



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities



Department
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Supporting Families Programme Systemic Practice Pilot Study

Expression of Interest guidance
January 2024

EOI deadline: **EXTENDED**

Please contact Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk if you are interested in taking part in the pilot.

Supporting Families Programme Systemic Practice Pilot Study

This document sets out guidance for local authorities to submit expressions of interest to participate in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) and the Department for Education (DfE) Supporting Families Programme Systemic Practice Pilot Study.

The deadline for expressions of interest (EOIs) has been extended. Please contact Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk if you are interested in taking part in the pilot.

A consortium led by Coram children's charity and the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT) will deliver the pilot in six local authorities. This will include systemic practice training for keyworkers delivered by IFT, funding to hire systemic practitioners and on-going support to embed systemic practice over the course of the pilot through a virtual systemic practice hub hosted by IFT. The pilot will be evaluated through a randomised controlled trial. Six additional local authorities will form the control group to facilitate the evaluation and will be provided with financial and technical support to collect data throughout the pilot. They will also be offered training in systemic practice for keyworkers *after* the pilot has ended in late 2025.

Local authorities selected to take part in the pilot study will be informed in April 2024 with set up kicking off in May 2024. The pilot will go live in September 2024 and run until December 2025. Findings from the pilot will inform the development of the Supporting Families Programme delivery and wider Early Help policy, including the Government's reform of children's social care and its strategy: Stable Homes, Built on Love.

Background

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) [Supporting Families Programme](#) (formerly Troubled Families) supports families facing multiple disadvantage to make significant and sustained improvements in their lives across a range of issues. The programme operates a keyworker model where keyworkers support the whole family around a single agreed plan and coordinate local support services. The programme is delivered by local authorities and partners across England.

Systemic practice has its roots in systemic therapy which focuses on group relationships or networks, such as family and friends, rather than solely on an individual's thoughts and feelings. It is widely used in clinical settings including the NHS, as well as increasingly in social care. Systemic practice formed a large part of the [Reclaiming Social Work \(RSW\) Model](#) which found evidence of high quality, family focused and strengths-based practice that built families' and young people's capacity to address their own issues more effectively.

The previous [National Evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme 2015-2020](#) found that the programme delivered positive impacts for families. This included reductions in the proportion of children being taken into care, juvenile sentencing outcomes and adult sentencing outcomes. The programme also represented value for money, delivering £2.23 in economic benefits for every £1 spent.

Building on the national evaluation, the Supporting Families Programme is taking a 'what works' approach with the aim of understanding effective keyworker practice that supports positive outcomes for families. Last year the programme worked with What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care to produce a [rapid review](#) on the most effective elements of the Supporting Families Programme. They also published a number of [feasibility studies](#), which identified that

embedding systemic practice in keyworker teams showed signs of promise, positively supporting keyworkers and the families they worked with. In addition What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care published a [series of reports](#) around the potential implementation and evaluation of systemic practice in Early Help services, helping to prepare for future evaluation.

Following on from the work, the Supporting Families Programme has commissioned Coram along with the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT) and Ecorys (see Annex A for more details on each partner), to lead a pilot study to understand the effectiveness of a systemic practice model.

Systemic practice model pilot

Based on the previous work the systemic practice model being piloted includes:

- **Systemic training** by accredited IFT systemic tutors including five days of in person Continuous Professional Development (CPD) certified training for all keyworkers, taking place over 10 weeks. In addition, 10-20 per cent of keyworkers (to be chosen by the local authority) will get 10 days of additional training resulting in an equivalent of a Foundation Course in Systemic Practice to become 'Systemic Champions'. They will support the embedding of systemic practice across keyworker teams. A 'leaders' training day in person will also be provided for senior managers and leaders in local authorities.
- Funding local authorities to **hire a systemic practitioner** qualified to an intermediate level in systemic practice and funded for the duration of the pilot to work with keyworker teams to embed systemic practice. This would include providing ongoing targeted training, monthly group reflective practice sessions and one-to-one consultation for key workers, in addition to supporting the use of systemic tools, such as genograms and outcome measures. To boost retention and sustainability, IFT would deliver qualifying level training within the pilot to become a fully qualified systemic psychotherapist.
- Support by IFT, including a **Systemic Practice Virtual Hub** providing an administrative, resource and networking centre for all keyworkers, embedded Systemic Practitioners and Systemic Champion keyworkers across the local authorities. Local authorities will also be supported by an IFT Systemic Psychotherapist Delivery Lead who will oversee the embedding systemic practice in local authorities.

For local authorities taking part in the systemic practice model pilot, support and guidance throughout the implementation of the pilot will be provided by IFT and Coram. This will include guidance on sustainability of the model after the end of the pilot at the end of 2025.

