

Pathways
programme



Handbook for
Pathway 4
leaders

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Frontline and leadership development

At Frontline – England's largest social work charity and experienced social work training provider – everything we do aims to make life better for children who need a social worker, to help keep them safe from harm and to give them every possible chance to fulfil their potential. We know that excellent social work leadership is one of the crucial elements to achieving this; strong leadership skills empower people at all levels to navigate their roles and contributes to creating a culture which prioritises children and families above all else.

That's why a focus on equipping social workers with the skills to deliver the best possible support and improved outcomes for children and families sits at the heart of the Pathways programme. The aim is for 1,000 social work leaders to complete the Pathways programme each year. These leaders will be from local authorities across England, working within different contexts at different stages of their career.



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Introduction to the Pathways programme

The Social Work Leadership Pathways programme is the national practice leadership development programme for social worker managers and supervisors across England, created by Frontline. It is funded by the Department for Education and is delivered in partnership with [North Yorkshire County Council](#) and [What Works for Children's Social Care](#), with the support of Hertfordshire County Council. The Pathways programme consolidates leadership development for leaders from practice supervisors to practice leaders into one cohesive offer.

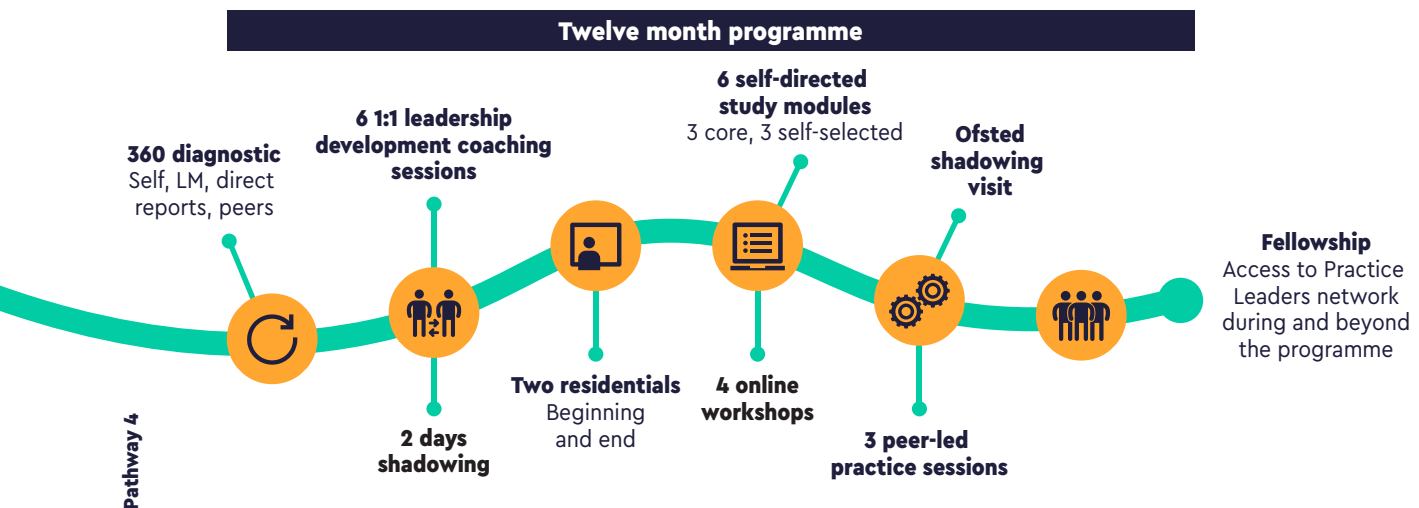
Pathway 4

Pathway 4 will empower aspirant and in-role practice leaders to lead, champion and continuously improve multiple services. There are two strands to Pathway 4:

In-role: Assistant directors (or equivalent role e.g. Director for Family Services) with day-to-day operational responsibility across the whole local system for child and family social work practice, ensuring it operates correctly and overseeing child and family frontline practitioners and leaders.

Aspirant: Experienced heads of service (or equivalent) who are motivated to develop their leadership skills and progress into a practice leader role.

The programme is comprised of various components, which are demonstrated by the delivery model below. The schedule (providing dates and delivery windows) for the programme is available on the bespoke learning platform my.thefrontline.org.uk.



