

What is Early Help?

Early Help is about identifying needs within families early; providing preventative support before problems become complex and more intractable and providing the right service at the right time. Services are designed to respond early to tackle issues emerging for children, young people and families at risk of having poor outcomes.

Evidence suggests that an early response is a more effective and more efficient way of delivering services. It is better to provide an intense, focussed intervention when problems first emerge, rather than delivering a more costly statutory intervention when the needs have escalated. The Early Help service aims to reduce the demands upon specialist and higher tier services and ensure children and young people can flourish and not experience harmful long-term consequences.

Early Help does not only mean offering support to very young children. Support may be offered early in life, or early after the emergence of a particular need. Although research shows that the most impact can be made during a child's early years, problems may emerge at any point throughout childhood and adolescence. Therefore services are offered to children and young people and their families aged 0 – 18, or 25 with additional needs.

Brent Early Help Offer

The Brent offer of Early Help reflects the recognition that it is better to identify and deal with problems early rather than to respond when difficulties have become acute and demand action by statutory or more intensive services.

Early Help Services and Teams

Early Help services are provided through separate but integrated teams, which offer more intensive support to those with more complex and high levels of need and less intensive support to families whose needs are just emerging.

- **The Family Solutions Team incorporating the Troubled Families (TF) initiative.** The Family Solutions (BFS) team is part of Brent's Early Help offer. Early Help aims to prevent children and young people from reaching the threshold for child protection whilst also ensuring that any escalating risks of harm are addressed through robust 'step up and step-down' arrangements. The Family Solutions team incorporates the Troubled Families (TF) initiative and has responsibility for implementing the TF programme across the whole Children and Young People (CYP) economy (internal and external). Six teams are based in the community in Family Wellbeing Centres, the final team, the Embedded Team (see below) is based in the Civic Centre.

The team also provides a 'step-down' support to families referred from the Children's Social Care Localities service who no longer require an allocated Social Worker. In addition, families assessed by the team as being at escalated risk of harm are 'stepped up' to Children's Social Care for statutory support services (see step up and step down flowchart).

In addition to the Family Solutions team, Brent's Early Help offer also includes Family Support Assistants (FSAs) based in the Family Wellbeing Centres and work with families with children up to 5 years old, presenting lower levels of need and also facilitating groups. Cases allocated to the FSAs do not have to meet the TF criteria, but all referral must be screened for TF prior to allocation.

Embedded Team – these are a team of experienced Family Support and key workers, based in Social Care teams. A key worker is based in the Brent Family Front Door to facilitate referrals to Family Solutions and other local services. A Family Support Worker is based in the Children's Locality teams and another in the Looked After Children's service, to provide intensive whole family support to improve outcomes for children and their families.

➤ **Accelerated Support Team (AST)**

Formulated partly from the restructure of the Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST), the Accelerated Support team supports families and vulnerable young people on the edge of care. Additionally, the early intervention aspect of the service will support vulnerable young people from progressing to higher level / statutory services and possibly on the edge-of-care level.

The key objective of the team is to divert young people (over the age of 10) from the care system and to enable them to continue to remain with, or return to, their families whenever safe to do so. The AST provides a 12 week intensive intervention in crisis situations if that is needed to avert family breakdown.

The aim of the service is to maintain young people within their family network by providing intensive, evidence-based interventions to prevent them from becoming looked after. The AST provides a dedicated early response that can be mobilised quickly, to support young people and their families who have reached a point of crisis. The service is available during the evening and weekend period to support Brent's vulnerable young people, some of whom may be known to services including Youth Offending, Brent Family Solutions and Social Care. This helps to reduce the escalation of cases through offering access to out-of-hours support and intensive rapid response services, resulting in a reduction in the number of young people going into interim or long term care.