Pilot Study Evaluation

Participation in the evaluation is a requirement of involvement in the pilot.

The pilot study has two primary aims: (i) to provide indicative evidence of the impact and efficacy that the model delivers on family outcomes compared to models that have not embedded systemic practice in their keyworker teams, and; (ii) to establish the feasibility of delivering a full trial of the model in a larger number of local authorities.

This will be achieved through a randomised controlled trial pilot study. The study will be run by Coram, Ecorys and Clarissa White Research as evaluators.

Eligible local authorities (see Eligibility below) are invited to submit an expression of interest to take part in the study.

Twelve eligible local authorities will be randomly selected. Six will be randomised to deliver the systemic practice model, with an additional six local authorities not delivering the model and acting as a control group. The local authorities not delivering the model will be provided with financial and technical support to collect data in order to facilitate the evaluation of the systemic practice model, and be provided with two days of CPD training in systemic practice for all their keyworkers by IFT after the pilot has ended in early 2026.

Participation in the pilot study evaluation will involve:

- Complying with random assignment as specified by Coram.
- Signing a Data Sharing Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding with Coram and IFT.
- Supporting IFT to run in-person training sessions, including providing venues for training to take place.
- Supporting keyworkers working with families to collect family-level outcome measures collected as part of standard keyworker assessments.
- Facilitating the collection of data from practitioners collected via an online survey at two time points.
- Providing existing administrative data and outcome data from local authorities including referral and family assessment data as well as children in need (CIN) census and children looked after (CLA) SSDA903 return.
- Supporting the evaluator to conduct interviews with practitioners and observations of training and practice.
- Local authorities delivering the trial: keyworkers adhering to the systemic practice model as intended and described through the training and virtual hub for the duration of the pilot (September 2024 – December 2025).
- Local authorities in the control group: keyworkers adhering to not be trained or supported in systemic family practice for the duration of the pilot (September 2024 – December 2025); or the local authority will notify Coram if this happens.

Local authorities will support the collection of data for the evaluation delivered by Coram, Ecorys and Clarissa White Research.

What is a pilot Randomised Controlled Trial and why is it being used?

RCTs are an evaluation method used to evaluate the impact of a specific model by randomly assigning to either receive the intervention (the treatment group) or not (the control group) and are considered the 'gold standard' for impact evaluation. In the context of this pilot study, six local authorities will be randomly assigned to implement the systemic practice model (the treatment group) and six local authorities will be randomly assigned to not implement the systemic practice model (the control group). This approach will help establish causal relationships between the model and the outcomes of improving the practice of keyworkers and ultimately improve the outcomes of families.

How will the findings be used?

A final report will be published in the spring of 2026.

Findings will be used as evidence to provide indications of the impact of the model on child and family outcomes such as family functioning and mental health, and keyworker practice and well-being. This will inform understanding of effective systemic practice models and ways of upskilling keyworkers to aid Supporting Families Programme delivery and wider social policy including the Government's reform of children's social care and its strategy: Stable Homes, Built on Love. Findings will also be used to inform decision making on trial feasibility which could be used to commission further trials.

Supporting Families Programme Machinery of Government transfer

The Supporting Families Programme will be moving to the Department for Education via a Machinery of Government transfer in April 2024. This transfer provides an opportunity to expand the impact of the programme by bringing together the system of support for children and families. This will enable the Education Secretary to deliver a co-ordinated approach through a series of reforms that support the Government's wider social policy agenda.

Funding

All twelve local authorities will be provided with £5k each to support them in the administration and data collection of the pilot. Half of the funding (£2.5k per local authority) will be provided when they have signed a Data Sharing Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding with Coram and IFT (expected to be in May 2024). The other half (£2.5k per local authority) will be provided after the end of the pilot in January 2026.

After the signing of a Data Sharing Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding, the six local authorities implementing the systemic practice model pilot will be provided with funding to hire a systemic practitioner qualified to an intermediate level in systemic practice and funded for the duration of the pilot. This will be up to £42,618 for an [NHS Band 6 Agenda for Change](#) equivalent. The exact funding will be calculated based on pay scales and higher cost area supplements in the local authority agreed by Coram.

No cost will be incurred by the local authority for the training and support (including the Virtual Practice Hub) provided by IFT and Coram for the duration of the pilot.

The eligibility criteria

Local authorities will **not** be eligible for the pilot if they:

- Currently, or in the last three years, have implemented systemic practice in their keyworker teams. This includes systematic training in systemic practice for keyworker or the hiring/commissioning of Psychotherapists or Clinicians to support keyworkers.
- Are a Families First for Children DfE pathfinder local authority.
- Currently, or in the last two years, have an inadequate Children's Services Ofsted rating.

