



Connecting Hub deliverers and policy makers as we develop the Family Hubs model across the UK

First newsletter of the Family Hubs Network

In this first edition, we're sharing our vision for the Family Hubs Network and reporting from our Virtual Roundtables with Network members about the current Covid-19 crisis and evaluation of Family Hubs.

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Family Hubs

Centres which enhance integrated working by enabling easier access to help and better outcomes for families; more effective service delivery; and smarter use of budgets

Why have we set up a Family Hubs Network?

Family Hubs are spreading across the UK: the Family Hubs Network aims to support this growth and share current good practice.

For providers and commissioners by:

- Mapping out where services and programmes are provided - by, for and with whom
- Facilitating service providers to share good practice through newsletters and events
- Building relationships with service providers to learn what works

For policy makers by:

- Demonstrating the impact of delivering in a Family Hub model
- Representing the momentum and support that is gathering for Hubs
- Explaining to government the benefits of moving to Hubs to improve family support

This Government has promised to champion Family Hubs¹ and the Network aims to work with all relevant Departments to help them fulfil this commitment.

¹Conservative Party Manifesto, December 2019

“Family Hubs is an idea whose time has come.”

Steve Walker, former Director of Children's Services, Leeds City Council

Our Virtual Roundtables

In March when Covid-19 lockdown was looming, we swiftly switched our plans for a Family Hubs Conference & Fair to a series of Virtual Roundtables. These gave us a fantastic opportunity to hear how Family Hubs were rising to the unprecedented challenges of the majority of families being required to stay behind closed doors.

We held seven one-hour virtual roundtable discussions between 23rd March and 6th April 2020, with a range of partners delivering Family Hubs across England.

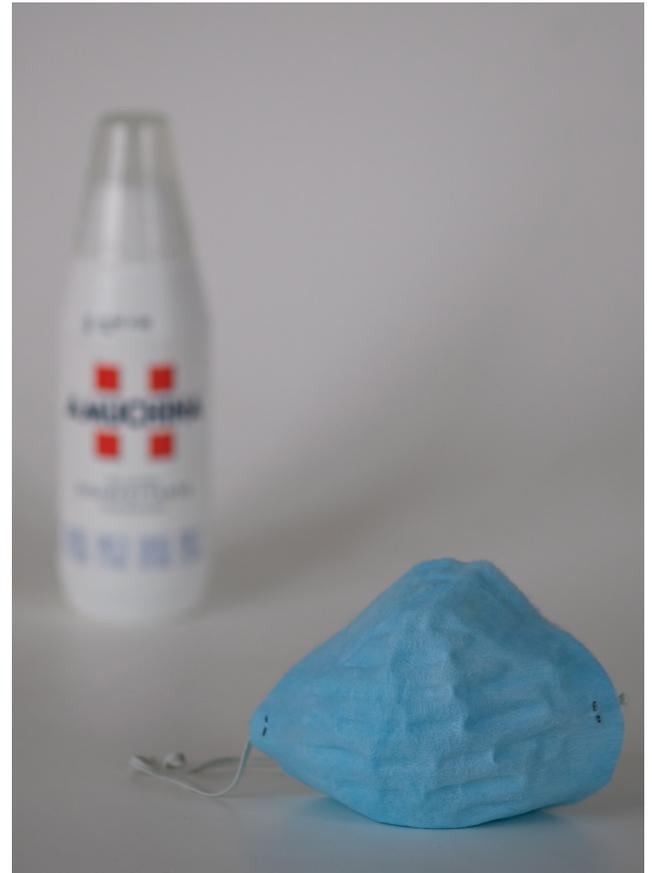
Our 35 participants represented the following organisations:

Action for Children, Barnardos, Changing Futures North East, Children's Commissioner for England, Connected Lives, Department for Work and Pensions (Reducing Parental Conflict), Doncaster Council, Essex County Council, Family Support, Fegans, Kensington & Chelsea London Borough Council, Kirklees Council, Manifesto to Strengthen Families, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (The Troubled Families Programme), Newcastle University, Rochdale Borough Council, Soulmates Academy, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, The National Parenting Initiative, Triple P, Virgin Care, Westminster City Council, Yeovil4Family

Family Hubs on the Frontline: responding to Covid-19

Working together in a well-integrated way is at the heart of the Family Hub operation and, in a time of crisis, this is serving communities well.

Organisations are responding quickly, nimbly and relatively comfortably to new challenges; working relationships and communication channels already exist; information sharing and joint problem solving are already practised.