Residentials, workshops and self-study: what to expect

Each programme is comprised of residentials, online workshops and self-study units. These are compulsory elements which have been sequenced to maximise your learning and development and attendance is mandatory for all. The below table provides an overview of these core elements:

Residential	<p>Residentials are a core component of the curriculum and provide a crucial opportunity for you to meet your fellow Pathways leaders and form a network. You will be immersed in the learning experience, providing an opportunity to learn away from your work context.</p> <p>Each residential lasts two days and you will have the option to stay for two nights.</p>
Workshops	<p>Our workshops are online learning experiences designed to build knowledge and peer relationships. The curriculum will be integrated with your coaching sessions, residential experiences and self-study units.</p>
Self-study units	<p>Self-study units will be sequenced to complement and support your learning at online workshops and residentials. You will have access to my.thefrontline.org.uk, a learning platform that will host programme information (such as agendas and residential logistics) and programme content.</p> <p>Self-study units will consist of reading materials, audio and video recordings, quizzes, and reflective logs. There will be a mix of core and self-selected study throughout the programme and there is an expectation that some of these will need to be completed ahead of an online workshop or residential.</p>
Leadership development coaching	<p>You will receive online leadership development coaching throughout the programme. These 90-minute sessions will support you to identify areas of strength and development, enhancing your leadership practice and embedding learning.</p>
Shadowing (including Ofsted visit)	<p>You will take part in up to 3 days of shadowing during the programme, with opportunities to shadow within and outside of your local authority and with close working agencies e.g., Ofsted. These visits provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your own service, learn from other authorities and understand the priorities of other agencies.</p>
Peer led practice sessions	<p>You will be allocated into small practice groups in which you will have the opportunity to further embed the teaching on the programme. For example, space to problem solve and practice essential skills with peers in a safe, supportive learning environment.</p>

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Expectations of you

- To complete the programme, we ask for your full commitment to the range of activities provided by the programme.
- Attendance is compulsory for all elements so that you (and in turn your teams and wider organisation) get the most from the programme.
- Please speak to your manager and colleagues regarding these commitments and ensure that they are aware of when you will be attending to manage any potential conflicts.
- If you anticipate any issues with this during your time on the programme, please contact us via [Zendesk](#).
- We ask for feedback regularly throughout our programmes which is all completely anonymous. We will ask explicit questions about diversity and inclusion and would like to encourage all leaders to be as candid and constructive as possible so that we (the programme and the team) can continue to ensure the best possible programme experience and impact.



Frontline's commitment to diversity and inclusion

Frontline's work is underpinned by our commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I) broadly and anti-racism in particular. We work to ensure that our programme cohorts are from a diverse range of backgrounds and ethnicities. As a charity striving to bring about social change for children and families through excellent social work practice, leadership and innovation, we are focused on ensuring that we are a genuinely anti-racist and anti-oppressive organisation. We fully recognise the value that such diversity brings to social work practice – we cannot develop excellent social work practice and leadership without including a wide variety of voices, experiences, and backgrounds.

What this means for the Social Work Leadership Pathways programme

We will:

- encourage, challenge, and influence our leaders, partners, suppliers and all those we work with to be actively anti-racist and fully inclusive.
- provide bespoke support from your leadership development coach (LDC) and apply research-informed pedagogical principles so that all leaders can fully engage and participate throughout the programme.
- actively seek and encourage applications from leaders from racialised minority backgrounds.
- actively recruit and seek to draw on a diverse range of experts (including LDCs) in designing and delivering the programme.
- include research, work and lived experience from a wide-ranging diversity of backgrounds within the curriculum.
- plan specific content centred on anti-racist, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, to impact on individual leaders, their teams and ultimately on the children and families that they serve.

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The overall aim of D&I content and delivery is to:

- meet leaders where they are and move them progressively along their D&I journey.
- normalise discomfort and challenge leaders' thinking.
- provide tools and strategies that leaders can practise using to become more confident, competent and articulate in conversations about race and discrimination, and able to instil this in others

D&I and the Pathways programme curriculum

- All leaders on our programmes will engage with the **Social Graces** (Burnham, 1992) as a reflexive tool for exploring identity, diversity, intersectionality and bias.



- The curriculum will be underpinned by relationship-based principles of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice.
- The majority of the curriculum will take an intersectional approach. However, there will be explicit and specific training about the protected characteristics of race, sexual orientation and disability (including SEN and neurodiversity). This is due to the disproportionate representation of children in the care system from these minoritised groups and therefore the relative importance and impact of developing understanding and skill in these areas.¹
- There will also be a focus on how gender intersects with race, disability and other Social Grades.
- Our evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning, including slide deck design, will ensure full accessibility and inclusion during sessions for leaders on our programmes.

