



New Beginnings

Annual Report
September 2021- September 2022

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Introduction

At New Beginnings we specialise in working with parents whose children are involved in the child protection system due to concerns relating to abuse and neglect. Our parents are often classed as 'difficult to reach' due to their complex lifestyles and prior experience of childhood trauma. Many of the parents we work with were subject to the child protection system themselves when they were children. At New Beginnings, therefore, we recognise that all the parents we work with have suffered significant harm at some point in their own lives and they need to be viewed as 'yesterday's children' (Crittenden, 2016). We believe that if society is to break the cycle of abuse, and children are kept safe from harm, then we need to provide parents with the love, care and support they need to become the parents they want to be. In turn, we can help them work to prevent their children from entering care. To do our work well, we focus on building meaningful relationships with parents so that we can develop trust and mutual respect with each other; we believe this is necessary if positive change is to take place.



The story of our project so far

In February 2021, we were awarded £260k of Reaching Communities Funding over a period of three years. This was our first large grant and we wanted to use it to employ two members of staff: an Operation Lead and Post Programme Support Worker. We also wanted to be able to use the funding to support our volunteers, sessional staff and pay for the rent at our drop in centre. We used the time between February and September to create job adverts and start our recruitment process.

In September 2021, following a robust interview process, our Operational Lead, Jadwiga Leigh, and a former parent who had been through the New Beginnings programme, Clare Western, started in their new roles.

The Operational Lead

The main objectives for the Operational Lead once established in post were:

1. To ensure that our parents and peer mentor volunteers were adequately supported and trained to do the programme or support with programme implementation;
2. To ensure that the organisation was practising in line with our policies and procedures as well as acting in accordance with our values and ethical principles;
3. To help us change from being a Community Interest Company (CIC) into becoming a Charity (CIO) so we could develop a sustainable future;
4. To start a pilot of New Beginnings with another Greater Manchester Local Authority;
5. To apply for further grant funding as and when required;
6. To carry out research that would help us better understand the needs of the families we work with;
7. To build an evidence base for New Beginnings and new suite of materials.

Parents and peer mentors

Something that Covid- 19 encouraged us to do was move our weekly therapeutic group work online. After lockdown, many of our new parents wanted to keep the group sessions online- they said that they found it easier to access as well as being a more comfortable space for them to talk in. Parents told us that they still wanted to meet other parents face to face but not talk about their traumatic experiences in that space. Taking this feedback on board, we found a drop-in centre in Bredbury where parents and their children can visit, have a cooked dinner, do art or yoga. The New Beginnings drop-in is held every Wednesday and we have learned that it is a good space for parents to connect with other parents and the core New Beginnings team. We also noticed that children used this space to make new friends.

When parents complete the 24-week programme, they are offered the opportunity to train as peer mentors. Thanks to the Reaching Communities Funding we can refer our parents to Society Inc, a charity we work in partnership with, who run a peer mentoring training course. So far this year, we have referred 6 parents to do the peer mentoring training. All of them are now on a rota, and they work with the core team to help facilitate the group sessions.

Policies and Procedures

In September 2021, we contracted in a human resources company called Citrus to help us run payroll and implement the relevant policies for our employed staff. In addition, the Operational Lead updated all in house policies for the smooth running of the organisation, introducing a Social Media policy as well as Group Work online policy.

Changing from a CIC to a CIO

We knew from the outset that we wanted to change our identity from a CIC to a charity because charities are widely recognised as existing for social good and are publicly trusted organisations. We also felt that a charity status would better suit the aims and objectives of

our organisation, and we strongly felt that with charitable status we would be able to pursue our charitable objectives more readily. Once the Operational Lead took up her role, one of the first things she did was start the application process with the Charity Commission. On 22nd of March, we were granted charity status and have transferred our service, activities, equipment, and team from the CIC to the CIO. We are now looking to expand our Board of Trustees and hope to recruit a wide range of talent, from people with lived experience to people with business acumen who can help us grow and develop in the coming years.

Develop another New Beginnings project with a different Local Authority

When we made the application to the Reaching Communities Fund, we were already having discussions with a Greater Local Authority about setting up a version of New Beginnings with them. However, following an Ofsted inspection, it was agreed that setting up a New Beginnings in that area was no longer their top priority and we would return to discussions at a later date.

During the months of February- May, we were visited on a number of occasions by Josh McAlister and on one occasion, the Children's Minister at the time, Will Quince. Both were involved in the Social Care Review, which was a government ordered review into the child protection system. On their visits they met parents, peer mentors, social workers, and the senior leadership team from Stockport Local Authority. The Government Representatives heard stories of the work that we do from all our primary stake holders, and they were impressed. When the Social Care Review was published, New Beginnings featured as a case study of best practice: <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/>

In addition, the BBC, North West Tonight, the Politics show and the Guardian came and interviewed parents, the team and Stockport Leadership team. Footage of those interviews was released at the same time as the publication of the Social Care Review. This generated a lot of interest in our work, and we have been approached by a few local authorities. Of these requests, one of the local authorities, Cheshire East, has applied for and been granted funding from their council to work with us. We are currently in the process of setting up those initial conversations and hope to run a pilot of New Beginnings in January 2023.

