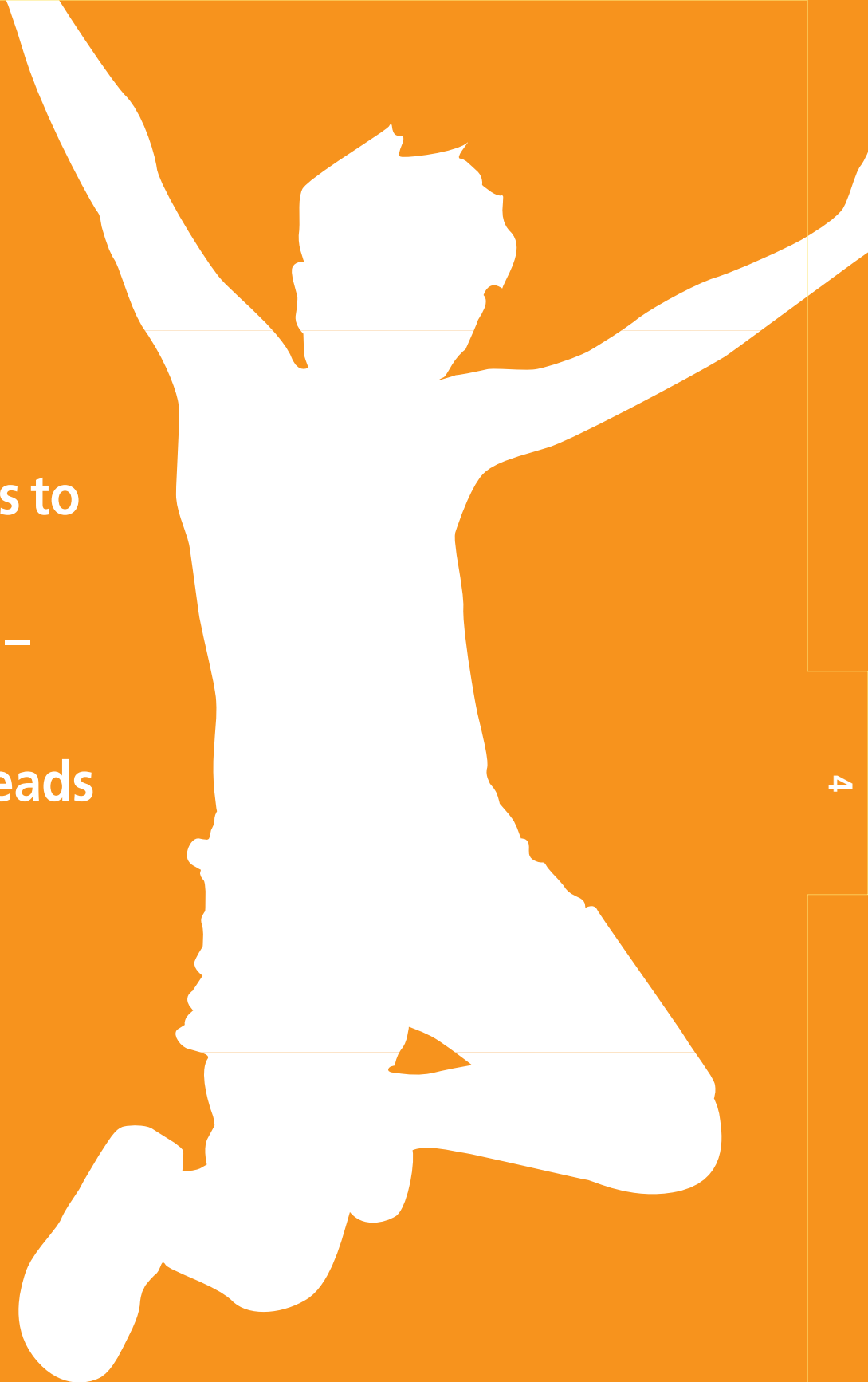


**4 what seems to  
'make the  
difference' –  
the top 10  
golden threads**





## The top 10 golden threads to 'narrow the gap' in outcomes for children

**These 'golden threads' done together, universally applied and relentlessly pursued, would impact significantly on outcomes for all children, particularly those who are most vulnerable or in need.**

### 1. you can do it! (expect the best)

Children, parents, carers and all those who work for and on behalf of children believe that all children can and deserve to succeed. Aspiration for children is in evidence, everywhere – in health centres, shopping malls, libraries, nurseries, Children's Centres and in every school in the land.

