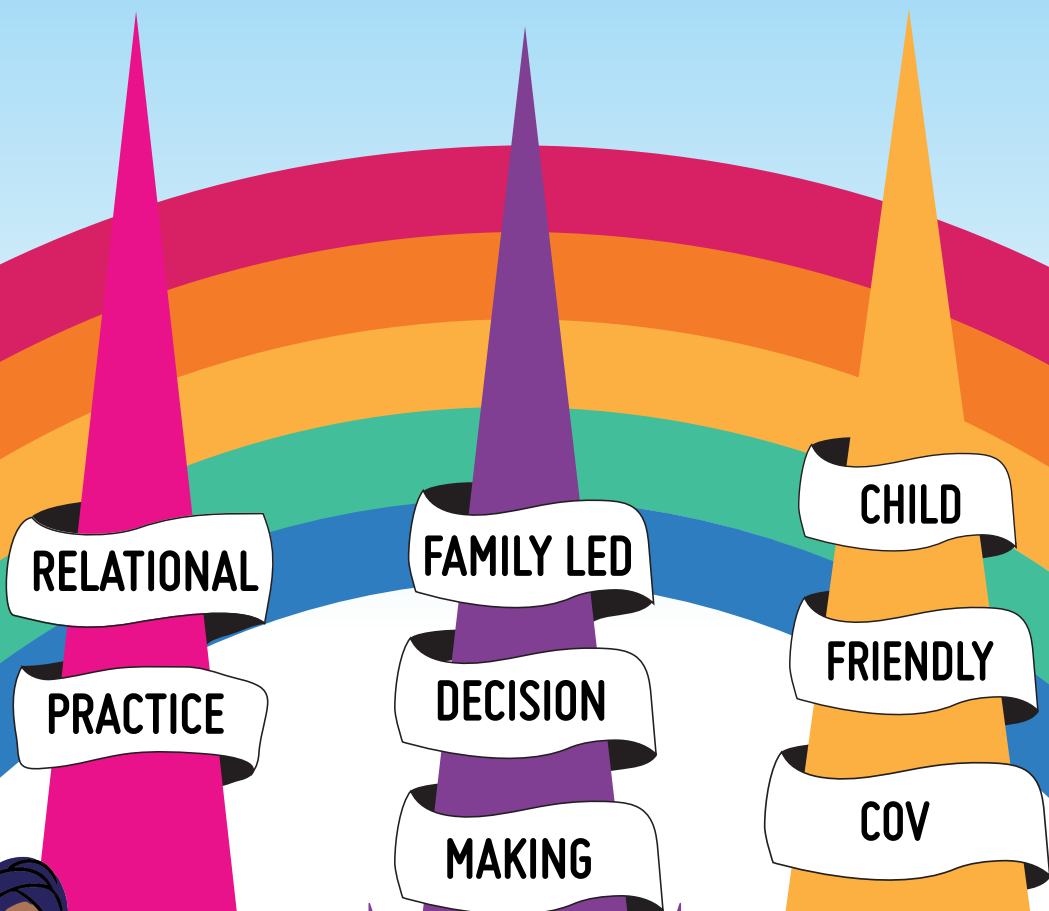


Coventry Family Valued Impact Report and Next Steps

April 2021 – March 2024



Forward

Looking back to the launch of Coventry Family Valued in April 2021, I remember the excitement that we were part of the Department for Education's Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme, and the determination, that in Coventry, we were going to work differently, 'with' children, young people and their families. Since then, I have been blown away by the feedback from families about the importance of working 'with' them in this way; relationships really do matter!

The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme ended in March 2024. This is the perfect time to reflect on the impact of Coventry Family Valued, as well as looking ahead as we continue to drive Coventry Family Valued forward as our practice approach. Coventry Family Valued has supported us to rethink our practice at all levels, placing a greater emphasis on how we value families, building trusting relationships with them, and wherever safe to do so, empowering family-led decision making.

Since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, more children and young people have been supported to live at home safely with family, with a safe reduction in our numbers of children in care year-on-year (excluding our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children), against a national backdrop of rising numbers of children entering the care system. Not only are we seeing less children entering care due to this change in our approach, we are also safely

returning children in our care to the care of their families, through our Reunification Project. Of course there are some children who are unable to remain with family, and we continue to be hugely ambitious for our children in care, giving them stable homes, built on love.

I am committed to continuing to drive forward relational and restorative practice and leadership, having seen the difference this is already making for our children, young people and their families, and I truly believe working 'with' families in this way, seeing family as part of the solution to the issues which have brought them to our attention, is the right thing to do.

Neil Macdonald
Interim Director of
Children's Services



Introduction

Coventry Family Valued launched on 1st April 2021 as part of the national Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme; a five-year programme funded by the Department for Education, focussing on safely reducing the number of children entering the care system, through implementing one of three approaches: Leeds Family Valued, Hereford Family Safeguarding, North Yorkshire's No Wrong Door.

Coventry adopted the Family Valued approach, with Leeds as partners in practice, offering high-support alongside high-challenge, to help shift culture across the whole-system, towards working 'with' families, rather than doing 'to' or 'for' them.

The Strengthening Families, Protection Children Programme ended on 31st March 2024. However, there is a strong commitment to continuing to drive forwards Family Valued in Coventry, building on the success of this programme, and continuing to see Coventry Family Valued as our approach to practice.

This report highlights the impact of Coventry Family Valued to date as well as outlining next steps.



The Three Spires of Coventry Family Valued

Coventry is a city famous for its three spires and the three spires of Coventry Family Valued outline our approach to working 'with' children, families and each other. These spires were known throughout the implementation of Coventry Family Valued as: a child friendly city, family-led decision making, and The Coventry Way.

Two of these spires have now been renamed to reflect our Coventry Family Valued work moving forwards. The spire previously known as 'a child

friendly city' is now named 'Child Friendly Cov', reflecting our approach to make Coventry the best city in the UK for children to live and grow-up in, and 'The Coventry Way' spire is now called the 'Relational Practice' spire, reflecting our relational approach.

