

Whole Family Wellbeing Implementation Report

Lessons learned from implementing the Whole Family
Wellbeing Fund in Edinburgh

May 2025

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Executive Summary

This report outlines Edinburgh's implementation of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF), highlighting the city's progress, challenges and lessons learned as it works towards a more coherent preventative system of support for families. In alignment with the Scottish Government's Year 2 evaluation, we find encouraging signs of change, as well as challenges that warrant further reflection. Feedback from services and families reveals persistent barriers to accessing support, including limited awareness of what is available, uneven confidence among professionals to address family level needs, and the complexity of navigating fragmented and strained services. Without a shared city-wide vision on how to integrate new services into the existing landscape, and clear pathways to promotion, we risk duplication, confusion and under utilisations of services.

Workforce issues also present a major challenge. Short term funding and uncertainty about future commissioning make it difficult to recruit and retain staff, sustain relationships, or plan strategically. Staff want to support whole families, but not at the cost of their expertise. Clarity of roles and mutual understanding across sectors are essential.

On data, our evaluation found strong appetite for learning what works, but staff are wary of being overburdened by data collection. A core dataset can support shared insight but only if carefully designed to reflect what matters and is proportionate to collect. Importantly, families' own feedback must be recognised as critical data, alongside quantitative measures. Understanding not just who engages with services but why others do not is essential to improving reach and trust.

This report offers a set of recommendations to support the next stage of Edinburgh's path towards an integrated and preventative family support system:

1. Prioritise relational working: Protect continuity in trusted roles, invest in inter-service relationships, and support opportunities for cross-sector learning and collaboration at all levels.
2. Strengthen outreach and promotion: Treat promotion of services as a core component of commissioning. Require realistic, well-resourced outreach strategies as part of all funded initiatives.
3. Support shared infrastructure: Invest in the maintenance of the Support for Families web pages as a 'digital front door' for families and promote the use of this resource across sectors.
4. Clarify roles in whole family support: Acknowledge the pressures of providing 'early support' on professionals and clarify expectations round roles. Whole family support should complement, not replace specialist roles.
5. Design better data, not more: Co-develop a core dataset that is meaningful, feasible and proportionate.

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6. Elevate family voice: Treat feedback as essential data. Resource co-design properly and make it routine to gather insights from service users and those not currently being reached.
7. Plan collaboratively, early: Before launching new initiatives, assess how they will fit within the existing landscape. Foster early collaboration in proposal development to ensure alignment and reduce duplication.

Introduction

The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) is a national initiative designed to explore means of transforming the way we support children and families by shifting the focus from crisis intervention to early, holistic support. Research shows that when families receive the right help at the right time, children have better life chances, and costly interventions, such as emergency care or child protection measures, are reduced (EIF, 2021).

Every service, even those that typically work with families at the point of crisis, has potential to adjust their practice and either support families at an earlier point, or prevent further escalation of a problem. Achieving this often requires close, thoughtful collaboration with other services, making collaboration an essential element of Whole Family Wellbeing.

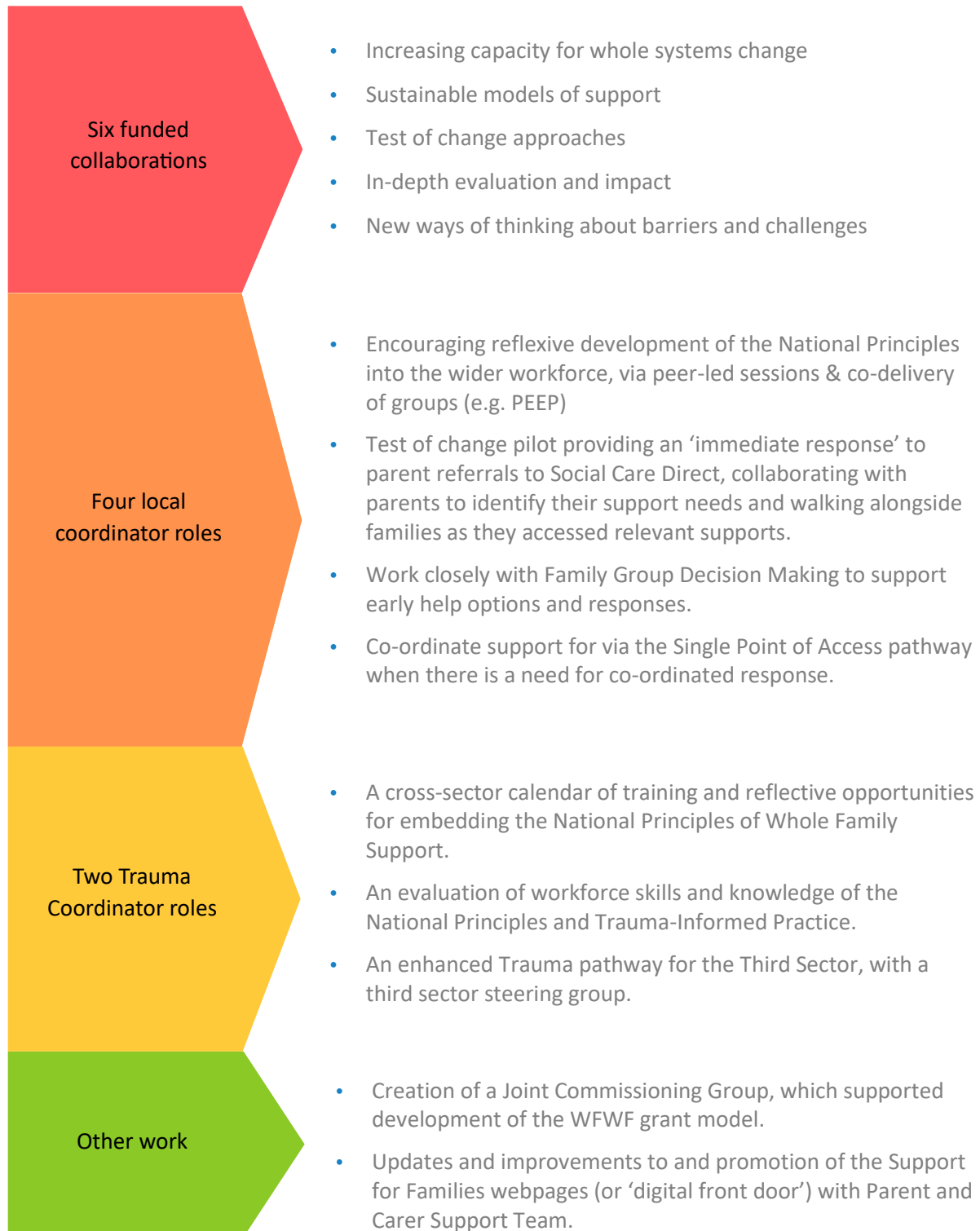
At its core, WFWF has created space for creative thinking and the kind of collaborative conversations that are often squeezed out by time pressures, crisis-driven work, or siloed funding streams. In Edinburgh, WFWF supported six collaborative projects between statutory and third sector partners, as well as the creation of a core council-based team dedicated to fostering collaboration, supporting services, and embedding the National Principle of Holistic Whole Family Support. (For more information on how the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund has been implemented in Edinburgh see Appendix 1).