Further grant funding applications

In addition to the Reaching Communities Fund, we have applied for and been awarded two further funds. The first was £10k from the National Lottery Community Fund and the second was £30k from Winston Churchill Activate Funding.

The National Lottery Community Fund that has enabled us to develop the Love2support Project. Not all the families we support on New Beginnings have an extended family network of their own due to having grown up in care or having lost family through bereavement or illness. Although our families continue to receive love, care, and support from New Beginnings, what they often ask for, in addition, is a connection to someone who is not linked to their past but could form part of their future. The funding we received has enabled us to write a programme of work, pay staff and peer mentors to deliver the training, and support

new volunteers in their roles. More information about what the project entails can be found here: <https://www.nbfoundation.co.uk/love2support>

Activate Funding: Following feedback from our parents that they struggled to complete the New Beginnings workbook we carried out research to find out why. We learned that of the 79 families we had worked with, only 8 had been referred to us with an identified learning need. This was because parents had informed their social worker that they struggled to read and write.

We learned on speaking to parents, that there were a further 60 parents who had *unidentified* learning needs. They had not informed their social worker because they were too ashamed to admit they struggled with literacy. This was a revealing discovery for several reasons.

- First, we realised that many of the families we worked with who were in the child protection system, did not understand why they were in that process because they were unable to read the reports they were given from social workers.
- Second, if they could not understand the reports, they were given they would not be able to understand the paper workbook we had produced. This new knowledge inspired us to apply for £30k of Activate Funding from the Winston Churchill Fellowship Trust. We will use this funding to contract a Digital Technician who will be responsible for working with a small group of parents, and a member of our seconded team, Lisa Wyche, who has extensive experience of working with people who have learning needs to develop the paper workbook into a digital resource that is accessible to all parents.

Research with New Beginnings families

An element of New Beginnings is to develop our knowledge and skills so that we can better support the families we work with. We are also curious as to why, what we do, works for the families with support. We therefore applied for £10k from the British Academy Leverhulme Fund to carry out life story interviews with 15 parents who have been through New Beginnings. We have completed those interviews and are now in the process of analysing the data. We hope to produce our own evidence base, make a short film for parents considering joining us and to publish a book that will help to support spread the news about our work.

Post Programme Support Worker and Administrator

We originally requested funding for a Peer Mentor Lead, but we soon realised that what we actually needed was support for **all** parents who had completed the programme- not just peer mentors. We also knew that ideally, we would like to recruit a support worker who had lived experience of being in the child protection system. It was a competitive process, but we were fortunate to have been able to recruit Clare Western. Clare had been a parent of two children who had been subject to the child protection process. She was referred to our programme for Cohort 6 and when she completed it, she became a peer mentor. Clare is also studying for a Diploma in Counselling, and she has extensive administrative experience.

This was a completely new role for New Beginnings, and we now wonder how we managed without it! Clare's role is to contact all the parents who have been through the programme and who want to stay connected to New Beginnings for support on a weekly basis. Clare is also able to provide practical support by completing PIP or DLA forms; supporting people to hospital/ GP/ school/ housing appointments. Clare is also able to support the core team as she has strong administrative skills and good website development skills as well.



How we have involved people from our community in the work that we do

New Beginnings has grown over the years due to the way it listens to the people it works with. It is an aspect of our service we take seriously because we understand that without our families there would be no New Beginnings.