So not to cause confusion, the newly names spires will be used throughout the remainder of this report.



Child Friendly Cov

Our aspiration as a city, to make Coventry the best city in the UK for children to live and grow-up in.

Child Friendly Cov has been developed alongside children, partners and local businesses. Child Friendly Cov launched in February 2023, with the launch event attended by over a hundred people, including children, local businesses, partner agencies, counsellors, and Children's Services leaders.

Child Friendly Cov started with four key pledges and in April 2024, a further pledge was added. These are that children in Coventry should always:



be and feel
valued



be and feel
safe



have
opportunities



be and feel
healthy



be and feel
loved

In February 2024, the One Big Voice Survey took place across Coventry, with children and young people across the city taking part, shaping the focus of Child Friendly Cov moving forward. Since Child Friendly Cov launched there has been considerable progress made against the Child Friendly Cov priorities including the development of safe spaces in the city, the creation of a Pupil Parliament, as well as

numerous other events and activities taking place across the city. More information about the impact of Child Friendly Cov in its first year can be found in the 'Child Friendly Cov Impact Report - 2023/2024'.



Celebrating the first Pupil Parliament

In July 2023 The University of Warwick, E.ON and the Participation Team jointly hosted the inaugural Pupil Parliament as part of the city's commitment to Child Friendly Cov. Over fifty primary school children attended, from sixteen different schools across Coventry. This event focussed on climate change, the environment and safety.

During this event, children were given the opportunity to express their views, share their experiences, and offer their perspectives on the topics which were discussed.

They also took part in several workshops, one being a spoken word workshop, led by local poet, John Bernard, which emphasised the importance of feeling valued, embracing one's individuality, and encouraging the children to express themselves creatively and authentically. There was also a workshop lead by Team Recycle, which aimed to educate the children about the significance of sustainable practices and the positive impact of recycling on the environment.

The children also engaged with a panel consisting of elected members, university representatives, and health professionals, providing a platform for the children to pose insightful questions and gain a deeper

understanding of governance, education, and healthcare in their community.

One young person who attended the event said, ***"Pupil Parliament was an opportunity to have my views heard"***.

The children's voices from this event helped to shape the development of the Safe Spaces initiative, as well as the topics to be covered at Pupil Parliament in 2024.



The number of official supporters of Child Friendly Cov is growing, with partners, local businesses, Children's Services and the Council as a whole Council being committed to making Coventry the best city in the UK for children to live and grow up in.

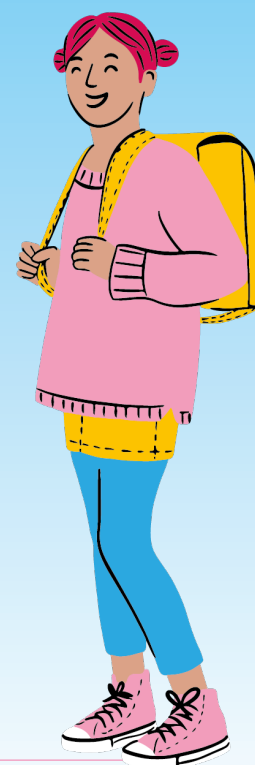
If you would like to find out more about Child Friendly Cov, or would like to become a supporter please visit:

www.childfriendlycov.co.uk

Family-Led Decision Making

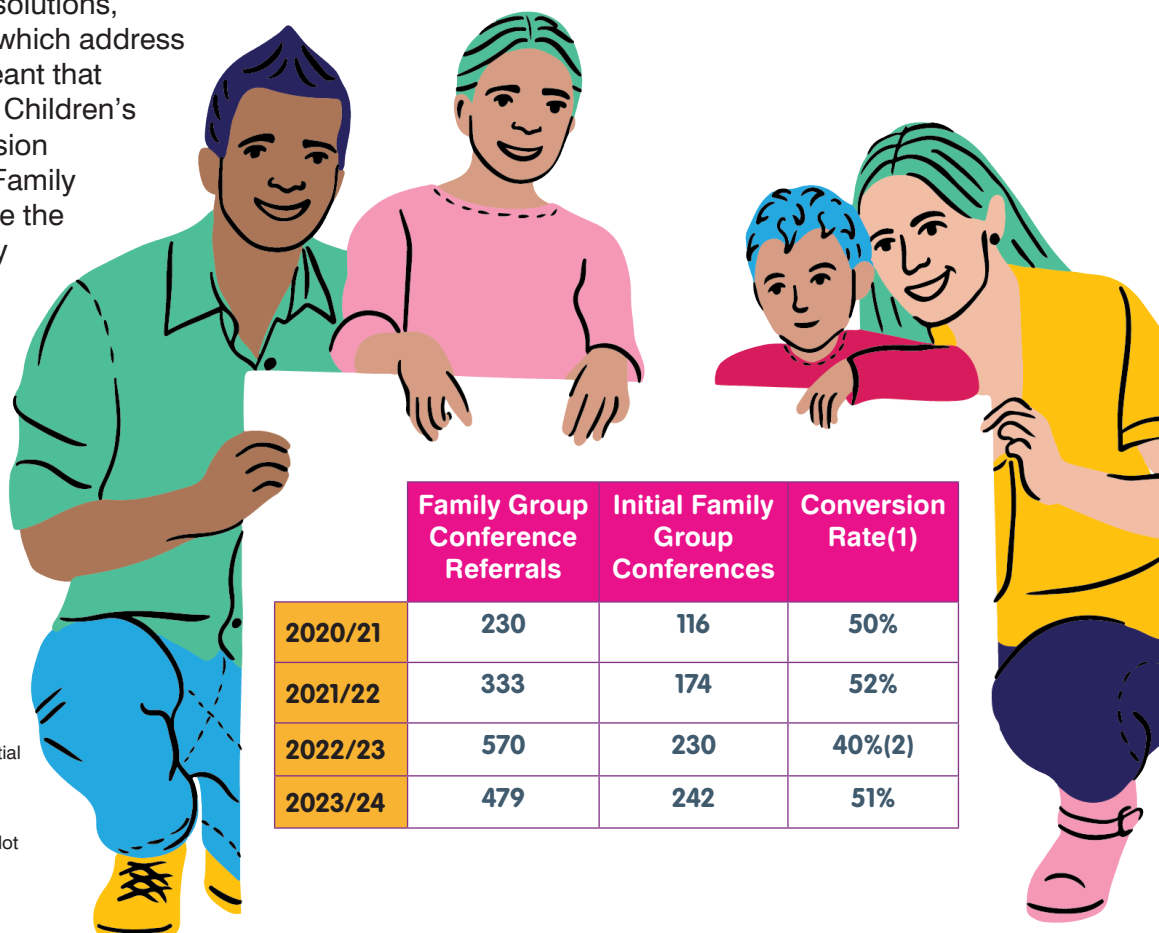
Seeing family as part of the solution, enabling and empowering them to lead on the decisions which affect their lives and the lives of their children whenever safe to do so.

