

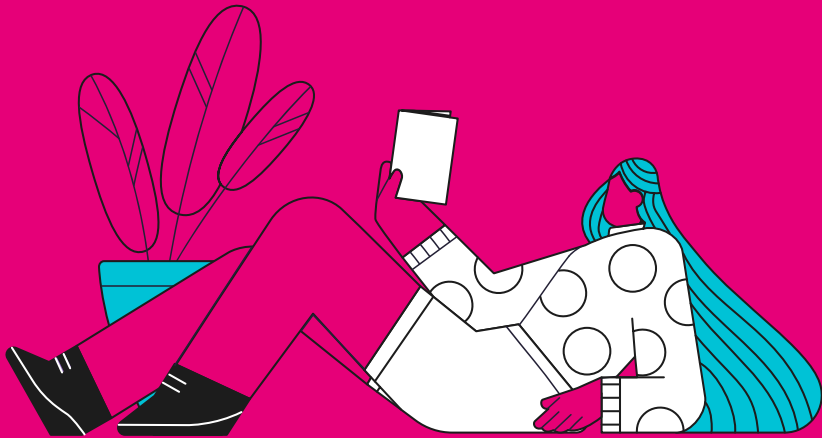
CAPACITY

Making Public Services
People Services



TRANSFORMING EARLY HELP IN WIRRAL.

The start of the Family Toolbox story.



Project Overview Spring 2022

Imagine you're ripping it up and starting again, **what could we do differently?**"

Elizabeth Hartley,
Director of Early Help, WMBC



As soon as someone said to me "I think it would be worth considering a 'Team Around the Family' for you." I felt the blood drain from my face. I was scared even though I knew that it was supposed to be helpful, **I felt like she thought I couldn't cope."**

Alison
Parent

⁴ The story so far...

A drop of

 **30%**

in demand for children's social care work (within 24 months)

Over

500  **hours**

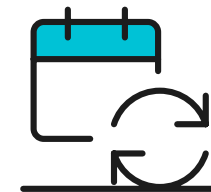
organisational development and 'new model' readiness support to third sector orgs

Clicks through to

19k 

pages of content via the digital tool (within five weeks of initial launch)

A new Early Help Alliance



9 years
in length



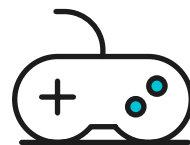
We've listened to 450 families. We spent time getting underneath the challenges they are facing and the opportunities they see for positive change. We'll be keeping this at the heart of the approach going forwards – allowing families to feedback, explain and share continually.



We've supported meaningful change in 'system culture'; challenging established, yet low impact ways of working. By embracing radical thinking and positively encouraging leaders who are creative, we're moving away from Capacity's banned phrase 'but we've always done it that way'.



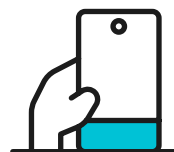
We've moved the focus away from families' needs and towards their strengths removing the automatic approach to go straight into 'we need to offer a service' mode. By supporting Wirral MBC to work more closely with the community, a rich network of partners are now working alongside families, listening closely to what they need and want.



We've transformed how support is delivered by putting families in control, enabled by a very positive attitude from Wirral MBC to remove criteria, thresholds and referrals and allow families to direct their own journey.



We've enabled a cross-borough partnership approach through a joint commitment that moves away from duplication and the focus on 'chasing funding'. This has reduced 'service overwhelm' for families and allows them to find great services through the new Family Toolbox digital tool.



We've co-designed a communications and brand feel that isn't about 'fixing' families but about energizing them - transforming how we speak and how we offer support. *"This doesn't feel like the council, it feels like a community of people in a similar situation"* Jay, Parent.



We've found ways to attract additional funding. To date this has resulted in over £35,000 in grants to small, grassroots organisations and securing £130k to test referral-free Family Coaching (working with over 400 families to discover their many strengths).

8 The background to the challenge at hand



In 2016, we didn't get the OFSTED result the Council wanted – it was found inadequate. I read the report, and it was really concerning, I remember it as a key moment – a time where I thought 'we've got to do this differently, we've got to rethink this'. We then went into this phase over the next two years, really it was a kneejerk reaction, but it focused on this idea that 'Children's Services need to do everything'. Of course, this really disempowered partner organisations and families. It all became about clear processes and tracking every decision. We weren't speaking to the families, instead we'd speak to all the organisations involved and create action lists of everything that needed to be done - all the services for each family member. That's just not what people wanted or need, they need to feel inspired and empowered. But of course, it is an understandable reaction, it felt like Early Help needed to justify itself – we'd lost trust in the system and as a result the role of community organisations became lost."

Elizabeth Hartley,
Assistant Director for Early Help



definition

What is Early Help?

wat / iz / urly / he-lp

Early Help means taking action to support a child, young person or their family as soon as a problem emerges. It can be required at any stage in a child's life, from pre-birth to adolescence, and applies to any problem or need that the family can't deal with alone.

**Wirral Safeguarding Children's
Partnership definition, 2021.**

10 In early 2019, the Capacity team sat down with Wirral Council's Early Help leads to kick-off a new project to truly shift how the borough approached support for local families.

