Empowering professionals to support families through the Family Network Approach

Family Group Conference and Family Network Service
Community and Partnerships Pathway

Katharine Robinson, Aurora Hall and Shelby Berrey - Family Group Conference and Family Networking Advisor in Community and Partnership
Sue Roden –Manager

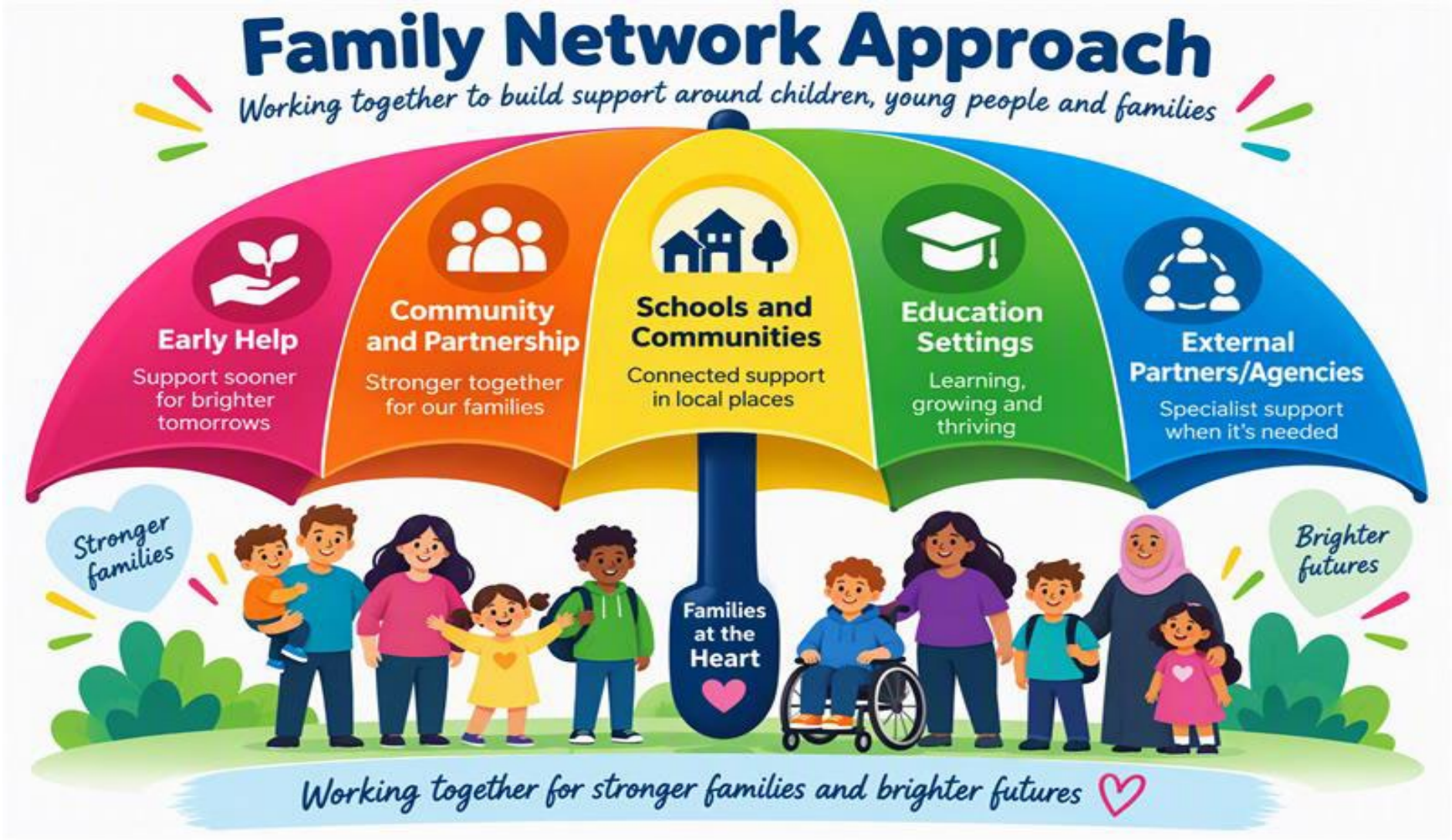
Session Outline

This session explores how families, schools, and partner agencies can work together to improve outcomes for children:

Attendees will understand how to use a Family Network Approach in everyday practice and gain an understanding of Family Network Meetings & Family Group Conferences, including their role in improving attendance, strengthening natural networks and build collaborative plans that help children and young people thrive.