For example, although parents can no longer simply walk in, Family Hubs have been quickly repurposed as an alternative venue for maternity appointments and food distribution.

"Because of the way we already work in partnership, we have the flexibility to do things differently and respond very quickly"

"Family Hubs have made our response easier – collectively, collaboratively... it's about corralling everyone together to work around similar objectives"

"We're working as usual but in a very different way."

The box below describes some of the new digital ways of working which Hub staff have enthusiastically embraced:

Digital solutions during lockdown

- New communication practices: with face-to-face contact limited to high-risk families, phone and video calls are becoming the main form of communication, including Skype, FaceTime and WhatsApp. Guidelines on permissions and contact record keeping have been challenging, prompting some pragmatic relaxation during this emergency.
- Remote programme delivery: where a small group format (such as for parenting support) has had to cease, remote alternatives are quickly being adopted. One-to-one video calls, group video conferencing and/or online resources have been welcomed although concerns have arisen about families' and practitioners' privacy and risk to vulnerable participants. Webinars are also being used to support and coach practitioners.
- Improved information online: using established websites more effectively, adding more resources and links to other online services.

"We're finally using the Family Information Service website for what it was intended."

- Reaching the community via social media: working with existing community groups on social media to reach and engage with people offering or needing help.
- Hub deliverers are energised by the long-term possibilities resulting from this unexpected period of accelerated innovation which might achieve better outcomes in normal times. Young people often respond better to contact by message or video call. Parents may be more likely to complete programmes which can be accessed from home, accompanied by virtual or phone-based mentoring.

Because Family Hubs offer support for the whole family, and are not just concerned about young children, their staff have long-term trusted relationships with families and are seen as a source of wider support. Family Hubs are the first port of call for many in this crisis and are the place where families feel most able to confide their fears and concerns.

"I have known some of the teenagers we work with since they were babies."

Integrated working across delivery sites means closure of individual sites during the crisis poses less of a challenge than with a single-site approach. Families are aware of other partner sites and as well as phone and online access points.

Family Hubs involve local authority partnerships with voluntary (and private sector) organisations which provide informal support in and through the community. New volunteers are coming forward (presenting some DBS checking challenges). When practitioners are unable to visit to some families, volunteers in the community can be valuable "eyes and ears". The benefits of a neighbourly relationship - more informal, more present - have wider potential in the longer term.

"In the local community, people often know the families that need looking out for...We need a community conversation about who needs watching out, who is reaching out and contacting these families. If you have a hub network already, it's a lot easier to do that."

The crisis is driving experimentation and innovation on a large scale, which can drive improvement and better outcomes in the future.

“Necessity seems to be the mother of invention.”

“Does the rule book even exist anymore?”

“When this is all over, we’ll have a new-found respect for each other because we’ve pulled together in an emergency. Why would we go back?”

Evaluating Family Hubs

In the budget, the Chancellor committed £2.5million

“...for research and developing best practice around the integration of services for families, including family hubs, and how best to support vulnerable children.”

The Family Hubs Network wants to work with the Government to help them deploy these funds as effectively as possible, so this was a key theme of the Virtual Roundtables.

A substantial body of evidence already makes the case for integrated working and underlies, for example, the Trouble Families Programme. Many of the programmes and activities that are delivered from or based in Hubs are also grounded in evidence. All this needs to be supplemented by evaluations determining if and how integrated working is improved by Family Hubs and the impact that Hubs have on practice, outcomes and value for money. Evaluations based on the “theory of change” which the Hub is working to are likely to be workable and yield valuable information for policy-makers.

“We have practice informed-evidence which matters in this space. It’s not just about evidence-informed practice but practice-informed evidence.”

“Every hub is different and operates in a different way so you can’t do Randomised Control Trials. We look at Theory of Change based on that organisation. We do a particular evaluation which suits that organisation and collect qual and quant evidence. Our bar is very high.”
(University of Newcastle)

Family Hubs need to be evaluated to identify desired benefits such as:

- Better access to help for families
- Better outcomes for children
- Enhanced effectiveness of professionals’ and others’ work with families
- Improved financial effectiveness

Participants also emphasised the need for an agreed outcomes framework to which all Hubs could work.

“We have a Children’s Centres framework for outcomes and we use this to rate integration. Could we have a Family Hubs framework? People would want to use it.”

Specific measures might include:

- Cases where early intervention has avoided referral to statutory services
- How shared outcome planning can improve efficiencies
- Impact of professionals working in partnership to review and help families
- Extent to which Family Hubs meet a whole family’s needs
- Satisfaction ratings amongst local families
- Financial savings from adopting a Family Hubs model