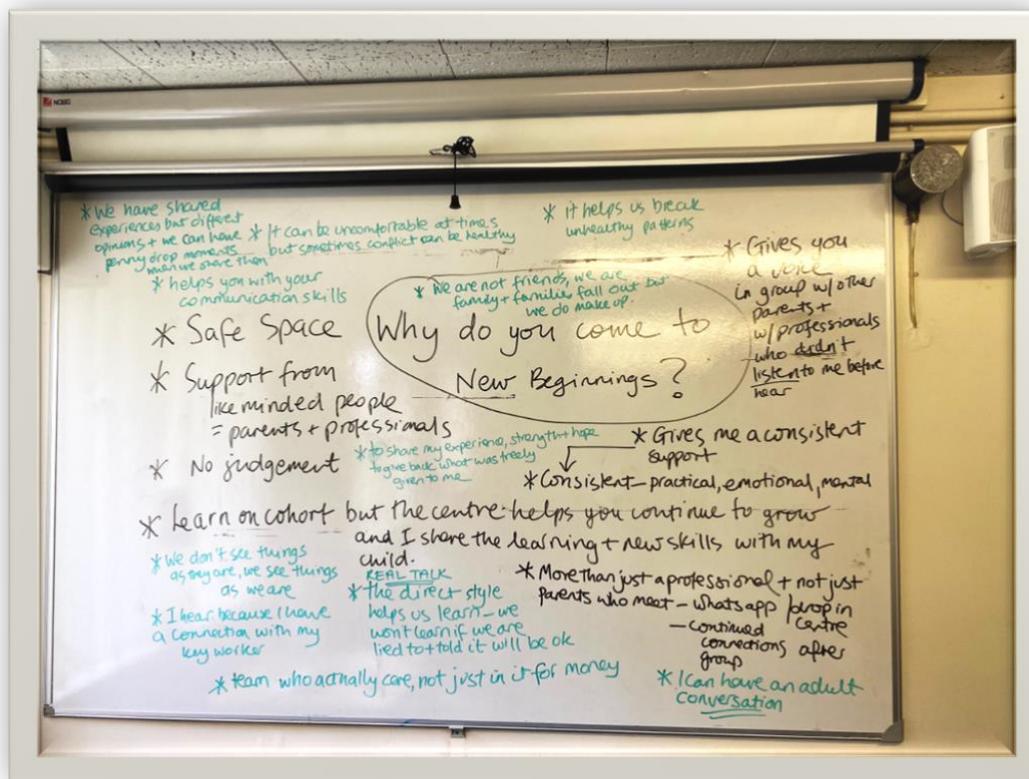
However, to make it easier for families to share their feedback with us we have developed ways in which we can receive feedback through the following methods:

- **Feedback sessions at the weekly drop in.** Every week parents and children can call into our drop in on a Wednesday in Bredbury. There is always something going on in this warm and comfortable space- good food; art or yoga; other families and an opportunity to talk to members of the team. Parents who had completed the programme but who had not become peer mentors told us earlier this year that they missed learning, and they wanted regular weekly top ups. This led to us starting the Life Laundry sessions.
- **Life Laundry sessions** are run by our Project Coordinator, Matthew Purves. Each week parents come to this session with a problem they are facing and share it with the group so they can work it out together. Using Dialectical Behaviour Therapy skills, Matthew helps the group think of what is causing the problem and then what the possible solutions might be.

- **Love2support project:** When families are discharged from Children’s Services, they can feel quite isolated. They realise that they no longer have regular contact with someone they have grown to rely on. We have learned that what parents yearn for is a connection with a replacement person who they might be able to go for coffee and cake with or someone who might be able to help them with some practical issues. Through talking with our families, we developed the idea for the Love2support project: <https://www.nbfoundation.co.uk/love2support>
- **Developing a digital resource:** Our programme paper workbook is a great resource but many of our parents have been vocal about how they struggle with it for two reasons: many cannot read or write well and the workbook involves reading and writing; the other issues, is that it is called ‘a work book’- it reminds them of being at school and they do not have fond memories of that time in their life. We have taken this feedback on board and sought funding to contract in a Digital Technician who will be able to turn our paper workbook into a digital resource that all parents can engage with, enjoy and benefit from.
- **Research:** Doing the Life Story interviews with parents have enabled us to hear from parents what difference New Beginnings has made to their lives. This exercise has helped us develop themes around why parents are referred into the child protection system and what they need to get out of it.
- **End of cohort evaluations:** At the end of each cohort, we send out evaluations to parents who have just completed the programme to find out what went well and what we could do to improve our practice. This feedback is valuable in enabling us to make tweaks to the way we deliver the programme; how 1:1 sessions work; Video Interaction Guidance and Attachment Theory Interviews.
- **Team meetings and group supervision:** Listening to the team is vitally important if we are to improve the way we practice. Every Wednesday the team meet to share their experiences of being part of New Beginnings. They regularly provide feedback on how we can improve the service they deliver to our families. Their views are always heard and responded to.
- **Advisory Board:** Every 6 weeks we have an advisory board with Stockport Council along with other professionals from different agencies who refer into our service. It is attended by the New Beginnings team and parents who have been on the programme. This space is helpful for us to share stories of what we have been doing; to give feedback about any issues we have encountered and to ask for support with what we would like to be doing.



Why do parents come to New Beginnings?



As mentioned earlier, becoming a charity means that we need to make sure the people we work with are part of our direction of travel. Their voice is important in helping us understand why we do what we do; but it can also shape what we can do differently in the future when working with new families and professionals.

We recently asked twelve parents at the drop in centre to help us shape our mission statement and our vision for the future. We began by asking a simple question: why do you come to New Beginnings? Above is a picture taken from the feedback we received that day but to give context we will provide more detail below:

AK – It's a safe space where we get respected and not judged regardless of what life throws at us. There are likeminded people here, whether that is other parents or professionals. And you get support and help.