Where we sit


Family Network Approach
Working together to build support around children, young people and families
Early Help
Support sooner for brighter tomorrows
Community and Partnership
Stronger together for our families
Schools and Communities
Connected support in local places
Education Settings
Learning, growing and thriving
External Partners/Agencies
Specialist support when it's needed
Stronger families
Families at the Heart
Brighter futures
Working together for stronger families and brighter futures

The Family Network Approach sits at the heart of our work, bringing together families, communities, schools and partner agencies to identify strengths, build support networks and create sustainable plans for children.



The Four Principles of Family Networking Approach

1. Everyone has a network
2. Networks help develop and maintain a sense of belonging and identity
3. Connected networks = Positive Outcomes
4. The network will plan and make decisions for their child

Applying the Family Network Approach in Practice

Parental Conflict & Domestic Abuse | Substance Misuse | Behaviour

SEND | School Attendance | Neglect | Physical & Mental Health

The Family Networking Approach

Curious Questioning + Network Exploration

Whole Family-Owned Plan of Support

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Bringing the Network Together…

Keeping it Child Focused

Curious questioning and EARS

Network conversations @ first contact

Identify & mobilise a child's extended family and friends network

Continue the conversation, continue to explore the network

How does it work?

Engaging → Identifying → Mobilising

FNA activities promote engagement and ownership of the child's needs by their natural network

Keeping everything Child Focused

FNA helps promote the essential connection for the child with its family network throughout their life, including their times of high need

Family Network Meetings or FGC's = a Family made plan

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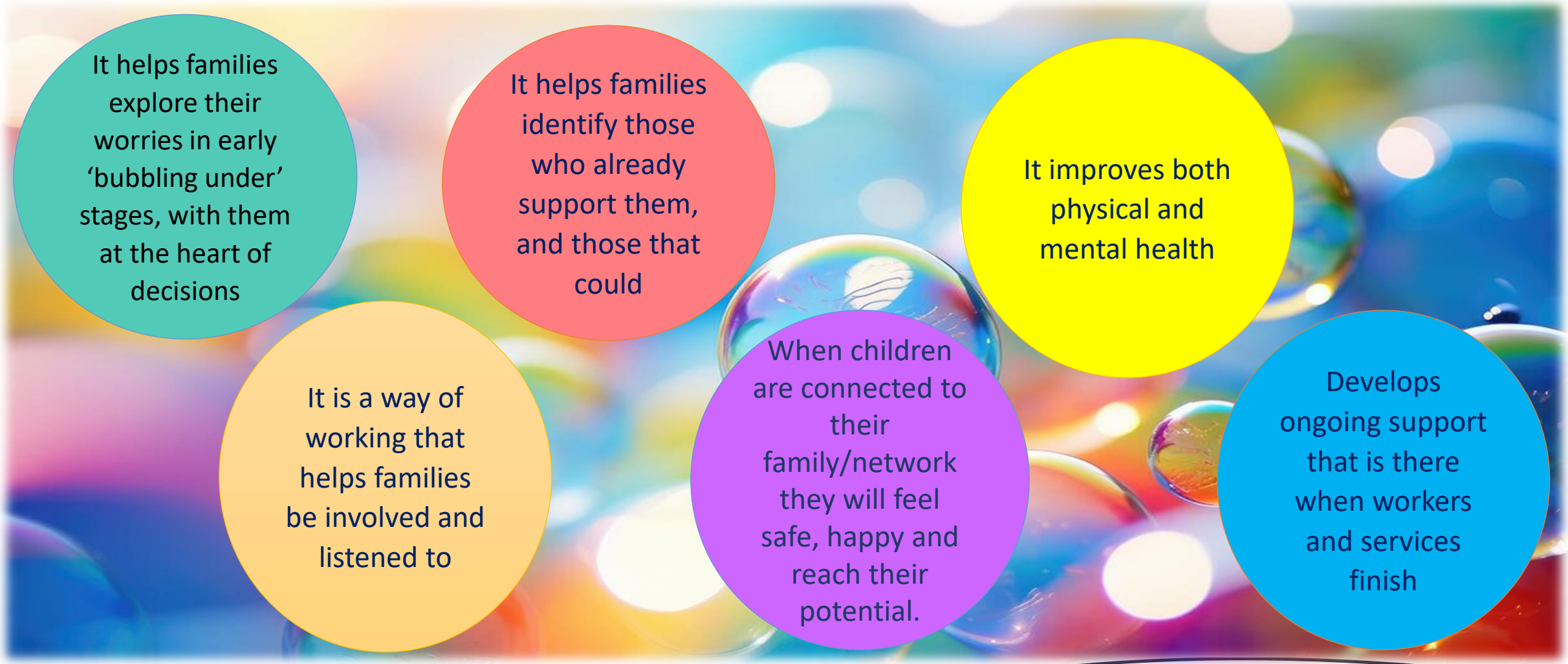
Benefits of FNM and FGDM - Spotting the “Under Bubbles”