This report offers a concise, accessible summary of what we've learned through implementing Whole Family Wellbeing, with a focus on insights most relevant to the Children's Partnership. It draws on the perspectives of professionals, families and strategic partners to identify key challenges and share recommendations. It is not intended as a comprehensive account of our collaborations, or of Edinburgh's performance against Scottish Government targets. A more detailed Year 3 WFWF report is in preparation, which will outline progress against the national aims of the fund.

Importantly, the insights of this report are unlikely to surprise those familiar with the family support landscape. Some challenges reflect practical issues that will take time to resolve as projects mature, while others call for reflective dialogue and leadership across the system.

Core Activities of our Team

Below is a short summary of the main roles and activities sparked by Whole Family Wellbeing in Edinburgh, with an emphasis on those expected to instigate and embed transformational whole systems change.



Overview of Funded Collaborations



* The original figure stated '£38,300 saved in benefits in one month of support.' This has been revised to clarify that the £38,300 represents the total benefits saved for these families over the course of a year.

Positioning Edinburgh's work in the national context

In February, The Scottish Government published its Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) Year 2 Process and Impact Evaluation Final Report. From the report we can see that the Edinburgh Children's Partnership is making good progress. Many of the national challenges reflect our local experience with WFWF implementation. While these challenges are not insurmountable, they confirm that transformation takes time and creative problem-solving. This section summarises national findings against the four core themes of transformational change and reflects upon Edinburgh's progress.

Availability and access

WFWF aims to improve families' awareness of support, ease of access, trust in services and ability to self-refer. As found nationally, Edinburgh has faced challenges in reaching and engaging families. Awareness of supports tends to be higher among families with prior service experience, but otherwise it is limited. Key barriers included promoting support effectively and helping families navigate the system. A strong example of effective promotion and accessibility locally is the WFWF EDAN Hub, which supported 119 self-referred families in the first six months. The Hub used The Yard's website as a central access point, leveraging both the site and social media reach of partner organisations to connect with families. The website presents clear, accessible information on available services, the aims of the partnership, and hub locations. A quarterly calendar outlines each service, which families can book via the website, with options to meet in person, online or by phone. To reduce uncertainty, a "what to expect" guide is also provided. While the offer is well developed, feedback has highlighted ongoing challenges such as establishing a shared vision and ensuring consistent messaging across partners. These topics are explored further in 'Navigating Supports' and 'Promotion of Services' sections later in this report.

Leadership, Workforce and Culture

Nationally CSPPs report stronger collaboration across statutory services, the third sector and adult services. Reported benefits have been less duplication of work, and improved working relationships. Rigid organisational structures were reported to have hindered collaboration. In Edinburgh, our flexible third sector supports statutory services creatively. For example, the WFWF Time to Talk project has allowed youth workers to support young people in an A&E department setting, providing vital emotional support to young people that clinical staff do not have the time or skills to do. Cross sector forums introduced through WFWF have been well received nationally and credited with enabling collaboration, particularly through third sector inclusion. Challenges include recruitment difficulties due to short term funding, siloed working, restrictive third sector funding stipulations, effective inclusion of smaller charities, and communicating WFWF aims to frontline staff. These issues have also been raised locally. For example, The Family Hub has reported that restrictions on childcare provision is a major barrier to delivering key services such as parenting programmes. This is a much-discussed topic (e.g.