In Children's Services and across the partnership, every day really difficult decisions are made to support, help and protect children, and whenever it is safe to do so, families should be leading on the decisions which affect them. When family is utilised in this way, plans are created which are creative, sustainable and work for that family.



Family Group Conferencing

Coventry Family Valued saw the expansion of the Family Group Conference Service, supporting more families to find their own solutions, creating family-led plans which address the issues which have meant that their children are open to Children's Services. Family-led decision making is at the heart of Family Group Conferences. Since the launch of Coventry Family Valued there has been an increasing number of initial Family Group Conferences taking place year-on-year.



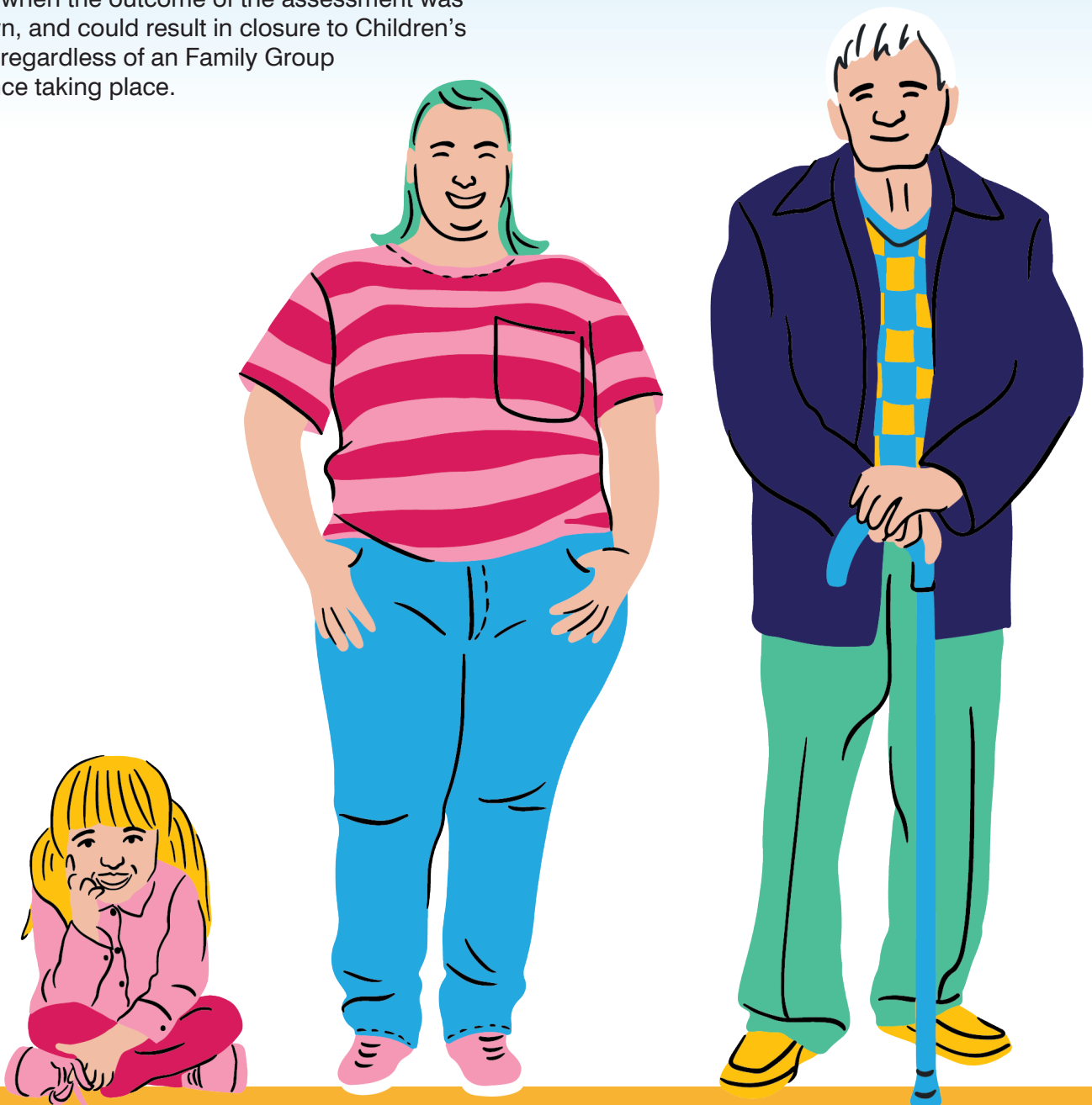
	Family Group Conference Referrals	Initial Family Group Conferences	Conversion Rate(1)
2020/21	230	116	50%
2021/22	333	174	52%
2022/23	570	230	40%(2)
2023/24	479	242	51%

NB: (1) % of referrals which led to an Initial Family Group Conference taking place

(2) There was a lower conversion rate during the South Help and Protection pilot which is explained below.

