

# Thriving in an uncertain time

Family Action's Impact  
2021-2022



Building  
stronger  
families



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# Introduction

**We aim to have a bold, strong voice for families that ensures the right support is available at the right time for anyone that needs it, and that these differing needs are better understood.**



**Mary Fulton, Chair of Trustees**  
**David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive**

We had hoped by the time we came to write this report that COVID-19 would be more of a distant memory, loosening its grip on our daily lives, but it was not to be. Since our report on our initial response to COVID-19, Family Action has continued to develop the way we work so that we remain agile and responsive to the changing needs of children and families while developing and providing services that are sustainable and have significant impact. Our success at doing this has resulted in us recently being named UK Charity of the Year 2021. That accolade has only encouraged us to do more.

We have updated our 'Building on 150 Years' Strategy, and will continue to do so annually to make sure it reflects the context we are operating in, the ongoing consequences of the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. We also continue to consider how our work leads to the impact we want to achieve. This report sets out the key areas where we think Family Action can make the most valuable contribution to changing lives and supporting families to thrive.

Both the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis are highlighting and exacerbating existing issues and inequalities for families, such as food insecurity, the digital divide, the gig economy, equality issues and the inconsistency of access to support. The likely long-term effects on family resilience are not yet known, but more action needs to be taken now to intervene early and to support needs that are likely to arise in the future, especially for the most vulnerable families. We will continue to push for the support that families need delivered in the ways that families have told us best works for them.

We know that we need to keep improving too as an organisation. Over the past year we have had an increased focus on equality, diversity and inclusion – families come in all shapes and sizes and our support needs to work for everyone. We have also thought hard about how best to monitor the quality of our work when our usual methods of delivery have adapted alongside changing restrictions. This work will continue. For example, even though all of our usual work places have now re-opened, technological changes mean that we can adapt the ways in which we deliver support. This can only benefit families as well as our staff and volunteers.

Our staff and volunteers have continued to go above and beyond over the past year. We are proud of their resourcefulness and the willingness of everyone to carry on despite all the challenges. Thank you to you all.

As you will see in this report we are also looking forward to the start of new services, the development of existing services and a number of exciting new partnerships.



# About Family Action

**Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families and brighter lives. We believe a family's life chances should not be determined by circumstance, so we provide innovative and effective services and support to over 60,000 of the UK's most vulnerable families through a network of national programmes, financial grants and some 200 community-based services. We help individuals and communities address the challenges they face through practical, emotional and financial support, working holistically with whole families wherever we can.**

## Our vision

Everyone who comes to us will receive the support they need to tackle their challenges, whether they are experiencing poverty, disadvantage or social isolation.

## Our mission

We provide services and financial support to strengthen and improve the life chances of those who are poor, disadvantaged or socially isolated. We believe in the strengths within families and seek to empower everyone we work with and ensure they are listened to. We help people look forward to the future and not be defined by their past.

## Our strategy

We focus on five key areas – being agile and responsive; managed growth; improved quality; being better known with a bolder, stronger voice for families and valuing our people. We update this strategy annually, and have included our learning from the pandemic so far and the context of the current cost of living crisis to drive us forward over the next 12 months.

## Our Values and Behaviours

We embrace our values and behaviours in our work, as well as in our professional relationships with colleagues, partners and those who use our services. We do this by:

- Being people focused
- Reflecting a 'can do' approach
- Striving for excellence in everything we do
- Having mutual respect for everyone we work with



## Awards

We were honoured to win Charity of the Year at the Third Sector Awards 2021 and be shortlisted for Fundraising Team of the Year. These awards recognise excellence and achievement – a testament to the hard work, passion and commitment of our staff and supporters.

**An excellent response to the pandemic with appropriate and timely new services being delivered. It is clear that passion drives this charity.**

– Award citation

# Social Value at Family Action

**Social Value is the positive benefit organisations create for the economy, communities, and society. As a charity, creating and delivering Social Value therefore runs through everything that we do.**

Since the passing of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, the measurement of Social Value has been increasingly important, so this year Family Action decided to explore in more depth the various Social Value outcomes that we deliver, and how we can maximise these.

We have invested in consultancy with the Social Value Portal to help us explore our current practice, as well support our use of the TOMs (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) framework that is frequently used as a way of calculating Social Value. We have also become members of Social Value UK. We have learned that our strengths and building blocks for implementing Social Value are:

- Social Value can support staff passion – our staff are passionate about their work and about supporting others, and Social Value is another way to communicate the impact of their work and of the organisation to staff, as well as demonstrating it externally
- Refining our bids - we want to better measure and quantify the impact of the services we deliver with public funds, which in turn will strengthen future tenders
- Modernising and improving – Family Action has been modernising many parts of our support functions in recent years, such as our IT and environmental approaches. A Social Value approach supports us to measure the impact of these