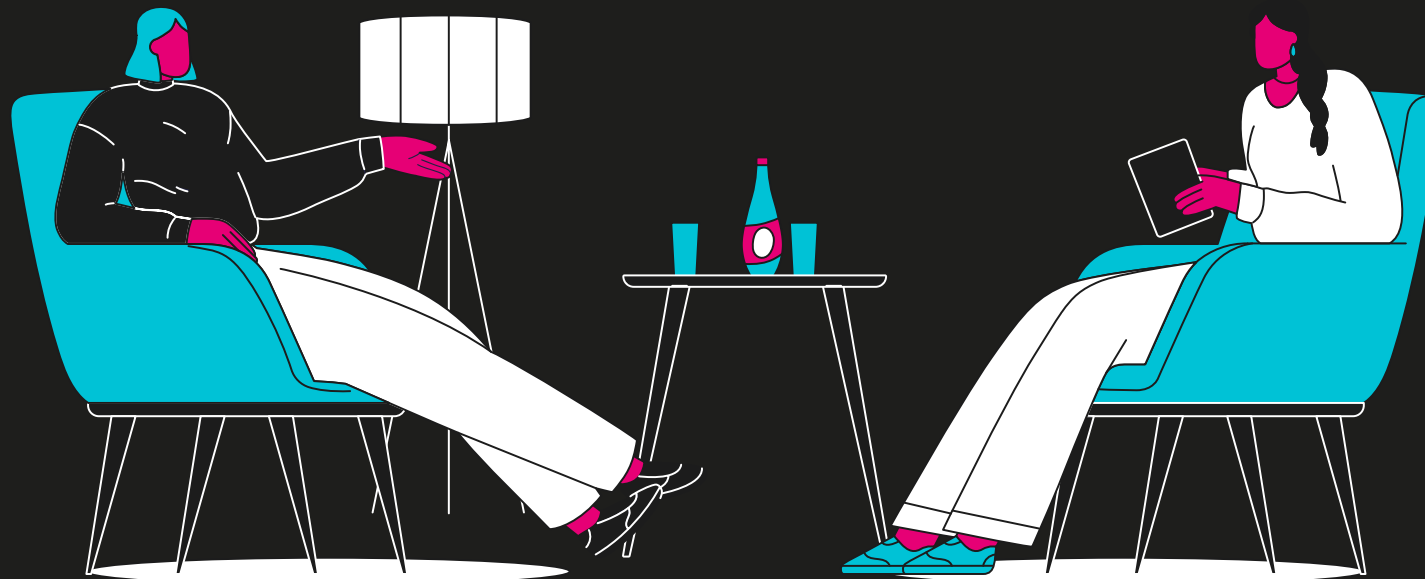
As we started work, an interim programme of support was in place – delivered by a brilliant network of third sector organisations, doing amazing new things. From the outset we wanted to support them to be the best providers they could be, asking them to help steer our project as we tested out new approaches. This initial project, called 'Community Matters', was a strand of Early Help and had been setup earlier that year, at its core was a key insight - a knock on the door from a Social Worker is not what many parents want or need when family life is becoming difficult.

Initially the team at Wirral asked us to complete a piece of work alongside families, communities and their own colleagues. Together, we wanted to start by understanding the real needs of local people and to put this at the heart of a complete redesign of their approach. This was driven by a desire to refocus the work of the Children's Services department and place more weight on supporting families as early as possible.

Led by Assistant Director for Early Help, Elizabeth Hartley, the vision was to focus not on doing things 'to' families but on moving the power into their hands.

“
We didn't just want an improved version of what we had – that's why we didn't involve professionals in the first year because that's what we'd have ended up with - everyone's wedded to **'they're good at what they do or they're not'** and that's the problem. Getting people to realise when parents have a bad experience - we all own that.”

Elizabeth Hartley,
Assistant Director for Early Help



Hang on a tick, who are Capacity?

So, before you hear this story, you probably want to know who Capacity are, so here's a quick introduction to us...

It's no secret that the public and third sectors are facing some tough internal and external challenges, and we need big ideas and brave leaders to tackle them. That's where Capacity comes in. We provide the know-how, big-picture thinking, and hands-on time to get moving on the projects that really matter: the ones that make the biggest impact on the lives of everyday people. In other words, you might call us a 'do-tank'. Unlike a think-tank, we also go on to do the stuff we've thought about.

We want the North West to be the best place to grow-up, grow-wise and grow-old. **If we do this well, public services will work for every person, every time. And as for us? Well, we'll be out of job.**

CAPACITY

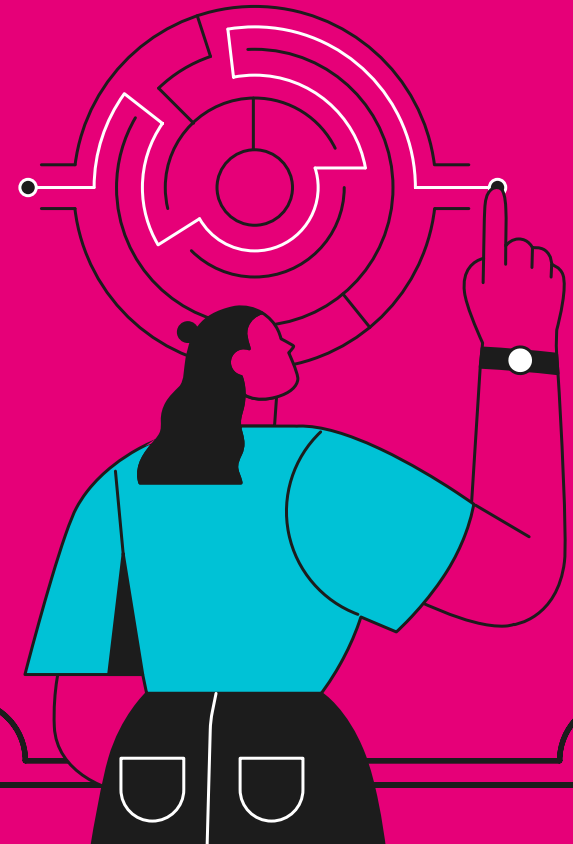
**Making Public Services
People Services**



Chapter one:

Where we started

Talking to and learning from
the families and Third Sector
organisations of Wirral.



16 What did the data tell us?

Like any good project, we started by finding out more about the background to the project - the core data and information that was being used to design early iterations of Early Help services. As we dug deeper into the local context it became clear that the picture for Wirral's children and families is mixed.