LB – Being on the cohort helps you grow and learn but coming to the centre continues that growth and learning.

SW – It gives you a voice. In the drop in, in group sessions and with professionals as well. When you have people with you, representing you, you are listened to whereas before professionals didn't listen to me or my kids.

ZA – When we're having assessments like psychologist assessments it's helpful for the professionals to know that New Beginnings gives us a reliable support network so our children can stay in our care.

AK- We access counselling, support to go to the GP, to court, support during parenting assessments, whatever we need you are there.

LB- NB goes beyond being just a professional body. We form connections via the WhatsApp, drop-in centre and have relationships beyond group. We meet up with our children. We go to play sessions and just have space and time for each other.

SS – I came to share my experience, strength and hope and to give back what was freely given to me

Matthew- I love NB it's my reason for being, but it's uncomfortable sometimes – Why do people come back with such discomfort or conflict?

ZA – sometimes I think conflict is healthy because it helps you sit with discomfort and grow. It helps us break unhealthy patterns. It helps with communication skills

Matthew – Repeated a phrase he had used in life laundry DBT the week before: “We don't see things as they are... We see things as we are.”

Jad – When you're talking about discomfort... We (NB) are very direct. Have we ever said anything to you that you didn't like?

SS – You are direct, which I respect a great deal. If I'm being an idiot, I need someone to tell me I'm being an idiot.

AK – We need that sometimes to help us reflect on where we might be going wrong. I don't want people to lie to me, and I don't want people to punish me for getting wrong. I want to know what others see so I can get it right.

SW – Lisa (key worker) has a great connection with me and helped challenge me to reframe my mindset on a piece of homework that I didn't want to do. She told me it wasn't healthy for me to keep saying “I cannot do something” and I realised she was right. So I just went and did it and it helped.

Jad – You're all speaking about what you get from the team, but what about each other?

AK/ GA – We are like a family, we may fall out, but we have moments where we support each other and be there for each other.

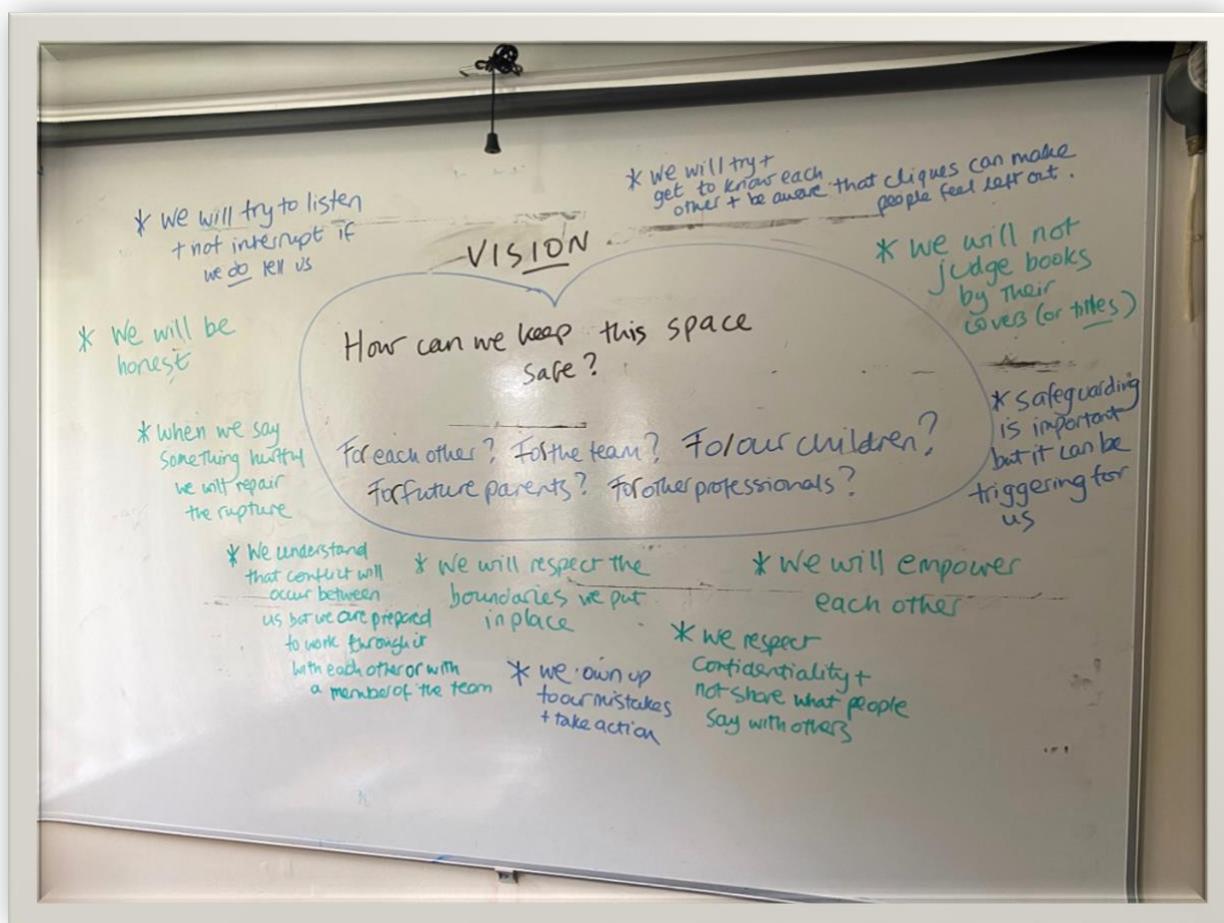
MT – I can have an adult conversation, because I'm a single mother and I can come here and have conversations with other mums and grown-ups.

