.”



Introduction

More than 37,000 children and young people live in Knowsley. The Children and Families Plan 2021-2024 has been developed with a focus on enabling each of them to achieve their full potential. That plan's focus on prevention is key to achieving this. Equipping children and families to build upon their strengths from an early stage, enabling them to be independent and to seek help for problems as they emerge means that they are far more likely to stop problems before they become too difficult and entrenched to overcome.

This Early Help and Prevention Strategy 2021 – 2024 provides a response to the prevention priority. It sets out the details of four principles of prevention that have been identified by the early help partnership as being important to improving and developing the Early Help Offer in Knowsley. A focus on these principles is essential to continue improving the Offer and ensure it remains responsive to the needs of the children and families within the Borough.

Effective early help is important at all stages of a child's life. When early help is talked about, it is referring to an approach rather than any one specific service. It is the responsibility of all partners to make sure that high-quality support is delivered to children and their families at the earliest opportunity to build the strongest possible foundations for children to thrive throughout their life. Early help is about providing swift intervention as soon as problems emerge, regardless of age. This kind of support is critical to improving outcomes for children and young people.

Early help can only work when delivered in partnership across multiple agencies, with the families themselves and everyone recognising it is their responsibility to act. For families, it can sometimes feel difficult to ask for help or to know what help is available and how to access this support. This strategy will focus on strengthening the early help partnership, sharing and utilising information more effectively, and increasing communication of the Offer to ensure it reaches those children and families who need it.



Knowsley Now: Local Context

Knowsley's population is growing after decades of decline. The last decade has seen Knowsley residents living longer, people moving into the Borough from neighbouring areas, and this is set to continue into the next 10 years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Knowsley had significant economic growth, with businesses growing and more jobs being available across the Borough, with unemployment levels falling and residents earning more money. However, despite the positive growth and progress that has been made in Knowsley, there remains significant challenges with high concentrations of deprivation and entrenched issues that exist in some communities including unemployment, ill-health and social issues including higher prevalence of domestic abuse, substance misuse and gang-related crimes. The long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people living in Knowsley remains uncertain, but the delivery of this Strategy sits within the context of the Knowsley 2030 strategy which aims to reduce the inequality within the borough to ensure everyone can enjoy happy, healthy and fulfilled lives.

An important part of understanding the local context in Knowsley involves listening to children and young people about how they feel about living in Knowsley, and what makes a difference in their lives. Children and young people have told us they recognise that love and emotional support from family, friends and communities is the key to a happy childhood, that the compassion and care for one another that exists across generations in Knowsley families is really important to them and is a strength of the Knowsley community. Children and younger people have told us that they are ambitious for their future and want to have a wide range of opportunities available to them. Opportunities to develop confidence and self-esteem are important to them. They also want to feel safe and secure within their communities, tackle the stigma associated with mental health and recognise the importance of preventing crisis' developing. Listening to children and young people is at the heart of our early help practice and in developing this strategy we are focused on improving the Early Help Offer in Knowsley to underpin the ambitions of children, ensuring their voice is heard and reflected in the services we deliver.