What does this mean for leaders on the Pathways programme?

- **Being comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.** This means actively listening to different perspectives, avoiding defensiveness and being open to challenge and change.
- **Accepting that learning is an ongoing process.** Recognise *where you are* and accept that language, knowledge and understanding are continually developing and learning. As Maya Angelou said, 'Do the best you can until you know better. When you know better, do better.'
- **Maintaining curiosity and actively listening.** This is vital, even when the discussion may not seem immediately relevant to your context.
- **Being self-reflexive.** Opening yourself up to new ways of thinking and to challenging bias.
- **Contributing to a safe space for all leaders.** While we want open dialogue and to create an environment for change, we will not tolerate discriminatory language or behaviour.

1. **28% of children with social workers are from racialised minority backgrounds** compared with 14% of the population (Turner, 2020). There are barriers and challenges for racialised minority disabled children and their families who experience multiple forms of inequalities (Ali et al, 2001; Kaushal and Nawaz, 2006; Nawaz, 2006). Research shows that children from racialised minority groups are overrepresented in Special Educational Needs and are more likely to be identified with social, emotional and mental health needs (Strand and Lindorff, 2018). Looked after children are almost **four times** more likely to have a special educational need (SEN) than all children, and are almost **nine times** more likely to have an education, health and care (EHC) plan than all children. In 2019, **55.9%** of looked after children had a special educational need compared with 14.9% of all children and **46%** of children in need.

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What support do we provide for leaders on our programmes?

- **Reasonable adjustments.** We would strongly encourage all leaders to share their needs with us and request adjustments that we can implement to support full engagement and success on our programmes.
- **LDC matching.** All our programmes include one-to-one coaching with an LDC. Before the start of the programme, leaders are matched with an LDC. It is recognised that a leader from a racialised minority background may prefer to have an LDC who is also racially minoritised; where this is the case, we will do our best to arrange it.
- **Reporting incidents.** If you experience, witness or learn about any form of discrimination or microaggression when on one of our programmes, we encourage you to report this to your LDC or whoever you feel comfortable speaking to. Alternatively, you can share this through [Contact Us](#).
- **Feedback loop.** We ask for feedback regularly throughout our programmes which is completely anonymous. We will ask explicit questions about D&I and would like to encourage all leaders to be as candid and constructive as possible so that we (the programme and the team) can continue to learn and develop.
- **Fellowship.** Everyone who completes Pathways 2, 3 and 4 will join the Frontline Fellowship, our community of over 2,000 social workers. The Fellowship brings together social workers from across England, at every level of experience, to spark ideas, share knowledge and build expertise. Through the Fellowship, leaders can engage with networks of support based on shared experience.



Curriculum overview

The curriculum for Pathway 4 has been designed in a way which means that some areas of focus are revisited multiple times across the course of the programme.

This reflects Frontline's spiral curriculum approach, in which concepts are taught iteratively, with each iteration reinforcing and moving beyond the last. Content will be delivered via in-person learning at residentials, online workshops and online self-study units. The below table indicates some of these focus areas and key themes which will be explored.*

Areas of focus	Key themes
Leadership essentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Revisiting your motivations and values – What makes a good practice leader: reflecting on own strengths and leadership style – Engaging and uniting staff in a shared vision
Listening to children and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using children's experiences of services to improve service delivery
Diversity and inclusion**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Embedding inclusive practices and culture across multiple services – Critically reflecting on decision making with anti-oppressive lens
System change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understanding the role of the corporate centre and local government – Leading sector improvement and building confidence to influence politically
Research and best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leading a research minded organisation: Making best use of knowledge and research evidence about effective social work practice
Risk management and decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Building a culture of learning, reflection and acceptance of accountability in which risk is accepted and understood – Managing risk at scale and safely reducing spend – Using service data to track progress and lead organisational improvement
Effective prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Managing competing demands and allocating resource across multiple services – Minimising bureaucracy and maximising the highest leverage work
Change management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leading cultural and organisational change to drive impact and improvement at scale – Navigating negative narratives and turbulent times (responding calmly and effectively in a crisis)
Supervision essentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Having a birds-eye view while staying close to the ground – Modelling relational, strengths-based leadership
Resilience, Wellbeing & Ongoing Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supporting staff resilience & wellbeing at scale – Ensuring access to continuous professional development within the organisation

* Content is subject to change throughout the programme to ensure that we are delivering the most up to date and relevant content to support your development.