- Focusing on our strengths – as Social Value runs through everything we do, we want to understand which outcomes to focus on measuring where we have the most to offer and can have a consistent approach across the organisation
- Improving understanding - the idea of Social Value is often understood within the organisation, but we want to develop our ability to understand which elements of the TOMs framework are part of our core delivery and which ones are things that could be considered 'additional'
- Hungry to learn and improve - we have an appetite and interest to learn more about Social Value in terms of what we deliver, and developments that are happening externally



We have appointed a dedicated Social Value Coordinator to support the implementation of our new Social Value strategy, with key targets for the next year being:

- Increased awareness of Social Value within the organisation and ability to capture this information
- Increased awareness across the organisation of additional Social Value outcomes created by services and where we can maximise these
- A Social Value policy and statement created and implemented
- The TOMs framework is reviewed and aligned to Family Action business and part of our 'business as usual'
- Work with Social Value Portal on developing the TOMs framework in relation to Health and Social Care
- Supporting our corporate partners to increase their Social Value through their work with us, and developing our ability to demonstrate this externally



# Our Theory of Change

**During 2021, the inevitable changes to our work resulting from the pandemic led to us reflecting on the impact we want to achieve for families, and how we can better demonstrate our approach to achieving this.**

Across our services we use a Theory of Change to express how our activities contribute to outcomes which, in turn, help us achieve our goals. In 2021, we developed a Theory of Change for Family Action as a whole organisation. This has five key pillars where we believe that we have a genuine role to play in changing families' lives:

- Reducing poverty
- Supporting relationships and safety
- Improving society's understanding and support of families' needs
- Supporting both family and community wellbeing and connectedness, and
- Supporting families through change

We know that these areas are complex, overlapping, and require integrated support from a variety of organisations. This report will explain how our work during 2021 has helped us to achieve change in these areas, what we have learnt, and how we will build on our impact in the future.

## How we work

We believe that families come in all shapes and sizes - when we say 'family' we do not just mean parents and dependent children. We support diverse families, actively promoting equality and inclusion. Every family is unique in its experiences and we work to empower them to adapt and manage them. Being a learning organisation enables us to be agile and responsive to these experiences and enables us to look ahead and innovate. We maximise the impact we have on families' lives by delivering high quality support that adapts to changing external situations and available technologies. We take a strengths-based and trauma informed approach to all our work, working with the whole family where possible.

We manage growth, so that not only can we support more families, but this support can be sustained, including during situations like COVID-19. Our delivery is also sustainable in relation to social value, making sure we have a beneficial impact on the wider community. We believe families are the foundations of communities - by building stronger families, we are building stronger communities.

We believe everyone should be able to thrive, regardless of their circumstances. We aim to empower families, enabling them to have a bolder, stronger voice, including through the use of our voice as a respected organisation. We co-produce our services, to ensure those with lived experience influence how we work, are as valued as our staff and volunteers and that everyone is supported to develop.



## Our Theory of Change

Our overarching goal

**Building stronger families, because every family has the right to thrive**

What we want  
for familiesThe difference we play a  
part in makingWhat we do  
(examples)Why we  
are needed**Families and poverty**

**Families are not living in poverty**

Social mobility and individual aspirations are increased  
Inequalities are reduced  
Welfare assistance is available for families in crisis  
Affordable, high quality childcare is available for all  
People are supported to be able to work regardless of their background or circumstances  
Families can access enough food regularly and affordably  
People are supported to access education/training and achieve  
Improved employability

- Grants
- Headstart
- National School Breakfast Programme

**Poverty can:**

Reduce life chances  
Increase stress and conflict in a family  
Increase mental and physical health issues  
Affect feelings of stigma

**Family dynamics and safety**

**Families have good quality relationships and are safe**

Improved family relationships and cohesion (where safe)  
Reduced family conflict and aggression  
Reduced family stress  
Individuals understand and can manage personal emotions, behaviour and power dynamics  
Parents/carers understand and can manage children's emotions and behaviour  
Improved understanding of risk  
Improved communication skills  
Families have strong social support network

- Relationship Support and SPIP
- SEND support
- Intensive Family Support

**Poor dynamics and safety can:**

Reduce the efficacy of parenting  
Slow down child development  
Lead to aggression and DVA  
Lead to future family breakdown  
Increase stress in the household

**Families today**

**Families have a bold, strong voice that is heard and supported by society**

Families feel able to discuss their issues openly and are less isolated as a result  
Families feel part of decisions around their support  
Society understands changing needs of families, e.g. through COVID-19, supporting rather than judging them  
Families have improved ability to seek support early, rather than at crisis point  
Family Action has a strong voice, speaking for families when they cannot speak for themselves  
Other agencies understand families' needs and how to provide high quality support

- Family Voices
- FamilyLine
- Influencing

**Societal support can:**

Give families the confidence to share issues and seek help early  
Make sure support changes as families and society changes  
Ensure support is relevant, representative and accessible