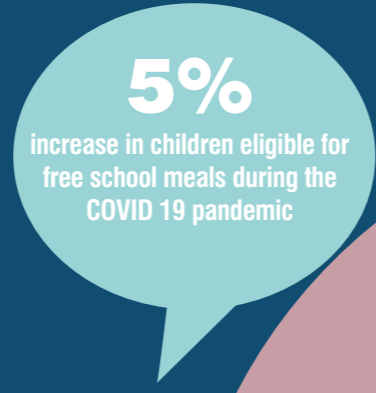
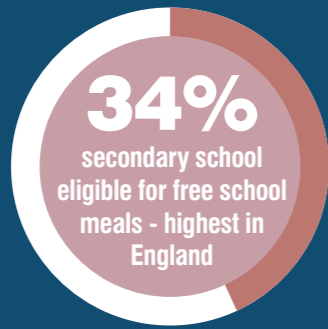
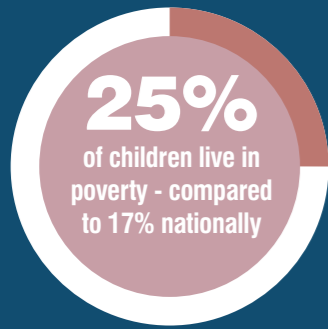
It is important to acknowledge that some children in Knowsley face additional barriers which, unless addressed early, can accumulate throughout life and negatively impact on their life chances, resulting in significant inequalities for them. Children living in Knowsley are less likely to meet the expected level of development in their early years, with speech and language needs being a particular challenge. Throughout their school career, children are more likely to need additional support or be identified as having Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities. At secondary level, challenges around school attendance and attainment are key drivers in preventing progression into Further and Higher Education and in later life, impacting on earning potential.

Families in Knowsley often face challenges which can have long-term detrimental impact on the wellbeing of children and young people into adulthood. In particular, domestic abuse, mental health issues, neglect and parental conflict are some of the issues that result in referrals to Children's Social Care. Intervening as soon as these issues are identified is vital in creating conditions where families can improve their own life situation and go on to thrive.

Understanding both the assets within families and the communities they live in, along with the challenges that they face is vital to the delivery of this strategy. By using both data and intelligence and listening to families we will strive to understand their needs better, and be responsive in supporting families.

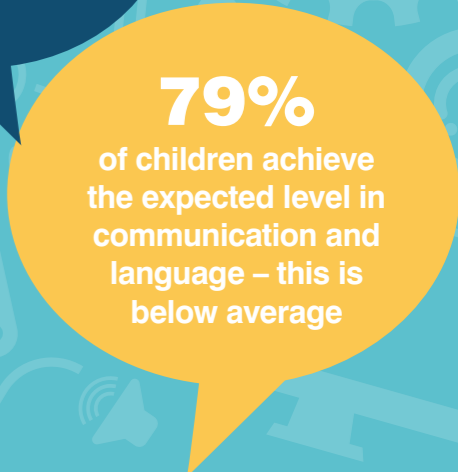
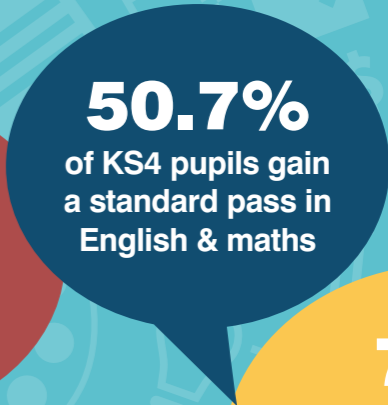
Child Poverty

Growing up in poverty can affect every area of a child's development and future life chances. Evidence shows that disadvantaged children are less likely to achieve their academic potential, secure employment and have future financial security.

