

Family Lives Strategy 2022-25



We build better family lives together

Our Strategy



Our vision is for all families to have access to active support and understanding. Through our new strategy, we outline the steps we will take to continue supporting some of the most vulnerable families, the issues we will focus on and how we seek to engage and support even more people.

There will always be a need for family support, and the Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact, with reported increases in young people and adults' mental health issues, child on parent violence, poverty and concerns around young children's language and physical development and educational outcomes, among many other issues of increasing concern.

We know the future remains uncertain as we continue to find a way forward as we emerge from the pandemic, taking on board what we learnt along the way about supporting families both in person and virtually, and as we recognise the needs of families facing the increasing cost of living. But we also know that as a charity we have the determination and commitment to do whatever it takes to support the families who need us for many years to come.

About Family Lives

Family Lives was formed over 45 years ago by volunteers, with the aim of ensuring that all parents had somewhere to turn before they reached crisis point. We know that the right support at the right time makes all the difference.

Family Lives provides targeted early intervention and crisis support to families who are struggling. The issues we support families with include children's early development, challenging relationships and behaviour, and emotional and mental wellbeing.

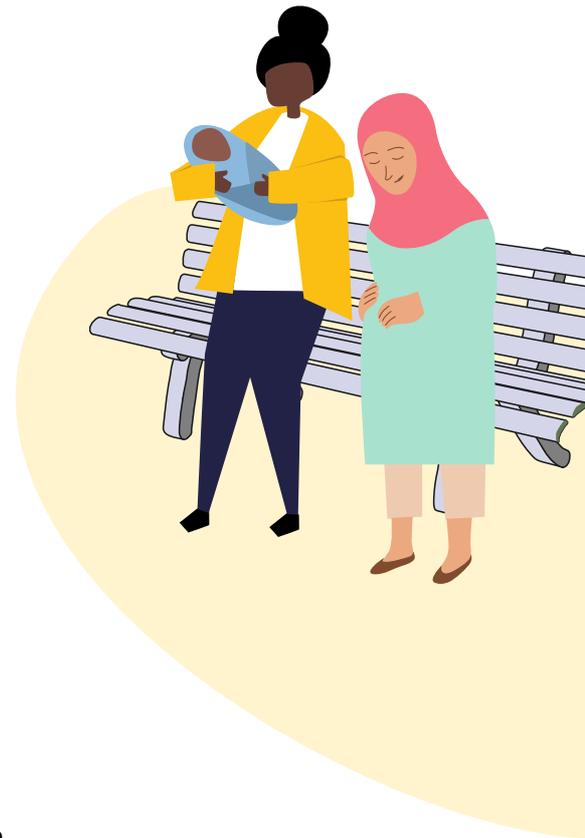
We know the difference being able to access appropriate, timely support can make to families in crisis, knowing there is someone at the end of the phone who will listen to them.

And we know the longer term impact of early intervention with families, such as supporting new parents who may be struggling, and our family befriending programmes.



The passion, commitment and expertise of our staff and volunteers is at the heart of everything we do, working together to support families through our range of services. We are a volunteer-led organisation with around 300 volunteers across our different services. We simply could not do what we do without them, alongside our dedicated team of staff. Many of our volunteers began their relationship with us as service users but have stayed to support others on their journey. This is a testament to the support they themselves received.

Our crisis support, provided through our helpline, chat and email services, has always been at the heart of what we do. Over the last year, demand has continued to outstrip our ability to help as many families as we want to. We have built up long-standing programmes in the areas we work in across England, providing support to thousands of families through our befriending, outreach and home-visiting services.



Our vision

Families should have access to active support and understanding.

Our mission

We build better family lives together.

Our values

We value being compassionate, collaborative and trustworthy.



Our four strategic objectives

Since our beginnings more than 45 years ago, Family Lives has supported families from the very first days of becoming a parent through to the teenage years and beyond. We are proud to offer support across the age range so that families can turn to us whenever they need us.

To reach as many families as possible, and respond to increasing areas of need, we have chosen to focus in on three specific objectives:

1

Building stronger families

We're working to ensure more families have access to a range of family support when and how they need it.



All families face challenges and issues at one time or another. We work to support families through the hard times, whether that's through a listening ear on our helpline, a befriender or accessing our online advice and resources. We aim to provide access to advice and support at times when families need it, whether that's using our live chat in the evening or visiting our website any time of the day.

Crisis support

Supporting parents in crisis has always been at the heart of Family Lives' mission. We want to ensure that all families have somewhere to turn when things are difficult, and we are proud of the immediate help we can provide through our national helpline and online support services.

