

# Staffordshire's Early Help Strategy

2022 - 2025

right  
help

right  
time

right  
place

 Staffordshire  
County Council

Staffordshire Families  
Strategic Partnership



# Foreword

As the chair of the Families Strategic Partnership Board, it is a privilege to introduce this strategy. Firstly, I would like to thank all the children, young people, families, and partners who helped us get to this point.

Your voice was heard, and we will continue to work with you to help and support you when you tell us you need us. We were extremely pleased to hear where we had got this right for so many families already, but we want to getting even better as too many of you told us that COVID had adversely impacted on you, your lives, and the way in which we worked with you to meet your needs.

What was clear is that you want us to provide the right help, in the right place, at the right time and sometimes we could do this earlier and in a more seamless way, wrapping the support around you in a more co-ordinated way.

This strategy shares our commitment, our values, the outcomes we are seeking to achieve and the way in which we will work with you so that we all have a common understanding of where we are trying to get to and how we will work with you to achieve this.

What we now need is everyone's collective action to help us make a real difference for every child, young person and family who is looking for help and support in Staffordshire. Building trusting relationships in a joined-up way to help you and your family with your changing needs.

I am confident that we can do this together. Early Help is critically important to our partnership, it was the priority that united us as we all want to help and support children, young people, and families as early as we can so that we achieve that you have a better life.

Neelam Bhardwaja

Director for Children and Families Services and  
Chair of Staffordshire's Families Strategic Partnership Board.

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# Our Commitment

We want families in Staffordshire to have the strength, skills and knowledge they need to ensure their children are happy, healthy, safe and achieve their potential. We want to see children and families who are supported to start, grow and live well, able to lead their best life possible.



## Start Well

Every child has the best possible start in life to reduce differences in the quality of their health and wellbeing in the future.



## Grow Well

Children and young people are supported to reach their potential so that they can have greater control over their lives.



## Live Well

Children, young people and adults are supported to make good lifestyle choices.

Staffordshire has a strong partnership who have been working to deliver Early Help for some time, but we know we can do more to provide better integrated and co-ordinated support for children and families who need Early Help.

"We will provide children and families with the support they need at the earliest opportunity by the people who are best placed to help. We will be inclusive, positive and build trusting relationships with families. We will work with families to put what they need first, as listening to families is at the heart of what we do."

"Our support will be flexible, adaptable and respond to changing needs of our families and we will work to ensure that families only tell their story once and make it easier to access our support when it is needed."

This commitment and strategy will be governed by the Early Help & Placed Based Approach Operations Group. They will make bringing this to life at the centre of what they do. They will be held accountable by the Family Strategic Partnership Board who are a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

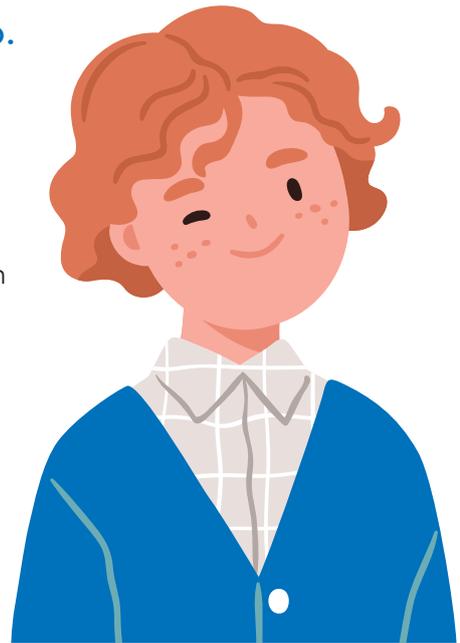
# Staffordshire Context and Need

Most children are happy, safe and have loving homes, but there are some families who face challenges that mean they cannot thrive in the way they want to.