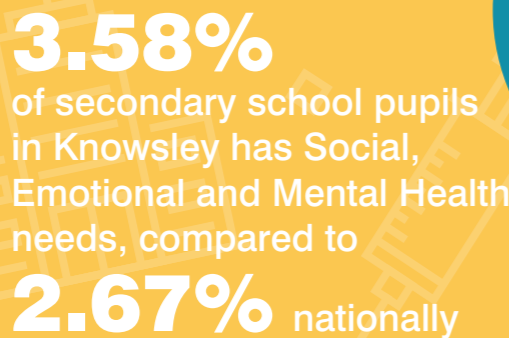
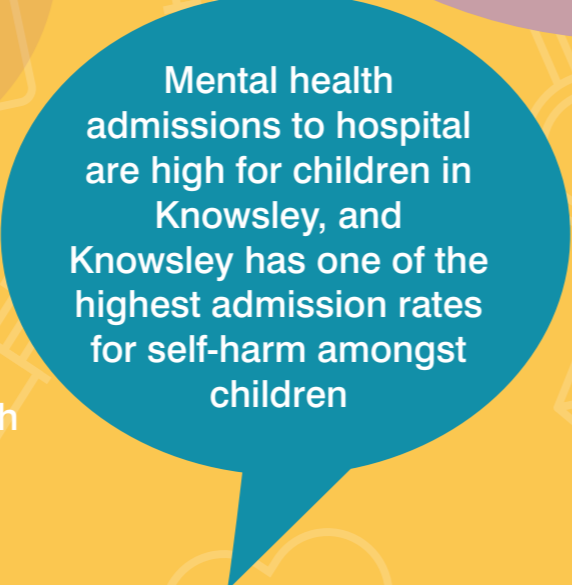
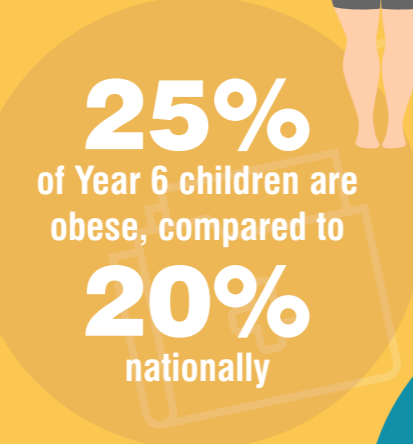
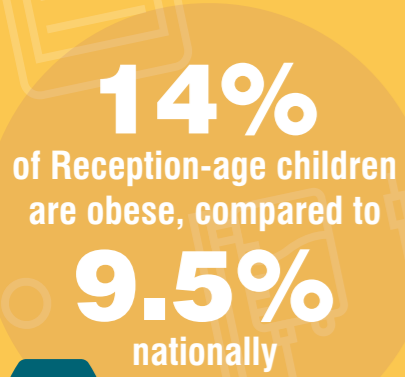


Knowsley Now

Education



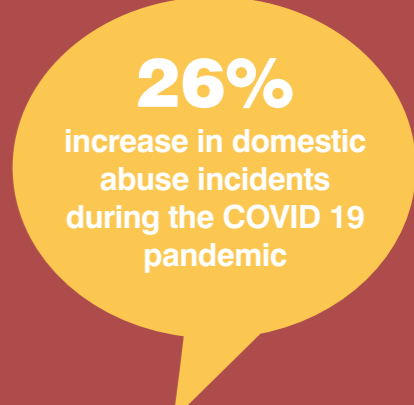
Health



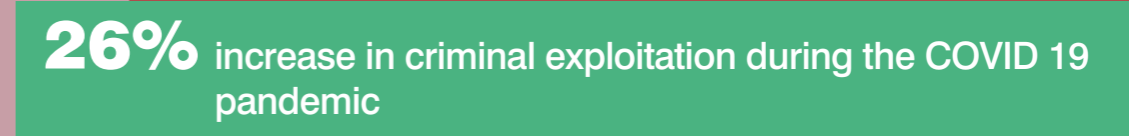
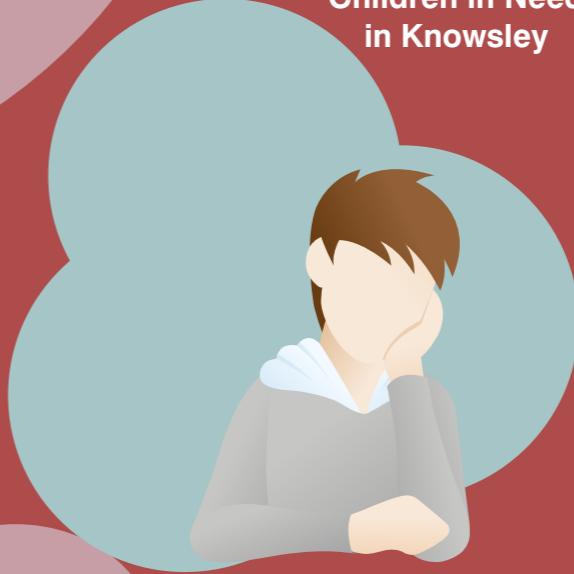
Protection

There are **1,213** Children in Need in Knowsley

Knowsley has the lowest rate of Child in Need in comparison with all statistical neighbours



Domestic abuse accounts for **17%** of all recorded crimes



What is Early Help?