Around

16%

school-aged children have special educational needs

Nearly

1 in 5

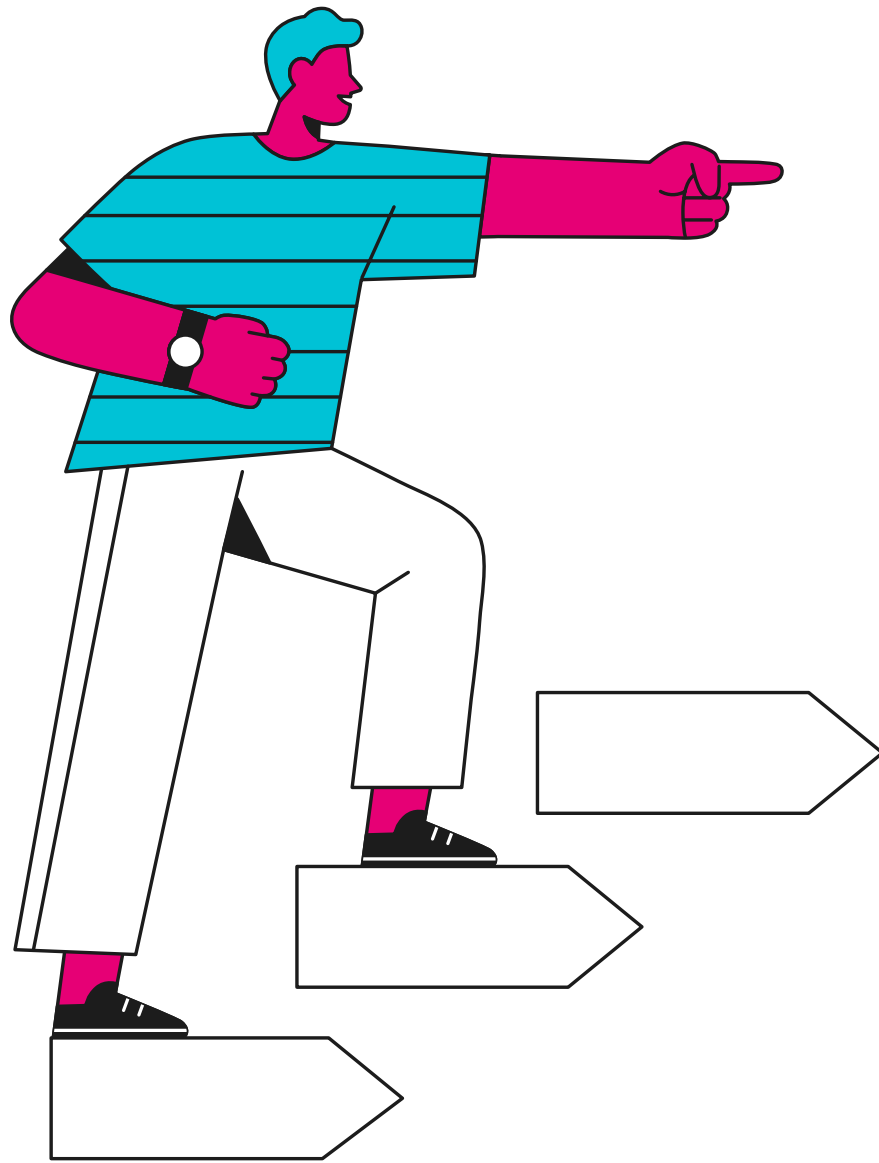
children and young people were living in **poverty**

The numbers of referrals for Children's Services support across the borough (both social care and Early Help) was **growing year on year**.

The data told us that the **main reasons for referrals into Early Help included managing children's behaviour, child mental health and issues with parenting skills**.

However, this overview wasn't enough, we wanted to know more and understand what life for diverse families in Wirral was really like. Data can only ever tell part of the story and if we wanted to design services effectively, we needed to listen closely to the experiences and insights of local people. When it comes to what's really needed thrive, families know best, so...**over the course of 6 months, we went on to speak to over 450 children, young people, parents, carers, guardians and professionals**.





Getting the third sector 'change-ready'

In parallel to our discovery work around families' stories, we wanted to immerse ourselves into the dynamics of Local Authority and Third Sector relationships. We wanted to find out what needed to happen to get this connection into the best possible position. In the process, this allowed us to support these organisations to strengthen their offer. We went on to support them to develop in key areas such as business planning, financial planning and fundraising, leadership development, impact and evaluation and marketing.

We shared a belief with Wirral MBC that ensuring small, local organisations continued to play a significant role in the future delivery of Early Help services was key to improving outcomes for children and families.

To access our support, we asked third sector organisations across Wirral to take part in a selection process looking at:



the impact, or potential impact, of their work in relation to Early Help



their financial sustainability



their appetite for change and openness to share organisational strengths and difficulties



their enthusiasm to commit to the support programme for at least six months



the help we felt we could offer around their development needs

20 From this we selected 6 organisations to support over an 18-month period, offering a minimum of 60 hours each to focus on their own individual development needs.



Using an array of third sector operational experience from Capacity's team (including finance, communications, strategic planning, service design and impact), we identified gaps and opportunities and supplemented this support through Lottery funding, increasing the time and resource available.

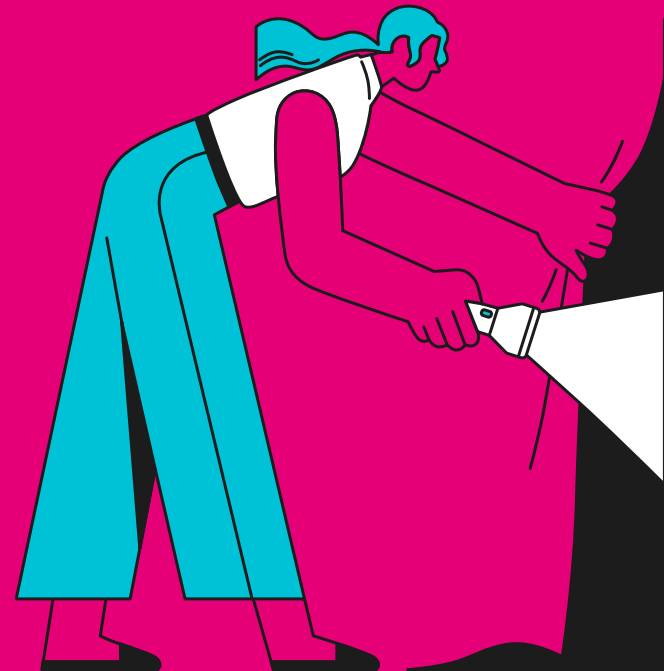
During this period, we also worked with Wirral MBC's Procurement & Commissioning teams to bring about internal changes that would maximise the number of third sector who secure Local Authority contracts.



Chapter two:

What we discovered

Working out what was at the
heart of these family's stories.



24 What families told us

The loudest voices for us were those of families living these challenges day in, day out, and it became very clear, very quickly that they didn't want 'traditional services'.

“
Take on board the reality of my situation without being overwhelmed or referring me on.”

Tony, Parent

Every positive moment they spoke about had one thing in common - **when they spoke about the wonderful support, they'd received they didn't describe programmes or pathways, they described people.**

“
Just having adult company is support enough sometimes. Having a baby can be the loneliest time.”

Jen, Parent

They told us what worked for them and what didn't and gave us and feel for where Early Help was starting from, and more importantly where families wanted it to end up.

What Early Help felt like at the start...	What people wanted in the future...
Disconnected/fractured across the borough	Collaborative working and great communication across a united team of partner organisations.
An intervention	A shared set of behaviours and actions across Wirral that nurtures supportive relationships.
Something certain families were asked to do	Something all families choose to do.
Dictated by referrals and thresholds	Self-directed and referral-free.
Focussed on transactions and outputs	Empowering whole families to achieve lasting change.
Process heavy	Streamlined and 'possibility focussed'.
Defined by professionals	Led by families.