For children who are vulnerable, this needs to be actively reinforced through each child having **one trusted adult** (in addition to their parents, family or friends) who will take an interest in their care and learning, day by day, value them, listen, give praise and encouragement. This 'dependable adult' (the **all weather friend**) should be there for the child whatever happens.

#### this means

- public campaign 'you can do it'
- no child written off
- every child a reader
- a 'mentor' (a caring and vigilant adult) for every vulnerable child (from 0–19 years), using volunteers (sensitive adults), older pupils, teachers, youth workers, whoever is best suited to age and circumstance.

### 2. together with parents ("you know your child, we know about children's services, we can help him/her better together")

Everyone working with children recognises, respects and supports parents as the key people in children's lives – particularly the need to support the development of sound early attachments. Family strengths are understood and built upon. Parents and services, including Children's Centres and schools, work together to find solutions to difficulties. Parents are encouraged to help design and develop local services for both their children and themselves... **"doing with, not doing unto"**.

#### this means

- services, Children's Centres and schools 'reach out' to parents and carers, in their communities. Many interventions can be low cost, low key but highly effective
- fathers and mothers supported to bond with their babies (health visitors)
- parents and carers welcomed into Children's Centres and schools, which actively help them understand how children develop and learn
- when problems arise, accessible advice and support readily available (right time, right place, right people, right price)
- focus on home-learning environments.

**2008 – the year of the family**

### 3. through the eyes of the child

Children spend most of their young lives with their family and their friends, living in their local communities. Strategies and services which promote children's safety and sense of safety, their health, and their economic circumstance and stability significantly enhance well-being and achievement.

Services need to recognise that many children are part of an extended family and that this can be strength, rather than a hindrance. Children's services working with other agencies to tackle homelessness, poor housing, poverty, domestic violence and mental ill-health are critical if the lives of many vulnerable children are to be improved.

Adult services, including social services, housing, health and police need to be aware of adults as parents or carers and take account of the needs of children when working with their parents.

#### this means

- **think family** – recognising grandparents, other kith and kin, family friends as important assets
- breakfast clubs for all children through Children's Centres and schools, free for families eligible for 'free school meals'.
- home-school support workers
- ongoing health visitors support 0–3 years at least, for families 'in need'
- drop in advice centres for, and run with, teenagers within every local community (sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll).

### 4. holding onto the baton – ensuring stability and continuity

All services should make every effort to offer continuity for children (and, wherever possible, their families) and avoid disrupting critical relationships.

Children need to be well prepared if and when individuals, services or institutions change. Vulnerable children generally face more disruption in their lives than other children.

Particular and careful attention needs to be given to these times of transition in a child's life.

#### this means

- planned and diligent 'handover' between personal tutors/class teachers/ mentors as children move between early years settings, classes and schools.
- lead professionals, rigorously 'hold the ring' on services for children and families with significant needs
- re-orientating social workers to more 'face to face' long term work with children in care
- not moving children in care, unless it is in their best interest and if placement change is essential, retaining a place at the same school
- no child feels abandoned or rejected when a change of personnel is necessary. 'Handovers' are always three-way and carried out between child, parent and practitioner.

## 5. learning to learn

In order to learn, children succeed best when they feel physically and emotionally secure, are stimulated and engaged, resilient and able to communicate.

Teaching and learning needs to be personal (building on individual strengths and understanding that children learn in different ways) and encourages perseverance, listening, negotiating, problem-solving, concentration, social interaction and develops confidence.

### this means

- early years focuses on first-hand experience, play (and pretend), nurturing social and emotional skills (getting on with others) – ‘chatter matters’
- all children taught to read and write
- children taught to ‘think and solve’ problems (learning ‘how to learn’ programmes)
- well-organised and timely ‘booster’ programmes, providing tailored one to one support particularly in literacy and numeracy – ‘Reading Recovery’
- skilled ‘learning mentors’
- children help take responsibility for their learning (as active partners) through shared targets (child, parent and teacher)
- children (including the very young) have a voice in their learning, the organisation of their Children’s Centre or school and the appointment of staff
- teachers given skills to observe and assess individual children and on planning programmes to meet their needs.