[Rostad et al., 2017¹](#)) and one we plan to explore further in relation to the National Principles as we gather more impact data and parent voice in the next report. Most areas reported that workforce wellbeing was not prioritised during the implementation phase of WFWF. In Edinburgh, we have established a baseline of the perception of the workforce, with regards to how developed they believe their own organisation's approach to trauma-informed practice is, including workforce wellbeing. A plan is underway to expand trauma-informed practice and support the wellbeing of the WFWF workforce.

Children and families at the centre of design

WFWF seeks to embed lived experience in the design and improvement of services. While national feedback mechanisms are improving, challenges remain in using feedback to influence wider service design. Moreover, there is limited understanding of how families perceive stigma in support services. Edinburgh's impact assessment measures progress against national principles, including non-stigmatising practice. Through service user feedback and participation, inter-collaborative training (e.g. capable environments training delivered via EDAN Hub), and improving trauma-informed and poverty-informed practice, we aim to reduce the stigma associated with certain support needs, such as mental health, statutory and community social work, and disability (see 'Listening to Families' for further discussion).

Whole systems approach

A key aim of WFWF is to support a whole systems approach by aligning planning, funding, and delivery across sectors to provide the right support at the right time for families. The national evaluation highlighted early progress towards aligning funding streams and fostering collaborative planning, but also that system-level integration remains aspirational in many areas and will require sustained effort over time (see Whole Systems Approach to Whole Family Support for further discussion).

¹ Rostad. L., Moreland. A.D., Valle. L.A., Chaffin. M.J. (2017). Barriers to Participation in Parenting Programs: The Relationship between Parenting Stress, Perceived Barriers, and Program Completion. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(4):1264–1274. doi: [10.1007/s10826-017-0963-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0963-6)

Making collaborative multi-agency working a reality

There is a growing recognition that no single service can meet the complex and interconnected needs of families. Poverty, mental health, housing, parenting pressures, substance use, and developmental issues rarely exist in isolation. In response, the Scottish Government has set out a vision for collaborative, multi-agency working that ensures families receive coordinated, timely support that reflects the reality of their lives, not the remit of a single organisation.

Our collaboratives have worked intensively to establish and deliver their services. This has been a huge effort, and we recognise that much of the focus so far has been on getting services operational. As we move forward, we will shift our attention to the strategic, transformational aspects of collaboration. Early evidence submitted by our collaboratives gives us a solid foundation to build on, highlighting both successes and areas where we can strengthen joint working, as well as providing early lessons for future collaborative initiatives:

Agreeing on a shared vision and way of working

Different services bring different priorities, funding structures and ways of working. Some services have reported challenges faced while developing a fully shared vision². In many cases, those delivering the services were not involved in developing initial proposals, which meant that key conversations around the underlying principles and aims of the service had to take place after implementation began³. This inevitably affected the point in which some projects could operate at full momentum. This has been especially true in the larger collaboratives, where each partner service is accustomed to its own values and practices, securing its own funding and measuring its own impact^{4, 5, 6}. However, these issues are to be expected and are a vital part of collaborative working. A key challenge is ensuring that 'the hard conversations' take place and continue to evolve how services are shaped⁷. Our impact assessment process was designed with this in mind. The aim is for each assessment to be completed jointly, allowing partners to reflect on the transformational aspect of their project, discuss challenges and celebrate successes together. This has been effective in some projects, with evidence of joint reflection on service transformation⁸. For others this needs more time to develop, perhaps with further support.

For true collaboration we need to move away from a dynamic where statutory partners are perceived as the dominant decision-makers. As a step towards moving away from this, we hosted an evaluation event with our successful project bidders, where we explained our evaluation responsibilities and encouraged discussion and feedback on the data we planned to collect. We also held one-to-one meetings with project leads, discussing how data would be collected for key performance indicators. We received thoughtful feedback which reflected the expertise of the professionals and shaped how we gathered data (for example equalities data). We continue to reflect on the data we gather and work with our partners to make this task as simple and useful as possible.

² “It’s also been a challenge to keep messaging and values clear and consistent across staff and services when we have different organisations with different views and a large collaboration to coordinate.” - EDAN Hubs (Period 4)

³ “despite having induction days [for staff] and profs forum and planned reflective spaces it is proving challenging to maintain consistent vision, values and messaging. We are developing the use of the profs forum and reflective spaces to tease some of these challenges out.” - EDAN Hub (Period 4)

⁴ “Supporting collab partners to ensure service offers are in line with both contracted KPIs and the vision and transformational aims are can be challenging. Guidance and support offered by the project management is not being responded to at all times so that elements of our service offer may be confusing for families e.g. similarities in group offer. We plan to meet with lead partners to develop this so that our offer can be clear, consistent and transparent for families. This ensures families have informed choice around service offer.” - EDAN Hubs (Period 4)

⁵ “Ongoing work required to keep collab partners service offers moving towards shared vision and aligned processes - this can be challenging when this is different from their historical/longstanding approach or the priority is how it fits with the rest of the organisational offer.” - EDAN Hubs (Period 5)

⁶ “...the recording of key information remains inconsistent across the Partnership and this presented challenges for our Operational Manager.” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 5)

⁷ “We have met with two partners within the Collab and have made the distinction clearer in our recent newsletter around the service offering - we feel this supports choice for families and empowers them to make decisions for their families based on their needs. We will continue to take this approach in the future where further distinction is required. Partners have made a short recording describing their EDAN service offer and these will be made available to the Collab practitioners to support their understanding and knowledge of services and provide a reference point. We hope to develop these further to make available to parents/carers”. - EDAN Hubs (Period 5)

⁸ See Parent Infant Partnership, EDAN Hubs and Time to Talk impact assessments

Specialist services and ‘Whole Family support’

Improving outcomes for a child or young person often depends on the wellbeing of their wider family. Challenges like poverty, poor mental health or insecure housing rarely affect just one individual, so support that focuses only on the child risks overlooking the wider context that shapes their daily life. A key principle of whole family support is that the right help is given at the right time, and if a service cannot meet a given support need, a family should be actively supported in finding the right help, rather than simply signposted or given another referral.