LB – Shared experiences. We all have different backgrounds and approaches, which can help us look at it differently. Which can lead to light bulb/penny drop moments.

ZA – Everyone is at different stages, but the drop in gives support and hope to whoever needs it.

SS – It's a nurturing environment.

How can we keep this space safe? For each other? For the team? For our children? For future parents? For other professionals?



One of the primary findings from the first question we asked, 'Why do you come to New Beginnings?' was that New Beginnings was a safe space. Parents stayed with us because they felt comfortable. They recognised that there were pockets of discomfort when disagreements took place between other parents or when a team member gave them information that they may not have expected, but they acknowledged that this discomfort was part of growth. They all agreed that they learned most when they were encouraged to reflect on actions they had made and the impact these had on their children or other parents or indeed, professionals.

We wanted to expand on this learning by exploring how we could continue to keep the space safe for each other; for our children; for future parents who wanted to join New Beginnings and for other professionals who wanted to visit or work with us.

Above is a picture of the main points from our discussion. Below we provide more context:

CE – I didn't trust anyone to begin with. I thought you were like all the other social workers. But then I saw you were consistent with your care, the boundaries that kept us safe and your honesty. It made me feel empowered that I could be part of that, truthfulness.

LB – We make mistakes but I think we have learned that when we say something hurtful, we will repair the rupture.

MT – I feel we have learned not to judge someone before you know their story – we don't judge a book by its cover.

SS – We respect confidentiality. What is stated here should be respected and not gossiped about externally.

AH – We take responsibility, own up to our mistakes and take action

ZA – Safeguarding is important but it's also a trigger for parents

GR – Be mindful that what we say can and will trigger people and be prepared to deal with that.

CE- We will try to listen and not interrupt – If we do tell us. Turn taking.

Jad next spoke about cliques and how if we are one space, one big group, how can we make sure everyone feels part of this one group?

This question encouraged a lot of debate. Everyone came to the decision that cliques may keep a small group of people safe but they were not helpful if we were to grow as a family and welcome new parents to the group. It was agreed that each week parents would talk to someone new or someone they had not spoken to before.

The parents then came back to the team with the question of security: How do we know you are here to stay?

It emerged that an important factor for our families is whether the team are secure and safe (Jad, Matthew, Clare and Lisa).

LB/ GA: Without our NB team, we don't work. Uncertain futures for our team is not a great motivator and does not allow our space to remain safe for all.

We have learned that the families that come to New Beginnings usually do so knowing that something in their lives is out of step.

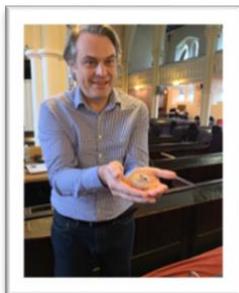
Whether this is unacknowledged or unprocessed trauma, or mental and emotional complex needs. We work holistically with parents to support them in a way that is both constructive and therapeutic. And in turn, we have developed into a support network that is present for those going through the toughest of times life has to throw at them.

Families can elect to stay involved with New Beginnings beyond the initial 24-week period for as long as they care to via our post-programme support system. As you can see from the feedback provided above, people come to New Beginnings because they feel like they have to but, in the end, they stay because they want to.

Events we have held for children

This year we have held a number of different events for children during the holidays.

Bring your pet day. Matthew, our project coordinator, is holding T's (10 years old) pet hamster.



Jadwiga, CEO, took P (14 years old) outdoor swimming for the first time.



P made Jadwiga a thank you card for taking her swimming.



Andy Fear, our resident artist, ran a Christmas Workshop for families, Dec 2021



We went to visit, Michelle, our counsellor's horse, Teddy.



At Hallowe'en, we made monster bags!



We asked children to tell us how they feel about New Beginnings. This is what they said:

"When can I come back?" R, aged 5 years old.

"I like the games we play, the art and making new friends" C, 7 years old.