Between May 2022 – August 2022, a pilot took place in the South Help and Protection Service Area, offering families a Family Group Conference at the earliest opportunity (during the Child and Family Assessment stage). The aim was to support family-led plans being developed from the outset of Children’s Services intervention, to reduce risk at this stage and avoid any escalation in risk, which could lead to statutory intervention. The findings of the pilot demonstrated that targeting Family Group Conference at the assessment stage was not as effective as had been hoped, and despite a peak in referrals during the pilot, there was a low conversation rate to initial Family Group Conferences taking place, with many families not wanting to share with their network that Children’s Services were involved with them and their children, at a time when the outcome of the assessment was not known, and could result in closure to Children’s Services regardless of an Family Group Conference taking place.

The learning from this pilot, as well as ongoing discussions with colleagues from the Leeds Relational Practice Centre, informed the Family Group Conference Priority Criteria; positioning the targeting of Family Group Conferences where there is a risk of significant harm and/ or children are on the edge of care. While the Family Group Conference Service will take referrals for families at any stage, Family Group Conference is now prioritised for these families, recognising that this is where family-led decision making will have the most impact and lead to improved outcomes for children and their families.



Sam, Angela and Tom's Story*

Sam* is a 2-year-old boy who was living in foster care. Sam came into care due to concerns around the home conditions, parental substance misuse, parental mental health, domestic abuse, and the general basic care that Sam was receiving from his parents. Sam's mother, Angela* had two older children who were removed from her care and placed for adoption approximately ten years previously.

Angela and Tom* (Sam's father) were initially reluctant to engage with the Family Group Conference Service due to feeling that their support network contained 'risky adults', family who lived far away, and family members in ill-health who would not be able to attend the Family Group Conference in person. The support network was explored further with Angela and Tom, including exploring the term 'risky adult', and how support could potentially be offered by these people without having any direct contact with Sam. When exploring the family who lived far away, or were in ill-health, it was identified that they have a lot of supporting qualities that ended up being vital to the family-plan being successful. A Family Group Conference was also offered virtually, at the request of the family due to distance and ill-health.

The family had a successful initial Family Group Conference and have had two review Family Group Conferences. The first review was requested by Angela and Tom, as they had felt that the family-plan had supported them to "stay on track" and they wanted to continue with this success. The family-plan encouraged the network to continue with their ongoing support, despite the network not being able to physically visit the family. By the second review, both Angela and Tom appeared much more confident, and felt able to move forwards knowing that their support network were available to them.

Since the Family Group Conference there have been no further domestic abuse incidents, with a plan in place for Tom to take his medication regularly and access emotional support from a member of the network. Angela has stopped using cannabis and has expressed that she is

feeling more emotional stable, and accesses emotional support from a member of the network. The home conditions have improved and remain consistently better. Angela and Tom have a daily routine which includes 30 minutes per day tidying and cleaning, and a member of the support network completes a virtual tour of the home via Facetime twice a week, to check the home conditions. Angela and Tom are both regularly attending family time with Sam which has been positive. A member of the network has put themselves forward to care for Sam full-time should he be unable to return to the care of his parents, however given the change in circumstances, planning is taking place for reunification.



*All names have been changed

Reunification Project

The Reunification Project has two strands, one within the Children In Care Service Service, and one within the Through Care/ Edge of Care Service. The Through Care/ Edge of Care strand of the project started working with children and their families in June 2021, and the Children In Care Service strand went live in October 2021.

Since the launch of the Reunification Project, 38 children have returned to the care of their parent(s) through this project, with a further 19 children, young people and their families working towards reunification.

Emily and Jason's Story*

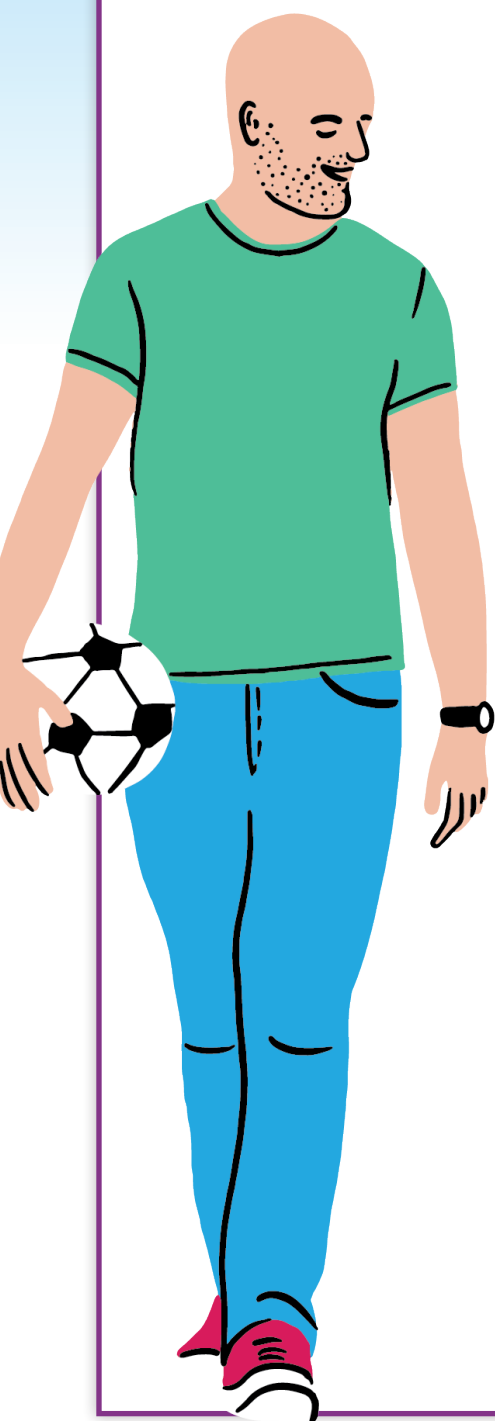
Emily is 11-years old. Emily went into care when she was 6-years old. During her time in care, Emily lived in eight different foster homes. When Emily was in care she felt angry and her behaviour often showed how angry she was feeling. Emily's foster carers struggled with her behaviour, and Emily felt rejected by her foster carers. She came to expect that adults would eventually "give up" and she would need to move again.