Some of the Whole Family Wellbeing workforce have voiced concerns that every worker is expected to become a ‘family support worker’, potentially undermining their specialist skills⁹. We would like to address this by assuring professionals that whole family support does not mean losing professional expertise. However, we must ensure that families are quickly and directly connected to someone who can provide appropriate support, without unnecessary handoffs. On a related topic, ‘seamless’ support does not mean that families are unaware of being supported by more than one service or organisation, but that they are fully supported in their introductions to other organisations, ensuring a safe, smooth transition, and that support is joined up and effectively communicated. This joined up way of working is understandably still in the early stages of implementation for our collaboratives, but there is evidence that the collaboratives are aware of the challenges and are taking steps to improve transitions^{10, 11}.

⁹ Discussion from WFWF Community of Practice event (11th March 2025)

¹⁰ “...a parent/carer...expressed that it had been unhelpful to begin building a relationship with one practitioner to then be introduced to another....we have been considerate of this when identifying supports during referral discussion meetings and practitioners have conducted joint visits to better understand the workplan alongside families and ensure the right partner takes the lead role...” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 5)

¹¹ “These introduction discussions have allowed us to understand the family background, the barriers and challenges they face, alongside their strengths and hopes; this has led to us initiating supports within the partnership in a timely manner as we understand the starting point for supports” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 5)

Whole Systems Approach to Whole Family Support

Whole Family Wellbeing is based on the premise that to improve outcomes for children it is necessary to support the whole family. Funding was directed through the Children's Partnerships in each local authority. While these partnerships are well placed to lead on work with children and families, many of the issues that affect families, such as poverty, housing, adult mental health, or substance use sit outside of their direct control. For this reason, one of the key WFWF aims is to build stronger links with adult services, but this remains a challenge in practice.

While Edinburgh has taken steps in the right direction (e.g. ¹²), the scale of what is needed goes beyond closer collaboration between family support services. For example, a family support service can build trusted relationships and offer practical help such as applying for benefits and navigating the housing system, but it cannot fix problems like lack of housing ¹³, childcare ¹⁴, cuts to addiction services, or regulatory delays¹⁵. If the right support is not available elsewhere in the system, even the best family focused services can only go so far ¹⁶. To truly support whole families, we need creative ways of coordinating across big systems, including housing, health, and adult social care and a shared commitment to prevention across all levels of public service.

¹² "With housing being in the top 10 challenges faced by the families we support, Children First practitioners will be meeting with our Policy Lead in Period 6 to provide consultation for Edinburgh Local Housing Strategy, advocating that the Edinburgh Housing Crisis needs to be recognised as a children's rights-based issue, aligning with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. Edinburgh's current housing crisis is having an impact on the health and wellbeing of children and families in temporary housing, alongside breaching legislative requirements. We will amplify the voice of families through the collaborative to strengthen this consultation, the collaborative has identified how housing is impacted families we are supporting." - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 5)

¹³ "...communication and collaboration with larger organisations, such as Edinburgh Council's housing department and the Home Office, remain significant challenges. Prolonged delays in responses and a lack of streamlined processes often hinder progress, leaving families waiting for urgent support. This affects our ability to meet their needs promptly, which can exacerbate their already precarious circumstances." - The Family Hub (Period 4)

¹⁴ "All settings in the south of the [city] are reporting waiting lists for their 1140 hours spaces and their 2 placement requests, we are in discussions how best to support these families who are waiting on a place" - The Family Hub (Period 5)

¹⁵ "The collaborative remains aware of the wider systemic challenges relating to regulated childcare, which includes recruitment and retention of staff and Care Inspectorate timescales to approve new services. These are a particular concern for the set up of the new service." - Edinburgh Parent-led Childcare Partnership (Period 4)

¹⁶ "Slow responses when dealing with benefit agencies, energy companies, and the Home Office have meant that most of CAE's support is still ongoing and families are left waiting too long for outcomes." -The Family Hub (Period 5)

Delivering hubs-based support

Basing multiple supports from a single location (for example via community hubs) has many potential advantages. The Scottish Government listed support being ‘accessible in one place’ as an indicator of success of WFWF ([Scottish Government, 2022](#)), and four of our six collaboratives were designed around a Hubs based model. These services have provided feedback on the set up and delivery of this model in practice:

Getting ‘the right space’

The success of a hub depends on being a non-stigmatising, accessible ^{17, 18} space, where families feel comfortable and safe ¹⁹. If no such space exists, securing an appropriate venue presents challenges, and current systems often do not lend themselves easily to colocation. Potential hub spaces have often been found to be unaffordable ²⁰, lack key facilities, require significant repairs ²¹ or adaptation. An additional challenge is ensuring equitable location of hubs, situated in neighbourhoods with the highest need. The data to inform these decisions may be difficult to locate ²², or the expertise needed to analyse and interpret the data may not exist within a service. Many local authority owned buildings are not easily accessible to health and third sector staff, leading to logistical barriers that undermine multi-agency working ²³.