“
Ultimately, we need to establish a culture driven by open-mindedness, fairness, and approachability so that every touchpoint with the new approach feels like it's part of something bigger. Whatever logo is on someone's ID badge (public, private or third sector) the experience should feel the same for families; it should feel like it's being offered by a 'trusted friend' rather than 'fixer'.”

26 When we explored the key challenges Wirral's families faced, we could see that they were often a symptom of other underlying issues that they are facing at home.

Parents went on to identify the key challenges they were facing, and four key themes came out very strongly*. Areas of their lives where they've struggled to access more informal support that could have made the difference for their family earlier, things that could have stopped problems getting worse:



Mental health advice, guidance and support for the whole family - both adults and children



Addressing social isolation and connecting families together to support one another



Support and skills development around managing change and key life transitions for them and their children



More opportunities, and more variety in how they can support their children where they experience additional needs

“
Help around me that doesn't look or feel like a statutory service: fear-free, delivered by someone I can develop a personal relationship with, in an environment where I am comfortable and welcome.”

Anonymous, Parent

This information was backed up far and wide, across the borough, across age groups and across needs. **We knew the gaps, now we had to find a way to fill them, a way that wasn't just about the 'what' but a way that absolutely focused on the 'how'.**



* Read the full 'Why Community Matters' insights report here.

28 What third sector organisations told us

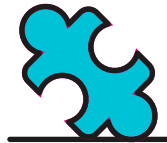
Each of the leaders we worked with described how they'd benefited from the support of Capacity at both an organisational and personal level. It gave many CEOs a critical friend as well as additional resource, giving them time to reflect on what was going well and what could be improved.



So, what did this tell us about the support they would need within the new model?



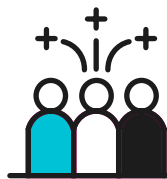
The approach needs to work in real-time – it needs to **flexible and creative; it must evolve as it goes along** to keep a diverse group of organisations and families engaged. 'You can't prescribe in advance what will be needed'.



People are the most important part of this puzzle; we need to work on relationships across the board. **Collaboration is an outcome, not an input**; we need trust to make this happen. Professionals don't always get it right; we need honesty and openness when things go wrong and a culture of learning together.



The need for a **consistent point of contact in the LA who had access to information about process, data, resources etc**, someone who had capacity to be on call to address these needs for professionals as they arose.



We can't underestimate the importance of local passion and understanding for what is needed and the function to coordinate such a pilot should not be underestimated. **A central organisation or team which sits independently from the Council could provide such support to partners.**



The ongoing involvement of parents and young people is key, **at the heart there needs to be a learning environment where growth and ideas are encouraged - we need to have flexible funding and constant feedback loops.** This shift in ways of working will take time, and we should be prepared for a period of transition to embed these processes and values.

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To make sure this new way of working is here to stay, the new approach must have a clear funding, leadership, and ownership structure to it. We believe we're on the way to creating a very exciting, very forward-thinking way of doing things, so we need to make sure this new approach is given time, **so that people can settle into new ways of working.** In addition, the way we approach funding across the new approach needs opening up and we need to find better ways to get money to the front line. **We need to make sure that procurement becomes a facilitator of what families want from the new approach, rather than the driver.**

“
Taking time to do stuff properly and meaningfully is worthwhile. It'll take much longer **but what you get is much more meaningful.** Trust families, they are more than capable of knowing what they need, shaping things designing things and making things happen. With partners bringing the right values, hearts, hopes, fears to things. **Feeling like you can share that responsibility.**”

Elizabeth Hartley

Chapter three:

What we've been doing

Getting our hands dirty and
getting on with the 'doing'.

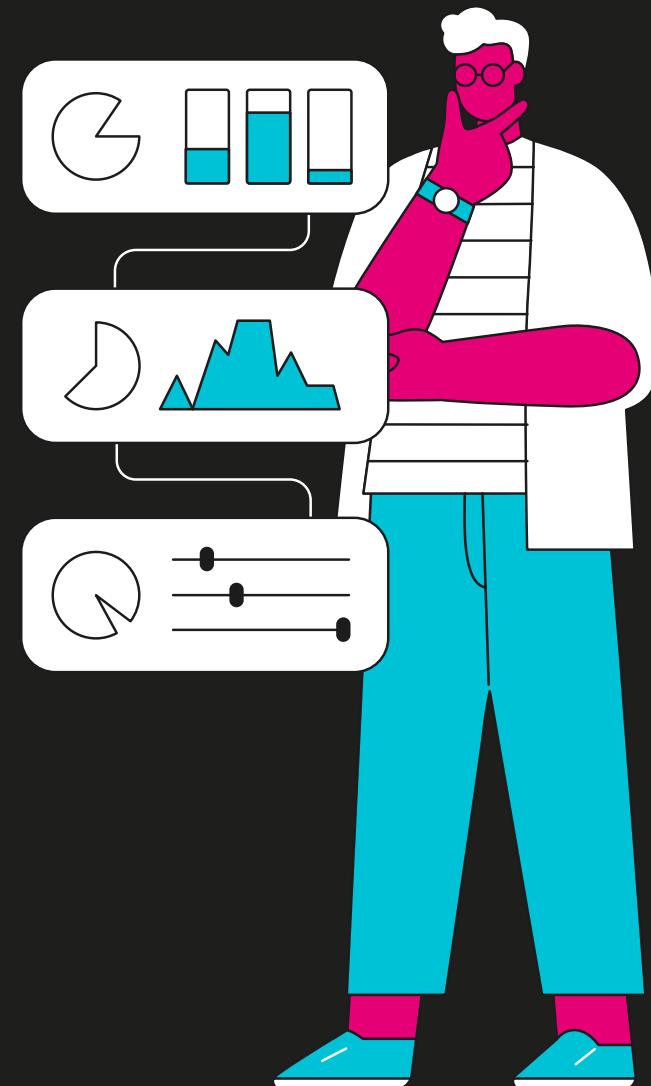


34 As an organisation, we pride ourselves in not just doing the 'finding out' but also acting, we've been described by clients as a 'do-tank', not creating a report and walking away, but supporting our clients to then act on these insights.

The last few years have tested us all, and trying to bring about transformational change during a global pandemic is not easy. However, we're proud to say we've made great things happen on the back of that report and have built some solid foundations for the next stages of the project.