**Family and community wellbeing**

**Families are healthy, have good wellbeing and feel connected**

Reduced isolation/loneliness  
Families feel connected with their community  
Communities are resilient  
Communities are better able to support the wellbeing of their members  
Improved personal confidence for children and adults  
Improved personal physical and mental health for children and adults  
Communities are supported to recover from the effects of COVID-19  
Families play an active positive role in their community

- Social Prescribing
- Therapeutic services
- Sexual Abuse services

**Health, wellbeing and connectedness can:**

Enable communities to support families beyond the support available from other agencies  
Break cycles within that community and family

**Families and change**

**Families are resilient through change**

Families and individuals have improved resilience  
Families are prepared for changing situations, both positive and negative  
Families are prepared for new life stages and transitions  
Improved confidence in parenting and child development  
Improved understanding of child developmental needs  
Families benefit from step up/down support as needs change  
Family Action's support adapts to changing needs e.g. COVID-19, digital technology

- Perinatal Support Services
- Adoption and SGO support
- Listening Works

**Changing family situations can:**

Affect people positively and negatively  
Lead to anxiety and stress  
Enable families to be more resilient if they are supported

# Families and poverty

**Family Action has a long history of providing financial and practical support to families. Poverty has been an ever-present issue throughout the 153 years that we have been in operation, and this has only been exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.**

We have therefore continued to develop our grants offers and services that can support with employability and address basic needs. Without these fundamental building blocks, we know it is very hard for families to address other issues in their lives and move forward.

## Survival and Recovery Grants

Thanks to significant and generous funding from Barclays' £100m COVID-19 Community Aid Package, in July 2020, we set up a Survival and Recovery Fund, open to Family Action services and partner organisations across the UK. The Programme gave a grant of up to £1,500 to households where there was severe and multiple disadvantage to help them survive and recover from the COVID-19 crisis. 79% of applicants only started receiving any kind of formal support in their lives after the start of the pandemic, with 69% needing to use a foodbank and 45% experiencing severe isolation.

***This grant has been a saving grace and I can't believe we had this level of support. I genuinely feel like I can breathe again and focus.***

– Grant recipient

## What difference have we made?

The Programme ended in March 2021, by which point:

A total of 2,529 grants had been made, with £2,498,507.18 distributed and an average grant amount of £987.94.

88% of applicants asked for funding for food and essential household items and 61% of applicants used their grant to purchase a laptop or tablet to support their children with school work and/or stay in touch with relatives and friends.

99.45% of grant recipients reported reduced financial pressures, with 96.76% of those reporting that their situation had improved a lot.



Survival and Recovery Grants

**2,529**  
grants made

**£2.49m**  
grants distributed

**£988**  
average grant



## Rebuilding Thriving Local Economies

We are also grateful to Barclays for awarding us funding to distribute a significant financial grant of up to £1,000 to approximately 400 vulnerable households to help them rebuild and thrive following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme started in July 2021 and builds on Barclays' previous support of the Survival and Recovery Grants. The funding aims to intensify support to families and individuals for basics and essentials. The grants are focused on four geographic areas: Bury, Taunton Deane, Kilmarnock and Great Yarmouth. The programme also encourages employability by paying for clothing and equipment for employment, and costs associated with further education.

### What difference have we made?

From October to December 2021, 80% of applicants were receiving Universal Credit and over 90% of applicants reported that the purpose of the grant was to support them to purchase food and other essential household items (including hygiene items), suggesting the grants are enabling families to meet their basic needs

100% of households have reported an improvement in the pressure on their finances and over 99% of households reported the grant improved their situation "a lot".

The project has also helped to improve mental health and wellbeing amongst grant recipients, with 46% reporting reduced feelings of anxiety and stress and 19% stating they had reduced feelings of despair, helplessness or suicidal thoughts.

29% of recipients reported that the grants have helped to improve their access to or engagement in education or training.



reported an improvement in the pressure on their finances



reported the grant improved their situation "a lot".

The project has also helped to improve mental health and wellbeing amongst grant recipients

**46%**  
reduced feelings of anxiety and stress

**19%**  
reduced feelings of despair, helplessness or suicidal thoughts

**29%**  
helped to improve their access to or engagement in education or training

## National School Breakfast Programme

The Government-funded National School Breakfast Programme was launched in March 2018 to ensure children in the most disadvantaged areas of England had access to a healthy breakfast at school, without barrier or stigma. We delivered the original programme in partnership with Magic Breakfast, with the shared belief that no child should sit in their morning lessons too hungry to learn. Since July 2021 Family Action has delivered the National School Breakfast Programme on our own. Evidence shows that a healthy breakfast at school helps provide children with the energy and nutrients they need to thrive – improving concentration, behaviour, attendance, punctuality, wellbeing and educational attainment.