Hubs must also have internal space suitable for a wide range of activities. Play groups and community activities require large, safe spaces, whereas personal consultations require private spaces for discussing sensitive topics. Finding the right blend of spaces has also proved challenging ²⁴. Families have reported being taken into an isolated room to receive support can feel intimidating or stigmatising, preferring public spaces or home support ²⁵.

Practical considerations

Even seemingly small details, such as access to toilets, heating, Wi-Fi, secure lockers/rooms for valuables such as work laptops, and reliable phone signal, can have a big impact on whether staff can effectively work in a hub environment. Without proper facilities, hubs risk becoming unworkable in practice. Hubs must also be adequately staffed so that practitioners are not left working alone and service delivery can be continued if one member of staff is absent.

A well-functioning hub model needs thoughtful planning, ongoing funding and genuine co-design with families and frontline staff. If the right location is not available, we need to be realistic about whether the model can succeed or whether alternative approaches would better meet family’s needs.

¹⁷ “Some young people who engaged in services in hospital settings said that they would struggle to travel to community-based services.” - Time to Talk (Period 5)

¹⁸ “Physical accessibility challenges within one family hub venue – difficult as there are stairs upon immediate entry so not buggy friendly” - The Family Hub (Period 4)

¹⁹ “With reference to feedback received at a focus group we held earlier in the year; we had hoped that the North East Team would be based in accessible, trauma-informed centres that are non-stigmatising.” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 4)

²⁰ Feedback from Edinburgh Family Support Partnership data meeting (2024)

²¹ “Whilst Craighentinny Community Centre meets the criteria for our families, unfortunately it is not a proper office space that is compatible with health and safety requirements.” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 4)

²² Feedback from the Family Hubs (Feb 2025 meeting)

²³ “It should also be noted that our third sector partners are not allowed access to CEC building space without a CEC employee “signing” them in.” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 4)

²⁴ Feedback from Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Feb 2025 meeting)

²⁵ “Initially I had expected all parents to prefer a private space for their appointment. While this is the case with most drop-ins, it became apparent that a one-to-one setting made some parents feel more anxious, especially if they weren’t with their child.” – Edinburgh Family Support Partnership - (Period 5 CAE Case Study)

Navigating the support landscape (or ‘Front Doors’)

A Universal directory

We have repeatedly heard through our work with families and professionals alike that navigating the support system is frustrating and overwhelming. In an ideal world, most families would be able to identify their own supports and would not require professional assistance. The Support for Families web pages, developed by the Parent and Carer support team, is an online directory of supports available across the city for a wide range of issues. A sample of 98 parents interviewed by the WFWF team said they would find the web pages useful, but 81% said they had not used the pages themselves.

“Sometimes you get signposted but that can end up in a dead end, however you have to try all the suggestions because you don’t know what ones will help and what will end up at a dead end until you’ve tried it...” (Parent Panel contributor).

Inaccurate information quickly erodes people’s trust therefore it is important that these web pages are maintained. However, it has been historically difficult to keep service details up to date. Determining whether a service is still funded, and keeping up with new services is time consuming work. In Edinburgh, there is no existing technological solution for this task, therefore the work must be done by a person. Our team has devoted a considerable amount of time updating service information, streamlining content, adding a ‘locality finder’, and helping to promote the web pages. We now have a comprehensive service directory, which can be sustained and supporting the digital ‘no wrong door’. Data shows that website hits have increased by over 200% in the short time since we began this process.

If this is to be our digital front door it is vital that Council staff time is protected to maintain the pages beyond the life of Whole Family Wellbeing. As the web pages benefit all sectors, other services could greatly assist by committing to support and promote the resource to the public, as well as putting measures in place to ensure the support team is notified when new services are developed, or old ones end. Promotion of the Parent and Carer Support Team would also benefit professionals, as many professionals our team have spoken to are not aware they could contact the team if struggling to identify supports.

The problem with ‘Support Mapping’

The Maternal and Early Years Complex Social Needs working group recently tried to map relevant supports city-wide, asking services to confirm whether they were fully funded for the duration of Children’s Services Partnership Plan.

Many reported complex funding arrangements, some of which were outdated even as the report was finalised. Some services appeared to be funded, but were restricted in who or what they could support due to funding conditions. Collecting this information required direct outreach, and some services were reluctant to share this information.

Frontline family support workers (for example the WFWF local coordinators) and service managers had conflicting information regarding whether certain important services were currently funded. In addition, the survey only captured responses from some services, so the data did not reflect the full system.

Though only a small exercise, these issues likely reflect wider challenges across all service areas. This highlights both the difficulties families and professionals face in navigating support and the limitations of relying on static documents to describe a constantly shifting landscape.

GIRFEC and The Missing Middle

It is important that those families who do not require social work support but who require assistance beyond single, self-directed universal services can access timely and appropriate support. Under the GIRFEC framework, key professionals in schools serve as the Named Person for children and young people in schools, positioning them as the first point of contact for families seeking help. While schools are often highly effective at identifying and coordinating support for education-related or child-focussed needs, our GIRFEC workforce survey found that educators are less confident in addressing broader family needs, particularly those relating to parents and carers ²⁶. Additionally, our work highlighted that families are often unaware that additional supports are available to them via the

²⁶ 80% of School based education and 65% of Early Years staff reported feeling not at all or only slightly knowledgeable about supports available for parents and carers (GIRFEC workforce survey, 2024)

GIRFEC framework, a view that is shared by professionals and the families themselves. This needs to be addressed if families are to feel confident and empowered to 'reach in' for help.

