



Building on 150 years

A strategy for Family Action 2019-2024

(2021 update)

Introduction

Family Action passionately believes in the strengths within families. Families may be very different in composition and circumstances but they should all be empowered and supported to enable all members to thrive. Through all that we do, Family Action is rooted in the belief that well-functioning and supported families are a driving force for happy, healthy individuals and communities.

In 2019 Family Action celebrated its 150th Anniversary. 150 years of providing practical, emotional and financial support to vulnerable children, adults and entire families. To mark that 150th Anniversary we launched the Family Monsters Project – a national conversation about the everyday pressures on families in Britain today.

Building on 150 Years, looks ahead to 2024 and builds on our previous *Stronger than Ever* strategy. *Stronger than Ever* was very much about modernisation and growth – to ensure we are able to continue to support families across the country, and indeed to reach more families with our work. Today, Family Action has achieved the goals of that strategy – the charity is supporting more children and families than ever before. We have modernised comprehensively, doubled our turnover and increased our geographical reach. We merged with seven other charities during this five-year period, introduced a range of new services and better evidenced our impact. We won national recognition for the excellence of the support we provide to vulnerable families and as a good employer.

To ensure that *Building on 150 Years* remains current, we are issuing annual updates which reflect our operating environment, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and all of the changes that has brought to Family Action, our service users and the way in which we deliver our services. These annual updates also set our key organisational priorities for the next 12 months.

Building on 150 Years (2021 Update) provides a route map for what we need to do next so that we can keep building stronger families. It is designed to provide a clear direction of travel to guide us through uncertain times rather than a detailed list of everything we need to do. That clear direction of travel, which allows for flexibility in its execution, should continue to serve us well in the years ahead.

If we achieve the objectives in this strategy we will not only provide high quality support to hundreds of thousands of children, adults and families, but our growing influence will also touch the lives of millions more.

Building on 150 Years will help us to achieve our potential as a charity with national impact.

The focus of our Building on 150 Years

Our strategy puts front and centre five key objectives:

1. Agile and Responsive – always able to look ahead, to innovate and to seize opportunities
2. Managed Growth - continue to grow in a managed, sustainable way so that we can support more children, adults and families to have better lives
3. Improved Quality - to ensure that our services are of the highest possible quality so that we can maximise the difference made to the people we work with
4. Better Known with a Bolder, Stronger Voice for Families – to speak out for families through building our national profile and positioning and having increased influence and impact
5. Valuing Our People - investing in our staff and volunteers and their development so that Family Action becomes an even better place to work

Why we chose these five objectives

This is a challenging time for vulnerable people. Despite the political claims that austerity is over, public money continues to be very tight and cuts to public service budgets and local services are continuing. The pandemic has only intensified the pressure on public spending and it is widening inequalities. Inevitably, we are often holding a great deal of risk in our services as we seek to work positively and effectively with individuals and families under considerable stress. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the pandemic has impacted upon people differently – while many people have had a surprisingly positive experience overall despite the lockdowns and other national restrictions, others are clearly struggling and there is increased pressure on many households not only financially but also in terms of relationships quality, parental confidence and mental health and wellbeing. The long term impact of the pandemic is still unknown but what is already abundantly clear is that there will be a significant impact for many people and possibly for our society as a whole.

Family Action must continue to be agile in its response to these uncertain times.

All of this is taking place against a backdrop of an increasingly digital world, a welcome stronger societal focus on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion and an evolving profile of pressures on family life, pressures that have only become more acute in the context of Covid-19.

Against this changing background Family Action has achieved a great deal. We have grown substantially and developed a reputation as an organisation that can deliver with quality on a national as well as local scale. We have been careful to diversify our sources of income and our range of services in order to reduce our dependence on single areas of work or income. We have been successful in substantially increasing our fundraising income too. We have also professionalised our back office and developed considerable agility and momentum within the organisation that has enabled us to seize opportunities and cope with setbacks. The organisation has coped remarkably well in the context of Covid-19, leaping forward in terms of virtual working, keeping our services open, developing new partnerships and innovating at pace.