Jason is Emily's dad. He worked hard to make changes in his lifestyle. He worked with drug and alcohol services, he completed parenting courses, and he accessed emotional support. Emily wanted to live with Jason and said that her life as a looked after child was "not normal".

A reunification assessment was started, and alongside the assessment, the Reunification Project supported Emily and Jason to improve their relationship, increasing family time sessions as the assessment progressed. The assessment concluded that Jason could provide the safe and consistent care that Emily required, and after a short period of transition, Emily went home to live with Jason.

As part of the family's reunification plan, a Family Group Conference took place, and wider family were able to identify how they would support Emily and Jason, alongside the support which was offered from the Reunification Project to support the transition from foster care to returning home, and family counselling.

Since Emily has returned home to live with Jason, she seems much happier, and school have said she appears settled, and is making really good progress.



The Reunification Project has made a real difference to many children and their families, with their improved outcomes being the biggest success of this project. Alongside this success the Reunification Project has made considerable financial savings, which led to the project being expanded in July 2022.

The achievements of our Reunification Project have been recognised nationally, being shortlisted for two national awards (Social Worker of the Year Awards 2022 and Frontline Awards 2023). In January 2024, one of the parents who has been part of the project attended the House of Commons, as part of the launch of 'Home Again: understanding reunification practice in the children's social care system in England', a report commissioned by NSPCC and Action for Children, to share her experience, and in April 2024, expert

evidence was given to the Education Committee Inquiry into Children's Social Care in relation to the reunification work which is taking place in Coventry. The Reunification Project has also generated keen interest from other Family Valued adopter Local Authorities, with Coventry colleagues working with Newcastle, Darlington and Sefton, to share learning, including the benefits to children, young people and their families, the financial savings, and the staffing structure which supports the reunification work in Coventry.



Connected Carers and Special Guardians

Work has been undertaken to support more children and young people who become looked after by the Local Authority, to be cared for by someone connected to them, and to increase the proportion of looked after children who achieve permanence via special guardianship, rather than remaining in care.

In July 2021 the Initial Assessments for Connected Persons (previously completed by the child's allocated Social Worker) transferred to being completed within the Connected Persons Team, who also complete the full Connected Person Foster Carer Assessments.

Both aspects of the fostering assessment being undertaken within the same team has led to a greater consistency in the initial assessments and fewer negative full assessments (as where applicants are unsuitable to meet the fostering regulations they are ruled out at an earlier stage). This improvement in practice has been well received, particularly by the Family Court, as it reduces delays in care proceedings.

In January 2022 - February 2022 consultation took place with Connected Carers and Special Guardians, to explore their experiences and consider how the support they receive could be strengthened.

This has resulted in an increased training offer, as well as invitations to celebration events and support groups, which build peer relationships with other Connected Carers and Special Guardians.

Since the launch of Coventry Family Valued there has been a shift to Connected Person Foster Carer Assessments being initiated prior to children becoming looked after. This has been positive as for those children who are unable to remain in the care of their parents, more timely decisions have been able to be made in relation to them living with someone who is connected to them.



Relational Practice

Recognising the importance of investing in relationships and working ‘with’ children and families, to support families to achieve sustainable change.

Significant work has taken place since Coventry Family Valued was introduced to develop the practice approach in Coventry, introducing restorative and relational practice, across Children’s Services and the partnership.

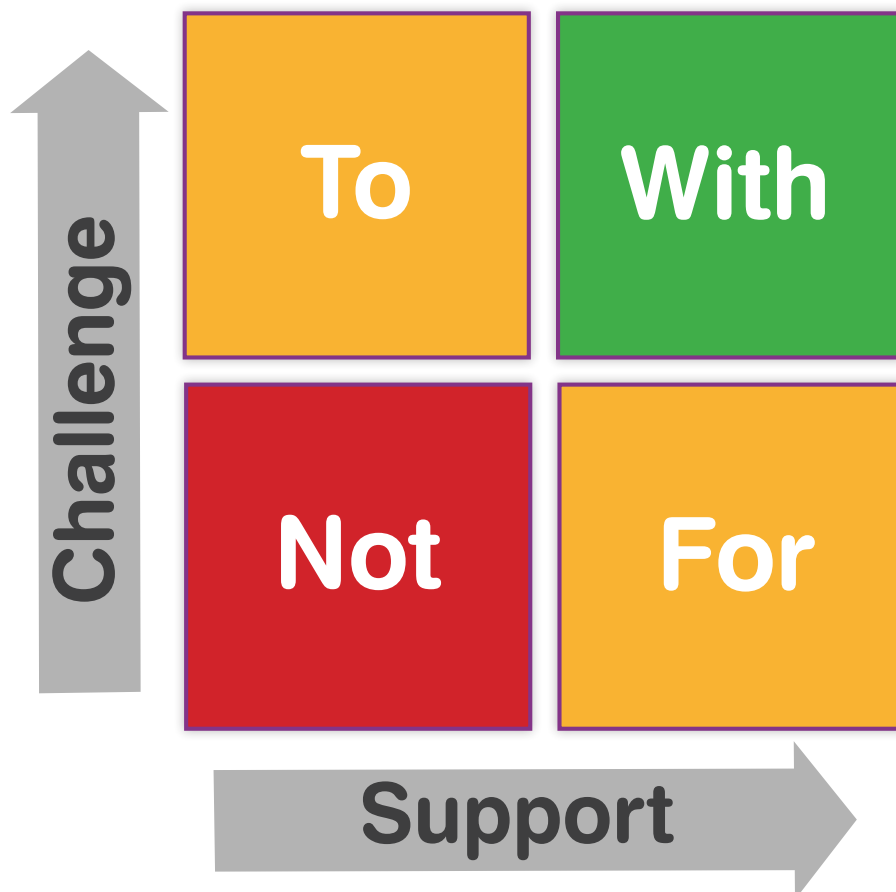
The Restorative Practice Leads have supported the embedding of relational and restorative practice, through workshops, training and

reflective restorative conversations ‘with’ practitioners, to consider how they are approaching their work ‘with’ children and families.