Over the last two years we've:

- 1. Worked with families to explore different ways for them to find support**, including family coaching and hyper-local grant giving.
- 2. Built the capacity of high impact, third sector, 'Early Help' organisations**, helping them to identify their strengths, their areas of weaknesses and working on them together.
- 3. Tested ideas and kept listening**, asking is this right? Might this help? What else should we be thinking about?
- 4. Secured additional funding** for pilots to be delivered by our third sector partners.
- 5. Challenged internal Council** ways of working to find approaches that gave third sector partners more trust & flexibility through an Alliance contracting model.
- 6. Trialled collective impact tools** to understand what's really changing as a result.
- 7. Transformed how we speak to and offer support for families**, developing a new family-facing brand and communications campaign to make the support offer more welcoming.
- 8. Supported the wind down of more traditional referral pathways**, exploring different opportunities for families to engage that put them in the driving seat.
- 9. Built strong partnerships across sectors** and a joint commitment to shared learning.



Time will tell us how successful these pieces of work go on to be, but as things stand dropping numbers of 'Looked After Children' and increasing Early Help work in Wirral shows us that we're on the right track.

A Pilot in Action: Wirral Family Coaching

In 2020 Capacity supported the Community Matters Alliance to deliver a Lottery Funded pilot of Family coaching. This coaching is all about encouraging a family member to think about the challenges they're facing and to find ways through them. This team of coaches were all been trained up (adding to their existing skillset) to take on this role, and, because they're local they could support families to find out about other things going on across Wirral.

Over the course of 18 months:

1. 478 received coaching support
2. 90% felt empowered by coaching
3. 86% felt inspired
4. 81% felt more connected to others
5. 84% felt their whole family benefitted
6. 92% felt it was easy to access
7. 90% achieved their goal or felt more confident that they could achieve it

“She helped me to start thinking about things properly and about looking after myself - everything felt a million miles away and feeling how I was it was really hard to think to the future - **she helped me change my mindset on that.**”

Steph, Parent

Don't take our word for it – listen to families themselves.

Use your phone camera to hover over the code below (a web link should magically pop up).



Enter stage right... The Family Toolbox.

The combined result of all this work was the April 2022 launch of an approach called the 'Family Toolbox Alliance'. This Alliance is made up of a group of 7 third-sector organisations who (alongside Wirral MBC) wanted to promote an earlier, more family-centred range of support. Having listened to families and local organisations and then reflected on the need for flexibility, stability, and a relational approach to working, we knew we needed to make a radical change. **This wasn't necessarily about the types of support available, but about the way they delivered and commissioned.**

The Founding members of the Family Toolbox Alliance:



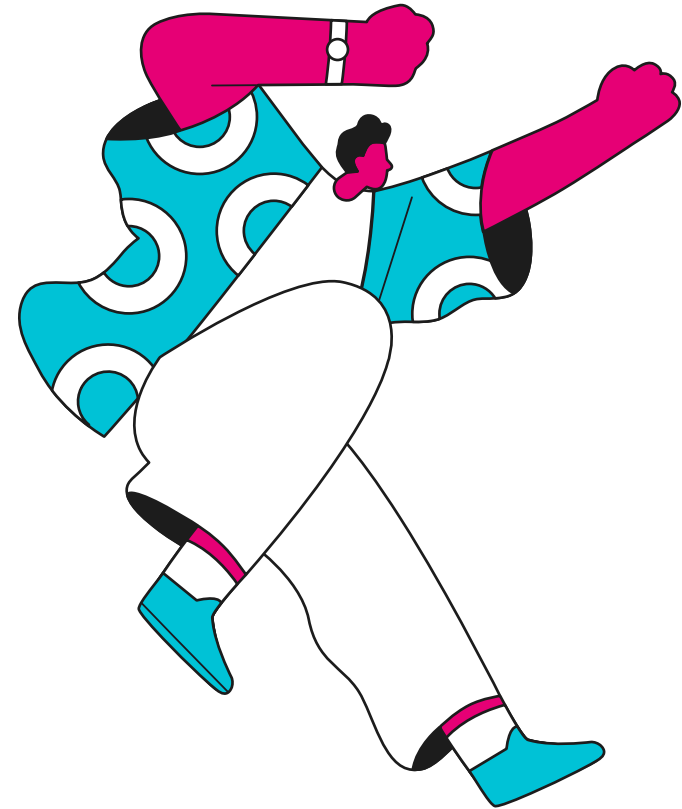
This required a longer-term commitment to make change, resulting in us working with the Council to ensure the model was commissioned as a **5-9 year contract, giving everyone a chance to truly test the approach.**

Alongside the core Alliance the Capacity team have worked with families to **design, develop and launch a unique digital support tool - the Family Toolbox website.** Its purpose is to allow families to find tips and tools quickly - ways to approach their challenges, and, if they feel they need to, find and access appropriate, local support afterwards. This site also allows families to create accounts where they can flag content they like, record their goals and progress against them, and collect badges for the work they've been doing through the tool.





We've wrapped this together with a **new awareness building campaign, rebranding it as 'Family Toolbox'** (a name proposed by a parent and voted for by families). As opposed to 'fixing families', this name gives a much stronger feel of putting the power in families' hands and giving them the tools to help themselves. It sits at the heart of creating an empowering and engaging experience using **the brand as a membership mark** that shows which organisations are involved are how they're tied together around this shared ambition.



“
Family Toolbox sounds like you're given ways to cope and change things that you're struggling with - more about you being in control.”

Gemma, Parent

To align with this new way of thinking the core values of Family Toolbox were developed with families. These are at the heart of the model and are signed up to by any organisation who is part of early family support in Wirral:

We give tools, not answers

“

Trust that we know what we need - and that with the right people around us, we can do it.”

We work together

“

We want great communication, so I know what support is out there and don't have to keep repeating my story to different organisations and professionals.”

We make sure families stay in control

“

Don't give me time restrictions, tick boxes or waiting lists. We want relationships, not traditional services.”

We keep things simple for families

“

Change the language around Early Help. It sounds like you only get a 'referral' when there's a problem, but we all need help at some points in our lives. It's there to hold you up.”

44 The Family Toolbox is there for:



All families in Wirral who want some free information, resources, ideas or support to help their family be the best it can be.



Any families who aren't sure exactly what they need but are beginning to feel overwhelmed.



Families facing specific challenges and looking for additional support.

Family Toolbox resources and experiences are available to all and are:

- 1. Free from criteria and thresholds.**
We want to remove thresholds for families to allow them to access support as and when they feel they need to (rather than when they meet a criteria).
- 2. Free from heavy assessments.**
We know that families are the ones who best know what they need. We listen to parents and carers and are led by them and their strengths, rather than by paperwork that can pigeon-hole families based on 'needs'.
- 3. Free from referrals.**
We want to publicly promote experiences and support through the Family Toolbox brand so that families can just get in touch directly - no one needs to 'refer' them (however, any professional can make an introduction if that makes things easier).