In the period to 2024, Family Action needs to consolidate this growth while remaining agile and resilient as our operating environment will not get any easier. We expect money to get even tighter, the level of risk being carried in individual services to increase further and fundraising to be even more competitive. In this context, in order to continue to deliver for everyone we work with, we need to continue to build the quality of our back office infrastructure and our spectrum of income generation. We must also ensure that our staff and volunteers are both of the highest calibre and well supported by the organisation and that every service provided by Family Action is not only of the highest quality but that we can evidence that quality.

We also need to keep building on the milestone of our 150th Anniversary and the success of The Family Monsters Project. Family Action is rapidly becoming better known and we are capitalising on that increased brand recognition to reach and support more families that need us. We want to keep using our increased profile to support us in becoming a stronger voice for families.

We recognise that Family Action is very much the product of our dedicated staff and volunteers as well as our fantastic supporters. We want to invest in the period to 2024 in the training and development of our staff and volunteers so that they are the very best that they can be and so that Family Action becomes an even better place to work. We have also committed to increasing our organisational focus on equality, diversity and inclusion throughout this period.

We have shown over the past five years that it is possible for a charity to grow in a context of continuing austerity and to increase our impact too. We know that Family Action has the values, the staff, volunteers and supporters, the ideas and service models and the sheer determination to keep on making a difference to the people we serve. The five objectives in this strategy are not standalone – they all cut across, speak to and rely on each other. We think that inter-relatedness demonstrates the cohesiveness of this strategy and the vision that lies behind it.

In conclusion, it is imperative for us to keep pushing on. This strategy sets out a direction of travel which feels right for now and it is giving us the flexibility we need to respond to changes in the external environment.

About Family Action

Family Action provides practical, emotional and financial support to strengthen and improve the life chances of those who are poor, disadvantaged or socially isolated. We seek to empower everyone we work with and ensure they are listened to, helping them look forward to the future and not be defined by their past. We believe in the strengths within families and we want them to achieve their potential with increased resilience. We support parents and carers to face their family pressures. We support children and young people to face their futures with confidence. We want every family to be celebrated and championed.

Family Action's values are central to us. We are a can-do organisation, we strive for excellence, we maintain a clear people focus and we have mutual respect for everyone. We recruit against these values, appraise our staff against them and ensure that our practice is continually informed by them.

Founded in 1869, the charity was providing services to children and families before the first aeroplane flew, before the first car was invented, even before it was first made compulsory for all primary age children to attend school. Our history is remarkable - we were there at the very beginnings of social work, we created the first Citizen's Advice Bureau and the forerunners of Job Centres. Today, Family Action supports over 60,000 families and hundreds of thousands of children and young people a year through some 200 community-based services across England, Wales and the Isle of Man. We help many thousands more across the UK with financial assistance through our education and welfare grant programmes and through our national programmes such as FamilyLine and FOOD Clubs.

Our services include:

- help for parents-to-be
- the provision of high quality pre-schools and Children's Centres in deprived communities
- provision of the National School Breakfast Programme
- provision of holiday hunger schemes and FOOD Clubs to alleviate family hunger
- behaviour outreach support and emotional wellbeing services in schools
- support for young carers
- counselling/emotional health and wellbeing services for vulnerable children, young people and adults
- therapeutic work with children, young people, young adults and families
- support services for adopted children and adults, adoptive families, birth families and special guardians
- SEND information, advice and guidance, and support to families of children and young people with additional needs
- intensive family support provided directly in the family home for family with complex difficulties
- relationship support for couples under stress
- specialist work with domestic violence and abuse
- befriending, mentoring, emotional support and employment advisory services for disadvantaged young people and care leavers
- befriending and mentoring services for new mothers struggling with perinatal mental ill health and for adults with mental ill health
- financial grants programmes for individuals and families in crisis
- FamilyLine: a national helpline, text and email advice service with befriending, counselling and mentoring
- Training and consultancy services