At the same time, a recurring theme in the survey was that Early Years and Education professionals feel overloaded by the growing expectations placed on them in delivering GIRFEC. The ambition is to shift from crisis response to early intervention, but this raises important questions: Are schools sufficiently resourced to support this shift? Are educators adequately prepared to respond to the needs of the whole family, particularly those of parents? The GIRFEC working group are currently refreshing professional guidance to reduce confusion over roles and responsibilities. However, the tensions between empowering families to ask for help and ensuring professionals are equipped to respond highlights the need for continued dialogue, clearer pathways and stronger cross-sector collaboration.

A strategic approach to new initiatives

Our team is currently working in collaboration with the Single Point of Access and EDAN Hubs²⁷ to create a clear guide to 'front doors' to family support. However, we are learning of new services and initiatives all the time, and, in turn, these services are learning about WFWF services! For example, as part of The EDAN Hub, parents can meet with a social worker to discuss the Social Work Assessment (Section 23) process. This has confused professionals and families with regards to the correct pathways to support²⁸. While innovation is important, the proliferation of separate services and 'front doors' can leave families and professionals unsure of where to turn, leading to missed opportunities for early intervention.

To create more coherent and accessible support system, we would benefit from a cross-sector commitment to consider how new multi-agency family support initiatives fit within the existing landscape before they are launched. Suggestions going forward include requirements to:

- Clearly articulate where new initiatives fit into the wider, existing support system.
- Define access routes so that professionals and families understand how to engage with it.
- Clarify the scope (what support it does and does not provide).

²⁷ "Following Reflective Space and Partner Lead Meeting an emerging theme is around defining pathways across the city e.g. education pathways. We plan to map these within our Collab and develop a visual, standardised communication around specific pathways to aid families and practitioners... Ongoing work with the WFWF team around clarifying pathways to support will also assist with this. We've asked EDAN practitioners across the collab to highlight pathways across health, education and social work where there is confusion... In line with our comms policy, we then plan to develop clear visual information, making these pathways and processes easier to navigate." - EDAN Hub (Period 5)

²⁸ "Some communication within CEC/SCD around social work appointments and s23 referrals has led to some confusion for families and other professionals" - EDAN Hub (Period 5)

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- Establish a plan for families who do not fit the remit, ensuring they are not simply turned away but are fully supported to access appropriate support.
- Develop a promotion and engagement strategy (see also Promotion section).
- Go through multi-agency planning to ensure alignment with existing services, prevent duplication or fragmentation, and ensure the service will work to the National Principles.

Data

Data sharing

Throughout the implementation of the funds, collaborators have consistently highlighted challenges in sharing and managing data across services, which they saw as a major barrier to delivering joined up support. One component of this was the lack of a unified data sharing agreement (DSA) and data protection impact assessment (DPIA) ^{29,30}. A long-term solution to this is in development, however there is evidence of a wider issue. Despite cross-sector commitment to collaborative working, there appear to be barriers to committing to the data sharing necessary to make this a reality. In some instances, this refers to sharing of personal information about individuals, which has been addressed at length with reference to the DSA. In others it is a reluctance to share service or population level data that might aid strategic decisions. This opinion has been shared by professionals both within and outside of our collaborations, however it was not addressed in writing in impact assessment reports.

A reluctance to share certain information is understandable. Local authority and health partners in particular face internal and reputational pressures that can discourage data sharing, even within agreed partnerships. Meanwhile, third sector partners are accustomed to competing for funding and their data may be seen as proprietary information. In some cases, basic digital incompatibilities, such as the ability to arrange online meetings or securely share documents with external collaborators, make inter-agency coordination difficult. This warrants reflection and discussion within the Partnership. To what extent are we ready to support collaborative working in practice, given the current constraints on information sharing, accountability, and risk tolerance?

What data do we need to collect?

As part of our WFWF evaluation, we asked for a limited core dataset from each collaboration. We recognise that services already collect extensive data for operational and reporting purposes, and we aimed to avoid adding unnecessary administrative burden. We chose not to request identifying information, both to reduce the risk of data over-sharing and to respect the privacy of families. This approach was broadly welcomed, although some services still reported feeling overburdened by data collection³¹.

Across the public sector, large volumes of data continue to be generated, but much of it remains underused due to analytical capacity ([Audit Scotland](#)). As a Partnership, we must be deliberate in the design and purpose of the data we collect through collaborative work. A well-defined core dataset can help us understand who is using services and support strategic decision making. However, we must also acknowledge the limitations and potential risks of certain indicators. For example, SIMD is often used as a proxy for poverty but requires full postcode information. This can be identifying, particularly when combined with other information such as age, and may not accurately reflect individual experiences. As we design future datasets we need to continually ask:

- How will the data collected be used?

- Does it truly measure what we need to understand?
- Is it feasible or reasonable to collect with the resources currently available?