Benefits of Family Networking & FGDM

Stronger families. Safer children. Brighter futures.

Families lead the way ♡

1 Worries & Challenges

- Helps families explore concerns early
- Prevents problems escalating
- Supports the right help at the right time

2 Family Voice

- Families are listened to
- Families help shape decisions
- Children and young people remain at the centre

3 Stronger Networks

- Identifies people who already support the family
- Builds wider family and community connections
- Reduces isolation
- Brings the right people together

4 Safety & Security

- Creates practical safety plans
- Increases stability and consistency
- Helps children feel safe, secure and supported
- Strengthens protective networks around children

5 Health & Wellbeing

- Improves emotional wellbeing
- Supports better physical health
- Increases resilience and confidence
- Helps children and families to thrive

6 Lasting Support

- Develops ongoing support that remains when services step back
- Sustainable family-led plans
- Stronger relationships and community connections
- Brighter futures for children and families

Support
Connect
Empower
Belong

Together today... ♡



...for brighter tomorrows ♡

Stronger Families
Safer Children
Brighter Futures
♡

Children and young people who are connected to supportive family and community networks are more likely to feel safe, secure, valued and able to thrive. ♡

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Health and Family Group Decision Making

Debbie Wilkinson, Family Group Decision Making Facilitator

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Benefits



MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH



NETWORKING



DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES



HEALTH PERSPECTIVE

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How does FNA benefit professionals?

Thicken the story

Shared Responsibility

Less Professional Anxiety

Less Crisis Management

Less Professional Dependence

Increased Safety

Less Professional Involvement

School attendance

FGC – Support First Process

- Stage 1 – Identification of attendance concerns
- Stage 2 – Escalation
- Stage 3 – Escalation to SLT/attendance champion and FGC offer
- Stage 4 – FGC meeting and notice to improve
- Stage 5 – Refer to attendance team

• Severe Absence Pilot

"Working alongside the FGC & FNA team has reinforced how powerful a family's wider network can be. By exploring relationships and identifying natural support systems, we can help families access the right support at the right time, creating stronger foundations for young people to flourish"

Georgia Cole EFW City

Learning Sets

Schools and Trusts	• Every school in Norfolk can access our learning sets to be trained by us to deliver the Family Network Approach and has ongoing support from our service.
External Agencies	• NHS services working with families and young people e.g Teenage Parent pathway, Mental Health in Schools' Team. DWP, Housing Associations, Food Banks, Matthew Project, SHPS. Future aim to deliver to GP surgeries.
Internal Agencies and Teams	• New FGDM 2 day training and bespoke leaning sets for internal teams e.g CADS, Schools and Communities, Early Help Advisors and Early Help Community Workers, ECFS





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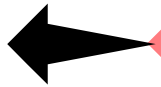
Principles of Family Network Meetings



Inclusive and Safe



Clear Purpose



Network focused



Open and Honest



Future Focused

Preparation and Planning

A Family Network Meeting takes time, thought and the right preparation to make sure it is meaningful, inclusive and tailored to the family's needs.

Plan well for a brighter tomorrow ♡

Takes time

A Family Network Meeting needs time for planning, relationship building and bringing the right people together.

Curious questioning

We use open and curious questions to understand the family's hopes, worries, strengths and support networks.

Multiple voices

We seek and value a range of voices, including family members, friends, professionals and, most importantly, the voice of the child/children.



Voice of the child/children

We make sure children and young people have the opportunity to share their views, wishes and feelings in a way that works for them.

Family Network Meeting Plan

- ☑ Listen
- ☑ Include
- ☑ Plan together
- ☑ Tailor to needs
- ☑ Support positive change

Needs and reasonable adjustments

We consider individual needs and any reasonable adjustments to make sure the meeting is accessible, inclusive and comfortable for everyone.