Since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, the Four Ways of Being, has supported managers and practitioners to reflect on practice.

The Four Ways of Being

Adapted from the Social Discipline Window.
Ted Wachtel and Paul McCold (2001)

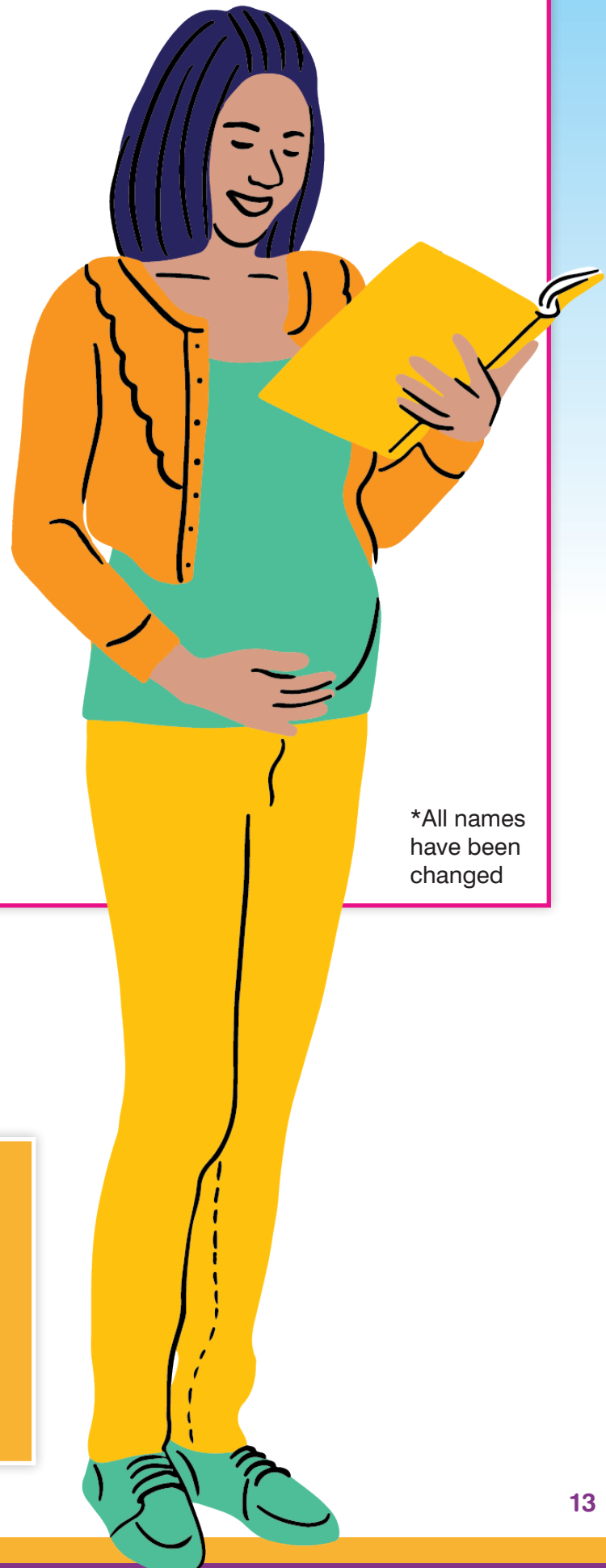


Reflecting on Practice using the Four Ways of Being

A Reflective Restorative Conversation took place between the allocated Social Worker and a Restorative Practice Lead in relation to a family where two children were previously removed from their mother, Bernadette*, and adopted. Bernadette was pregnant, and the Social Worker had recently been allocated to work with the family and some difficult decisions needed to be made quickly about whether Bernadette, and Jacob* (the unborn babies father) would be able to care for their unborn after birth.

The reflective conversation supported the Social Worker using the Four Ways of Being to support their understanding of how the family might feel about the future of the baby in their care and what the work completed with the family has looked like previously, so changes could be made to support more effective planning around this child.

The conversation supported the Social Worker to consider alternative options to removal, with the plan being that a community-based assessment could take place. Discussion included how the worker could approach and engage the parents within their Public Law Outline (PLO) meeting and the importance of building and investing in relationships, which the Social Worker took on board in their work 'with' the family going forward.



*All names have been changed

Coventry's practice approach has evolved since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, as Coventry Children's Services has become more relational and restorative, and most recently, Rethink Formulation has been introduced as a tool to support practitioners to rethink practice 'with' children and families further, and to support the growing relational and restorative culture in Children's Services and across the partnership.

Coventry Family Valued — Our Practice Approach

Working 'with' families — keeping children and young people at the heart of everything we do



Relational and restorative practice

Relational and restorative practice focusses on the importance of relationships: building relationships, maintaining relationships and repairing relationships. The emphasis of relational and restorative practice is how we work 'with' children and families, rather than doing 'to' them or 'for' them.

Strengths-based and solution-focused

Strengths based practice identifies family's strengths and solution focussed practice concentrates on supporting people to move towards the future that they want, drawing on their strengths rather than focussing on the problem.

Focussing on strengths and how we move towards solutions, supports us to work 'with' children and families.

Trauma-informed

Trauma informed practice is strengths-based approach, recognising that behaviour when understood in context of trauma is normal. This avoids pathologising and labelling children's behaviours in ways that can be stigmatising and victim blaming. Children have told us that they don't want to be labelled as 'bad' or 'mad'; they want to be connected back to their communities (social prescribing) and want practitioners working 'with' them to be relatable, understand their story, and take the time to get to know them.

