



Introducing Thrive at Five

Levelling the playing field:

Thrive at Five is conceived around a vision of a society that cherishes children's development in the early years, where every child can thrive and achieve their full potential. Our mission is to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve a good level of development at the age of five.

“Giving every child the best start in life is crucial for securing health and reducing health inequalities across the life course. The foundations for virtually every aspect of human development – physical, intellectual and emotional – are laid in early childhood. What happens during these early years, starting in the womb, has life-long effects on many aspects of health and wellbeing.”

Sir Michael Marmot, Director, UCL Institute of Health Equity

The problem:

The deepening tragedy of child poverty in Britain has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the most vulnerable children and their families facing ever more hardship. The need is most pressing for young children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who do worse on many important measures than their better-off peers, and this gap is highly evident by the age of five. A YouGov poll published in November 2020 found that 46% of four to five-year-olds were not school ready.

Children with low levels of development on starting school are often unable to catch up, and this can have lifelong consequences. In too many cases a poor start in life leads to a child entering the care system, being excluded from school, youth offending or being unable to access fully education, employment, or training.

A Collective Impact and evidence-led Initiative:

The Thrive at Five place-based **collective impact initiative** brings together a diverse group of stakeholders from the public, voluntary and private sector. On the ground Thrive at Five will harness collaboration between local Authorities and their constituent statutory partners, health, education and social services, charities, community and voluntary organizations. Critical to the success of the model are local parents whose needs and voices will help to guide the work. All these stakeholders will collaborate in co-developing, driving and funding early years initiatives at every stage, advancing the capacity of disadvantaged children to be school-ready at five.

‘They say that it takes a village to raise a child. But if you’re a family that’s under immense pressure, maybe living in poor social temporary housing, maybe experiencing poverty, perhaps one or both parents has mental

health issues, it is very difficult to find that village. And the state doesn't help as we don't join up the services and, instead, we expect these families to join them up themselves. What Thrive at Five does is that it says, "Actually, we need to do that joining up. We need a comprehensive and holistic approach to how we relate to families. We don't condescend and we don't patronise. But we work to adjust and adapt the services and the help the families' need, so they can actually make progress and ultimately thrive." So, one of the most important things that Thrive at Five does is that it joins up all of that together with a single model, a single approach. And it is us who have to work hard rather than the families themselves, who can actually concentrate on raising their children in the village.'

Jon Rouse, City Director, Stoke on Trent City Council

Throughout the initiative, the Thrive at Five approach, supported by our funders, will be guided by the collective impact principles first codified in the Stanford Social Innovation Review¹ in 2013, predicated on **five conditions of collective success** – as adapted below:

- We will work based on a **common agenda**, with a shared vision which places the child and the lived experience of families at the heart of the initiative.
- We will develop **shared measurement systems**, embedding a *test, learn and refine* approach, evaluating what works and does not work within our target communities.
- We will support **mutually reinforcing activities** that fit into local systems, with identification of those that can be scaled and/or transferred to other communities.
- We will maintain **continuous communications** to build trust among key stakeholders - parents, families, schools, charities, health and parenting services and local government.
- Thrive at Five will be the dedicated **backbone support organisation** that will have the capacity and skills to steward relationships and projects across the whole Thrive at Five initiative.

Thrive at Five will build on learnings from other initiatives, both nationally and internationally, that harness collaboration and collective impact to drive positive, social change. The work will be evidence-led. It will draw on research and evaluations of services and interventions.

At the heart of the Thrive at Five model is our **Parent Champion** network, which will be co-developed in Stoke with *pro bono* support from the UK innovation foundation, NESTA. This initiative will embed the voices and lived experience of children and families into this new, integrated model for achieving improvements in school-readiness, so that Thrive at Five can ensure it is continually responding to the community's needs.

Thrive at Five in Stoke

Stoke-on-Trent is Thrive at Five's first pathfinder area and we plan to work in partnership with Stoke for five years. The decision to focus first on Stoke was based on need, and on acknowledged gaps in school readiness:

- Stoke is amongst the highest-ranking Local Authorities in England by level of deprivation, when assessed together with the numbers of children failing to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) at five.
- Pre-COVID-19, it was estimated that 23.6% of children in Stoke live in poverty (against a national average of 16.8%), and the ONS estimates 19,436 children in Stoke are living 'below the breadline'.
- One in six children in Stoke is diagnosed as having Special Educational Needs.