Families at the heart ♡

Tailored support. Stronger families. Brighter futures. ♡

Preparation today ♡ positive change tomorrow

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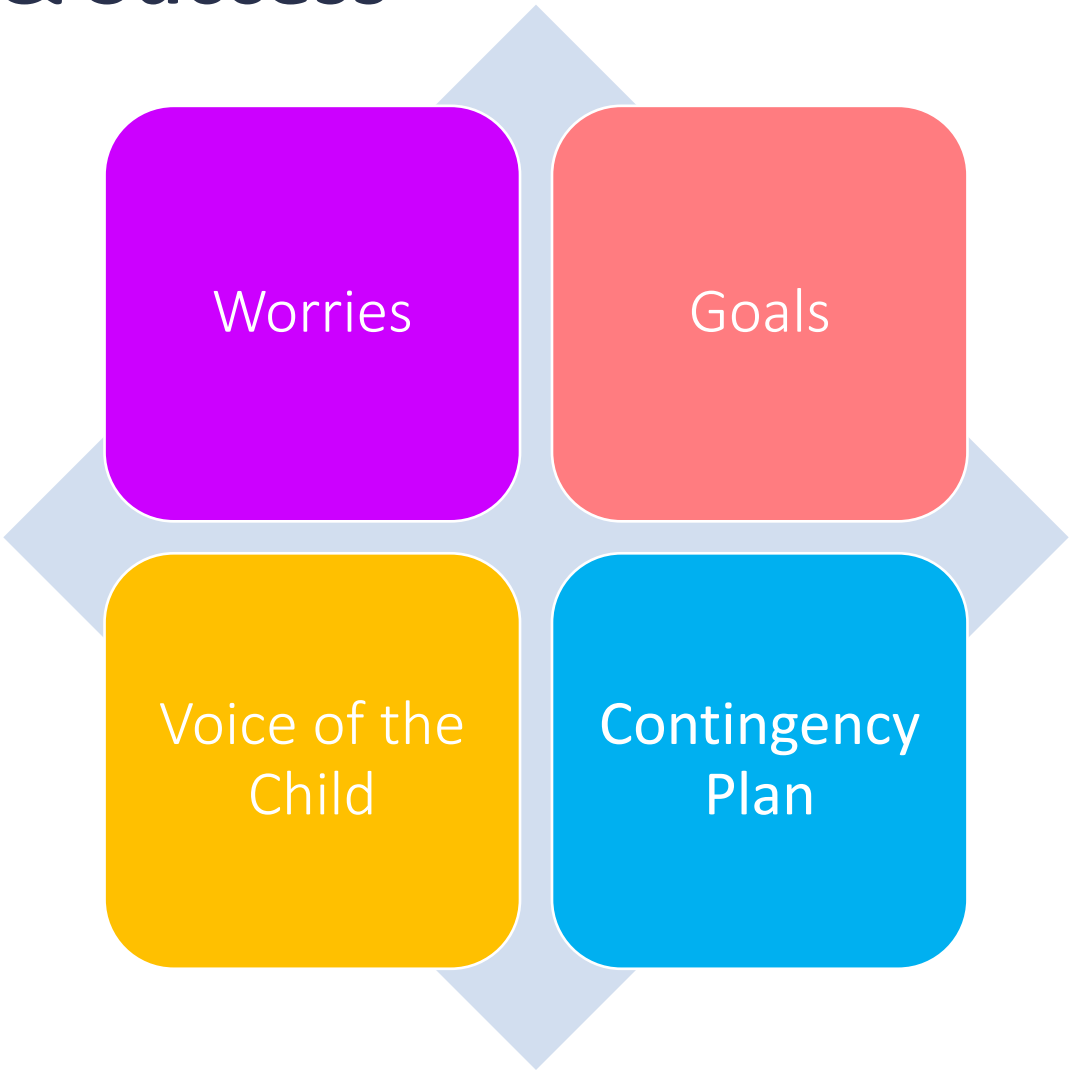
Worries, Safety & Success