The AST aligns with Brent's contextual safeguarding approach which recognises and responds to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in a range of social contexts (neighbourhoods, schools and online) can feature violence and abuse and parents and carers can have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships, leading to family breakdown. AST practitioners, therefore, need to engage with individuals and sectors who have influence over and within contexts outside the family. The Brent Contextual Safeguarding approach helps practitioners move beyond work with individual young people and families to recognise a) the differential weight of influence that contexts have in shaping the behaviours of young people, b) the impact that settings outside of the family can have on the ability of parents and carers to be protective and c) how best to enhance family relationships and networks to improve safety for young people beyond the boundary of the family/agency. This provision complements the contextual safeguarding work currently being developed by the pan London Rescue and Response service with the police and other partners, which seeks to disrupt crime and remove young people from harm in the community.

In addition to the above, the AST also aligns with the Brent Practice Framework in relation to Signs of Safety, highlighting strengths in families (what is working well), building on those strengths and ensuring an in-depth exploration of family networks in order to achieve safety for vulnerable young people within the community rather than placing them within the care system.

The AST framework provides an amalgamation of the early intervention approach, out of hours support and social work intervention as a wrap-around service which brings together all services involved with a young person in ensuring they are maintained within their family network and ultimately prevented from coming into the care system.

- **The Early Help Panel** is a multidisciplinary panel which consists of representatives from Family Solutions, Health, Education and the Aligned services. The aim of the Panel is to hold robust multi agency discussions about complex families who meet the Troubled Families criteria and ensure that services / resources are targeted at the right level at the right time for Troubled Families.
- **Family Wellbeing Centres (FWC)** form a core part of the Early Help offer in Brent. These have been developed from the Children's Centres, but continue to provide the children's centre offer. The 8 centres aim to promote inclusion for children from 0-18 (25 years with additional needs), their families and carers in a positive environment. The Centres are run and managed by Brent Early Help service, include Granville, Three Trees, St Raphael's, Alperton, Church Lane, Preston Park and Willow (specialist SEND FWC). The remaining 1 Centre is continuing to be managed by the Governing Body of Curzon and Fawood Federation. The network of Centres provide children and families access to integrated, multi-agency support including universal health, homework clubs, police surgeries, dads' programmes, education and employment services, adult learning courses, targeted support for families with multiple needs and much more. The teams include key workers, triage officers, family support Assistants, and early year's workers, who all work in a whole way to improve outcomes for the children and family.
- **Early Support** coordinates care for disabled children from birth to aged five and their families who receive four or more services from multidisciplinary professionals in health, social care, education and the voluntary sector. As part of Early Support, we operate Portage which is a home visiting service for families with children aged 0-4 years with a disability, additional needs or developmental delay. Portage is available for families prior to their child/ren starting nursery or school and supports parents in improving their child/ren's confidence, communication, physical and social skills and learning and development.
- **Willow Family Wellbeing Centre and Nursery** accommodates a high quality special needs nursery that has specific expertise in meeting the needs of young children with additional needs related to disabilities and/or where a child has a Child Protection Plan or Looked After Child Plan. Willow also has a small unit to support children with autism. Willow is developing into a Family Wellbeing Centre with a specialist offer for children of all ages with additional needs.
- **Parenting programmes** are a comprehensive offer of evidence based programmes and interventions that parents can access relevant to the different life stages of their children. Programmes for parents start in the ante-natal period through to adolescence. Parenting support (both on a one to one basis and groups) is offered via the Family Wellbeing Centres, schools and other community venues using a range of evidence based parenting programmes.
- **Aligned Services** - a major part of the Working with Families change programme was the creation of an 'Early Help Aligned Services' team for Brent. The team has professionals from various partner agencies who are matrix managed by a Family Solutions team leader including Job Centre Plus Advisors, Connexions Personal Advisor, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), and DV Perpetrator workers with interventions for both men and women.

- **Youth Offending Service (YOS)** - YOS is comprised of representatives from the local authority, police, National Probation Service, CAMHS, and local service providers. In addition to supporting young people who have offended. To successfully complete court and police ordered youth justice disposals, the YOS offers some non-statutory early interventions and preventative work funded by MOPAC. The YOS principal aims are to:
 - Reduce the likelihood of young people offending or re-offending.
 - Protect children and young people.
 - Protect members of the public.
 - Ensure that sentences are served.