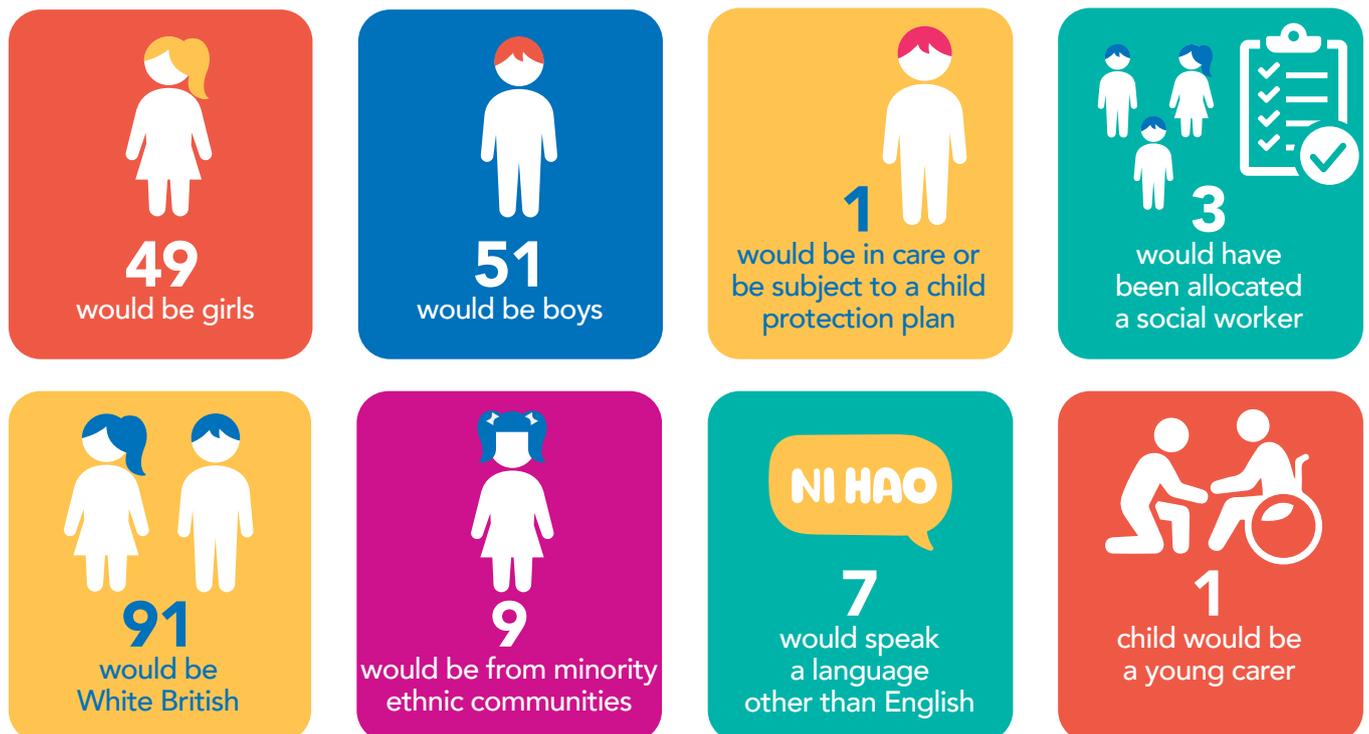
There are 168,935 children and young people aged 0-19 years across the county, an area which spans 1,010 square miles.

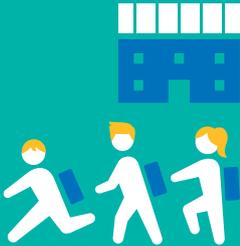
Families across Staffordshire can be very different to each other. Some live in the middle of the countryside; others live in large busy towns. People in some areas have quite a lot of money and comfortable lives, others have less and some live in poverty. This means that the needs of Staffordshire's children and families can be very different and the way we meet the needs of these families will be different.

For more information see Staffordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment: Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment 2021 - Staffordshire Observatory



## If Staffordshire had 100 children...





**MORE THAN**  
**10**  
(per 100 pupils enrolled) are persistently absent from school



The majority would have good emotional wellbeing; however,  
**13**  
would have mental health problems



**3**  
would not be in any form of employment or training at 16-17



Many children would live in families of modest or affluent means  
**18**  
would be living in poverty



**9**  
would be eligible for free school meals



**15**  
would have a special educational need or disability



**MORE THAN**  
**3**  
would be living in a household where a parent is suffering with alcohol/drug dependency



**MORE THAN**  
**10**  
would be living in a household where a parent is suffering with a severe mental health issue



**ON AVERAGE**  
**19**  
in Year 6 would be classified as obese



**LESS THAN**  
**1**  
would get into trouble and work with the Youth Offending Service



**MORE THAN**  
**26**  
reception age children have not reached expected levels of development across all EYFS indicators



**MORE THAN**  
**15**  
would be living in a household where a parent is suffering with either domestic abuse, alcohol/drug dependency or a severe mental health issue



**37**  
would achieve a 9-5 pass in English and Maths



**85**  
would go on to any sustained education destination



**MORE THAN**  
**5**  
would be living in a household where a parent is suffering domestic abuse

# What Do We Mean by Early Help?

Early Help is what we call the approach to supporting children and families as early as possible so that problems do not get worse.