Rethink Formulation

Rethink formulation supports practitioners to slow down their thinking, to better understand the needs and experiences of children and families, to inform practice 'with' children and families.

Rethink formulation provides a clear analytical model to consider what we know about children and family's circumstances, focussing on addressing the presenting issue, rather than past ones.

Elements of signs of safety

Signs of Safety is a strengths-based, safety orientated approach to working 'with' children and families, centred around safeguarding.

Coventry draws on elements of Signs of Safety when working 'with' children and families. For example, Family Network Meetings (bringing families together to identify family-led solutions), Safety Planning 'with' children and families, and Words and Pictures explanations.

Overall Impact

The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme aimed to safely reduce the number of children entering the care system; recognising that for most children and young people, their outcomes are better if they live with their family and within their community.

There is an ongoing national evaluation of the programme being completed by Foundations (previously the What Work's Centre), which is due to be published in 2025. However, while awaiting the publication of the evaluation report, the impact of Coventry Family Valued can be seen, demonstrating that investing in relationships and working 'with' children, young people and their families is making a difference in Coventry, and this is something that will continue to be driven forwards.

The Coventry Family Valued Programme has had to deliver against a challenging backdrop, with national issues in relation to social work recruitment and retention, rising numbers of looked after children nationally, and a placement market which is untenable. Despite these challenges, culture in Coventry has shifted towards working 'with', both with children, young people, and their families, as well as with colleagues and other professionals.

There is a focus on the importance of investing in relationships with children, young people and their families, and that relationships are key to creating sustainable change 'with' families.

“ Using this approach [Coventry Family Valued] helps me to reflect on the family's situation, which can help me understand the family's dynamic and needs.” (Social Worker)

“ I can see some changes in the way things [Children's Services] work and people want to change and that they care about me ” (Young Person)

“ It feels good when you are sitting in a circle with your team. Conversation flows better, and nobody feels excluded ” (Improvement Officer, Children's Services)

“ I've noticed through having a few different social workers that things change for the better, quicker when social workers really listen to me or my kids. I'm more likely to take on board advice and pay attention to some of the early warning signs of things getting bad again if me and the kids are supported by a person who we have a good relationship with ” (Parent)



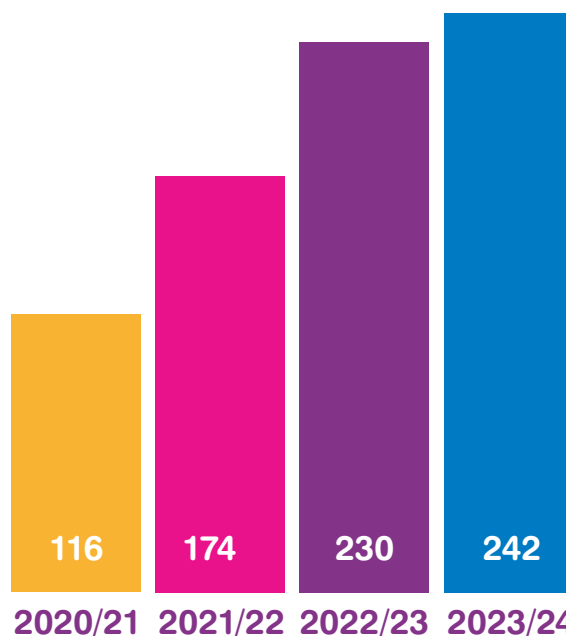
This focus on working 'with' has shifted thinking towards families being part of the solution to whatever issue has brought them to the attention of Children's Services, with more Initial Family Group Conferences taking place year-on-year since the launch of Coventry Family Valued, driving forward family-led decision-making.

“ I liked that I knew more about my social worker [from her one-page profile] without having to ask her. It helped me to talk to her ” (Young Person)

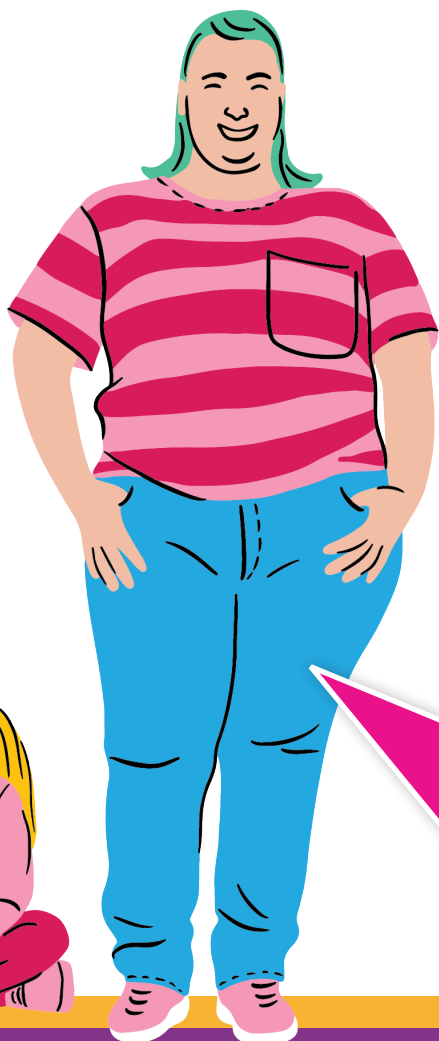
“ It's important to continue to ask about networks, as families and support networks change over time ” (Social Worker)

Number of initial Family Group Conferences

2020/2021	116
2021/2022	174
2022/2023	230
2023/2024	242



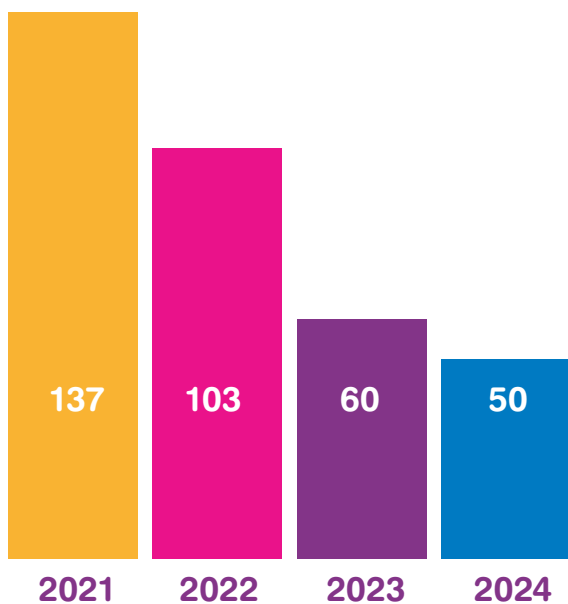
There has been a reduction in the number of families subject to ongoing care proceedings, year-on-year since Coventry Family Valued launched, with the focus shifting to how we can support these families differently, and how extended family and networks can be utilised to keep children living at home safely.