²⁹ “Sharing data within the Collab, and having robust processes in place to ensure data is stored and shared safely remains a challenge at times. We are working with a Management Information Officer from Barnardos as part of the Collaborative to support our work in this area” - EDAN Hub (Period 5)

³⁰ “The governance of this proposed arrangement – involving 6 separate organisations – is complex and has involved Data Protection leads from each organisation.” - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 4)

³¹ “...there is a lot of effort being put in combining all the paperwork we have to provide on time...we are using [our service’s] form...and then the Hub’s forms in order to document and track the families we are working with and our Hubs....there is a lot of overlapping between the forms and families sometimes feel confused and overwhelmed filling them all in.” - The Family Hub (Period 4)

The importance of relationships

Some of our collaboratives, particularly the larger ones, have reported difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff for this project ^{32,33,34,35}. The impact of short term and insecure funding on relationship-based practice has been widely discussed (e.g. *Life Changes Trust*, 2021; *Children in Scotland*, 2024). When services face ongoing uncertainty about their future or the continuity of key staff, it inevitably affects their ability to build and sustain meaningful, trusting relationships with families and with each other. It also hinders staff retention, long-term planning, and the consistent collaboration that effective family support relies on. These issues are neither new nor unique to this project (*Scottish Government*, 2022).

What is within our control recognising the central role of relationships in effective practice and supporting relational working at every level. Leaders and managers can actively model and invest in this by investing in stronger inter-management relationships, developing mutual understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities ^{36, 37}, as well as creating space for frontline practitioners to connect across organisational boundaries ^{38, 39}.

Senior staff can also model constructive relationships and navigating the difficult conversations required for genuine collaboration. Frontline staff need the confidence and knowledge to navigate local support offers, and trust that their relational work is recognised and valued. Crucially, families need continuity in the people they speak to. Trusted roles such as Pupil Support Officers in schools are often the cornerstone of a family's engagement with services ⁴⁰. These relationships are central to effective family support and deserve to be protected and prioritised.

As part of the WFWF commissioning process, we hosted two events to introduce the fund. This was done in recognition of the fact that we expected collaborative bids to be developed against a backdrop of little historic interaction between some services. Feedback from this process was positive and people valued having the time to learn about services across the city and make new connections. One criticism was that there wasn't enough time between the events and the proposal deadline to develop these into fully formed partnerships. Ongoing, structured opportunities for cross-sector learning and collaboration, with sufficient time, promotion, funding and leadership support, would likely be welcomed by the workforce.

The GIRFEC workforce survey further emphasised the value of relationships. Staff highlighted the importance of being able to work, learn, train and socialise together. Indeed cross-sector working has been one of the most positive themes emerging from WFWF to date. While collaboration can be challenging, the workforce has consistently reported valuing the opportunity to build stronger relationships with peers across sectors.

³² “We reported in Period 4 that recruitment remains a challenge within the collaborative and that enabling SCD to refer families into EFSP [Edinburgh Family Support Partnership] from all localities could influence the readiness and responsiveness of EFSP”. Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 5)

³³ “Staffing in the NE has been limited in number of hours due to sickness and resignations” The Family Hub (Period 5)

³⁴ “Recruitment at The Junction for ‘Whole Family Wellbeing’ One to One Support Worker resulted in some delays in young people being able to access support in North East...” Time to Talk (Period 4)

³⁵ “The collaborative remains aware of the wider systemic challenges relating to regulated childcare, which includes recruitment and retention of staff” Parent-led childcare collaborative (Period 4)

³⁶ “The work in hospital emergency departments has allowed for increased collaboration with NHS colleagues and creative positive working relationships... As a result, 6VT have been asked to partner with the Edinburgh University Psychology Dept to road test a “clinical trial” which will be a group work intervention using Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) for young people who have experienced complex trauma.” Time to Talk (Period 5)

³⁷ “We have also built on this through recording presentations on each others internal offerings to improve understanding and knowledge within the collab.” EDAN Hub (Period 5)

³⁸ “First reflective space took place - overall feedback was positive. Allowed practitioners to reflect and consider EDAN practice and any challenges that were arising and any changes that would be helpful. Plan for the next sessions is to build on this and use a common framework for reflection e.g. NVC or Transactional Analysis. CAMHS ID Team are facilitating these” EDAN Hub (Period 5)

³⁹ “To ensure organisations and the staff team work together effectively we implemented monthly managers meetings and bi-annual events to bring the whole ‘Time to Talk’ team together, to build working relationships and allow a place for reflection and learning.” Time to Talk (Period 4)

⁴⁰ Reflections from Whole Family Wellbeing GIRFEC workforce and family focus groups (2024/25)

Listening to families: Co-design and feedback as core practice

The Scottish Government has identified co-design with families as a central objective of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. This commitment reflects the growing consensus that services are most effective when they are shaped by those who use them. True co-design takes time. For example, the Regenerative Futures Fund in Edinburgh was co-designed with citizens, community organisations and funders over an 18 month period ([Regenerative Futures Fund, 2024](#)). In practice, the timeline of WFW funding did not allow for a full co-design process to take place before project applications were submitted. While service's experience of family engagement informed project planning, time pressures limited the scope for deeper collaboration. This is a recognised tension within short term funding models where service design is often shaped by deadlines and reporting cycles.

Creative ways around this include:

- Leveraging multiple smaller funding sources into a coherent, long term vision (e.g. [Regenerative Futures Fund](#)).
- Focus on shared outcomes to allow for cross-funding alignment.
- Pre-design engagement before funding calls issued.
- Allow funding to have flexible activities, based on family feedback and data on how services are used.
- Use existing panels and networks

We have made the inclusion of family voice a central part of our impact assessment, and early on there was evidence from all partners of family feedback shaping the support on offer. We have also allowed for flexibility in service design and delivery, based on feedback and how families are using the service ^{41, 42}.