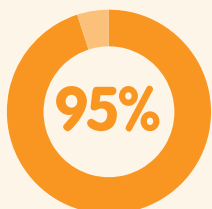
In December 2020, we surveyed schools on how far they had been positively supported on the following issues\*. The percentages reporting that the NSBP was 'important' or 'extremely important' were:



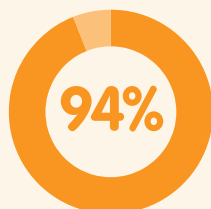
General  
behaviour



Readiness to  
learn at the start  
of the school day



Healthy eating  
habits



Educational  
attainment



Concentration  
in class



Social skills

\*818 schools responded

The National School Breakfast Programme has supported schools throughout the pandemic, with the swift introduction of take-home breakfast packs, which were eagerly taken up by many programme schools. The packs consisted of enough bagels, cereal and porridge for one child for two weeks and schools were provided with guidance on how best to distribute the breakfast packs.

### What difference have we made?

Over 2,400 schools joined the programme (1,812 between March 2018 and March 2020 and a further 650 during the COVID-19 response phase). 375,000 pupils were provided with healthy, daily breakfasts at the peak of the programme. Schools reported a 28% reduction in late marks in a term and 24% reduction in behavioural incidents.

**Our breakfast club at The Forest Academy has so far been a massive success. Each day we have had more students attend than the day before, and the reception from the parents and the school community has been very positive.**

– The Forest Academy, Ilford.

### Key learning and next steps

Since July 2021 we have been recruiting schools on to the new National School Breakfast Programme, sourcing and delivering breakfast food products to schools. The new Programme will support up to 2,500 schools in the period to July 2023 and may be extended further. We are using the learning from the initial programme to drive impact, including:

- The importance of school partner support and challenge for success
- Flexibility from the outset to ensure that the breakfast model chosen is tailored to meet the exact needs of the school, which in turn improves outcomes
- Intelligent promotion in order to improve secondary take-up
- the need for buy in from the whole school and continued engagement



# Family dynamics and safety

**We recognise families in all their shapes, forms and configurations, including acknowledging how family members support each other to function in day to day life. Families need to have strong, safe relationships, and parents and carers need to have the skills to parent well in order for the family to thrive.**

## **'Families at the Frontlines of COVID-19' Report**

In order to make sure that the support we provide is as effective as possible, and to gauge whether there may be any changes in the support needed in the near future, we felt it important to understand the effect of COVID-19 on family relationships. In July 2020, we received funding from the University of Essex's Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) to work with academics at the university. IAAs are block awards made to research organisations by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) with the aim of speeding up the impact of research.

We surveyed over 1,000 people across the country in December 2020 and May 2021, comparing our findings with existing video recordings of family interaction, and found that families have proved resilient in the face of the pandemic. Generally, people felt their relationships with their children were better now than they had been at the beginning of 2020 and were optimistic that their relationships would continue to improve. Despite this broadly positive theme, it was felt by families that the challenges they face are considerable, and they needed additional support and resources to thrive.

In particular, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with children under the age of five reported more serious conflicts with their partners, with

the common areas of stress for all people surveyed being money, followed by schooling and children's behaviour.

Relationships between parents and older children also suffered, with parents of five to 11-year-olds reporting that conflicts with them were significantly more serious throughout this period compared to before COVID-19.

We might assume that spending more time together during the pandemic might reveal more to us about our partner, but most people reported they had not learned anything surprising about their partner during COVID-19. However, for those who did feel they learned something, people commonly reported how surprised they were by the love, strength, support and quality of their relationships, followed by how skilled their partners were at work and household chores. In general, more respondents than not reported that lockdown had allowed their families more quality time together.



**Families feel that the challenges they face are considerable, and they need additional support and resources to thrive**

## Sandwell Helping Hands

Our Sandwell Helping Hands Service supports families who have a child diagnosed with ASD or ADHD (and/or other conditions that result in challenging behaviours), or where they are waiting for a diagnosis. Along with helping parents to develop a better understanding of sensory processing and challenging behaviours, the service aims to increase parents' social networks, improve wellbeing, and to reduce the impact of ASD and ADHD on the whole family.

### The Helping Hands service offers:

- Behaviour support sessions with supporting videos and other resources
- 1:1 support outside of the sessions
- 'The sharing rooms' (in person drop-in sessions before the pandemic, and 1:1 telephone calls with the service co-ordinator and access to an online sharing room during the pandemic)
- Signposting to other agencies and advocacy as needed

An independent evaluation of the service by Apteligen was completed in January 2021 and found that Helping Hands has the potential to transform the lives of families living with ASD or ADHD (or other sensory processing conditions), and to generate longer lasting benefits through knowledge and skills transfer, the development of action plans that are specific to each family, and by supporting a calmer, more confident, and less stressful family environment. There is especially strong evidence that parents feel better equipped to manage behaviour, that they are more confident advocating for their child (especially within school and with healthcare professionals) and more confident in their parenting ability. Parents were also less stressed and worried about the future. There is some promising evidence of a positive impact on wellbeing and the potential for this to be sustainable over the longer term, especially given the lower than population average for wellbeing that parents recorded when they started using the service.