** Diversity and inclusion content will include a specific focus on anti-racism, neurodiversity, and LGBTQ+ and explore the above through these lenses.

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Curriculum design and delivery

The programme is underpinned by relationship-based practice which has a key assumption that families and people have the capacity to change in most cases. This approach ensures that problems are seen to exist within relationships, rather than with an individual, and sit within a wider family context.

As a result, these are the key principles of the programme's design and delivery:

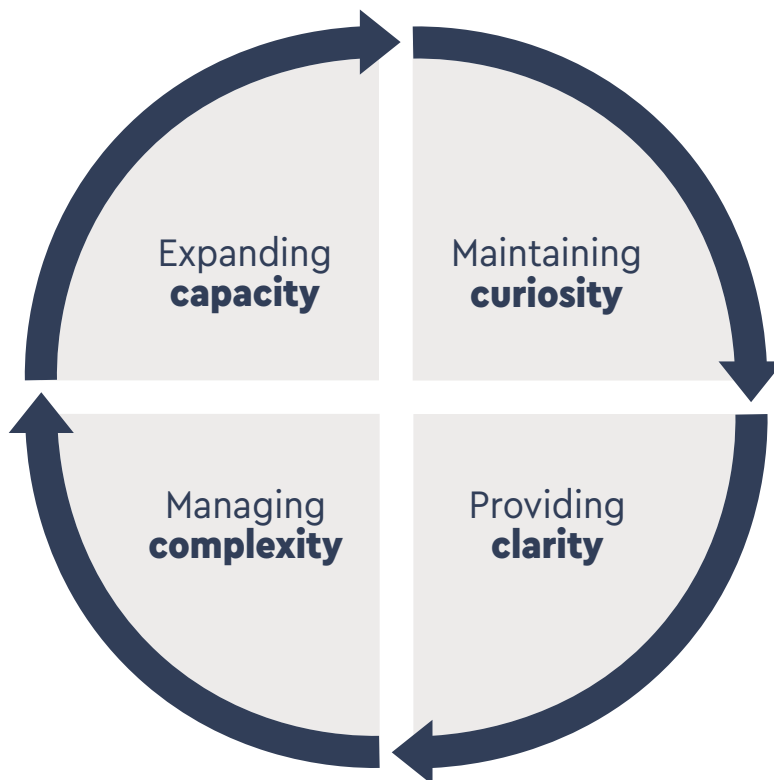
- Excellent social work leadership is underpinned by child-centred, strengths-based practice.
- Relationships drive impact.
- Diversity and inclusion are essential tenets of excellent teams.
- Building domain-specific knowledge and using deliberate practice leads to expertise.
- Evidence-informed content design leads to long-term learning and behaviour change.
- Reflexivity underpins the 4C leadership capabilities that are the key to excellent practice:
 - Maintaining Curiosity
 - Providing Clarity
 - Managing Complexity
 - Expanding Capacity



The 4C leadership capability framework

The Pathways programme curriculum will centre around developing knowledge, skills and expertise against the 4C leadership capability framework. This has been designed with the 'Seven features of practice and seven outcomes' firmly embedded and has been mapped against the KSS for practice leaders and PQS for practice supervisors.

We have identified four key challenges for social work leaders which are demonstrated in the diagram. Although they are all necessary to develop holistically, each unlocks the next. Curiosity enables leaders to provide clarity. Clarity supports leaders and teams to manage complexity. And by managing the complexity of the work, leaders and teams have the space to do what's needed to expand capacity and increase quality and impact.



| You can find the leadership capabilities framework on my.thefrontline.org.uk

Blended learning

Combination of in-person residential, online workshops and online self-study

There are many benefits of in-person residential: being physically in a different space can make focusing and avoiding distractions easier and being in a physical room with others can aid the formation of new relationships and networks.

However, providing high quality learning online significantly reduces the need for travel, in turn ensuring that learning is more cost-effective, sustainable, and accessible to a wider geographical area, particularly benefiting those in remote areas. Being online also aids inclusivity as digital technologies allow for a wide range of needs to be catered for through easy compatibility with assistive technologies and multimodal content design.

Therefore, by having a combination of in-person and online learning, leaders will have regular contact and input throughout the programme, enabling those networks to build, without it becoming too disruptive to busy schedules and not requiring significant amounts of travel.

Online leadership development coaching

A recent study (Kraft, et al., 2018) found online coaching to be equally effective as in person coaching; improving the skills, knowledge and motivation of professional learners while complementing the wider blended course (Hundey, et al., 2020). Therefore, in order to ensure that Pathways leaders have access to highly experienced LDCs who meet their development needs, the programme will conduct all coaching online.