The Family's meeting/plan

Actions

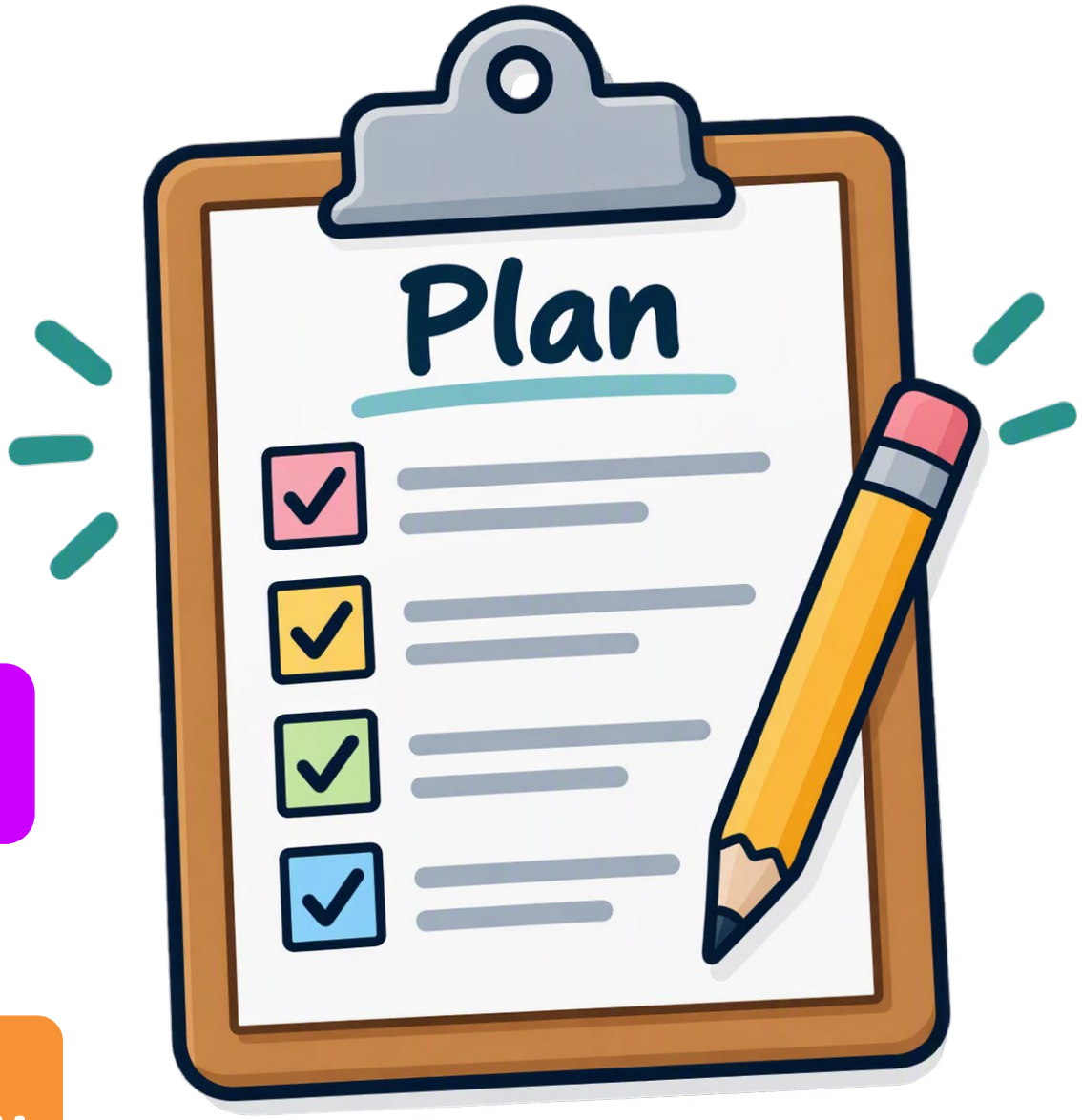
Roles

Details

Contingency

Review?

Next Steps...



Impact of using The Family Network Approach

Families are valued

Families are engaged

Reduction in professional support

Less pressure

Less judgemental

What do families and young people say?