## Emily and Katie

**Emily\*, a mother of three school aged children, came into contact with Helping Hands following a referral from one of her daughter's doctors.**

Katie, who is in primary school, had been diagnosed some years before with a condition that affects her sensory processing.

This caused Katie to struggle with high levels of anxiety, and to demonstrate challenging behaviours including meltdowns that would sometimes last for up to three hours. Emily was struggling with Katie's behaviour and how best to manage her anxiety. She felt isolated and exhausted. She felt that Katie's school wasn't doing enough. She was frustrated and angry and she had started to shut out the outside world.

The Helping Hands service gave Emily a new perspective on how to be a parent for Katie. She learnt about the different strategies she could use to better manage Katie's anxiety and, importantly, to understand why meltdowns happen and what she could do to prevent them. She also got help to talk to Katie's teachers about what they could do to support Katie better at school. Being able to talk to other parents in the sessions was a real lifeline for her too. To know that she wasn't the only one struggling with these behaviours, and to get ideas from the other parents about things to try was really helpful.

Although there are still difficult days, Emily feels much calmer now and more positive about the future.

**\*All names have been changed to protect anonymity.**



**"I can't praise them enough. I wouldn't be here. I was constantly crying. Whereas now, it's totally amazing, totally different. I've put the work in to get where I am, but it has been worth it and I've learnt so much.**

– Emily



# Families today

**One of the key pillars of Family Action's Theory of Change is 'Families Today'. By this we mean continuing to learn as an organisation about what 'family' means to people, the pressures families face, and supporting all families to share their experiences.**

Through our work and research families tell us they often fear others will judge them if they access support, or they feel like others need support more than they do.

We strive to remove stigma and empower families to get support when they need it. We do this by helping society to understand ever-changing family needs, reducing judgement and sharing families' voices through our campaigns, with the aim to ultimately influence policy and funding decisions.

## Family Voices and Influencing

Family Voices is Family Action's overarching campaign, sharing families' experiences and advice to the general public throughout the year through our social media and blog – we have shared 32 stories and 30 support articles during 2021.

In addition to sharing family voices online, we also share their voices and what we learn from our work with professional audiences through wider influencing and membership of a variety of alliances and advisory groups. We have submitted nine responses to consultations, inquiries and reviews during 2021, including the Children's Social Care Review and the DfE review of Behaviour Management Strategies. We are currently members of the advisory group for UCL's FACT-COVID research project and sit on the Policy and Partnerships Forum

for 'Understanding Society', the UK Household longitudinal study. We also regularly contribute to high profile events such as a recent roundtable with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge about children in care and care leavers and we gave oral evidence to the Commission on Young Lives in January 2022.

## What difference have we made?

We have been able to reach more families and professionals with our content, with 5,286 people viewing our stories and 6,296 people viewing the support articles on our blog.

Our written submission to the House of Lords COVID-19 Committee's Inquiry into the long-term impact of the pandemic on parents and families was well-received, and we were asked to give oral evidence to the Inquiry in April 2021, enabling us to share more detail about the issues facing families today. Our oral evidence to the Commission on Young Lives enabled us to speak from our service delivery experience about current issues facing young people, how Family Hubs may need to flex and develop to support this age group, and where there are particular gaps in support, such as the precarious nature of funding for support for care leavers.



Family Voices

**5,286**

people viewing stories

**6,296**

people viewing support articles on the blog

## Creating Happy Memories



Creating Happy Memories is our Summer campaign, encouraging families to connect and make happy memories. In 2021, we focused on resilience, recovery, reconnecting, spending quality time together, health and wellbeing and family pressures.

### What difference did we make?

We created an online activity pack for families to use during the summer holidays, which was downloaded over 5,000 times. Our website to go alongside the campaign had over 10,000 views and 76 letters to editors about the campaign were published in the media. Through our partnership with LV= General Insurance, their employees and suppliers collected 586 toys to donate to the campaign, including picnic items, sports equipment, arts and crafts sets and nature kits. These toys and games supported our services to provide fun and engaging activities for the families they work with.

We chatted live to social media influencer 'Not Your Average Family' about motherhood, parenting and looking forward to summer – reaching her engaged audience of over 12,800 followers with our campaign messages. Presenter and life coach Anna Williamson shared the campaign with her 250,000 Instagram followers.

With the support of KIDLY, we established a Creating Happy Memories Fund, so that families from our services could have quality time together where perhaps they wouldn't normally have this opportunity. 38 grants were distributed, with a total value of £18,300, and families enjoyed lots of different days out including trips to the zoo, trampoline parks, the beach, and doing a teddy bear's picnic.

## Make Theirs Magic



We believe that every family deserves a happy Christmas – it's what our Make Theirs Magic campaign is all about. In 2021, alongside supporting families with guidance and advice on how to tackle seasonal pressures, we also provided support for people to give back to their communities and make new traditions rooted in kindness and understanding through the development of our downloadable 'advent calendar'.

### What difference have we made?

Our advent calendar was downloaded over 1,800 times, and our blogs and website page for the campaign were viewed over 6,000 times.