“

The things that parents tell you they want are what the organisation wants too; we want to be listened to; we need support to be accessible.”

Anne-Marie, Parent



46 The signs of longer-term success

So, what will early help services on the Wirral look like when we've achieved our goals? How will we know we've been successful?

Early Help will play a more effective, meaningful role in supporting families which will in turn:



Increase the number of families accessing this support



Have clear results in terms of their satisfaction with the tools organisations they engage with



Reduce the demand placed on local social care teams

The Alliance Model and its delivery

- Families will have access to a wide variety of supportive experiences - things they have told us would help them to thrive - from online resources to one-to-one family coaching to grassroots activities.
- They won't reinvent the wheel creating duplicate services but will bring organisations that are already doing great work into the fold under the 'membership mark' - aligning them to the Family Toolbox values and thinking.
- This membership mark will help families quickly identify people and organisations who are there to help them if they need it - holding the Family Toolbox values at heart - no judgement, no criteria, no professional referrals.

The Family Toolbox Digital Tool

- Support will feel accessible 'whether it's in the middle of the night or when I'm in the supermarket carpark'.
- There'll be an array of online self-help tools, events, resources and contact details of local organisations.
- The tool will have high levels of engagement and happy customers that leave the site feeling stronger.
- Its content will be diverse and ever-developing. It'll never be static - 'what's next?' will always be in the mind of commissioners and the Alliance, and this will be led by what the families want and need.



48 The change in culture



Radical thinking around how we can deliver family services will be embraced and promoted. The focus will move away from services and automatic referral to the next 'stop on the line' and will zoom in on relationships, confidence building and local networks of support.



The core provider group will be delivering on what they've promised in their bid.



The team will build an offer that attracts additional income to bolt onto the core funding.



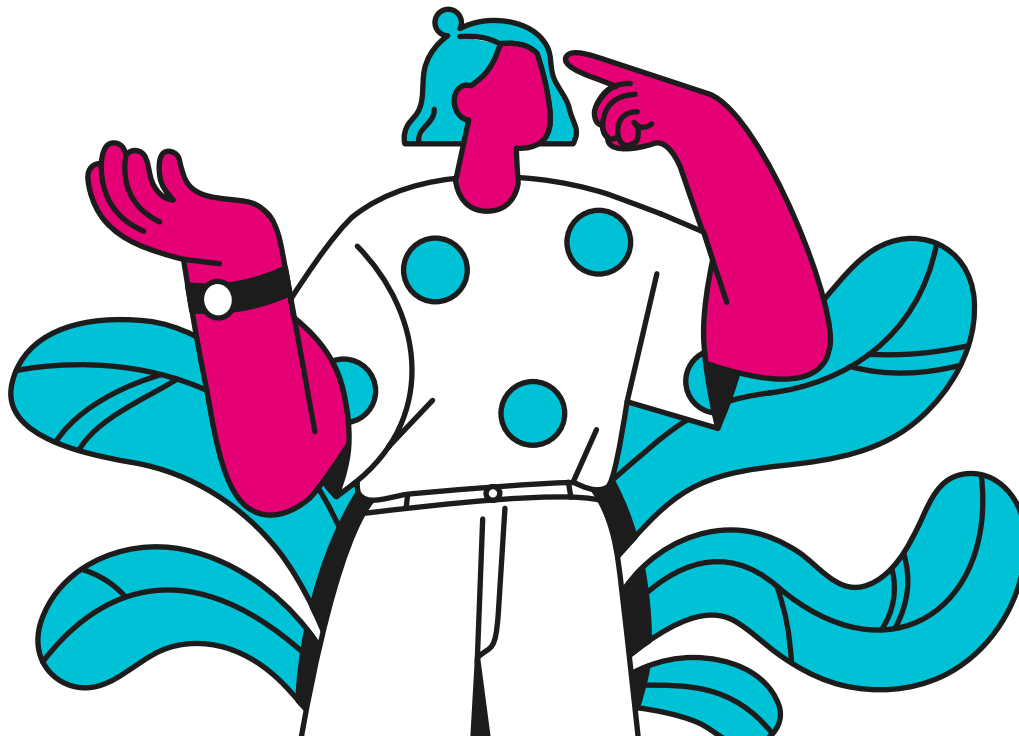
Those delivering support will keep in touch with real-life family experiences through data and feedback so they can clearly identify what is working and where there are gaps.



All partners will consistently raise the profile of Family Toolbox through the use of the core brand and communications tools that have been co-designed with local families.



The approach to planning or commissioning services won't be led by process, or tick boxes. It'll be led by families - by people who can rate what's on offer by their experiences and knowledge of what family life feels like in Wirral.



We worked with the team at Wirral Council to think creatively about the commissioning process; everyone was keen to look at collaborative working as a key theme in the questions and responses. This wasn't just about having traditional high scoring tender answers, but creating space for the LA and potential partners to articulate how they would really share values, risk and responsibilities."

Sophie Clarke,
Capacity Children's Director

Chapter four:

What's changed so far?

Time to take a closer look of
the impact we're having.



52 The top line figures on success to date are worth repeating here. We've seen a truly astonishing change in the numbers of families, engaging with and working through different types of support. Between December 2018 and December 2021, we've seen...



A 30% drop in referrals to Children's Social Care



A 45% increase in the number of families engaging with Early Help



A 47% increase in Early Help work closing as 'needs met'.

Throughout this process we have been listening to the experiences of the incredible partner organisations who are out there working with Wirral families day in day out. As well as figuring out what works brilliantly, this test and learn phase has highlighted what hasn't been going so well, and we've captured the main areas for improvement here.



Driving these stats are the 'on the ground' changes we're witnessing amongst families, within the Local Authority and amongst third sector organisations.

1.

The commitment of £5m to support third sector organisations delivering Early Help over 9 years:

The launch of the Alliance commissioning model in April 2022 – seven organisations driving a new way of delivering Early Help across Wirral, designed with and steered by local families.

The Founding members of the Family Toolbox Alliance:



2.

A feel of meaningful change: Families and professionals who have been on this journey with us have spoken of a real appetite across Wirral for meaningful change. Together, we've developed a model that prioritises relationships, shared values, and risk across both the Council itself but also its third sector partners. This is having a genuine and lasting impact on collaboration, removing the focus 'who does what' and instead focusing on providing what families have told us they need.

“

The families that stand out are the ones where many members accessed support and we were able to partner with other local organisations to meet the needs of the whole family. One family that stands out to me were supported individually and together as a whole family unit. It's great to look back and reflect on how trusting each family was with me about their circumstances.”

Zoe Richardson,
Open Door Charity

3.