My.thefrontline.org.uk – your bespoke online learning platform

[My.thefrontline](https://my.thefrontline.org.uk) includes all the information you need to support your learning over the course of the programme. This includes workshop and residential agendas, logistical information, pre-reading and resources, as well as interactive self-study units.

You will access all self-study content from this platform along with resources to support your learning development. It will also be an interactive space with discussion and Q&A boards, reflective logs and development goal setting, providing autonomy and flexibility for all leaders to further their learning throughout the programme.

You will be introduced to my.thefrontline in our Welcome Sessions (prior to your first residential) and there will be support available over the course of the programme via [Zendesk](#) if you run into any difficulties or have questions.

Deliberate practice

'Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes permanent' (Doug Lemov, Practice Perfect). Yet in real life situations we don't get to practice. We know that having a bank of core skills that we feel confident and fluent in will improve the experience for children and families. Deliberate practice enables the space to practice essential skills with peers and mentors in a safe environment. The five principles of deliberate practice are outlined below demonstrating the clarity, focus, feedback and repetition which allow skills to be honed until fluency is achieved.

One common misconception about deliberate practice is that it is role play; thankfully it isn't. You are still yourself within the deliberate practice experience, rather than taking on the persona of someone else. Deliberate practice provides a structure to enable focused effort on specific skills in a low stakes environment to make implementing these new techniques into practice more likely and effective.

The five principles of deliberate practice



Push beyond
one's
comfort zone



Work toward
well-defined
specific goals



Focus
intently on
practice
activities



Receive and
respond to
high-quality feedback



Develop a
mental model
of
expertise

Leadership development coaching

Purpose of coaching

Leadership development coaching is an important part of the programme. Leaders have previously found this element of the programme extremely valuable and that it has had a significant impact on their development. With this in mind, we encourage you to prioritise these sessions and ensure that you are making the most of this opportunity during the programme.

The purpose of leadership development coaching is to:

- (re)connect with your values and feel (re)energised.
- develop your leadership skills through reflexive practice.
- support you in managing the competing demands of your role.
- help you to identify and make changes to your leadership practice that places children and families even more at the centre of decision making.

Who are the LDCs?

Leadership development coaches (LDCs) come from a range of backgrounds and have a wealth of experience; all of them have vast coaching experience and many have also worked in the children's social care sector.

As part of the LDC allocation process, there will be an opportunity to indicate any preferences you may have, although we cannot guarantee being able to meet these.

What you can expect from your coaching sessions:

- 4x one-to-one leadership development coaching sessions with your LDC
- each session to last 1.5 hours
- sessions are delivered online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom (depending on your preference).
- an individualised and tailored approach
- confidentiality – you'll be encouraged to share your learning from coaching as appropriate but ultimately what you discuss with your LDC will remain between the two of you.
- you will be supported, challenged, and coached to develop your leadership skill and style.
- you will work towards achieving your development goals for the programme.
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Expectations of you

- Our LDCs will work with you to find suitable times for your sessions to take place. Please ensure that this time is protected in your diary and consider how to build some preparation and reflection time around these discussions.
- If you are unable to attend any leadership coaching or facilitated group sessions, you must let your LDC know **at least 24 hours in advance**.
- Sessions must take place within your programme window; if you miss a session, this will be considered spent and flagged with the coaching team.
- Missing more than one session could lead to non-completion of the programme – we will reach out to discuss this with you and communicate non-attendance with your local authority where necessary.

Getting started – how you will arrange your coaching sessions.

1. You will receive an email from our coaching team which will share your LDC's details and some helpful information about ways of working.
2. Your LDC will get in contact to arrange your first leadership coaching session (see delivery dates section to check the window for this).
3. Prior to the first session, you and your LDC will receive the report from your leadership diagnostics. This will enable you to gain greater insight into your leadership style and views of your respondents, and to discuss these findings with your LDC.
4. In session one, you will contract and arrange all subsequent leadership development coaching sessions between you and your LDC.
5. We will ask you for feedback on the impact that your LDC and the leadership development coaching sessions have had on you throughout the programme and encourage you to please be open and honest in this feedback.

Leadership diagnostics

The leadership diagnostics are an important part of the programme and provide an opportunity for you to gain feedback from your line manager and colleagues via a short survey which is summarised into a report. This provides you with the opportunity to understand more about how your leadership skills are perceived by your colleagues and will help you identify areas of strength and further development that can inform your leadership development journey.