"It feels like my second home" P, aged 14 years old

"It's better than school" A, 8 years old.

"It makes me feel special" T, aged 10 years old.

The differences we are making

Since September 2021 we have worked with 34 families: 34 parents and 56 children. The following data explores the details of the 34 families further:

Ten parents are still completing the programme. They are currently on Week 15 and due to finish in December 2022. **We received 42 referrals for Cohort 10** and are expecting 20+ new families to start on Tuesday 18th of October.

Eight parents did not complete the programme:

- Five families withdrew stating that they could not commit to time required to do the work.
- Two families were referred onto FDAC (Family Drug and Alcohol Court) due to court proceedings being initiated.
- One parent withdrew because she disagreed with the fact that we were also working with the father of her youngest child (on a 1:1 basis).

Two parents completed the programme but did not complete the 1:1 key work sessions:

- One parent felt it was too hard to commit to 1:1 sessions when she was also working part time. It also materialised that this parent was dependent on alcohol and this became more apparent the more we worked with the parent.
- One parent was heavily pregnant and decided to re-refer herself back into the programme when she had had her baby. She returns for Cohort 10 on 18th of October.

12 parents did complete the programme and all 12 have either been stepped down from child protection and/or no longer receive any form of social care intervention.

- **19 children have been prevented from entering the care system.**
- **3 children were returned home from being in care.**

Here are their stories:

- AK's child was subject to child protection at the start of the programme. The concerns related to domestic abuse, cannabis use and poor attachment between mother and child which affected the child's ability to engage well with school. By working closely with AK she has reduced her cannabis use. She recognises the risks involved with domestic abuse and the impact it had on her child. A QbCheck test showed that the parent had ADHD and it materialised her child was neurodiverse also. The narrative around poor attachment was reframed and in turn, the school adapted their support to take into consideration the additional needs of both parent and child. The family no longer receive any form of social care intervention. AK is now a peer mentor for New Beginnings.
- DH's child was in foster care when she started working with us. DH was referred to us with an identified learning need however, due to concerns that DH was still in a relationship with her ex-partner and not able to see the risks posed by other family members, the social worker felt that it was not safe for the child to return home. However, we held a different perspective. By working closely with DH we learned that she did not understand some of the implicit directions/ tasks set by the social worker.

We therefore worked closely with DH, the social worker, team manager and IRO to change the dominant narrative that DH did not have the capacity to parent well, to a narrative that DH could parent well when professionals were clear with their expectations. By the time DH completed the programme, her child had been rehabilitated to her care and social care intervention has now ended altogether. DH continues to receive post programme support from New Beginnings.

- EO's three children have been in and out of child protection for 12 years due to concerns relating to drug misuse, domestic abuse and neglect. In November 2021, EO's family were stepped out of child protection and no longer receive any form of social care intervention. EO also learned that she has ADHD and was seen within 6 weeks of our referral. The ADHD medication EO takes has transformed her life. EO has been accessing post programme support from New Beginnings but has asked to join Cohort 10 group sessions and re-do the workbook with Clare Western. Her reason for doing so is that she did not concentrate before ADHD diagnosis and feels she missed a lot; now she has the ability to concentrate she would like to do it again and retain the information she learned.
- JB's child was subject to a full care order at home when she started working with us due to concerns relating to domestic abuse and drug misuse. JB was thought to have borderline personality disorder but after she did a QbCheck and scored 100% it materialised she had ADHD. She is waiting for a full assessment. The care order has been discharged and parent and child live at home together with minimal social care intervention. JB continues to access post programme support from New Beginnings.
- LTM's four children were subject to child protection at the start of the programme due to concerns relating to domestic abuse. By the end of the programme, LTM's family had stepped out of child protection and social care intervention had ceased. LTM only had 1:1 key work sessions. She has chosen not to access post programme support.
- SK's child was subject to child protection when she started working with us due to concerns relating to cannabis use and domestic abuse. By the time she completed the programme, the family had stepped out of child protection and no longer receive social care intervention from Stockport Local Authority. They moved to another area and remain in contact with New Beginnings.
- AB's two children were subject to child protection when she started working with us. Concerns related to domestic abuse and emotional harm as the eldest child was not attending school regularly. A QbCheck showed that the eldest child was likely to have Autism and ADHD, which explained why it was difficult for her to engage with mainstream education. Once AB realised that she was not a "bad" parent, but a parent of a child with additional needs she grew in strength and confidence. By the time she completed the programme, the family had stepped out of child protection and no longer receive social care intervention from Stockport Local Authority. The family continue to come to the drop in.
- KP's two children were in foster care when she started working with us due to concerns relating to drug dependency and domestic abuse. By the time she completed the programme, the concerns were no longer prevalent and both children had been rehabilitated home. The case has been stepped out of child protection but still receive support on a child in need basis. KP continues to access post programme support from New Beginnings.