Early Help is an approach to working with children and their families. It is everyone's responsibility. Early intervention focuses on preventing problems occurring, or on tackling challenges head-on before they get worse. Effective early intervention enables children and families to build on their personal strengths and skills to become more independent and resilient to the challenges that they face. Whilst early interventions are often focused on the early years of a child's life, interventions can improve children's life chances at any point during childhood and adolescence.

It is recognised that intervening early can prevent problems getting worse and becoming more complex and entrenched. Tackling issues sooner also makes it more likely for the family to achieve good outcomes.

Early help involves all partners sharing responsibility for looking for signs that children and families need help and then acting quickly to address these needs. Providing good early help takes into account what is happening for everyone in the family, not just one individual. In Knowsley a 'whole family approach' is promoted and the needs of all children, young people and their family members are considered in the assessment and support provided.

Often when one person in a family has a problem, it affects others in the family. Early help brings professionals together to work with the whole family to try to improve things for everyone. The Early Help Offer of support to families in Knowsley could include support with:

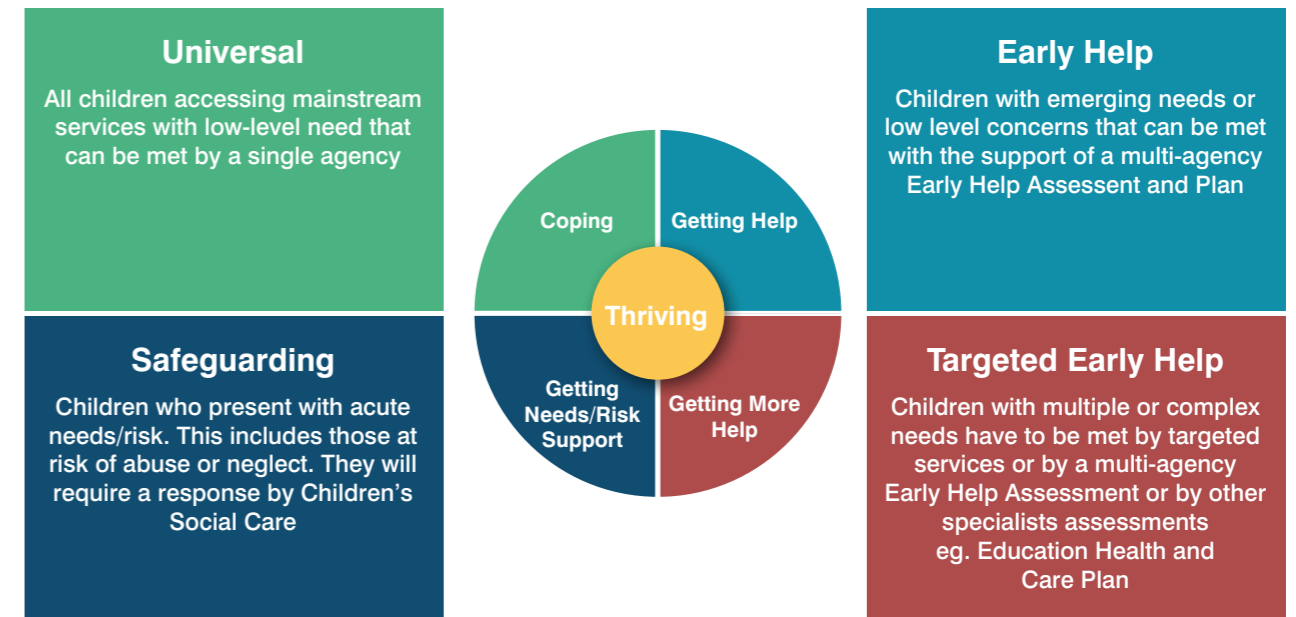
- parenting
- employment
- anti-social behaviour
- substance misuse
- domestic abuse
- school attendance