¹ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

- Stoke-on-Trent currently has the third highest proportion of children in care in the UK.

A further criterion used to select Stoke-on-Trent as a pathfinder area was the leadership and commitment within the Local Authority to early intervention and the thoughtful approach it is taking to building early years integrated services. The Stoke-on-Trent City Council report of October 2020, *Early Help and Prevention Strategy for Children, Young People and Families 2020-24*², outlines a series of key priorities for early years which is fully aligned with the Thrive at Five model:

- High-quality early years provision, accessible to all families.
- An integrated early years offering, which will embed evidence-based best practice pathways.
- Increased engagement with and empowerment of children and families.
- Improved quality and co-ordination of early help and prevention services.

We will purposefully select our pathfinder communities to allow us to test and, where necessary, adapt the model for different circumstances. Our aim is to understand which parts of the Thrive at Five framework can be scaled and spread, which parts are replicable, and which must be built locally. We expect to see within our pathfinder community areas a diverse mix of culture, ethnicity, faith, and religion to ensure these factors are taken into account in defining various approaches to parental engagement.

Locally Owned & Run

Thrive at Five will have both a national and a local presence. A national director will lead a small executive team to oversee and deliver the national strategy. This includes the development, funding and roll out of the initiative nationally; ensuring robust monitoring and evaluation; building and maintaining relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders who will be critical to the success of Thrive at Five; leading national-level advocacy and communications; and developing and delivering plans for long-term sustainability of the model.

The first Thrive at Five pathfinder area, in Stoke, will be driven by local organisations and families, employing a governance structure that ensures they are part of the decision-making and oversight process.

Thrive at Five will establish a local programme office that will act as a “backbone” organization, providing the capacity and capability for local stakeholders to collaborate. The purpose of the local programme office is to foster, build and maintain relationships with all who have an interest locally in the early years; to facilitate collaboration between all the key stakeholders in the design and delivery of a common strategy for the early years; to ensure that data and other information is gathered so the initiative can be robustly evaluated; to share learning to inform Thrive at Five’s national operations; and to help build the strategy for long-term sustainability, looking at ways to integrate the Thrive at Five model into local systems.

In terms of staff and volunteers our priority is to recruit locally in the pathfinder areas.

Three-Stage Implementation Process

The development and implementation of the initiative in our first pathfinder area will be structured as a three-stage process, in which parents, practitioners, local authorities, organisations and funders will participate in co-developing the initiative:

² https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20043/councillors_and_decision-making/365/early_help_and_prevention_strategy_2020-2024

- Phase 1. **Discovery - mapping early years in the community:** together with the Stoke Local Authority, community groups and local families, we will jointly undertake a mapping exercise to understand the early years services that exist, who provides them, how they are used and what they cost. We will work with local agencies to gather data about babies, infants and their families so we have base line measurements for monitoring and evaluation. Using relevant data, we will spotlight local outcomes, compare them to national statistics, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing services, highlighting the gaps in services, and inadequate existing outcomes, to inform Phase 2.
- Phase 2. **Design - local strategy development:** in partnership with local organisations, we will work with parents, practitioners, and professionals to develop a shared understanding of the gaps in support and provision that need to be filled, the factors which will undermine progress towards our shared outcomes and the ways in which these could be remedied. From this will emerge funding priorities, the Thrive at Five community strategy and a roadmap for the initiative.
- Phase 3. **Delivery - implementation plan:** costed, detailed plans that can meet the strategy's priorities will be prepared. Some of this work will be delivered by local agencies and organisations and, working with local parents and professionals, we are keen to engage with leading innovators in early years provision and organisations not currently working in the area that can bring in tailor-made expertise and skills.

Thrive at Five will not deliver the local strategy itself but it will work with partners to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy. It will also play a critical role in establishing and embedding a Parents Champions Network. It will provide funding for this network and provide grants for evidence-based programmes to be delivered (primarily by voluntary organisations) as part of the local strategy.

