



One Front Door Executive Summary

Introduction

SafeLives were funded by the Government's Tampon Tax fund to pilot the first stage of One Front Door, an integrated risk-led whole family response to children's safeguarding and domestic abuse concerns. The approach was developed in response to repeated findings in Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) that professionals were not working together to share information effectively. As a result there was poor identification of the different forms of risk that were present and how they had impacted on different family members. In turn this meant the response provided did not address the risks and needs for those experiencing abuse and their families.

The overall vision for One Front Door is a single access point for support with the whole spectrum of needs for families. This includes but is not exclusive to DA, mental health, substance misuse, housing and child or adult safeguarding.

Aims of One Front Door

- to identify risks and needs within families experiencing domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity
- to support vulnerable adults and children to get a swift and effective response to address the needs within their family before safeguarding thresholds are met
- to mitigate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on children and young people and reduce future incidence of ACEs

The first stage of One Front Door was piloted in seven sites across England; Bexley, Norfolk, North Somerset, North Tyneside, St Helens, Suffolk and West Sussex. All sites received support from SafeLives practice advisors to collaboratively develop a bespoke implementation plan aligned with the principles of One Front Door, and support initial delivery.

Principles of One Front Door

One Front Door is underpinned by principles which we believe encapsulate the approach that we need to take to meet the needs of families experiencing domestic abuse:

- A** transformation of systems, processes and responses
- B**etter support for children and young people who live in fear
- C**reating long term change, not short-term fixes
- D**isrupting those that abuse; perpetrators challenged and held to account
- E**ngaging the 'whole family' means more opportunity to make people safe, sooner
- F**amilies do not operate in silos, and neither must we

One Front Door is a flexible approach which takes account of the local picture and creates an approach that is responsive to the specific needs of families and professionals in each area.

Methodology

SafeLives completed evaluation activities to map practice and process within children's social care (CSC) and domestic abuse services. This included evaluating collaborative working arrangements, and the response provided to families with children experiencing domestic abuse in each of the sites. Some activities were repeated post micro-pilot in the four sites who reached the delivery stage within project timescales for comparison with baseline findings.

Research activity completed before micro-pilot implementation:

- Consultation with survivors of abuse through focus groups and interviews

Research activities completed before and after micro-pilot implementation:

- Mapping of referral pathways and service provision
- Consultation with practitioners working in the area via online surveys and interviews
- Auditing of CSC cases relating to domestic abuse with an Adverse Childhood Experiences lens

Key Findings

Strategic and operational staff within the pilot sites were very positive about the difference One Front Door had made to their inter-agency collaboration and their work with families. The below sets out the key findings. Please see the full report for more details:

One Front Door improves the whole family response to safeguarding and domestic abuse concerns at all levels of identified risk. Where high risk concerns are identified, One Front Door ensures that the risks and needs of all family members and connected individuals are addressed in a co-ordinated way by relevant partner agencies.

“It’s not just saving time, we’re better risk assessing, we’re helping the families better”
Police representative, One Front Door pilot site

When agencies work together can they see the whole picture and support the whole family. Gaps in agency participation should be addressed to ensure all agencies contribute to risk assessment and information sharing processes. Statutory timescales should not be a barrier to collaborative decision making in cases where adults or children are at high risk of harm.

Expertise of wider agencies is critical to seeing the whole picture and all agencies should have equal input to the assessment and action planning for families. Each agency sees the risk and needs of a family from a different perspective. By bringing these together professionals have a picture of the whole family at the earliest opportunity.

Non-statutory services such as mental health and substance misuse services contribute valuable information and expert analysis and are key to preventing escalation for families experiencing complex needs. The expertise and unique contributions of each agency are recognised and valued.

“I’ve never worked anywhere it has been so streamlined, it’s so focused and everybody knows what they are doing and everybody is there together in that multi-agency approach” Domestic Abuse specialist, One Front Door pilot site

Perpetrators of abuse must be subject to scrutiny by all One Front Door professionals, who should seek to understand their behaviour and the risk they pose to others. This includes links to other crimes such as gangs or trafficking. Opportunities to change and break the cycle of abuse should be offered where applicable, alongside interventions to meet support needs.

“The best long-term outcome for any child is that the abusive parent changes their behaviour” JTAI on domestic abuse, 2017¹

Where there is no statutory involvement, identification of a lead professional to co-ordinate is key to providing a joined up response to the needs of the family, reducing duplication and avoiding overwhelming the non-abusive parent with professional contact. Where good relationships between families and professionals already exist these can be utilised rather than introducing someone new.

“No one understands what is happening for us a family. We have eight different workers in our house but each one cares about something different” Survivor of domestic abuse

No Further Action is not an appropriate action for families where there is domestic abuse. Where Children’s Social Care thresholds are not met, consideration should be given to which non-statutory services can provide relevant support to the family. It costs more in the long run when supportive actions are not implemented at the earliest opportunity.

Comprehensive support should be commissioned at Early Help level. This should include provision of direct work with children to support them with the impact of living with domestic abuse and other ACEs, particularly where no specialist DA services for children and young people are commissioned. A clear pathway should be in place for families to access Early Help support.

Commissioners also have a responsibility to provide a specialist response to perpetrators of abuse, and this is critical to the whole family approach and to increasing the safety of the victim/survivor and any children. We need to stop asking 'why doesn't she leave?', and start asking 'why doesn't he stop?'

Domestic abuse is everyone's problem, just as children's safeguarding is. Every agency has a role to play in supporting the whole family where there domestic abuse concerns. We recommend practitioners from all agencies are offered quality domestic abuse training which focuses on what they can contribute in response to all family members.

"It is effective and it really does work" Service Lead, One Front Door Pilot Site

Next Steps

Our next steps are to stress test this approach in additional sites and continue to build the evidence base supporting One Front Door as an effective whole family response. We will look for funding opportunities that will allow us to continue working with our current pilot sites to align all multi-agency responses to the principles of One Front Door. By maximising resources and avoiding duplication of effort the needs of the whole family will remain central to our work.

For more information contact OFD@safelives.org.uk

ⁱ Ibid.