“ The more they believed in me, the more I believed in myself ” (Parent)

Numbers of families subject to ongoing care proceedings

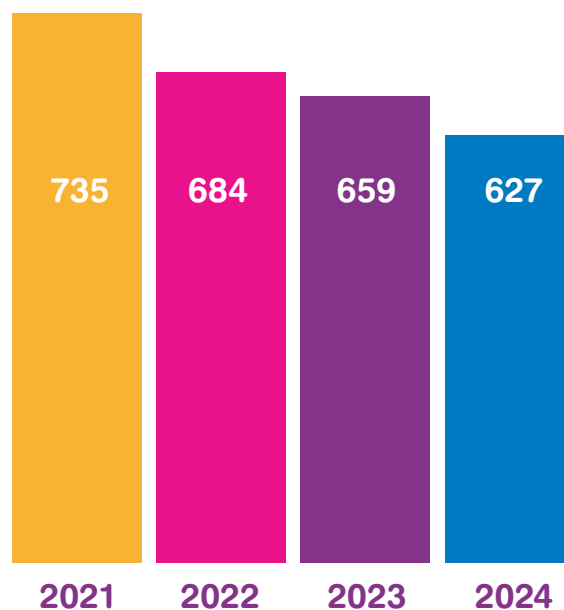
March 2021	137
March 2022	103
March 2023	60
March 2024	50



Since the launch of Coventry Family Valued there has been a safe reduction in the number of children and young people in care in Coventry (excluding unaccompanied asylum seeking children) year-on-year, meaning that more children and young people in Coventry are living at home safely with their families and within their communities.

Numbers of children in care (excluding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children)

March 2021	735
March 2022	684
March 2023	659
March 2024	627



The consideration of reunification is becoming part of the culture in Coventry, continuously reviewing whether there has been significant changes since children and young people became looked after, and assessing whether children and young people could safely return to live with their parent(s).

38 children in care have safely returned home through the Reunification Project

“ We had to get people [family and professionals] who were going to support us, people you can trust and who will be behind you 110% ” (Parent)

Next Steps

Although the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme has now come to an end, we are committed to continuing to drive forward Coventry Family Valued as our approach to practice, with key priorities for 2024/25. These priorities are:

Introducing and embedding Rethink Formulation

Rethink Formulation is being introduced as part of the Coventry Family Valued practice approach, providing a tool to support working 'with'. Rethink Formulation will help practitioners to slow down their thinking, reflect and rethink their practice, and help to develop a shared understanding of the needs and experiences of children, to support next steps and planning 'with' families.

Rollout of Coventry's Practice Approach

Coventry's practice approach has evolved since the launch of Coventry Family Valued. To support a better understanding of Coventry Family Valued as a relational approach to working 'with' children, young people and families, training is being rolled out across Children's Services and the partnership, as well as the continued high-support and high-challenge from the Family Valued Practice Leads (previously known as Restorative Practice Leads), to support continued practice development.

Family-Led Decision Making – One Family, One Plan

Family-Led Decision Making is one of the spires of Coventry Family Valued and is imperative to relational and restorative practice, and the Coventry Family Valued approach. Family-Led Decision Making will continue to be driven forward, including through Family Group Conferences, and Family Network Meetings.

Turning the Curve/ Sharpening our understanding of significant harm

Coventry Family Valued has seen the safe reduction of the number of children and young people in care in Coventry. This priority aims to continue to support in turning this curve, as well as focussing on sharpening our understanding of significant harm in Children's Services and across the partnership, to ensure that children, young people, and families are being supported through the right level of intervention.

Pre-Proceedings (Families Together)

Developing practice and intervention with children, young people and families in pre-proceedings, through the use of high-challenge and targeted intensive support. This will include piloting the Edge of Care offer, to cover 0 – 8, to be able to support struggling families, regardless of the age of their children, aligning pre-proceedings work with Edge of Care, to reduce the length of pre-proceedings, recognising the role of Child Protection Chairs in driving timely pre-proceedings, and diverting more children from care, wherever safe to do so.



Front Door

Ensuring that “think family” starts within MASH, and working ‘with’ families and partner agencies is promoted at this early stage. This includes high-support and high-challenge conversations at the Front Door, helping to ensure that referrals made are for children in need and in need of protection, supporting demand reduction at the Front Door.

Child Friendly Cov

Continuing to embed Child Friendly Cov in Children’s Services, across the City Council, the partnership and with local businesses, so that all children and young people in Coventry be and feel valued, be and feel loved, be and feel safe, be and feel healthy, and have opportunities. Embed Child Friendly Cov across the city, with Family Hubs/ Early Help being critical to driving this forward from within Children’s Services.

Supervision and InterVision

Improving the quality of reflective supervision offered across Children’s Services, with supervision discussion and records being centred around three questions 1) Why this plan? 2) Where do we need to get to (desired outcome for the child)? 3) How are we going to get there?

Voice and Influence

Nothing About Us, Without Us – further developing how children, young people, parents and carers feed into Service Development in Coventry and regionally.



Contact

If you would like more information about Coventry Family Valued please contact:

Coventry Family Valued

CoventryFamilyValued@coventry.gov.uk

