

Frontline strategy 2025-28

Frontline's vision is of a society where no child's life chances are limited by their family or social circumstances. For the 700,000 children in England who rely on social workers each year, this vision is too often sadly far from their reality. That's why Frontline has played a crucial role in developing excellent practice, leadership and innovation in children's social work over the last 11 years.

In our first decade we have trained over 2,500 leaders with the skills to create a culture where social workers can thrive. We have enabled and funded over 30 innovations that help children and provided coaching to thousands of social workers and managers to improve their skills and keep motivated to stay in social work. And we have recruited more than 3,600 new children's social workers from diverse backgrounds, to reflect the families they support, and trained them to become relational, anti-oppressive, systemic practitioners.

Over the last decade, we have seen an overall reduction in the number of children coming into care in England (excluding an increase in unaccompanied minors). More than a third of local authority children's services use an evidence-informed practice methodology, compared to a handful in 2015. And a greater proportion are rated good than were 10 years ago. During this time, Frontline has worked alongside virtually all local authority children's services in England and achieved excellent partner retention and satisfaction rates, demonstrating that we are a valued contributor to this improved national picture.

Yet we still need to see a seismic shift in the way social workers work if we want children to have better outcomes. This is why systems change is a core objective for Frontline. An important precondition for systems change is a critical mass of skilled, brave leaders at all levels of social work (and beyond), making decisions that are best for children. This has informed our work to date and will continue to drive our choices.

What we have currently is a system increasingly skewed to crisis intervention, with outcomes for children that continue to be unacceptably poor and costs that continue to rise – Stable Homes Built on Love, Independent Review of Children's Social Care, DfE, 2023

The next three years

Our theory of change sets out how our work as a charity will lead to improvements for children. Over the next three years we will focus our energy and resources in three key areas.

Practice, leadership and innovation in children's services

We will continue to develop the practice, leadership and innovation skills of social workers and other professionals in children's services. At the current rate, the Fellowship – professionals



who have completed training with Frontline – will number 8,000 in 2028, including an estimated 15% of the entire children's social work workforce. This ever-growing community of diverse, mission-aligned individuals will share an approach to practice and leadership, and an appetite for driving change. Together they will create a powerful force of positive influence on the quality of practice and culture within local authority children's services.

Using our sector knowledge and experience, we will explore a number of new areas over the coming months and years, such as:

- a range of training packages for like-minded charities and organisations
- leadership development programmes for more senior managers
- a wrap-around leadership offer for high-potential senior social work leaders, focusing on progression and ongoing, career-long coaching and mentoring
- expanded innovation work, with an emphasis on building a pipeline of ideas to benefit from our Innovation programme, and creating a programme for senior leaders to develop and incubate their innovations
- the development of a social worker designed case recording system with AI functions embedded to reduce the bureaucratic burden on practitioners
- the development of VR tools for use in social work education and delivery

New ways to bring about systems change

As a national charity with excellent relationships with children's services and government, we are well positioned to influence culture and policy at the local and national level. By mobilising our thousands of fellows and growing our direct work with young people with lived experience, we can ensure the voices of these social workers and young people are able to help shape decision-making and raise the positive profile of social work in the process.

Expanding our approach to include the team around the child

For the past decade we have focused our attention on improving lives for children who do not have safe and stable homes, or who are at risk of harm, by striving to make social work better. While this will remain at the heart of our work, we believe that in order to create significant and lasting change, we also need to widen our approach to other professionals working with these children. That's why we have developed our mission, which is to make life better for children at risk of harm, by improving the services that support them. And it's why, over the next three years and beyond, we will expand our training offer to professionals working alongside children's social workers – such as early help and youth workers – and explore opportunities to improve practice, leadership and innovation across the public and third sectors, to support children.



Objectives for 2025-2028

To remain ambitious and on track we will measure progress against the following objectives:

1. Recruit, train and develop 1,000+ social workers each year

The result will be social workers with the right skills and attributes to:

- work in an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, relational, systemic way with professionals and children and their families
- be equipped with cultural humility and awareness of bias and an understanding of how to utilise the social graces
- bring the ambition and innovative ideas to change things for the better.

2. Develop and maintain relationships with key stakeholders.

This will include stakeholders such as local authorities, the Department for Education and Social Work England, in order to:

- find 500+ placements in local authorities across England for Approach Social Work participants annually
- encourage organisations to invest in staff development via Progress Social Work and our other training opportunities
- ensure initial social work and leadership training remain a priority for central government
- influence the regulatory landscape to focus on better outcomes for children and families.

3. Train leaders in the sector and mission-aligned roles

The result will be leaders with the right skills and attributes to:

- hold/balance risk and make decisions with children at the centre
- use a systemic, equitable approach to supervision and management
- drive systemic change by embedding and evidencing the effectiveness of Frontline's training.

4. Set fellows up to create lasting change for children

To achieve this we will ensure fellows are:

- supported and resilient
- excellent at practice
- proactive in achieving sector improvements through innovation and leadership
- remaining in roles working with children and families
- advocating for the Frontline approach with central and local government.

To achieve these objectives, we need to run an **efficient, effective organisation** with a culture of freedom and responsibility, by:

**Putting children and families first:**

- leading with a focus on children in all our work
- maintaining a clear commitment to mission and purpose
- communicating our purpose clearly - internally and externally

Making diversity and inclusion everyone's business:

- investing in resources and build accountability
- prioritising a clear focus on equity, diversity and inclusion in all our work

Working as one team:

- creating systems and conditions for effective cross-team working
- investing in meetings, internal communications and away days

Making decisions based on good judgement and evidence:

- maintaining accurate and accessible data and dashboards
- investing in evaluation

We are proud of what we've achieved in our first 11 years, but there is clearly still much more to do. We are looking forward to developing the work outlined in this strategy in order to ensure that we continue to make life better for children at risk of harm.