Effective early help has to be a partnership not just with agencies across the Borough but also with families. It is based on respectful but persistent engagement and a commitment to helping families find ways to help themselves. It supports families to build on their strengths so they are able to deal with setbacks themselves, seize opportunities to flourish and know where to turn to for help when needed.

Early help has to be challenging to ensure that restorative practice is reflected and encourages families to engage more fully in the communities in which they live; drawing on its assets and opportunities to support them and becoming more engaged members of their community.

Knowsley's Early Help Approach

Knowsley have adopted the Knowsley Thrive Model - a graduated response to supporting families in the Borough.



Early Help and Targeted Early Help follow the same approach and processes for working with families. When additional need is identified which is beyond the universal support available to everyone, the early help process is started. An Early Help Assessment is completed with the family and the lead professional will work alongside the family to develop a plan of action and co-ordinate support. Support begins as soon as the early help process starts.

The progress made and any ongoing needs of the family are reviewed through the Team Around the Family meetings. Engagement with all members of the family is crucial to the success of this approach and the child's voice has to be heard strongly within the assessment and plan to ensure it is meeting their needs. Targeted Early Help follows the same approach but is provided when issues have become multiple or complex and stronger co-ordination of support is needed.

To underpin Knowsley's Early Help Offer, the Signs of Safety/Signs of Wellbeing framework has been adopted as part of the Early Help Assessment to strengthen safety and well-being planning with families. This is a strength based, solution focused model that looks to assess risk and concerns, identifying solutions with the family.

It can be difficult for the family to ask for or accept help. This is why it is important for professionals who already have an existing relationship with the family to identify need and offer support. Early help and prevention is more cost effective in the long term, reducing the need for costlier interventions as problems become more complex and entrenched, and vulnerabilities and risk increase in families.

Making it Happen – Our Principles of Prevention

Knowsley's Early Help Offer has developed over a number of years to the point where a strong partnership working together for families exists. Many families have been supported to achieve better outcomes for themselves and avoided needing more intensive, sometimes statutory, support from other services.

From consultation and engagement with children and families and individuals who work within the Early Help Offer, four principles of prevention have been identified that will help develop the Offer further. While there are other principles that support prevention, the partnership has focussed in on the following four to form the framework for the development work over the life of this strategy. The four principles of prevention:

1. **Effective Partnerships:** building on existing strong leadership in Knowsley to strengthen the shared focus and ambition for early help across the partnership. Developing new partnerships including those with community, voluntary and faith sectors in reaching local communities and supporting individuals and families.
2. **Workforce Development:** providing all people working within the Early Help Offer access to training and support, to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and behaviours to feel confident in delivering early help. Equipping them to take the lead on Family Assessments and Plans, recording appropriately on shared systems.
3. **Improving the use of data:** maximising the use of the partnership case management system to improve the picture of family need, strengths and risks to ensure families get the right help at the right time. Improving the sharing and analysis of data from across the partnership to effectively understand the impact of the Early Help Offer, make improvements where necessary, and demonstrate positive change in the lives of families and children.
4. **Communication:** providing clear information to families about the support available and how to access it, enabling them to deal with their own problems before they become more severe. Listening to feedback from families about their experiences of support to ensure the continued development of the Offer.

To complement the delivery of these principles, the development of a community asset programme is being explored. This programme will seek to better understand what is already available within local communities and how this provision can form part of the wider Early Help Offer. It will look to promote these activities and resources so that individuals within families can link into them, strengthening their support network and increasing their resilience further.