Early Help means that children get the support needed to reach their full potential and improve children's long-term outcomes. It can improve the quality of a child's home and family life, enable them to perform better at school and support their mental health and development. Early Help can also support a child to develop strengths and skills that can prepare them for adult life.

Early Help is everyone's business and it is expected that any worker or volunteer from any agency, provider or service will respond to meet those needs, by working with others to do so. It is recognised that no one is an expert in everything and there is a team of partners available to share information, offer advice and guidance and offer practical hands-on support to one another when needed.

EARLY HELP is  
about the RIGHT HELP,  
at the RIGHT TIME,  
in the RIGHT PLACE.



Clarke, A., Morreale, S., Field, C., Hussein, Y. & Barry, M. (2015). What works in enhancing social and emotional skills development during childhood and adolescence?, Early Intervention Foundation. <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/what-works-in-enhancingsocial-and-emotional-skills-development-during-childhood-and-adolescence>

Early Intervention Foundation (2021). Spending review 2021: The case for early intervention to support levelling up and Covid recovery. [early-intervention-to-support-levelling-up-and-covid-recovery](https://www.eif.org.uk/report/early-intervention-to-support-levelling-up-and-covid-recovery) (1).pdf

Early Help will consider the needs of the family as a whole, understanding these are interconnected, doing what works best for the child(ren).

A lead worker dedicated to a family to build an honest and productive relationship. We know that Early Help works best when those who know the family well or speak with them regularly act as the lead worker by acting as the point of contact for the family and working with a range of other agencies to support meeting the needs of children and their families.

A lead person for the family, to help coordinate support

The actions planned together need to consider what practical support may be required, such as how to do something, not presume everyone already knows how to do something. This might be how to work out a morning routine to get to school on time, guidance and reassurance for a parent learning a new technique like breast feeding, changing a nappy, how to get from point a to b using public transport or how to do a household budget and many more examples.

Delivering practical, hands-on support.

Considering the whole family.

Working 'with' families, not doing 'to' or 'for'.

Where more than one agency is working with a family, they recognise the difficulty families may experience with lots of people wanting them to do things at the same time. For this reason, the Early Help Assessment is used to bring together all of these needs in one place.

Everyone working to the same family plan.

Whilst the family have one main lead worker helping to link them with appropriate support, successful Early Help requires a partnership response. This is often achieved through multi-agency 'Team Around the Family', or 'Restorative Circle' meetings-working WITH families, not doing TO families, known as a strengths-based 'restorative approach' and promotes a culture of inclusion and support which enables children to achieve their best outcomes, builds resilience and enhances problem solving skills.



# Everyone's Business

It is a collaboration and not about an individual service working alone, it relies on everyone working together effectively.



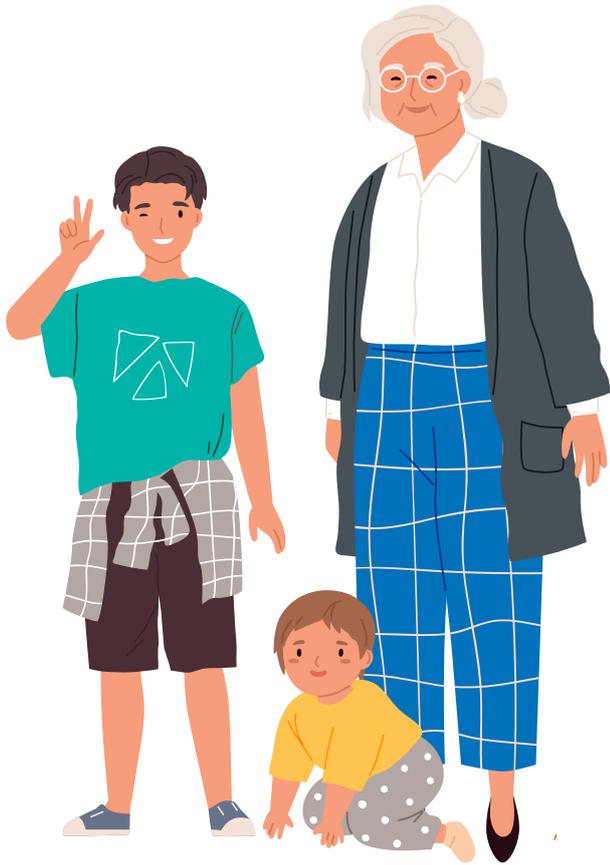
## Universal and Community Support

Most children's needs are met by their family or universal services that are available to everyone, and by community-based support.