Dartington Service Design Labs (Strategy Design Partner) will be working with Thrive at Five to deliver the discovery and design stages in the Stoke pathfinder area. This process will enable an articulation of Thrive at Five's place/role in the system, the key assets required, and any gaps in provision to be built upon. Working collaboratively, we expect to support improvements across the three early years pillars:

1. **System:** supporting development of a shared, joined-up strategy across early years agencies and its operationalisation, including new data collection and monitoring to assess progress and to drive decision-making.
2. **Services:** targeting intermediate outcomes, to improve existing services rather than developing new ones (except where clear gaps are identified); developing digital services to complement face-to-face working; developing improvement strategies to support intermediate outcomes, based on understanding of needs, and evidence-based practice
3. **Parents:** advised by NESTA, the development of a Parent Champion model and network to embed the voices of families at system- and service-level, providing support to parents directly.

Measuring Success

Success for Thrive at Five will be measured by assessing the improvement in the number of children achieving or exceeding a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception year, using the nationally recognized Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) assessment.

The primary areas of development for school readiness under the new EYFSP framework are:

1. Communication and language development.
2. Physical development.
3. Personal, social and emotional development.

Thrive at Five will focus its work on five intermediate outcomes with a causal, evidence-based link to the ultimate outcome of fostering school readiness:

1. More responsive parenting.
2. Improved home learning environment.
3. Improved maternal mental health.
4. Increased enrolment in high-quality, early years education.
5. Improved health and physical development.

Thrive at Five will work directly with the key stakeholders who influence the lives of children in the early years and can support them with the knowledge, skills, and resources to maximize improvements in school readiness.

A **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)** framework will be developed and assessed independently by an external partner, so that each of the intermediate outcomes can be continually measured and reported on against an agreed set of benchmarked Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Building knowledge over time about our impact across the intermediate and ultimate outcomes is vital to informing the development of the Thrive at Five model and to measure its long-term impact.

A **learning partner** will work proactively with all stakeholders to frame the priority learning objectives, once the initiative is active. The learning partner will also support the implementation of a **test, learn, and refine** process to inform decisions about resource allocation, based on what works.

Long-Term Sustainability

Thrive at Five will develop its model to ensure it is proven to be effective, affordable and can be replicated and adapted in different community contexts. Each place-based pathfinder programme, of which we plan to develop several, will enable us to test empirically the Thrive at Five theory of change, gathering a large amount of data, knowledge, and practical experience around driving improvement in school readiness. The data and knowledge acquired in the pathfinder communities will help us to build the wider framework for Thrive at Five to promote adoption of the tools and approach nationally.

We will develop a framework which will provide local communities with practices and tools to work together, that are easy to navigate, cost effective and supported by local authorities and the wider early years system.

Work will also be required to understand how, using an outcome-based model, it would be possible to attract long-term funding from Government or through alternative financing models, such as impact investment, to achieve long-term systemic improvements in early childhood development.

The Minister for Children and Families, Department for Education, has confirmed the Department for Education's support for Thrive at Five in Stoke as follows:

"I am delighted that the Department is supporting Stoke on Trent Council and the Thrive at Five initiative with contributions from the Opportunity Area (subject to ministerial agreement for the OA 2021-22 extension), and by funding the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to act in an advisory

role. The EIF will also ensure that your innovations are played into the national policymaking process.”

In the long run, we want to support as many communities, children, and families as possible who actively share our vision.

Leadership and Governance

During 2021 Thrive at Five will be spun-off from the Childhood Trust into an independent registered charity. The national board of the new collective impact charity will be co-chaired by Thrive at Five co-founders, Grant Gordon (Chair, Childhood Trust) and Larissa Joy (Chair, Foundling Museum and Social Business Trust). Independent trustees representing a range of relevant skills and with diverse backgrounds will be appointed to ensure good governance and oversight of the new collective impact initiative. The first of these is Merle Davis, who, for the past 6 years, has been the Director for the Centre for Early Child Development in Blackpool, leading the multi-agency “A Better Start” programme. Aida Cable has been appointed as national director to lead the Thrive at Five executive team. She joins Thrive at Five after 8 years at The Royal Foundation where, as its Chief Advisor, she led both the Early Years and Mental Health strategies.

Thrive at Five will establish an Advisory Board bringing together a range of experts who we can call upon to help with specific areas e.g., maternal mental health, learning development, collaborative impact, and international experience.