"Thank you for all of your help with getting us all organised and working together. We are all so very grateful. You do an amazing job!" - *Uncle*

"I just wanted to say thankyou so much for everything you have done for us and our family we really do appreciate everything it has been a pleasure to work along side you and try to help with stuff regarding O. We wish you all the best." - *Mum*

"your support has made such a positive impact on our lives, we wouldn't have gotten this far without you. Now we can move forward with certainty and hope," - *Young person*

"I felt very supported and listened to. I felt like you heard and understood all of my concerns, probably better than I understand my own concerns. When you did my home visit you recognised that I was starting to feel tired due to my illnesses and offered to put a pause on it for us finish at a later time, which we did. You gave space when I felt like I just needed to get things off my chest, and validated my emotions, you didn't pry when I said there were things I couldn't cope with talking about. You handled the case absolutely perfectly and I am very grateful to you. It feels good to have a solid plan going forward and took the weight of it off mine, and G's, shoulders. Thank you." - *Mum*

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What do internal agencies say?

Family Hub Breckland Team Contribution

One example of where we've worked well with our Network Advisor involved a family where school attendance was becoming a concern and parents were feeling overwhelmed by several challenges at home. Rather than professionals trying to solve everything, the family were supported to bring together people they trusted through a Family Network Meeting. During the conversation, family members were able to identify practical ways they could help, from supporting morning routines and school drop-offs to being there for emotional support when things felt difficult. The family told us they felt listened to and, for the first time in a while, felt they had people around them who could help. We regularly link in with and draw on the support and expertise of Katherine at Breckland Family Hub.

This is exactly why we're so passionate about promoting the Family Network Approach and encouraging local schools to access the training. When schools and professionals take a strengths-based approach and help families recognise the support already around them, it often leads to better and more sustainable outcomes. Working together, the Family Hub and Family Networking Advisor have seen how these conversations can strengthen relationships, improve engagement with school, and build families' confidence to find their own solutions. Families lead the plan while professionals and their wider network work together to help children feel supported and thrive. **Hayley Bullock, Team Manager**

What do internal agencies say?

Family Network Approach training has positively influenced the way we engage with families, encouraging more strengths-based conversations that help individuals identify and make use of their wider support networks. By exploring family, friends, and community connections, we are better able to empower families to find sustainable solutions, build resilience, and access support beyond traditional services. This has helped us create more collaborative and meaningful conversations with the families we support.

The Family Network Approach training has really influenced the way we work with and support families. Rather than focusing solely on the immediate challenge someone is facing, we spend more time exploring the strengths, relationships, and support that already exist around them. For example, we worked with a parent who felt they had no support while trying to move closer to employment, but through a conversation about their wider network, they identified family members and friends who could help with childcare and encouragement. It was empowering for them to recognise that support was already there, and it gave them the confidence to take their next steps. The approach has helped us have more positive, collaborative conversations that build resilience and encourage families to draw on the support available within their own networks.

Tracey Tanner DWP

A strong example of collaborative working with the Family Network Team involved a family experiencing challenges linked to a child's SEND needs. A Family Network Meeting provided a safe space for family members to share their experiences, improve communication, and identify support available within their wider network. Alongside the meeting, the family accessed SEND services, mental health support, and local community groups. Professionals worked closely together to ensure the family felt supported, particularly during difficult periods. By keeping the family at the centre of decision-making, they were able to identify their own priorities and agree practical strategies that worked for them. As a result, the parents engaged positively with support, strengthened their network, and improved family relationships. The children also felt more listened to and involved, helping the family develop a greater understanding of each other's needs and build more sustainable solutions for the future.

We regularly promote the Family Network Approach because we see the difference it can make when families are given the opportunity to bring together the people who know and care about them. These conversations often help families recognise their strengths, improve communication, and develop solutions that feel achievable and sustainable. As well as supporting individual families, we work closely together to promote the Family Network Approach across our local schools and communities. We often attend schools events together, where we can share information and create opportunities for both professionals and families to learn more about the support available through both services.

Georgina Baldwin, Early Help Community Worker

What do schools and external agencies say?

"Thank you for bringing the relatives together. Having only met B and the children in the last 9 months, I was so reassured to meet the other relatives via Teams and to see a) how much they understand the family's situation and b) how much they are willing to support the siblings in the long term. THANK YOU for chairing such an encouraging meeting yesterday."

Alison Butler, Carers Matters

"We need more of you. It's a brilliant service, being the link for action plans between home and school. The family are in a much better position with your help."

Sam Watts, City of Norwich School

"The meeting was a real turning point. I think it was the first time that K (Dad) really felt heard and listened to."

Wendy Gooch, Perinatal Social worker, Kingfisher unit

Thank you for taking part!

If you have further questions or would like to discuss FNA and how we can support teams in embedding the practice in their work please contact us.

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