## Targeted and Acute Services

Targeted services can provide additional support such as undertaking an Early Help assessment and creating a family plan with a Lead Practitioner coordinating support across a number of different agencies. If these are unable to meet the needs of a family, a request can be made for acute or specialist services.



## Early Help in Action

A grandparent was struggling with the challenging behaviour of her grandchildren, after they were removed from their parent due to neglect.

The grandparent was reluctant to accept support as they thought it would question their ability to care for the children.

Over time their Early Help Practitioner built up a relationship of trust and was able to provide them with parenting support alongside helping the children make sense and deal with their lived experience. Working with the family, the practitioner developed a better support network with the extended family, school and DWP. This additional support helped the grandparent focus on improving the relationship with their grandchildren.

The grandparent is now almost able to manage without support with a plan in place to build on their resilience and determination to provide the children with a stable home supported by their network.

## Early Help in Action

Mum and her 2 very young children came to Staffordshire from abroad with very limited English. With the help of interpreters, it soon became clear that the worries around some of mum's child supervision and choices were because she had no choices; the family were living in poverty with no support networks or benefits.

The Family Practitioner took a restorative approach to get mum onboard as she was initially resistant to the offered help given as she felt vulnerable.

The family were stepped down from Child in Need to Early Help once they had secured a right to remain in this country and the family could now benefit from BRFC which helped to fund much needed items and activities. Today, mum has the right benefits in place, they have a safe place to call home, the children are both in education, mum is spending positive time with the children and they are accessing activities and services in the community together with friends they have made.

Mum is attending college to study ESOL and is very keen to move into work and be a positive role model for her children.

None of this could have happened without close multiagency working with our DWP, the children's schools, health and local charities.





## Early Help in Action

A pregnant woman was supported referred by her midwife to Early Help for substance misuse and poor mental health. Her temporary housing was also not suitable for a new-born.

A multi-agency approach was taken to support the parents' mental health by addressing their childhood lived experiences, alongside financial support and assistance with finding suitable housing. The Bumps to Babies programme delivered practical parenting support leading to positive outcomes for the family.

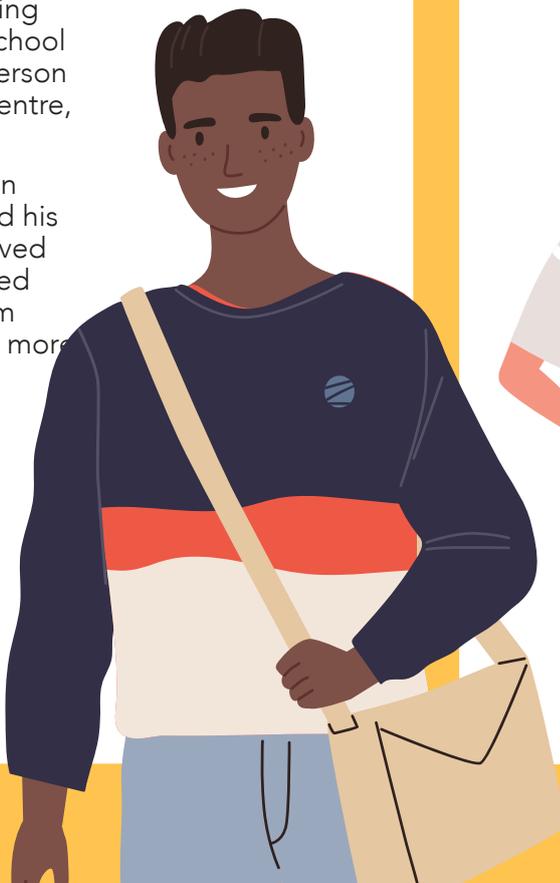
## Early Help in Action

A referral was received from a 13-year-old Young Person due to their high anxiety and school avoidance since the national pandemic lockdown and their reluctance to go outside the family home. The school had already tried to provide support with no improvement.