Trying new support experiences:

We secured £130k to test referral-free Family Coaching. Family Coaches have been building the confidence of over 400 families to use their own strengths to take on the challenges they face as a family. It has given parents space to reflect, helped them find the right tools, and 9 out of 10 who took part said they felt.

4.

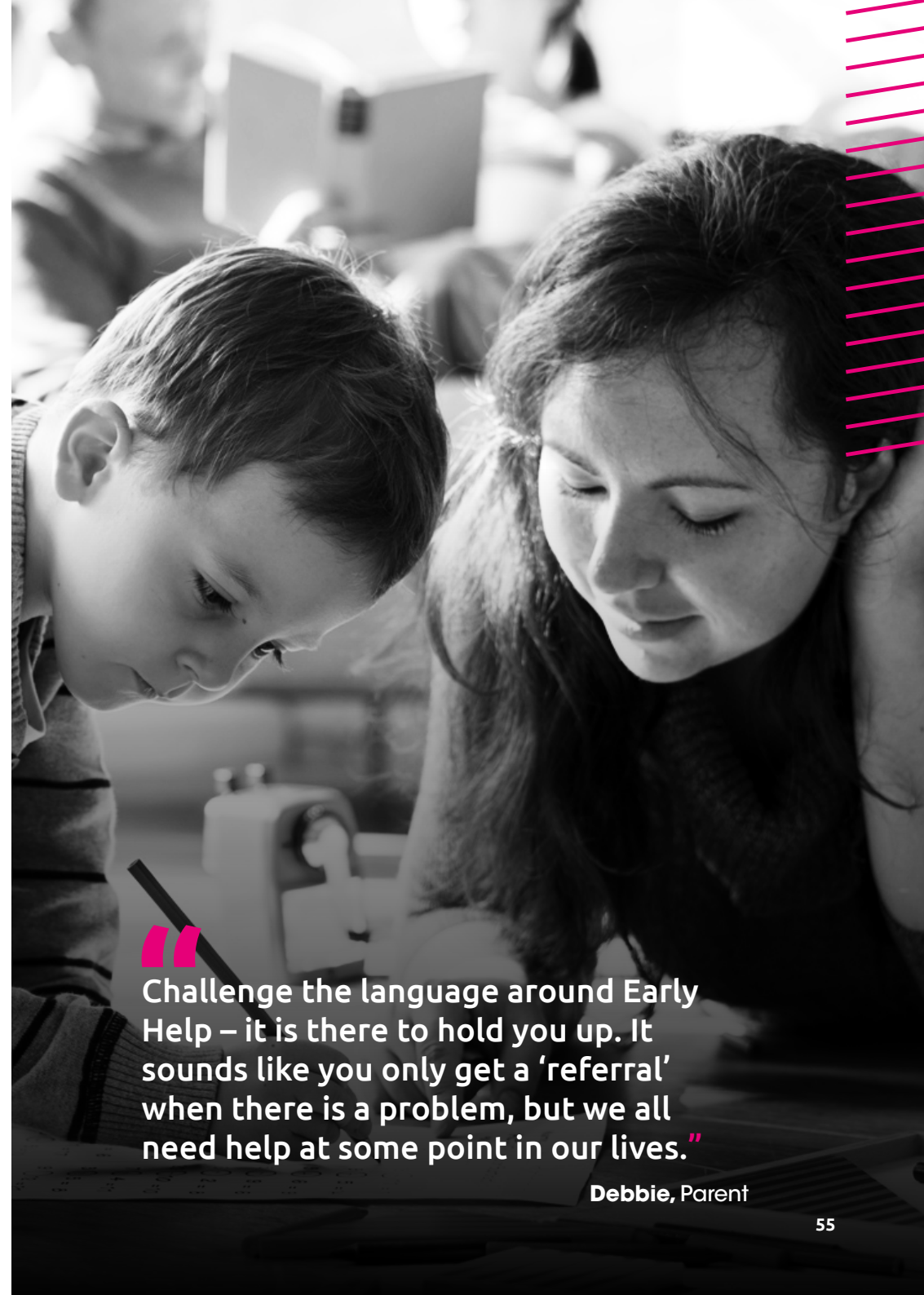
Boosting online engagement: At the time of writing this report the website has only been launched for four weeks, but early engagement, feedback and usage has been strong.

- More than 3,000 unique users
- Viewing 19,000 pages of content
- 70% of engagement on mobile or tablet devices

Both direct users and families who've recommended the digital tool to others have told us it's a great way to receive support. Schools have told us how pleased they are to be able to immediately signpost parents and carers to something that can offer immediate help.

5.

Launching a brand that 'feels different': The Family Toolbox branding has landed very positively. Engagement in promotion of the brand – from social media groups and posts to school information sharing and upcoming outdoor advertising have all been tested with families and received very positive feedback. Families feel it is very different, it 'doesn't feel like the Council' and found the messaging welcoming and exciting.



“ Challenge the language around Early Help – it is there to hold you up. It sounds like you only get a ‘referral’ when there is a problem, but we all need help at some point in our lives.”

Debbie, Parent

Chapter five:

What have we learnt along the way?

Finding out what we could do better next time really matters to us.



As an organisation we are 100% committed to learning. We've a team that is amazing at facilitating conversations, driving creativity and getting things done, but we're not the experts in everything – we're led by those with the real-life experience: in this project, the families of Wirral.

What's made this a success?

- We've really benefited from our internal Capacity team's persistence around **sticking to the core values and having a problem-solving mentality** when we've hit hurdles.
- Our key relationships within WMBC and VCSE partners in Community Matters and the wider sector have been hugely beneficial, **developing and maintaining strong links** with the thinkers (strategy) and the doers (operationalising).
- Finding truly committed funders who are wanting to think differently and are willing to try new things.
- Keeping **strong oversight of all the different moving pieces** that tie this work together – this has helped us keep connected and shape a strong brief for the whole model.
- Using Capacity internships to offer a **fresh 'outside' perspective** on the work we're doing and offer extra pairs of hands when workload got heavy.

What's been tough?

- Working with Corporate council teams who by the nature of their field of work are process heavy, lacking in resource and who **don't naturally come from a place of positive risk-taking**.
- Doing all this during COVID, **creating challenges in maintaining personal connection** which encourages collaboration and pace – much more difficult over video calling than face to face.
- **A perfect storm of timing** as the project ran alongside a WMBC financial audit, SEND inspection and other reviews/audits.
- **Individual leaders being at the heart of the change rather than whole teams** has required more time from our directors to support these radical thinkers to get buy in from other leaders.
- **Difficulties in connecting all the dots of the various initiatives and ideas** which are ongoing as the department drives wider change across services for the families being supported.