If you are unsure if your local authority would qualify for the trial, please contact Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk to discuss this further.

Timelines

Local authorities will be notified of the outcome in April.

The twelve local authorities taking part in the pilot study will be invited to a kick-off meeting in May 2024. Local authorities will be expected to sign a Data Sharing Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding with Coram and IFT in May/June 2024.

The six local authorities implementing the systemic practice model will be expected to hire a systemic practitioner qualified to an intermediate level by August 2024. IFT will support local authorities in this process, helping to promote the opportunity.

Training for the six local authorities implementing the systemic practice model will start with a 'leaders' training day for senior managers and leaders in local authorities in July/August 2024. Training for keyworkers is expected to start in September 2024 and run for 10 weeks. The additional 10 days of training will take place throughout 2025, and result in an equivalent of a Foundation Course in Systemic Practice for a number of keyworkers who will become 'Systemic Champions'.

The pilot will run until December 2025.

The local authorities not delivering the systemic practice model will be provided with two days of CPD training in systemic practice for all their keyworkers by IFT, after the pilot has ended from January 2026.

How to apply

Please contact Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk if you are interested in taking part in the pilot. Coram will then talk you through the process before supporting you to complete an Expression of Interest.

For information, the expression of interest (EOI) form linked is here:

<https://forms.office.com/e/JNpXvM3Hxt>

Information required from an expression of interest is set out below.

If you have specific questions not answered in this guidance, please email:

Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk.

Decisions

Expressions of Interest will be assessed by Coram using the indicative scoring matrix set out below, with input from DLUHC, DfE and IFT where necessary. Where necessary, we may request a clarification call.

Decisions will be made based on the evidence you provide through the EOI and any additional clarification information that may be requested.

Local authorities receiving a fail or a 0 or 1 on **any** of the scoring criteria will be excluded from the randomisation. Local authorities that pass and receive a 2 or higher on **all criteria** will be included in the randomisation. DLUHC and DfE reserves the right to utilise further selection criteria to ensure the feasible delivery of the selected evaluation design.

Local authorities will be notified in April 2024.

Indicative scoring matrix

Expressions of Interest will be assessed using an indicative scoring matrix.

Currently, or in the last three years, have implemented systemic practice in their keyworker teams.	Pass/Fail
A Families First for Children DfE pathfinder local authority.	Pass/Fail
Currently, or in the last two years, have an inadequate Children's Services Ofsted rating.	Pass/Fail
Project support and senior leadership	Scoring 0-3 0 = no evidence 1 = limited evidence 2 = good evidence 3 = strong evidence
Hiring of Systemic Practitioners	Scoring 0-3 0 = no evidence 1 = limited evidence 2 = good evidence 3 = strong evidence
Training and embedding of systemic practice	Scoring 0-3 0 = no evidence 1 = limited evidence 2 = good evidence 3 = strong evidence
Sustainability	Scoring 0-3 0 = no evidence 1 = limited evidence 2 = good evidence 3 = strong evidence
Supporting evaluation	Scoring 0-3 0 = no evidence 1 = limited evidence 2 = good evidence 3 = strong evidence
A supporting letter signed by your Director of Children's Services or equivalent agreeing to participate in the pilot study	Pass/Fail

Expression of interest information required

Below sets out the information requested as part of the online expression of interest application which can be found here: <https://forms.office.com/e/JNpXvM3Hxt>

We will store and use this information to contact you about your application. This will involve sharing details with DLUHC, DfE and IFT.

Expression of interest questions

Lead contact details

Please provide the contact details for the lead in local authority submitting the EOI.

Local authority submitting EOI on behalf of	[Drop down list]
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Contact details for lead in local authority submitting EOI	
First name	[open text]
Surname	[open text]
Job title	[open text]
Email	[has to be email to be valid]
Phone Number	[numerals only]

Eligibility criteria

Please provide answers on the eligibility criteria for the local authority you are completing the expression of interest form on behalf of.

Currently, or in the last three years, has your local authority implemented systemic practice in their keyworker teams? This includes systematic training in systemic practice for keyworkers or the hiring/commissioning of Psychotherapist or Clinicians to support keyworkers.	[yes / no]
If yes, please provide details	[open text]
Is your local authority A Families First for Children DfE pathfinder local authority?	[yes / no]
Currently, or in the last two years, has your local authority received an inadequate Children's Services Ofsted rating?	[yes / no]

Data on your local authority Supporting Families Programme

Please provide answers on the data your local authority holds on the following information.