A multi agency Team around the Family meeting was arranged. The School worked with CAMHS, the Educational Psychologist, Family Support Worker and family to complete the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) application and Staffordshire County Council were able to fund at home tuition while a decision was made. In addition, external emotional coaching was funded by School and the Young Person attending their centre, once a week.

The Young Person engaged well and his EHCP was approved and recommended a non-mainstream setting would be more appropriate.

The Young Person has started at his new school and has settled in well. They continue to do some emotional coaching work school.



## Early Help in Action

Police were concerned about anti-social behaviour involving young people and issued a Section 35 notice to disperse the gatherings.

The Police contacted the Vulnerability Partnership who were able to link local Youth Workers to the site and times of the anti-social behaviour.

Where agencies were already involved with the young people, information was shared. If agencies were not involved, family support was offered via the school partnership.



## Early Help in Action

A Health Visitor supported a young couple both aged 19 upon the birth of their first daughter, each parent had ASD and had previously been involved in drinking and drugs. Baby and mum had moved back in with mum's parents following an incident where the father became verbally aggressive.

The Health Visitor assessed that help was required in the following areas: Finances, housing, benefit entitlement, relationship management, mother mental health, parent support and work plans.

Their Health Visitor contacted childrens services for an Early Help Assessment and a 'Team Around the Family' was arranged. This Team put in place a range of support through a multi agency approach enabling each to support with their expertise.

Health Visitor reflected that by working in a multi agency way it helped her be clear about the work they needed to do with the family and ensured they got the right support they needed.



## Early Help in Action

A family, who had fled domestic abuse, arrived in Staffordshire with very little belongings and needed support to find one of the children a school space. Upon meeting the family and undertaking the Early Help Assessment it was clear that there were several areas where they needed support. A multi-agency approach was taken to support the family to appeal a decision from a local high school for a place, undertake a financial assessment and refer the family to Potteries Moneywise. In addition, a referral was made to the BRFC fund for essential furniture.

Once referred to these organisations, they too used a multi-agency approach and made further referrals to a local charity for clothes and essentials and accessed their own funds to provide a cooker for the family.

Due to the history of domestic abuse both New Era and GLOW were also involved.

The family are now in a much better place and continue to work with several of the professionals who they were referred to.



## Early Help in Action

A 15 year old girl was pregnant and needed support, given her age and previous service involvement. An Early Help Assessment was completed that also involved the soon to be grandparents and teenage expectant father.

A 'Team around the Family' was in put in place, bringing in support from the Family Practitioner, midwife and school. Working with the family, a plan was put in place to give support to the mum-to-be and wider family.

The mum-to-be was able to continue her education despite struggling with illnesses due to her pregnancy and Bumps to Babes was done on a 1-1 basis with the dad to prepare them for parenthood.

The baby is now born and mum is doing exceptionally well with the skills she has learnt and her wider family support.

The young parents are working out co-parenting between them with wider family supporting this.



# Our Partnership Approach to Early Help

Early Help is everyone's business and it is expected that any worker or volunteer from any agency, provider or service will respond to meet those needs, by working with others to do so.

It is recognised that no one is an expert in everything and there is a team of partners available to share information, advice and guidance to one another when needed.

We maximise the engagement of communities, the voluntary sector, partners and universal services to address all needs at the earliest point.

## Our Approach to Early Help

Our Early Help offer provides Staffordshire children and families the right help at the right time in the right place, creating a shared responsibility for services and practitioners to identify emerging support needs for individual children, and families, irrespective of whether they are providing services for children or for adults, based on an understanding that Early Help is everyone's responsibility.

Early Help support in Staffordshire aims to help families make long-term, sustainable change, enabling them to be independent and achieve positive outcomes.

Part of this approach is ensuring that a family are empowered to access community-based and universal services. We want families to feel supported by their own community.

## Our Vision

Staffordshire Families and communities have the strength, skills and knowledge they need to ensure their children and young people are healthy, happy, safe and achieve their potential.

## Our Values

Working WITH children and families, establishing respectful and trusting relationships, where families can expect:

- › To be listened to
- › To only need to tell their story once
- › To have one lead worker and one shared plan
- › High support and high challenge
- › To receive high support and high challenge
- › Use of everyday language with no confusing jargon or abbreviations
- › Empathetic, non-judgemental support, helping families to move past any feelings of shame or stigma that may come with asking for help.