## 6. ‘cornflakes to canoeing’

Extended schooling should be planned and provided in all areas, starting in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

This locally based provision needs to be organised through Children’s Centres, schools, FE and HE and other providers, working together, to ensure that there is a comprehensive ‘core offer’. This should be available for all children but particularly those whose parents have neither the will nor the means to provide their children with the opportunities that other parents seek out for more advantaged young people.

Extended schooling provides children with activities which increases their physical, social, emotional, spiritual and creative well-being – all vital if children are to thrive and attain well at school.

### this means

- breakfast clubs
- after school clubs
- weekend and holiday clubs
- able and gifted/‘catch-up’ clubs
- a children’s university for every local authority area (schools/FE/HE Museums/libraries/business and industry)
- music for all
- arts for all
- sports for all
- one week’s residential outdoor education experience for every 11-year-old, at least.

## 7. unite to succeed (sanity not vanity)

Multi-disciplinary working, which genuinely enables effective early intervention (at low cost) can make significant and long lasting differences to children's outcomes.

But this depends on strong partnerships at every level, shared priorities and agreed plans based on rigorous analysis of needs (for both populations and individuals).

Locally based teams, using a common language, common values and behaviours, and committed to using common processes such as common assessment, team around the child and lead professional, make the difference.

### this means

- commitment from the 'top' of local authority and key partners, particularly health and police – vision and priorities are **communicated, communicated and communicated**
- relentless inter-disciplinary training – and **more training** – and **more training**
- an integrated training team (drawn together from at least education, social services, health and the voluntary sector)
- a shared system of supervision
- a working culture of trust, focused on the needs of children not the pre-occupations of practitioners or politicians.

## 8. shape-up and keep fit

The children's workforce is re-shaped and made 'fit for purpose', ensuring everyone who works with children has a set of core skills (in basic child development, child protection, listening and negotiating). And that specialist staff are focused on activities which require their specialist skills, guiding and empowering less qualified staff who can ably carry out a range of tasks. All staff need leaders who create a climate where learning is shared.

### this means

- celebrating success locally, regionally and nationally. 'social worker of the year' awards – a culture of 'acclaim rather than blame'
- all new job descriptions include a commitment to work with other agencies and use common processes for children 'in need' (when and where appropriate) including common assessment, team around the child and lead professional roles. This should include social workers and teachers
- local schools, FE and HE institutions provide a 'ladder of accreditation' for children's services workers
- a national campaign to recruit both volunteers and paid staff to work with children 'their future is our future'
- qualified teachers in all early years settings
- equipping all staff with effective self-evaluation skills, encouraging them to adapt to individual or local circumstance.

## 9. prove it – making change happen

Making change happen required a planning and performance framework where information is shared across and between services; data is collected, analysed and understood; and the views of children and parents/carers are sought. The right partners decide, together, what needs to be done to bring about change.

The performance of schools, services and local authorities are judged on the basis of a slim set of outcome measures, rather than a focus on inputs and outputs. There is a magnified focus on the outcomes of vulnerable groups and the 'gaps to be narrowed'.

### this means

- having a joint performance and information function within every local area – at the very least across education and children's social services
- using '**outcomes based accountability**' as a framework or tool for 'narrowing the gap'
- deciding which 'curves' need to be turned, what data is available (or not available) and which partners need to be involved
- a comprehensive local needs analysis which details the needs of individuals, groups or whole populations and underpins the local Children and Young People's Plan
- a much sharper focus by Ofsted on the outcomes of vulnerable groups, 'the gaps' and action being taken to close them through Early Years and School Inspections and the future Comprehensive Area Assessment of localities.

## 10. from good to great – 'passion with purpose'

Directors of children's services, elected members and leaders throughout the workforce champion children, having a vision and a plan which they drive with energy and vigour – 'passion with purpose'. This 'transformational leadership' supports and is supported by the effective joint commissioning of children's services.

Good governance, rooted in shared values, behaviours and agreed ways of working oversees the production of the children and young people's plan and take into account the views and experiences of children, young people, families, communities and service providers.

### this means

- an agreed vision with shared priorities across and between all partners within the Children's Trusts, including schools and the voluntary sector
- new systems and processes are not 'bolted' onto existing systems. Systems and processes are 'reviewed and refreshed' and redundant meetings, groups, Boards and processes eliminated
- backroom functions across the local children's sector (LA and beyond) are merged. This could include information and data, performance management, training, finance, ICT, engaging children and young people, retention and recruitment
- a children's commissioner for every local area (linked to 'you can do it').