In developing this strategy and these principles, national and local drivers have been taken into account. These include:

- **Knowsley 2030** – the 10-year Strategy: Knowsley 2030 sets out the ambition for Knowsley. The Knowsley Now Evidence base was created to support Knowsley 2030 and this has been drawn on in the development of this strategy.
- **Children and Families Plan 2021 – 2024** which has identified prevention as a priority
- **Knowsley Better Together** – this strategy has been developed and will be delivered in line with Knowsley Better Together principles. This focuses on a culture of equal partnership with the Council, residents, businesses, partners and the voluntary sector and this partnership coming together to improve outcomes for Knowsley.
- **Supporting Families Programme** (formerly the Troubled Families Programme) – this national programme has a strong focus on how early help can be developed and promotes the whole family approach nationally. The programme has provided tools that have been used to assess the strengths and maturity of the local Offer and inform the development of this strategy.

The principles of prevention within this Early Help and Prevention Strategy 2021 - 2024 provide the focus and framework to direct the partnership's development work over the next three years. The delivery and development of the Offer is overseen by the multi-agency Early Help Governance Group. This group will be responsible for owning and driving the delivery of this strategy and its principles. The Early Help Governance Group will provide regular updates to the Children and Families Board. To support their activity, the Governance Group has established Locality Networks which bring together individuals who deliver support to children and families in an area as a peer support and development network.



Principle One

Effective Partnerships



Why is this important?

Early help is everyone's responsibility. There is no individual service delivering early help; it is an approach that all people who work in the Early Help Offer adopt. The Early Help Offer therefore includes local agencies, voluntary partners, early years settings, schools and colleges, community and faith groups. These partners work together to identify children and families who would benefit from early help, undertake an assessment of need, and provide support which will address these needs and improve outcomes for the family.

Existing strong leadership in Knowsley needs to be built on to ensure a shared focus and ambition for early help across the Partnership. Working more closely with the voluntary, community and faith sectors will enable families to help themselves and access provision in their local communities. A wider Early Help Offer in Knowsley will reach more local communities and support families to lead happy, independent lives, and reduce the demand on public services.

Outcomes

- All partners working together to deliver more effective outcomes for children and families
- More partners lead on Early Help Assessments with successful family outcomes

How we will deliver this:

1. Ensure there is clear accountability across the Partnership for delivery and development of the Early Help Offer, through the Early Help Governance Group, Locality Networks and utilising performance frameworks
2. Seek to develop a stronger partnership with the community and voluntary sector to help families support themselves
3. All working within the Offer adopt the Knowsley approach to working with families

How we'll know if we have been successful

- Increased ownership and diversity of the Early Help Offer
- Partners are working together to identify and assess need, and offer the right support to families at the right time
- Effective leadership, governance and quality assurance is delivered through the Early Help Governance Group
- Improved relationship with the voluntary and community sector



Principle Two

Workforce Development



Why is this important?

Many people working within the Early Help Offer in different partner agencies are now delivering early help effectively and utilising the partnership case management system to record interventions and inform decision making around risk, safety and support. However, there is more to be done to support individuals to take the lead role and access this shared system. All those working with children and families across the Offer need to have the knowledge, skills and behaviours to feel confident in delivering early help. The establishment of Early Help Locality Networks has provided a space for learning, sharing best practice and raising concerns and these will continue to provide an important vehicle for people working in early help to develop their practice and change culture in the coming years.

Outcomes

- More people who work in early help attending Early Help Locality Networks
- More people who work in early help have the knowledge, skills and behaviours to feel confident in delivering early help
- Quality of Early Help Assessments improves
- Reduction in the number of inappropriate referrals to statutory and targeted services

How we will deliver this:

1. Develop and deliver a Partnership Workforce Development Plan that outlines the knowledge, skills, behaviours and standards required of all people who work within the Early Help Offer at each level of the delivery system
2. Ensure a regular schedule of Early Help Locality Network meetings