60 **Sharing learning with professionals**

We've also been proactive in sharing the story of Community Matters and Family Toolbox with other commissioners. Within our home area of Liverpool City Region, we delivered a 'Huddle' session with directors, commissioner and other operational staff from surround Local Authorities. Hosted by Capacity but with a panel made up of Josh McAllister author of 'The Case for Change: an independent review of Children's social care' and our WMBC strategic lead on this project Elizabeth Hartley, we led a dynamic discussion about the need to open discussions, step out our comfort zones and how essential it is to commit funding to early help.

Initial Findings of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England, Case for Change, June 2021:

“

Too often we are allowing situations to escalate and then being forced to intervene too late, severing children's relationships and setting them on a worse trajectory.”

“

The power of a strong community network should not be underestimated.”

“

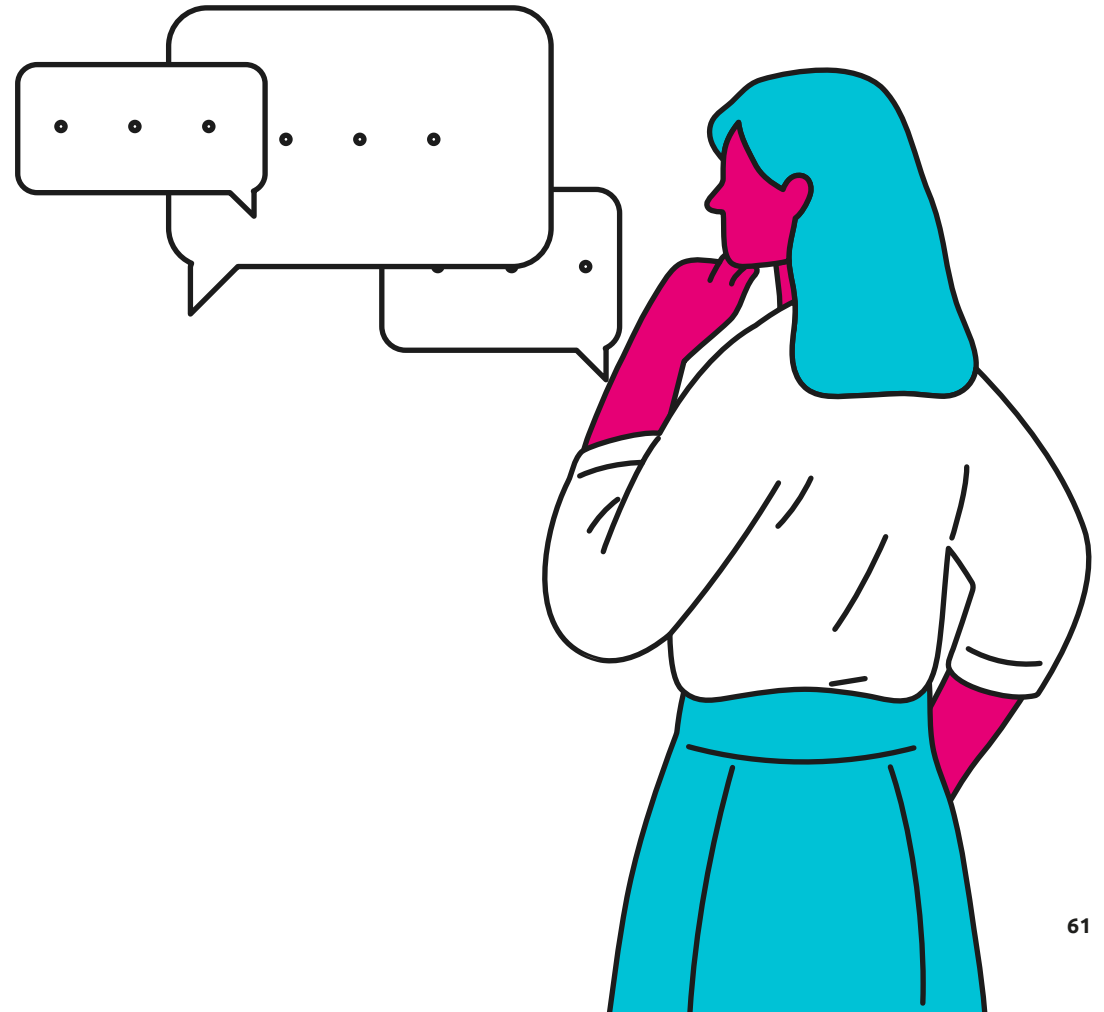
The trouble is that, if efforts to work with families run into difficulties, the local authority can always resort to care proceedings and the families know that.”

Lady Hale, 2019

“

I would say to other mums: don't be afraid to ask for help. What I really wanted from support as a new parent was someone to reassure me that I am doing a good job and to tell me to keep going.”

Molly, Parent



⁶² Working with Capacity: Thoughts of our project commissioner.

We always like to know what has worked for the person commissioning a project - What they value, what they liked and what could work better. We conducted a close of project with Elizabeth Hartley in April 2022 and here are some of the things she had to say.

“

I just wanted to send a heart-felt thank you for playing such an important part in the journey- it's been amazing!

When we started in January 2019, I must admit I was very nervous about whether it would work or not.... but I don't mind a bit of fear, and closed my eyes and dived in! What I was certain of, right from the start and the whole way through the project, was that I was working with the right people.

From day one colleagues in Capacity have been amazing- full of ideas, support, energy, drive, and have made this one of the most enjoyable pieces of work I've ever been involved in. The trust, collaboration, energy and belief that we shared, really made it something special.

We are all really excited about the Family Toolbox and the Alliance- at the outset I said I didn't want a better version of what we had but something radically different, and we've delivered that. The Family Toolbox has exceeded my expectations and I fully believe it will transform the system, empower families, and change cultures.”

Elizabeth Hartley,
Assistant Director of Early Help, Wirral MBC.

The story doesn't end here....

This report has been released a matter of weeks after the Alliance and Family Toolbox campaign and site were live. We've now got a period of quiet as we follow the journey, keeping a close eye on these outputs, working with Wirral Council to monitor their progress, through engagement stats and family stories. We hope to come back in 12 months and share the change that this project has made.

If you'd like to be kept up to date Sophie Clarke, our Director of Children's is happy to have regular conversations on the progress of this project. Just get in touch at sophie.clarke@capacity.co.uk.

“

The stuff I value, that makes the biggest difference to me, is here to stay.”

Jodie, Parent