Looking forward, we believe family feedback must become a core metric of service evaluation. Measuring effectiveness purely through outputs or referral data offers only a partial picture. Services that feel confusing, judgemental, difficult to access, or inflexible may still meet formal targets while failing to build trust or deliver meaningful change.

However, we recognise that:

- Staff are often stretched and working under pressure, and feedback can feel personal, especially when it is critical. We need to support staff to process and reflect on feedback safely, without blame. A culture of learning must go alongside a culture of care for the workforce.
- Some services support families at their most difficult moments. Not all feedback will be positive or easy to hear and not all expectations can or should be met. What matters most is how support is delivered and recognition that even difficult decisions or limitation should be communicated with empathy, clarity and a trauma-informed approach.
- Feedback mechanisms must be accessible and meaningful. Long format free text responses are difficult to analyse and may not yield actionable insight. We need simple, consistent formats that provide a comparable baseline while still allowing space for narrative context.

- Families must feel safe and empowered to be honest. This means separating feedback processes from direct service relationships. For example, ensuring that feedback is not collected by the same person that delivered the support, and that families know their input will not affect future support. An example of this is the Edinburgh Family Support Partnership, where feedback is being collected by an impartial participation officer in the form of short, semi-structured interviews.

A core aim of the WFW funded Parent Infant Partnership is the development of a Parenting Capacity Assessment, to help provide a 'whole city' approach to the assessment and support of parenting for vulnerable families with young babies. Family voice is integral to this process and represents an example of a service actively seeking feedback and meaningful engagement from families who may have experienced distressing outcomes, such as separation from their child. Rather than avoiding these conversations, the service is inviting parents to help shape future assessment processes so that their experiences inform more compassionate, effective support for others.

As Edinburgh continues to review and reform its approach to commissioning and service delivery, we strongly advocate that family voice be treated as essential data. This means resourcing co-design properly, collecting and responding to feedback systematically, and recognising families and key partners in shaping the support landscape.

Equally important is understanding the views of these we are not currently reaching. Many families who need support may not engage with services at all, whether due to stigma, previous negative experience, lack of awareness or structural barriers. Gathering insight from these families is more difficult and requires creative thinking and conscious effort. Trusted community connectors or using peer led engagement may help reach those people. For WFWF, we are gathering information on priority family groups and equalities data to build a picture of who we are not reaching, with the aim of helping services develop strategies for changing this.

⁴¹ "We have been looking at where we've had low uptake and considering if accessibility is an issue and then altering delivery." - EDAN Hub (Period 4)

⁴² "Due to feedback with from young people and families we have taken the following steps to provide more accessible (sic)...This has been particularly helpful where there are barriers to attendance due to poor mental health/anxiety issues or reduced mobility." - Time to Talk (Period 5)

Promotion of services

Partners have reported challenges in promoting their services, a theme that was mirrored in the National evaluation. Questions arise over what information is included, whether information being shared is accurate ⁴³, where it is shared, and whether all partners are equally visible. A lack of coordination in outreach can lead to families receiving inaccurate information ⁴⁴ or struggling to find the right support.

Promotion of a new service or initiative is deceptively complex and contains many hidden pitfalls. Treating promotion as an afterthought leads to delays, missed opportunities and underutilised support. We recommend that developing a fully thought out, clear and realistic outreach strategy should be a mandatory part of commissioning, and not something that is considered after funding is secured.

Key questions to consider:

- Is there a planned budget for promotion?
- If the service is collaborative, how will staff within each service learn and understand what is on offer (internal promotion)?
- If a website is planned, which Partner's web pages will host the information? What is the plan to keep information up to date, in a timely manner? Are there costs associated with keeping information up to date and who pays these (e.g. an external provider)? Is the website already regularly accessed by the target audience? If not, how will it be promoted?
- If the initiative will rely on a social media strategy – which platforms will be used? Who manages these pages? Do the intended families already engage with the platform and the pages?
- If leaflets are planned, where will they be placed? Will they be lost in a sea of other leaflets? Have those venues agreed to display and actively promote them? Is there a distribution plan?
- Design and production of printed materials - who is responsible for printing? Are there funding limitations (e.g. approved suppliers) or branding restrictions (e.g. logos, colours)? Who will determine whether the content clear, engaging and accessible to the target audience?
- If the service will rely on professional referrals, are the relevant professionals supportive of the initiative and have they agreed to refer families? What is the plan to ensure they can effectively communicate the service (e.g. one-on-one Q&A sessions)?
- If the service will relay in word of mouth, what is the plan to accelerate this process (e.g. targeting influential community leaders)?
- Will the service take place at consistent times and venues? If not, how will these be communicated?

Conclusion

Edinburgh's implementation of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund shows early signs of positive change, alongside persistent structural challenges. Key themes include the need for clear service paths, more confident and connected workforce support, and smarter, light-touch data use. A stronger shared vision, rooted in relational working and family voice is essential as the city moves towards a more integrated and preventative system. The recommendations aim to support this next phase of development.



⁴³ "Information that is passed onto to professionals is not always then the information that is being shared with families. For example, a family arrived at a family hub and didn't know about the range of support on offer. How do we reach families more directly and not rely on information being passed from external partners?" - The Family Hub (Period 4)

⁴⁴ "To provide consistent messaging, the EFSP have devised Our Promise statement which has been stated on the service's promotional leaflets" - Edinburgh Family Support Partnership (Period 5)