How we'll know if we have been successful

- Partnership Workforce Development Plan is embedded
- Early Help Locality Networks support learning, development and offer peer support
- Improved quality of Early Help Assessments
- People who work in early help report increased confidence in delivering early help to families



Principle Three

Improving the use of data



Outcomes

- More partnership data is shared and analysed to understand need, risk and vulnerabilities
- Increased reporting of the effectiveness of the Early Help Offer through the Early Help Governance Group

How we will deliver this:

1. Develop effective data capture across the partnership, ensuring a data-led Early Help Offer
2. Early Help Governance Group and Early Help Locality Networks will routinely discuss and challenge data sharing across the partnership

How we'll know if we have been successful

- Family level outcome, experience and impact information is captured, reported, shared and actioned in a timely manner
- There is continuous improvement of the Early Help Offer through regular reporting to the Early Help Governance Group of the effectiveness of the Offer and family impact
- There is a strengthened culture of data sharing across the partnership

Why is this important?

To ensure families get the right help at the right time, information about the needs, strengths and risks in families must be captured and shared between those who work in early help. The use of early help assessments and the partnership case management system has increased over the recent years, ensuring that an improved picture of families and their needs is captured and used in decision making. But there is still a lot of evidence of early help support which takes place outside of the partnership case management system and is held on standalone systems. Improving appropriate sharing and analysis of data across the partnership will enhance the decision making around family support, demonstrate when positive change has taken place in families lives, and better understand the impact of the Early Help Offer and where improvements are needed.



Principle Four Communication



Why is this important?

To enable families to help themselves and respond to changes in their circumstances or any problems, they need to understand the range of services, information and groups on offer to them in Knowsley. People will then be able to deal with their own problems or issues before they become more severe, using their own resilience and access to information about the support available. Individuals who work in early help also need clear messages about the Early Help Offer, thresholds of needs and how to support families alongside other professionals. This will ensure families get the right help as early as possible. Capturing feedback from families who have received support is also important to find out about their experiences and use this information to improve and shape services and practice.

Outcomes

- More families access early help
- More families report that they have been offered a range of local support services that meet their needs
- More families report that they feel better supported and know where to go for help

How we will deliver this:

1. Develop and deliver a Communication Plan for Families, and a Communication Plan for people who work in early help with clear information about the Early Help Offer, the support available, and how to access this
2. Engage with families to capture their experiences and use this feedback to improve service delivery

How we'll know if we have been successful

- Communication Plans are established and implemented
- Family experiences are captured regularly and inform service and practice development and delivery across the Early Help Offer
- Families know how to access information and advice about early help and how to receive support



How We Will Measure Success

It is recognised nationally that measuring the effectiveness of early help systems is extremely complex and challenging. Early help and prevention approaches are long term investment to save models which require time to generate hard evidence of fiscal savings and provide 'cashable' savings. It is also difficult to demonstrate the cost avoidance generated by preventing problems. The broad nature of interventions and services delivered by partners as part of early help adds to the complexity of evaluating impact. Attributing improvements in family situations and the outcomes they achieve to one service or intervention is exceptionally difficult as demonstrated by the well-resourced and robust National Troubled Families Evaluation. Collating good quality evidence of impact takes time, capacity and resources but is still important to do.

Despite the challenges, there is an emerging evidence base demonstrating that sustained investment in early help and preventative services over time can be effective and reduce demand on high cost services. The Early Help Governance Group will continue to develop this locally and assess the effectiveness of early help interventions. It will collate evidence and utilise the following sources:

- Early Help and Prevention Strategy Outcome Framework
- Early Help and Prevention Strategy Performance Dashboard
- Management and Performance information
- Feedback from families
- Feedback from practitioners
- Case Studies
- Cost saving analysis
- National tools – for example Early Help System Guide

To develop this work further, the Early Help Governance Group are exploring the development of a common evaluation framework for early help. This will build on national best practice around evaluation of early help systems and ensure a stronger evidence base for the Early Help Offer is available to support future investment decisions.





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