<p>Current number of Supporting Families keyworkers.</p> <p>Keyworkers have to be partly or wholly funded by the Supporting Families Programme and have a family caseload.</p>	<p>[numerals only]</p>
<p>Current number of Supporting Families keyworker teams.</p> <p>The number of teams that your Supporting Family Programme team has</p>	<p>[numerals only]</p>
<p>Current number of <i>additional</i> early help or family support keyworkers.</p>	<p>[numerals only]</p>
<p>Number of families supported by your Supporting Families Programme in the 2022/23 financial year.</p>	<p>[numerals only]</p>
<p>Number of children supported by your Supporting Families Programme in the 2022/23 financial year.</p>	<p>[numerals only]</p>
<p>Number of <i>additional</i> families supported by your Early Help or equivalent family support service in 2022/23 financial year.</p> <p>Information should be provided on the number of families who have received an Early Help assessment or equivalent and been worked with for at least 12 weeks.</p>	<p>[numerals only]</p>
<p>Please provide a brief description of the integration of the local Supporting Families Programme with your local authority Early Help or equivalent family support service and whether there is a significant overlap.</p> <p><i>[maximum 250 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>

Experience and motivation for applying

Please provide answers on the data your local authority's experience and motivation for applying to the systemic practice model pilot study.

<p>Practice model</p> <p>Please outline any practice models or approaches that your Supporting Families programme or Early Help/family support service uses. For example, Signs of Safety, Contextual Safeguarding.</p> <p><i>[maximum 250 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>
<p>Project support and senior leadership</p> <p>Please outline the roles and experience of each of the key individuals who will support the implementation (including senior leadership).</p> <p><i>[maximum 250 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>
<p>Hiring of Systemic Practitioners</p> <p>Please outline how you would identify and hire Systemic Practitioners who are Intermediate Level trained in Systemic Practice (equivalent to Band 6 NHS Agenda for Change).</p> <p><i>[maximum 250 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>
<p>Training and embedding of systemic practice</p> <p>Please outline how you would support training of keyworkers and embedding of systemic practice including use of Virtual Systemic Hub and group supervision etc.</p> <p><i>[maximum 250 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>
<p>Sustainability</p> <p>Please outline how you plan to support the ongoing embedding of systemic practice in your local Supporting Families Programme after the end of the pilot study from 2026 onwards. Please include examples of initiatives which you have successfully supported beyond their initial external funding period.</p> <p><i>[maximum 500 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>
<p>Supporting evaluation</p> <p>Please outline how you would support the collection of data as part of the pilot study. Please also include any previous experience of externally commissioned evaluation in early help/children's social care in your local authority.</p> <p><i>[maximum 500 words]</i></p>	<p>[open text]</p>

Additional contact details

Please provide additional contact details for the systemic practice model pilot study.

Contact details for local authority Supporting Families Programme lead	
First name	[open text]
Surname	[open text]
Job title	[open text]
Email	[has to be email to be valid]
Phone Number	[numerals only]

Contact details for Director of Children's Services (or equivalent)	
First name	[open text]
Surname	[open text]
Job title	[open text]
Email	[has to be email to be valid]
Phone Number	[numerals only]

Contact details for data lead for local authorities Supporting Families Programme	
First name	[open text]
Surname	[open text]
Job title	[open text]
Email	[has to be email to be valid]
Phone Number	[numerals only]

Requirement

Please email a supporting letter signed by your Director of Children's Services or equivalent on local authority headed paper agreeing to participate in the pilot study, including agreement to take part if assigned to the control group not implementing the systemic practice model to Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk.

Additional supporting information

Please email any additional supporting information you feel would be useful to Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk.

Thank you for filling out this expression of interest for the Supporting Families Systemic Practice Model Pilot Study. If you have any further questions, please email Impactandevaluation@coram.org.uk.

Annex A: Supporting Families systemic practice model partners

About Coram

Established as the Foundling Hospital in 1739, and the first children's charity, today Coram is a vibrant group of specialist charities and organisations, supporting hundreds of thousands of children, young people and families every year. We use our expert insight and research to engage with government, local authorities, practitioners, carers and families to help deliver better practice, systems and laws. Our mission is to create positive change that lasts a lifetime for children and young people.

For more information please visit www.coram.org.uk.

About IFT

The Institute for Family Therapy is the UK's leading providers of family therapy and systemic psychotherapy training, delivering training to over 500 practitioners annually. IFT is a national charity, which since 1977 has pioneered the development of systemic practice and family therapy in the UK. They currently deliver to a wide range of organisations including local authorities' adult and children's social care and family help services, as well as the NHS and the voluntary and community sector.

IFT will be responsible for delivering the training to local authorities and supporting them to embed the systemic practice model.

For more information, please visit www.ift.org.uk/

About Ecorys

Ecorys is a trusted evaluator for UK Government, with a track record of evaluating local authority-led family intervention and systems change programmes. Ecorys will be supporting Coram in the evaluation of the pilot study.

For more information please visit www.ecorys.com/