Child and adolescent behaviour

Supporting families to understand and address the behaviour of their child or teenager has been a core part of what we do ever since we started. We know that being a parent is hard, and having somewhere to turn for support is vital. From helping parents deal with toddler tantrums, support a child being bullied or giving parents guidance on dealing with risky behaviour, we believe this is a vital area of our work.

Emotional and mental wellbeing

We know that the mental health of young people was already a growing cause for concern before the pandemic, with numbers rising, and that the pandemic itself has had a detrimental effect on children and young people's mental and emotional health. Parents turn to us to help understand how to support their child when they are struggling, and to understand the changing needs of their teenager as they grow and develop.

Violence and aggression

As a charity we have continued to see an increase in parents turning to us through our national services for help to deal with a child who is violent towards them. Sadly we know that this, too, has been exacerbated by the pandemic; a report in 2020 showed that the pressure of the pandemic lockdowns increased the issue, with families saying violence had increased by 70%, (Universities of Oxford and Manchester).



2

Supporting families experiencing child to parent aggression and violence

We're working to raise awareness of the increase of child to parent aggression and violence, and to support families experiencing this

At Family Lives, we have seen an escalation in calls from family members relating to concerns about the levels of violence that children and young people are using against them. Since the publication of our report, *When Family Life Hurts: Family Experience of Aggression in Children (Parentline Plus, 2010)*, there has been a significant increase in research that has identified it as a problem in the lives of many families, with it often intersecting with other issues such as poverty, poor mental health and stress (e.g. Holt, 2013, Brennan et al, 2022).

We will continue to provide services for families experiencing this, to help raise awareness of the issue and to encourage people to access the support they need. We take a 'whole family' or 'family first' approach to support, that considers the dynamics and needs of the entire family and recognise the role that stigma plays in preventing parents/carers from disclosing their struggles and seeking help.

3

Connecting families and communities

We're working to support families to feel part of their community and access local resources

We recognise that families do not exist in isolation and a key element of many of our services is how we support families to have the confidence and skills to connect with other families around them, as well as services and activities in their local community.

Social isolation can have a detrimental impact on many parents and children, and parenting groups and support can play a significant role in enabling connections and friendships to develop.



Many of the families we work with are often socially isolated, experiencing mental or physical ill-health or are disadvantaged in some way and they struggle to access the community services they need.

We support families to access nurseries and schools, benefits checks or housing support as well as connecting them with other services and parents to reduce isolation and increase community engagement and participation. Part of our role is to build a legacy of community cohesion and volunteers in the areas we work in.

4

Raising children's potential

To support families in the early years to help more children be ready for school and have the same chances as their peers

We are very proud of the work we do to support families in the early years, supporting parents to help their children grow and develop to give them the best start in life. We recognise that the impact of Covid-19 on the early years has been detrimental to many aspects of children's early development, with language development, physical development and educational outcomes all being areas of concern (Mitigating Impacts of COVID-19 in the Early Years - Rapid Evidence Review, National Institute for Economic and Social research and University of York).



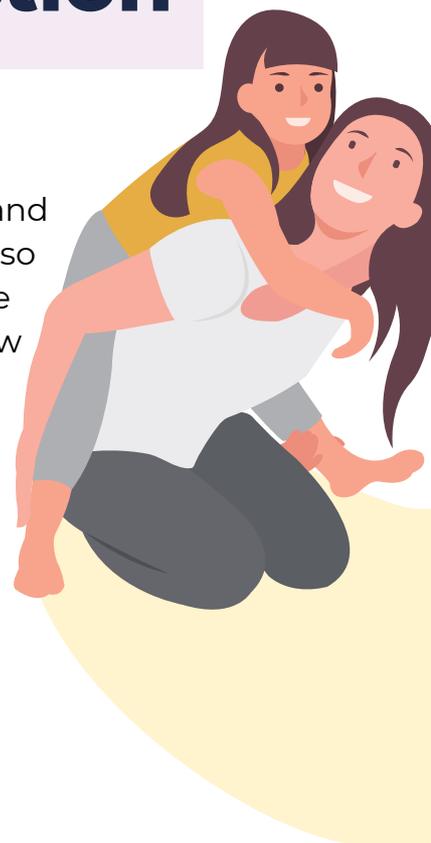
We will continue to provide services for parents with young children, such as our perinatal services in South Yorkshire and London which were a lifeline to many during the pandemic. We were able to quickly adapt to help families with the most pressing issues, such as helping families access food bank tokens, advising on how to do the weekly shop, sourcing free or low-price household equipment and clothes, and providing personal support and an empathetic listening ear when families are at their lowest.