The YOS also focuses on achieving three Youth Justice Outcomes:

- Reduction in youth re-offending.
 - Reduction in the numbers of first time entrants to the justice system.
 - Reduction in the use of youth custody.
- **Education Welfare Service (EWS)** - provides a statutory service when children go missing from education¹. Children who go missing from education may be at risk of abuse or neglect. The EWS provides an outline of systems within the Children and Young People department for identifying and maintaining contact with children missing education and for identifying those at risk of going missing from education. The Service ensures that Brent Council meets its statutory duties relating to establishing the identities of children in their area who are not receiving a suitable education and the education and safeguarding and welfare of children more generally.

Children missing from education are (a) children of compulsory school age who are not on a school roll, and who are not receiving a suitable education otherwise than being at school and; (b) children on roll at a school whose whereabouts are unknown.

² It has regard to Equalities Act 2010, Children Act 2004 and section 436A of Education Act 1996 updated in Section 4 Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The EWS aims to secure the safeguarding of children and young people by ensuring that fewer drop out of the system and those that do are located, drawn back in, and re-engaged more effectively. All schools (maintained, academies and independent) have a safeguarding duty regarding their pupils, and as part of this should investigate any unexplained absences. The school has a duty to make a referral to the EWS.

The principal aims of the service are:

- Ensuring all children who are registered at school or alternative provision attend regularly and that cases of poor attendance are followed up as quickly as possible;
- Ensuring that immediate steps are put in place to try to locate children who go missing from school in Brent;
- Following up on cases of children who are found without any educational provision;
- Maintaining a database of children who appear to be missing from education
- Working closely with other local authorities to locate children who appear to be missing;
- Being alert to any potential safeguarding concerns and dealing with them effectively.
- Providing services that include child employment/performance licences and chaperone licences and being the Education Welfare Officer for Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils

- and chaperone licences and being the Education Welfare Officer for Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils

➤ **The Early Help Assessment (EHA)**

The Early Help Assessment (EHA), which replaced the Common Assessment Framework, is a multi-agency referral and assessment form that supports identification of needs within a family when they first arise. The EHA supports improvement of the families' situation via targeted, effective evidenced based early interventions and multi-agency support for the whole family. Families are required to give consent for the sharing of information between agencies to facilitate multi-agency working.

Integral to this process is a Signs of Safety approach which is embedded across the Early Help pathway. The EHA also screens families to determine if they meet the Troubled Families criteria to support with the identification and claiming of families that are eligible for the programme.

Referrals to the Early Help Family Solutions service are received via the Brent Family Front Door (BFFD) and are triaged to determine threshold and then signposted on to the most appropriate support service. This ensures that families receive the right help, at the right time, and as quickly as possible.

The Early Help pathway aims to prevent children and young people from reaching the threshold for child protection whilst also ensuring that any escalating risks of harm are addressed through robust 'step-up and step-down' arrangements. There are clear processes in place for stepping cases up and down the continuum of need and risk.

➤ **The Troubled Families Programme**

The Brent Family Solutions Team receives referrals for, and carries out work with a broad range of families with complex needs. All these families fall within Brent's cohort of the Government's 'Troubled Families' programme. The Troubled Families (TF) Programme is a national initiative that started in 2012. Brent Council Has a 100% track record in achieving "sustained and significant" progress for all the families identified as meeting the criteria. The government is reviewing the programme currently and indicated that it will continue until 2024, subject the agreement in the Spending Review.

Families open to other services within CYP including Localities or LAC and Permanency can be identified as TF at any stage in the referral, assessment or intervention process. If the TF identification is not completed while a case is triaged at the BFFD, then it can be nominated by the allocated worker at any stage. The allocated worker just needs to complete a nomination form and e mail it to the data team. This has to be done prior to stepping down cases to Family Solutions.

- Parents and children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
- Children who have not been attending school regularly (including those at risk of and being excluded from school)
- Children who need help
- Adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness
- Families affected by domestic violence and abuse
- Parents and children with a range of health problems