Keeping the family central and ensuring support is individual and strength focused

Ensuring families know how and where to access available support in their local community

Promoting health, wellbeing and education for children and families.

Supporting each other to develop the services and support we provide, learning from all feedback to improve services for everyone

## Supporting Children to Attend

We recognise the importance and value of improving attendance to school. Education settings have lots of opportunities. Children can build friendship networks, try new skills like sports and have the chance to play and be creative in music and the arts. They help give children the chance to grow and achieve their potential.

## Early Help is Everyone's Business

- › We recognise that people who work mainly in universal services may be best placed to identify children and/or their families that are at risk of poor outcomes.
- › We work more collaboratively to identify those who are more likely to need Early Help, so that we are able to work with families most in need of our support.
- › We all promote local community resources and networks of support.
- › We will work to provide local support to address local needs.
- › Where possible we will work around the place, working with and as part of the local community.

# How we will know we are making a difference?

## Our Outcomes



Be Happy  
and Healthy



Achieve and  
Contribute.



Feel Safe  
and Belong

## How will we know we are making a difference?



Children enter  
school ready to learn



Children attend school and take part in community activities - building their confidence, social skills and support network



Child's developmental needs are being met, allowing them to make progress at a pace that is suitable for them



Parents /carers feel better equipped to manage the child's mental health and well-being.



Families are engaged with appropriate support that can be seen to be making a difference



Parent / carer demonstrates improved, positive parenting (e.g., improved parent / child interactions; positive attachment etc)



Child not experiencing criminal or pre-criminal exploitation (e.g., radicalisation)



Children not involved in crime or anti-social behaviour.



Children feel safe at home

## Early Help... The Voice of our Children, Young People and Families.

We are building from our strengths... We asked our children and families and they told Early Help...

"I never felt rushed. You listened to me in depth [...] No one wants to admit they need help, but you gave us the structure and the skills we needed to be more consistent as parents, and we have worked so well together. You have helped us so much and we can now move forward positively".

"It's been good to talk things through with someone who can lend a fresh pair of eyes to the situation, who can advise from a professional and experienced perspective and provide strategies to help. Seeing things written down has also been helpful. Breaking down parts of the assessment weekly made it feel manageable too."

"This experience taught me to trust my instincts and helped me understand that asking for help was not me failing, but actually showing how much I love and care for my children and our family."

'It was fast, it was efficient, it was informative, it was great. I never felt rushed... you really listened to me.

"It's been good to talk things through with someone who can lend a fresh pair of eyes to the situation, who can advise from a professional and experienced perspective and provide strategies to help. Seeing things written down has also been helpful. Breaking down parts of the assessment weekly made it feel manageable too."

Throughout the whole process, I've learned so much about me as a parent, I've learnt more about how my children respond to me. You gave us the skills, techniques and structure that we need to move forward. I'm in a completely different place if I look back. We can move forward with (child) positively'

I don't have the words to describe what you did for our family. Financially we see a difference, so we can spend more time with the kids, hope - I understand that everything I can do. We can see the future. Everything has changed now.'

"I have learnt ways to help my daughter with her emotions and she has also learnt how to control them with different breathing activities and a worry box."

"I feel far less anxious and isolated. I now have a multitude of options to use for help, support or advice."

It was hard-hitting to reflect where we were as a family...we had let things slide. It was rough.

'We talked...about us as a family. (We) were able to have open discussions on where I was at as a mum and where the children are at. To be honest I was quite apprehensive 'cos I don't think I entered into this to look at me as a parent but for (child) issues. We've still got a way to go ...it doesn't happen overnight, it's a change in behaviour and how we are as a family. It's really helped us move forward together. It's been a really valuable experience for all of us as a family'

"My baby and I have been able to make some new and wonderful friends; it has also helped my baby to grow so much in his confidence, especially as he has had such a difficult year. It has also been through this support, that you have completely inspired me to see what I can do to try to help others".