Our priority areas for action

Underpinning our work to support the families who need us is our internal efficiency and productivity, and of course our staff and volunteers. Alongside our income diversification aims, we will also focus on ensuring we continue to use the learning from how we adapted to support families during national lockdowns, and how we can further innovate and grow our range of products and services.

We learnt a lot about supporting families through digital services such as video and online groups as a result of the pandemic, and will continue to include some digital elements in many of our services. But we are also mindful of the barriers digital delivery can include, such as digital exclusion and unequal access.

Our strategic goals give us a long-term focus. We expect our priorities and activities to flex over time as we adapt to seize opportunities in the changing external environment and as we respond to the needs of families. From April 2022, we will focus on:



1 Our products and services

2 Our people

3 Income generation



1

Our products and services

Growth and learning

- Building on the changes we made to our delivery models during the pandemic where these have offered benefits and opportunities; this will include virtual, in person and hybrid delivery models
- Undertaking/commissioning research to understand the prevalence and impact of child on parent violence
- Identify opportunities to support families through a 'first responder' model with issues such as children's mental and emotional wellbeing, learning, and child on parent violence, recognising that we are often the first port of call for families dealing with complex issues
- Identifying opportunities to meet increasing demand through our national services – helpline, live chat and email
- Expand our range of 'self-service' options – such as online parenting courses and webinars
- Explore options to expand our remote individual befriending support offer



Partnerships

- Actively seeking partnership opportunities to expand our service delivery or enhance our offer in areas such as family law and mental health
- Identifying opportunities for corporate partnerships



Innovation

- Continuing to implement innovation to enable us to utilise the benefits of digital technology in terms of reach, accessibility and affordability

Impact, evidence and data

- Improve the way we collect and coordinate data to continuously improve services
- Seek external or pro bono expertise to support us on impact development, evidence and data analysis
- Improve the way we communicate our impact to our stakeholders and funders, providing evidence of impact and outcomes, as well as cost effectiveness

2

Our people

We couldn't support families without our amazing body of staff and volunteers who are passionate about what they do and dedicated to the families who need us.

Our staff and volunteers are our organisational heartbeat and have provided endless support and care to tens of thousands of families over the last couple of years, while contending with many similar and difficult personal circumstances themselves. We have worked hard as an organisation to support 'our family' and see this as an essential part of our strategy.

We hold the Investors in People and Investors in Volunteers kitemarks, the Queen's award for Volunteering, the Helpline Standard and continue to be a Living Wage employer, ensuring that all staff are paid at least the Real Living Wage.

Diversity, equality and inclusion

- Challenging any form of exclusion or discrimination within Family Lives
- Evaluating the diversity of our workforce against national statistics
- Publish a DEI Policy created by our DEI group
- Ensuring that the observations and discussions from the DEI group affect change
- Creating a more inclusive culture of respect, support and trust