Our annual Christmas Toy Appeal aims to make Christmas magic for the children we work with by providing them with a gift, when otherwise they might have had nothing. Each year, we receive requests from our services for toys – in 2021 we delivered 8,748 gifts across 67 of our services with support from 66 companies.



**Oh my goodness, thank you so much, it's so kind of you... you couldn't have given him anything better!**

– Parent

### Key learning and next steps

In this coming year we want to empower families to be involved throughout the development of our campaigns, helping us to shape the content so that it is as helpful and accessible as possible. For example, in 2021 we learnt that we need to consider including more video based content for people who would prefer not to have to read everything, and that 'pack' style content was more useful in summer rather than at Christmas because of the different amount of time parents had available to them to engage with the activities.

# Family and community wellbeing

**We are clear that every family is strengthened by being part of a healthy and resilient community. We also understand that for those without traditional family relationships, alternative connections with friends, community members and neighbours can provide this vital kind of support.**

## Staff and volunteer wellbeing

Our staff and volunteers are part of the community in which they work, and we have placed a significant focus on their wellbeing during the pandemic. We are aware our staff are under a lot of pressure as a result of the increased demand for our services, in addition to changes in their own lives and working practices as a result of COVID-19.

We invited staff and volunteers in our services to create happy memories together in local teams, which included events such as picnics, mini golf and escape rooms. In September 2021, we held an all staff virtual development, learning and celebration event with a talk by Paul McGee, one of Europe's leading speakers on the subject of change, resilience, wellbeing, and communication. We have also ensured staff have free access to the Calm app.

## What difference have we made?

We had excellent feedback from the events:

"We all had a great day creating happy memories. We had some laughs, some much needed down time."

"It was lovely to be together and for everyone to meet those who have joined during the pandemic."

"This was an excellent session, thank you to all of the people involved in organising this session. And a big thank you to Paul for being an inspiration!"

We placed 7th best charity and 55th best large company in the Sunday Times 'Best 100 Companies to Work For' lists for 2021. These are achievements that mean a great deal to us and reflect how positively our employees feel about working for Family Action.

## Gardening and food related support

As well as the National School Breakfast Programme, we provide a wide range of other food related support at Family Action, from our allotment in Norfolk, to our network of FOOD clubs across the country. Not only do these services provide people with good quality food at a low cost, they are also key in improving public health through supporting mental wellbeing, reducing social isolation, increasing healthy eating, exploring new foods and increasing shared mealtimes.



**Working outdoors in nature has a calming effect on me. I've achieved a diploma and certificate in Level 2 practical horticulture skills, felt proud of myself achieving this, whilst dealing with depression, anxiety and a toxic relationship.**

- Growing Communities Participant



## Growing Communities

An independent evaluation of our Growing Communities project, which we delivered in partnership with Garden Organic, was completed by Envoy Partnership in 2021. Growing Communities was a specialist community horticulture project in and around Swaffham, Norfolk focused on increasing organic growing knowledge, while tackling problems such as poor health and wellbeing, isolation and exclusion, food poverty, climate and environmental justice, diversity and local skills and employability. The three-year project provided community gardening sessions and team workshops on:

- Traditional and organic growing skillscooking sessions
- Using seasonal organic produce from allotments;
- Shared community spaces; volunteering and support
- Work for vulnerable participants
- Practical and technical training and accredited courses
- Outdoor physical activity in nature.

### Key learning and next steps

Our evaluators recommended that the project could work with local businesses and the government's National Food Strategy review, in generating further awareness, knowledge of the effects, and participation in, community organic growing and therapeutic horticulture.

## What difference have we made?

As participants progressed, their wellbeing scores tended to improve significantly, with many indicators showing at least a doubling in scores.

**980**  
therapeutic horticulture sessions

**350**  
accredited training sessions

**3,550**  
conversations with residents

**Over 4,000**  
hours of participation

## FOOD Clubs

We have continued to deliver Food On Our Doorstep (FOOD) Clubs this year, working with a wide range of partners, funders and suppliers, such as FareShare, the national network of charitable food redistributors. FOOD Clubs support families by providing good-quality food at a low cost, while also reducing food waste. It costs £1 a year for a family to become a member, and once they have joined, members can purchase a bag of food items each week worth approx. £10-£15 for £3.50.

## What difference have we made?

FOOD Clubs mean much more than food to our members and volunteers. Along with a warm welcome, we look for opportunities to offer additional support and activities based on the different needs of our members, such as financial skills, wellbeing, cooking, growing food, nutrition, social eating and local support services. One FOOD club member said:

"It broadens my recipe ideas, it allows us to try healthier options and financially it is a good option, as it means we save on the weekly shop. It has stretched me to try cooking new things."