## APPENDIX 1

# What Do We Mean by Right Help, Right Time and Right Place?



## Right Help

- › Early Help can take many forms, such as community advice programmes, school-based programmes, mentoring and peer support schemes, support in the home, home visiting programmes and more. It's about the right level of support for the challenges the family is facing at that time.
- › Children and parents/ carers should be central to each stage of the process and be supported to drive their own plans and make their own decisions.
- › Decisions are transparent and based on achieving the best outcomes for the child or young person. This will normally include the child being visited or spoken to by the people making decisions unless it is felt to not be in their best interests not to.
- › Everybody is encouraged to be an advocate for SEND so that there is greater awareness of SEND in the community.
- › Strengthening relationships and building relationships is at the core of what we do. Relationships are at the heart of what we do.
- › Everybody is encouraged to be an advocate for SEND so that there is greater awareness of SEND in the community.



## Right Time

- › Early Help is about providing support to children and their families as soon as possible. This means both at the earliest time in a child's life, as well as, before higher level or specialist services are needed. Focusing on giving children the 'best start in life' and ensuring that children are ready for starting school.
- › Early Help is children with SEND being offered the support they need at an early stage; in a place they are comfortable and without the need for an EHCP (where this is possible).
- › We listen to the voice of the child(ren) and family, alongside evidence-based partnership information so the family only have to tell their story once and are helped to seamlessly access all the advice and guidance they need at the earliest opportunity.
- › Strong multiagency assessments helping to identify support needs early on by considering the family as a whole and doing what works best for the child(ren).
- › We maximise the engagement of communities, the voluntary sector, partners, and universal services to address all needs at the earliest point.

# Right Place

## Right Place

- › Places are friendly, welcoming, and inclusive for children and with additional needs and their families.
- › Working with families in their community or neighbourhood or their home, or where they feel most comfortable.
- › Families and children aware of the support available and know how to access the right support if they need it, whether this is from their family, friends, community, or statutory support.
- › Children and families can access effective support within their own community
- › Through our placed-based approach, local solutions are designed to meet local needs, of which partnership groups like the SEND and Inclusion Hubs and Children's Centres are an essential part.
- › Promoting local community resources and networks of support.
- › Localised services to address local needs.
- › District model of working with consistent child-centred keyworkers.



## APPENDIX 2

# What Early Help Looks Like in Practice

It is everybody's responsibility to identify and assess need, through having conversations with children, and their families and planning with them to address these needs. This will look slightly different for every family as each child is an individual with different abilities and needs who require different levels of support.

## Accessing Support for Children and Families

There are many Early Help offers available for children and families. We recognise this and are working to make information easier to find and where possible integrate referral processes, so to help avoid confusion, overlap and delay in families accessing the support and advice they need.

Often, in the first instance families will seek support from their Health Visitor, GP, School, local Police, Housing Officer and other familiar professionals their family has contact with. Where the service alone cannot meet the needs of the family, (with the parents/carers agreement) they can seek more help and information from other local partners.

## Early Help - Sharing information, advice and guidance

Information about the range of face to face, virtual and phone based Early Help support can be found on Staffordshire Connects (INSERT link), including the SEND Local Offer and the Health Hub advice line.

It may be that it is not always obvious which type of support is most appropriate or could

most effectively meet the support needs of the family. In such instances, remember no one is an expert in everything and this is how Staffordshire partners can work together to help share options, strategies and potential solutions. There are lots of local partnership meetings where such advice can be shared like the SEND and Inclusion Hubs, Vulnerability Hubs, and more.