The leadership diagnostics will run at the beginning and end of the programme. In line with the design of the curriculum, this will be based on how you demonstrate leadership capabilities in relation to Frontline's **4C Leadership Capabilities Framework** (see [My.thefrontline.org.uk](https://my.thefrontline.org.uk)).

Receiving this feedback at the beginning and end of the programme will also help you to get a good understanding of whether any changes you have made have been recognised by colleagues and helps you to get a clear sense of how the programme has influenced your leadership. You will have the opportunity to explore and discuss this feedback with your LDC in your sessions.

Development goal setting

We ask that you set development goals at the start of the programme, to help focus your learning over the course of the programme. Data gathered from the leadership diagnostics, combined with knowledge of your local authority context and guidance from your LDC, will support you in doing this.

SMART goal examples

- To develop my ability to hold others to account by practising and implementing a structure for having difficult conversations.
- To increase the use of reflective supervision practices within my teams, aiming at 50% of supervision time being spent on reflective discussion, so that members of staff report feeling better supported.
- To build a stronger relationship with leaders in the health service, evidenced in improved feedback from our NHS partner survey, to improve our channels of communication for the benefit of children and families.

We encourage you to input these development goals into [my.thefrontline](#) and to reflect on your progress towards these goals before each coaching session.

We would also encourage you to share your development goals with your line manager so that they can support you most effectively over the course of the programme. You will then reflect on your overall progress at the end of the programme. At the end of the programme you will be asked to reflect on your overall progress towards your goals and to share your developmental journey through a short presentation.

Pathways programme networks and the Frontline Fellowship

Networks

We know that networks have the potential to create social change, building the power of social workers, children and families to act on systemic issues upstream. They also create a relational culture both within social work and wider partnerships, placing relationships at the heart of the work and encouraging a bottom-up approach to culture change.

The Pathways programme is built to promote and encourage relationship building within the programme and beyond, through the formation of a professional network. As well as a space for learning, the residential elements of the programme provide the opportunity for networking both formally within the curriculum and informally at lunches and dinners. These can then be built on further through online workshops and other interactive forums.

Networks enable Frontline to live out its mission of creating social change for children who do not have a safe and stable home. In taking part in Frontline's programmes, leaders can build mutually beneficial relationships with others in the field to exchange learning, discuss challenges and offer support to one another. Growing a network also provides the opportunity for a community of social work leaders to come together to advocate for and champion social work.

On pathway 4, you will have the opportunity join a practice leader network during and beyond the programme. You will also become part of the Frontline Fellowship.

Beyond these networking opportunities we would also encourage and support you to build networks within and between different pathways that could centre on special interests, affinity groups, community spaces or other elements. Please get in touch via Contact Us if you would like support with this.

Frontline Fellowship

Everyone who completes the Frontline programme, the Consultant Social Worker (CSW) programme and Pathways 2, 3 or 4 of the Pathways programme joins the Frontline Fellowship; a community of over 2,000 social work leaders who continue to come together as a network beyond the conclusion of their programme. The Fellowship brings together social workers from across England, at every level of experience, to spark ideas, get support, share knowledge and build expertise.

Our fellows have enormous potential to create change for children and families in their community. But only through collective action, and in collaboration with other professionals, can they achieve the wide-ranging and lasting social change needed to create a society where no child's life chances are limited by their social or family circumstance.

"With fellows across the country, the Fellowship is in a unique position. Between us, we represent a significant number of local authorities and other connected organisations. This allows us to compare successes and failures across multiple settings, sharpening our ability to create tailor-made change relevant to our own place of work."

Frontline Fellow

On completion of the Pathways programme, you too will become part of the Frontline Fellowship and have the opportunity to engage with networks of support based on shared experience.



About Frontline

At Frontline, everything we do aims to make life better for children who need a social worker, to help keep them safe from harm and to give them every possible chance to fulfil their potential.

We know that excellent social work leadership is one of the crucial elements to achieving this; strong leadership skills empower people at all levels to navigate their roles and contributes to creating a culture which prioritises children and families above all else.

That's why a focus on equipping social workers with the skills to deliver the best possible support and improved outcomes for children and families sits at the heart of the Pathways programme.

The aim is for 1,000 social work leaders to complete the Pathways programme each year. These leaders will be from local authorities across England, working within different contexts at different stages of their career.

Frontline

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 Frontline-Changing Lives

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The Frontline Organisation is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

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