Workforce development

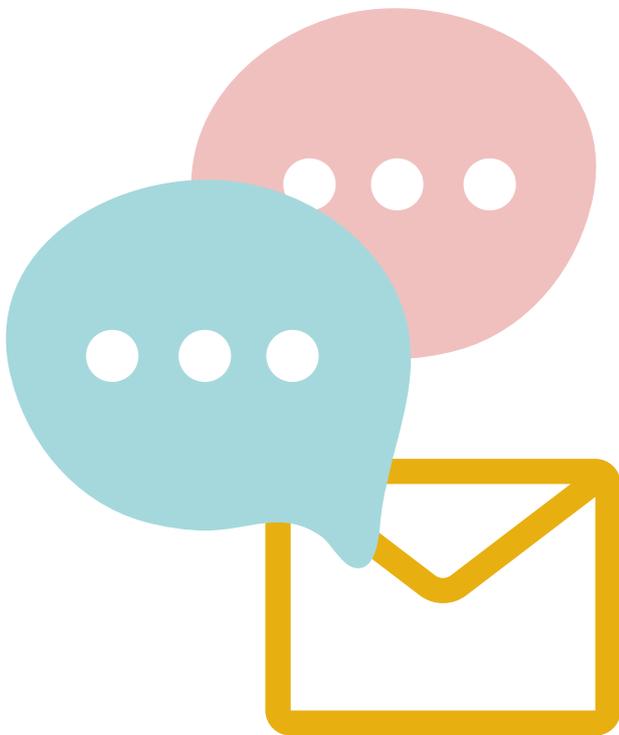
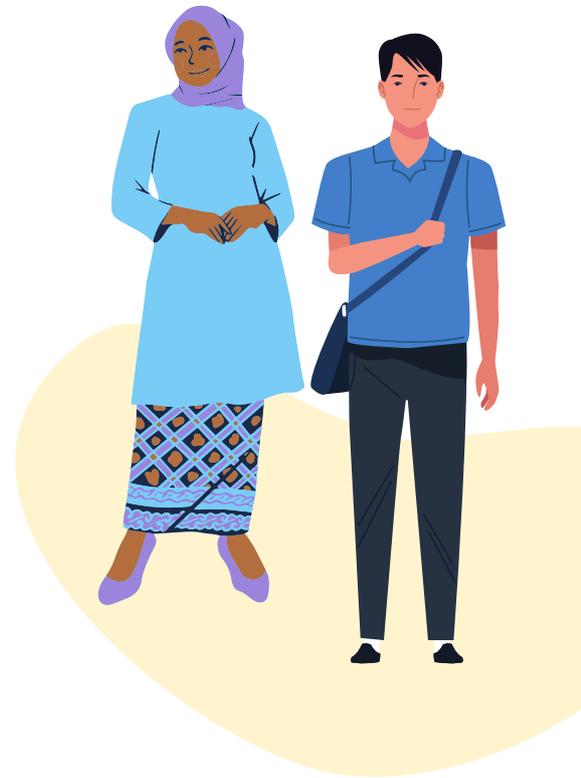
- Ensuring safe practice
- Developing professional practice
- Ensuring our leadership and management are appropriately trained and responsive
- Managing and responding to changes in the external environment

2

Our people

Our volunteers

- Work together with volunteers to support more families
- Broaden and expand our volunteers' contributions, roles and representation across the organisation
- Provide our volunteers with a quality experience – continuing to review the way we engage with, train and support them
- Continue to identify the ways technology could enhance the volunteer experience



Communication – how we communicate with each other

- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers have access to the latest organisational news and highlights
- Providing regular opportunities for staff and volunteers to come together to share best practice and learning
- Establish methods of recognising volunteer and staff contributions

3

Income generation



While our main focus will continue to be on statutory and grant/trust funding, we recognise the known pressures on public finances. We now need to seek to increase time and effort on diversifying our income sources, specifically focussing on:

Corporate and partnerships

- Seeking opportunities to partner with corporates aligned to our key aims by developing our service offer
- Explore opportunities to support public sector organisations
- Explore opportunities to 'sell' our expertise in volunteer engagement and training

Services

- Seek to expand our delivery of key services in areas
- Explore opportunities to introduce 'paid for' options for some of our self-service offers alongside our free services

Donations, legacies and fundraising

- Develop clear strategies to attract major donors and legacy donations
- Develop a donor/fundraising stakeholder engagement strategy



Who we'll work with

The families we support

Families we support should be central to our work, ensuring we understand their needs, how they want to access support and how we help to build stronger family lives.

Our volunteers

Family Lives would not exist without the compassion, dedication and commitment of our volunteers. We will work to ensure volunteers are represented across the organisation so that their voice is heard at all levels.

Our funders

We will work closely with our funders to build relationships with them, and share what we learn about the families we support and the impact we have.

Policy makers and organisations

We will reach out to organisations and policy makers who can help to raise awareness of the importance of our three strategic objectives and ensuring families have access to the support they need.

Other organisations

Partner organisations are key in helping us to support families with the many and overlapping issues families experience. We will work proactively with like-minded partners to improve the circumstances and life chances of vulnerable families and enable long-term change. A commitment to collaboration will help us explore new solutions, build evidence, share thinking and deliver greater impact



The difference we want to see

1. Building stronger families

We're working to ensure more families have access to a range of family support when they need it

- We are able to support more families through our range of services
- Families can access our support through a variety of different services and delivery methods
- We will continue to provide crisis support and early intervention to families in need

2. Raising children's aspirations and potential

We're working to support families in the early years to help more children be ready for school and have the same chances as their peers

- We are able to support more children to reach their potential
- More new parents can access appropriate support in their local area
- Parents can access advice and guidance resources on giving their child the best start in life

3. Connecting families and communities

We're working to support families to feel part of their community and access local resources

- Leaving a legacy by supporting service users and volunteers to access and contribute to their local community
- Vulnerable and hard-to-reach families are supported through effective outreach services
- Collaboration with local partners to ensure strong foundations
- Providing online forums bringing people together for sharing and support on family issues



We build better family lives together

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Contact us

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Or chat to us [online](#)

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