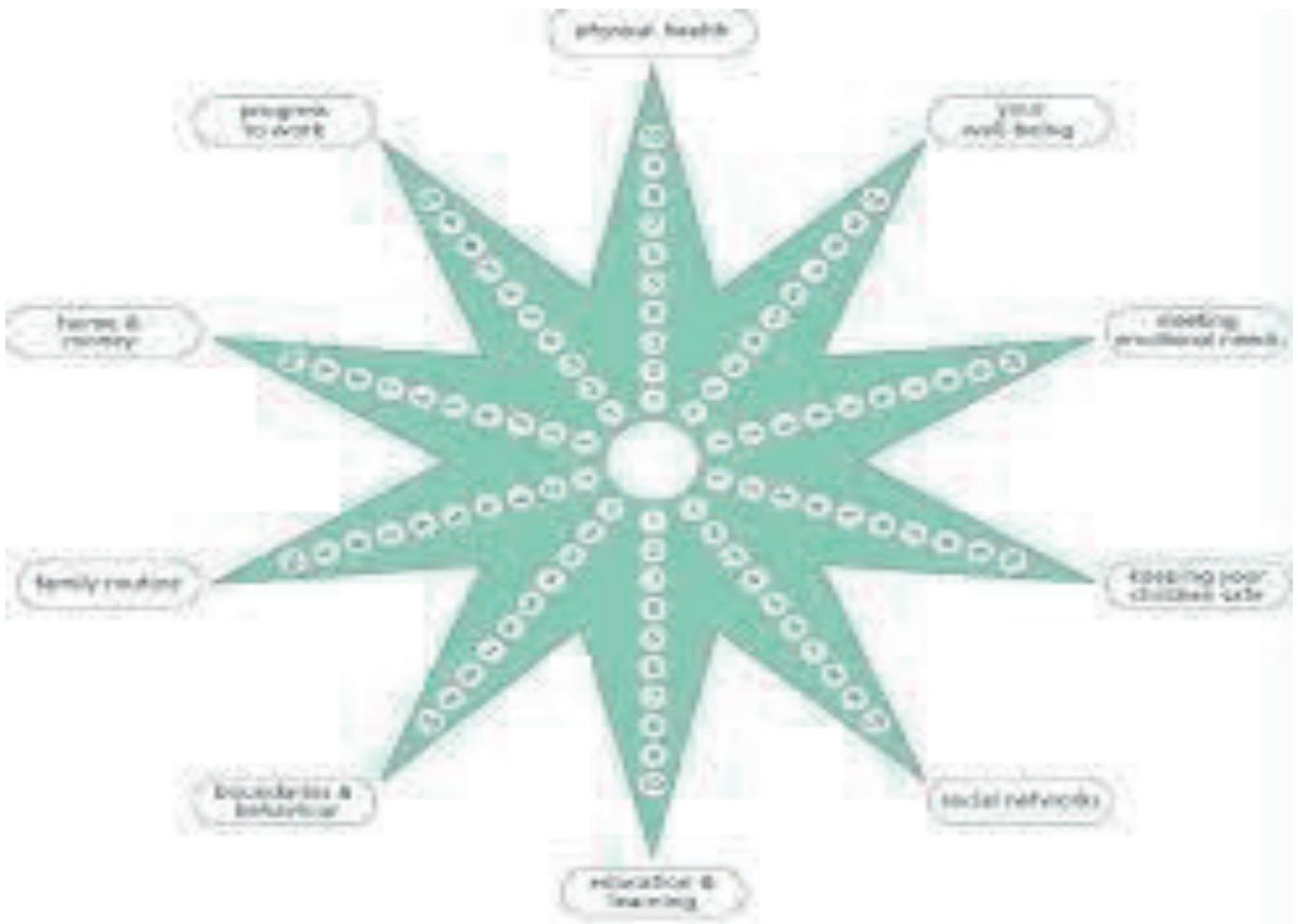
## Early Help - Additional Support needed for Children and Families

For more complex support needs, Staffordshire County Council Contact Centre plays a critical role in providing a route for our children and families as well as information, advice and guidance that is community-based, with an emphasis on Early Help.

Everyone can refer to targeted Early Help to request additional support, including parents/carers referring themselves. You must have the parents/carers agreement to do so.

Referrals can be made by calling Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support Service on 0300 111 8007.

An Early Help Assessment is the main assessment Staffordshire Early Help partners use with families, to gather all the information about the family in one place and so it is easy to understand. This is the families assessment, filled in with the families



help and all information is treated confidentially.

- › Any agency or organisation can complete an Early Help Assessment
- › The assessment is co-produced with the child(ren) and family
- › It takes into account the views of all of the family
- › It includes the strengths and support needs of the whole family, recognising them to be interconnected.
- › The agency or organisation will work with other agencies to coordinate a multi-agency plan showing who will do what by when, including what the family will do to.

The Family Star Plus is part of the Early Help Assessment and helps with understanding the range of support needs.

Once all the information has been added to the assessment, this help create a shared action plan (see section 'What do we mean by Early Help 'Right Help' model of support).

## Reporting concerns about the safety of a child or young person

Where professionals concerns are unable to be met by Early Help:

- › Reports can be made by calling Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support Service on 0300 111 8007.
- › Advice will be given by a Social Worker and this may result in making a referral to Children's Social Work Service, signposting to specialist services or recommending that an Early Help Assessment is more appropriate.

If you believe the child to be at risk of immediate harm this must be reported to the police on 999 or 101. Once you have reported to the police, please contact Staffordshire Children's Advice and Support Service on 0300 111 8007.