- LR's child was receiving support from the Team Around Child Social Care service when she was referred to us due to concerns relating to domestic abuse. By the time she had completed the programme, LR had moved home and was in a new relationship with a partner who she has a good supportive relationship with. The family no longer receiving support from social care. LR continues to access post programme support from New Beginnings.
- CE's three children were in the pre-proceedings process when the family started working with us. The local authority was close to initiating court proceedings due to concerns relating to her choice in partners who posed a risk to her children. They wanted CE to carry out a psychological assessment but she refused. We met with the Service Unit Manager and proposed a different plan, one which was more therapeutic and worked to understand and support CE. Our plan was agreed with and due to the significant progress CE made with New Beginnings Programme, Video Interaction Guidance and 6 sessions with a psychotherapist, court proceedings were avoided. The family have recently stepped out of child protection and are now receiving support from the Team Around Child service. CE is now training to become a peer mentor for New Beginnings.
- SS's child was subject to the child protection process and in the care of mother when he self-referred into our service and started working with us. SS had 4 children previously removed from his care and there were concerns that he would be unable to parent his child who has autism. However, SS worked well with New Beginnings, VIG and his counsellor and significant change was observed. Court proceedings were initiated by the local authority and in July 2022, the father was granted a supervision order which means the child resides with him rather than the mother. SS recently moved into a 2 bedroom flat with his child after having lived in homeless accommodation for a year. SS continues to attend the drop in every Wednesday.
- GK's two children were subject to child protection when they were referred to our service due to concerns relating to domestic abuse. By the time GK completed the programme, the family had been stepped down from child protection and were no longer receiving any form of social care intervention. GK is training to become a peer mentor for New Beginnings.

To give context to the information above here are some quotes taken from interviews with the parents following completion from the programme:

Extract 1, mother who had a child in foster care:

And how were the key work sessions?

I like them. I like it when you come here, because I know I can offload on you. If I've got anything that I'm worried about, I know that you'll solve it on the same day like you just have with them forms and stuff. So yeah, I look forward to you coming seeing me.

Were you suspicious of me at the start?

Only because I thought you was a social worker.

Which I am.

I know, but you're not like the other social workers.

So what's different about me, then, to the other social workers?

You understand us more. You give us hope. I trust you. They just... I don't know why I think it, but I just think they're fobbing me off all the time. Whereas with you, I

know you're not. I know that if you say summat, you'll do it. Or if you tell us something, I know it's true and you mean it, whereas they've been saying this, we're gonna get this done, gonna do that, and I'm still waiting. So I don't really know where I stand until I met your group, and now I feel like I'm getting somewhere.

Extract 2, mother who had a child in pre-proceedings:

And how did working with New Beginnings compare to your previous experiences of children's social care?

Well, it's nothing like children's social care, you feel like you can open up to New Beginnings, you can be honest. And they only... don't get me wrong, they do talk to you, social workers, but New Beginnings save you in many, many situations that I can think of, and not just with me but with any other case that was on that group, there was a lot of girls that New Beginnings saved, and even directing on to other departments, drug departments when they thought New Beginnings wasn't good enough, that they needed really good help, and they even kept the door open for them to come back if you wanted to; just little things like they just don't give up on people.

Extract 3, mother who had a child in child protection process:

What did you think about New Beginnings when you started?

I thought it was going to be really scary.

And was it?

No, I love New Beginnings. I'd recommend New Beginnings for anyone who's struggling or in social, I think it's such a good group. It's helped me so much with just not feeling like I'm failing all the time, and stuff can be hard, but we've got a little group where we all get together, we have a little brew and a whinge on a Wednesday and it's just nice, it's like a nice little community of mums; I love it.

Extract 4, mother who had children in pre-proceedings:

What is different about New Beginnings do you think?

I mean, I think of all the other courses that I've done like for example, [Name] programme, and as soon as like, we did the last session, the door slammed behind you, and not even shut nicely. It is slammed. And it's like I mean, I was supposed to be on the [Name] programme again this year but I think I've got more out of New Beginnings than any other course I've done. I mean I have emotional resilience now and I feel stronger than I ever have.

That's interesting because I don't think we consider ourselves as a domestic abuse programme but interestingly, all our parents have experienced domestic abuse so it is something we need to consider....

Well, I have learned that I think I crave that that very, very needy kind of person because I never had that secure or love or care as a kid. So once somebody shows me that it's like the best thing since sliced bread. You know, the kind of sort of like love bombing, knowing that I'll fall for it. And then I can't find that strength to get out of it until somebody gives me that strength like a social worker, for example. "Him or you kids?" No, it's my kids every time. So, I can't find that strength until somebody I suppose threatens to take my kids because they are my strength. But now I have learned, I have strength. I don't need social workers to tell me what I need to do. My childhood doesn't have to define me so I have picked up my crown, dusted it off and I am going to wear it with pride.