We surveyed FOOD club users across seven locations in Summer 2021 and, when asked what the FOOD Clubs had helped people to do<sup>2</sup>, 80% of respondents said that the FOOD Club had helped them to save money and 73% said it had helped them to try new food and recipes. The clubs have also helped the environment, by saving approximately 790 tonnes of food from landfill per week throughout 2021. Also in 2021, 200 people accessed volunteering opportunities within FOOD Clubs and members enjoyed over £1million of financial savings.

### Key learning and next steps

We are working with researchers to explore the impact of the FOOD Clubs on families, communities and wider support systems. 95% of those who responded to our Summer 2021 survey question<sup>3</sup> would recommend the FOOD clubs to family and friends. Suggestions for improvement included considering specific dietary requirements, reducing the time taken to queue for food and increasing the variety of food available, which all will be considered as part of future planning.



# Families and change

**We all experience change in our lives but, for some, change - even if positive - can be overwhelming. We work with families to empower them and provide them with opportunities to learn and improve all-round resilience in a way that means they do not become reliant on our support.**

## Listening Works

Family Action's care leavers support line 'Listening Works' was rapidly coproduced during April 2020 in response to the specific challenges faced by care leavers aged 18-27 during the COVID-19 restrictions, such as mental health issues, loneliness and isolation. The service offers practical and emotional support via phone, webchat and text for young adults who were previously Looked After by a local authority. It is open 6pm-midnight, seven days per week and is staffed by trained volunteers, supported by paid supervisors, who are experienced and knowledgeable about being Looked After and leaving care.

## What difference have we made?

Over 80% of callers are seeking support with their emotional wellbeing and mental health. Over 85% of callers have reported feeling calmer or more able to think through their challenges and consider appropriate action at the end of their contact, and 20% of callers have referenced the support as being crucial in reducing the likelihood of a mental health crisis.

## Key learning and next steps

The average length of a contact is 45 minutes and the most common form of contact is webchat with 69% of contacts being made this way. Feedback indicates the experience of not being rushed is important to care leavers as many have reported feeling like a 'burden' to others. Funding for this type of service is something we want to make sure is sustainable, so we have been exploring how this model can work on a subscription basis for Local Authorities.

## 'Family Resilience: The Impact of COVID-19' Report

To launch our three-year partnership with LV= General Insurance, in January 2021 we produced a joint research report on the five pillars of family resilience, in order to understand what had changed for families as a result of COVID-19, and use this to advocate for the support they need. The five pillars are finances, relationships, support networks, physical and mental health, and self-efficacy. The data gathered for this report, based on a survey of 4,000 UK parents, provides a mixed picture, both across the five pillars, and between different families across the UK.



## Listening Works

**85%**  
of callers have reported  
feeling calmer

**85%**  
more able to think through  
their challenges

**Key findings included:**

- One in five parents had experienced financial difficulties during the pandemic, with over one in four expecting their personal finances to get worse during 2021
- Two in five parents said their mental health and wellbeing was worse than a year ago, with a third feeling less confident
- One in 10 – around two million – felt less effective as a parent as a result and 16% said their relationship with their partner had deteriorated

**The learning from the report led to three recommendations:**

- We should encourage people across the country to share the pressures they are facing, in order to provide support for each other and reduce some of the barriers to people seeking wider support.
- We need a societal recovery strategy that focuses on reducing inequalities deepened by COVID-19 and on helping the most vulnerable families in particular.
- We should build on the positive developments from the pandemic, such as digital support offers and initiatives to reduce the digital divide.

**FamilyLine**

We recognise that we all have times when, despite our personal resilience, we just need some trusted information or support quickly, and this is why we provide our free FamilyLine service, which had its third anniversary in January 2022.

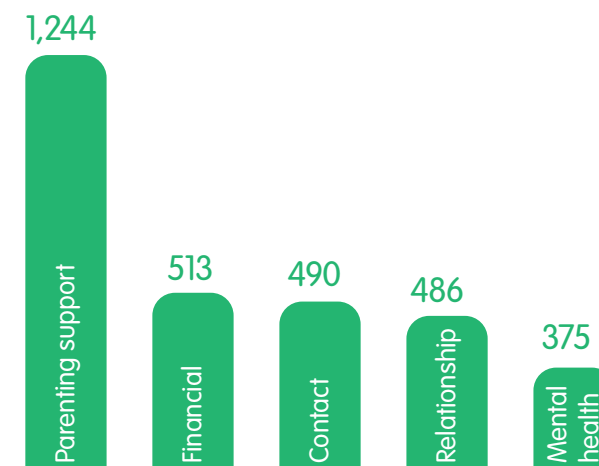
FamilyLine is a free service provided to family members over 18, using a team of trained volunteers with extensive knowledge and experience of family issues to support service users via telephone, text, web chat and email. We are here to provide a listening ear, answer particular parenting questions or help with guidance around more complex family issues. We can also provide longer-term support through regular sessions with our befrienders and counsellors. The service is available Monday to Friday 9am to 9pm. Text crisis support is available outside these hours, including bank holidays and weekends when other support services may be closed.