Extract 5, father who was homeless and not having contact with his son when he self referred into us:

Can you remember how you came back into New Beginnings?

You worked with me and my ex-partner in 2018 and then I came back when she ended the relationship and threw me out. I was in a bad place. I was mentally and physically exhausted and sofa surfing. She wouldn't let me see my son and that was

bad for me and him. I was giving up hope then you said I could come back. I started the 1:1 work with Luke, counselling with Michelle, and doing a bit of painting and decorating for the other parents. I did that cos you paid off my arrears with housing so I could get a bed at [Name of hostel]. Then Matt sorted out contact and you did VIG with me and my son and then it all turned round. Last Christmas I had, a single bed in a hostel. This Christmas I have my son in my care and we are in this two bedroom flat. Look at them carpets. I still keep pinching myself. We have never been so happy and people can't get over the change in me or my son.

Concluding comments: What we have learned

We have learned a lot this year and are still learning! But to summarise here are the main reflections:

- From the data provided above, it is evident that when parents complete the programme, they not only stay together as a family, but they also step out or down from the child protection process.
- There are a few reasons for this:
 1. Parents are ready to effect change and commit to learning new strategies;
 2. Parents value building a relationship with a transitional attachment figure from New Beginnings, someone (or some people) who cares about their welfare and that of their children;
 3. Parents value the fact that we never close the door on them- our door is always open and we will continue to provide post programme support for whoever needs it.
 4. Professionals are open to receiving differing perspectives on a parent and developing a new narrative about who they are and what they are trying to achieve.

We have also learned that parents with drug and alcohol dependency issues struggle to work with us when they are not able to reduce or cease using drugs and alcohol before starting to work with us. We therefore need to consider how we can better detect the levels of drug and alcohol use parents are using so that we know which kind of support parents need to engage with prior to joining us.

What we are changing

Project changes:

We are making tweaks to the programme following advice from parents and the team:

- Our secondments are crucial to the work we do but for them to offer families the right advice, support and therapeutic care they need to be experienced social workers. This year we recruited Lisa Wyche to join Matthew Purves- both of whom are social workers, practice educators; experienced therapeutic practitioners and skilled representatives;
- Creating a digital workbook;
- Encouraging parents to do group work at the start but if it does not work for them, offering them a 1:1 option
- If we learn that parents are drug and/or alcohol dependent then they need to engage with services meaningfully before starting with New Beginnings

- Parents are to have an Adult Attachment Interview at the start of the programme so we can learn which attachment strategy they are using. This will help the team know how to support the parent to effect change and it will inform a bespoke plan of work for the counsellor to complete with the parent.
- Video Interaction Guidance is a crucial tool to develop parental confidence in parenting their children but also a means for the team to better understand the dynamics of parent- child relationship. All the team will be trained in VIG- however, funding needs to be sourced to pay for their training.

What do we need to grow and become sustainable

Security for our secondment roles

- The evidence shows we do good work, but we recognise that we would not be able to do it without the secondments that Stockport Local Authority have provided us with. It has taken us a while to get the team just right, so that we have the (com)passion, skills and expertise on hand to support parents effectively. We now have that team in place and our families love them. However, what we cannot provide is the security that Lisa and Matthew seek. We would like to establish a more secure future for our two social work secondments so that they can relax and enjoy their role. It would also help our families feel reassured that they are here to stay.

Business consultant quotes:

- We currently rely on fundraising to pay for the salaries of New Beginnings staff, volunteers, sessional workers and general running costs of the project. We are fortunate that Stockport local authority contribute to the project with two secondments who are experienced and valuable resources. However, we recognise that the current funding model is not sustainable. We have received quotes from business consultants who have the expertise to help us develop a more sustainable business model, one which can more accurately cost the service we provide and the savings we can bring to local authorities.

Apply for further funding for an additional post:

- We would like to talk to the National Lottery about whether it would be possible to apply for additional Reaching Community Funding. The CEO's current working hours are not sustainable and further support is required if she is to properly set up a pilot in another local authority.

Trustee recruitment

- We are recruiting new trustees. Our current board consists of three people and we hope that a stronger more diverse and experienced board of trustees will help us navigate the next two years more effectively.



Thank you to our supporters

New Beginnings would not have been able to achieve any of the good work we have carried out to date with our families without the support of certain people. We want to use this space to acknowledge everyone who has given us their time and energy; referred into us; worked with us; taught us new skills; shared insight and experience from their own journey; believed in us and given us inspiration for the future. We appreciate your involvement, however big or small that maybe. We do what we do because we love our work, but more so, we love the families we work with. Thank you for being part of our journey.

Special thanks go to:

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Artwork from families at New Beginnings at the ARC Exhibition, October 2022.