**Our partnership with LV= General Insurance is supporting FamilyLine in three ways:**

- A financial donation to secure the continuation of the FamilyLine service and growth of new services as families recover from the pandemic
- Volunteering opportunities for their staff to sign up as a FamilyLine volunteer, befriender or mentor
- Fundraising events for their people, as well as matching the money raised

**What difference have we made?**

FamilyLine has continued to see a higher number of contacts made to the service compared to previous years, rising from 8,034 contacts in 2020 to 10,460 in 2021 (an average of 874 contacts a month and a 30% increase). The most common reasons for contacting the service were parenting support, financial issues, contact issues, relationship issues and mental health issues.

**Top 5 reasons for contact 2021****Key learning and next steps**

FamilyLine's most significant challenge is recruiting volunteers for the main FamilyLine helpline. However, the support from LV= General Insurance has eased this pressure and allowed us to streamline our volunteer recruitment. In addition, the insurer's employees also volunteer as befrienders and coaches, which has freed up the time of our Volunteer Coordinators to focus on the recruitment of helpline volunteers, as well as supporting and retaining them.

# Looking forward

**We continue to reflect on how to best deliver support to individuals and families now that COVID-19 restrictions appear to be easing, but we are acutely aware that the pandemic is not yet over and we are also in the midst of a new cost of living crisis.**

We have started a number of new services during the pandemic and expanded others, and we have been working hard to find sustainable sources of funding for those services developed during the pandemic that really need to continue.

## Peterborough Community Engagement Service

We established this new service in 2021, working with Cambridge and Peterborough CCG and Peterborough City Council. The aim of this service is to help people struggling with vaccination hesitancy, as well as any other issues associated with COVID-19. The service works with seven coordinators across the city and links with community centres, the local voluntary sector, faith groups, schools and pre-schools and all the associated activities they run. The focus is currently around testing, isolating, transport and financial support, along with other issues clients may need support with to get back to 'normal' life.

## West Suffolk Neurodevelopmental Support

Our West Suffolk service provides pre, during and post diagnosis support for children and young people aged 0-25 with neurodevelopmental conditions and their families. Support ranges from one-off advice and signposting to family support over a six week period.

## Dorset and Wakefield SENDIAS Services

We launched the Dorset and Wakefield Special Educational Needs and Disability Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) in February and April 2022 respectively. These are both new geographical delivery areas for Family Action. The aims of the services are to:

- Provide a high quality, impartial, accurate and confidential service to children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers to enable them to improve outcomes and achieve their aspirations
- Empower children and young people with SEND and their parents/carers to play an informed and active part in decision making about provision made by education, health and social care and the take up and management of personal budgets
- Contribute to partnership working with SEND children, young people, parents/carers across early years



providers, schools, colleges and other settings through a programme of training and information exchange that focuses on achievement of positive outcomes

- Empower children, young people and their parents/carers to be able to effectively support themselves - promoting resilience, independence and self-advocacy
- Ensure service user views are heard and understood, including through assisting service users to participate in the design and delivery of services, pathways and procedures through agreed local area mechanisms for engagement and co-production, in order to make services more responsive to local needs and aspirations
- Make sure service users understand their rights, roles and responsibilities and have clear, comprehensive, accessible and up to date information about available provision through the Local Offer and how to access it



- Support service users to acquire the skills and knowledge to effectively access services and navigate the SEND system

## Stockton Strategic Partnership for Family Support

We have been delivering a volunteering and outreach service in Stockton since 2018 and were recently awarded a Strategic Partnership. This allows us to build on our strong current service delivery and partnerships locally to support Stockton-On-Tees Borough Council's Children's Services significant transformation programme. The contract will initially run for five years and from April 2022 we have been:

- Delivering and coordinating the Family Time service, including supervision of Family Time assessments and supporting Family Time to be facilitated by extended family, friends and foster carers, utilising a range of community venues
- Delivering low-level family support (outreach) through universal community-based capacity building and identified need for support
- Coordinating volunteer services and innovative approaches to strengthening a volunteer approach within the Strategic Partnership
- Strengthening communities and maximising community assets

## Staffordshire Family Support and Outreach Service

Family Action started delivering this service in April 2022, covering five districts of Staffordshire for a minimum of three years. The Family Support and Outreach Service works within Staffordshire's emerging model for Family Hubs and support the delivery of the Building Resilient

Families and Communities programme. The service:

- Takes a whole-family approach, supporting families to address complex family issues
- Works with others to act as a connector, joining up services around the family to tackle the root causes of these family issues
- Supports parents/carers to develop their parenting skills and enable them to provide a good quality home learning environment from their child's earliest years
- Grows families' ability to manage themselves within their own community and extended support network, so that they feel empowered to manage challenges and take much greater control over their own health and wellbeing







**Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families and brighter lives. We provide innovative and effective services and support to many of the UK's most vulnerable people, helping individuals, families and communities address the challenges they face through practical, emotional and financial support.**

**If you would like to find out more about Family Action's work, please visit our website.**

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