Team Around the School Case Study

Context

The *Team Around the School (TAS)* model was piloted in Sefton from September 2023 as part of the borough's improvement journey. It emerged from learning that families often engaged with multiple services without a coherent plan, leading to stress and poor outcomes, whilst acknowledging education was a key anchor, which wasn't being fully utilised. TAS offers a school-led, multi-agency early intervention approach, designed to provide the right support, at the right time, by the right person.
The pilot initially involved **27 schools grouped into five clusters** and has since expanded to include more schools. Partners include Sefton Council, NHS (Mersey Care, Alder Hey), Family Wellbeing Hubs, and the voluntary sector.

Objectives

- Enable timely, coordinated early help to reduce escalation into statutory services.
- Strengthen local partnerships and networks.
- Improve school attendance, attainment, and emotional well-being.
- Stop the "refer on" culture by sharing responsibility for risk.
- Build family resilience through asset-based and restorative practice.
- Embed trauma-informed and attachment-aware approaches across schools.
- Develop and embed the role of the lead practitioner

Intervention

The Team Around the School model delivers support through a flexible, multi-layered approach. At its core are cluster meetings, where schools and a multi-agency team come together to identify emerging needs and agree what support or intervention would be most helpful. This collaborative process ensures timely responses and avoids unnecessary escalation. Families are engaged using the Pathway to Change, a strengths-based tool that helps co-produce clear goals and monitor progress, reinforcing empowerment and resilience. Alongside individual support, TAS promotes a whole school approach, offering training such as Trauma-Informed Practice, peer learning opportunities, and shared resources across clusters to build capacity and consistency. Community engagement is central to the model, with coffee mornings, drop-ins, and marketplace events creating informal spaces for trust-building and early conversations. Interventions are proportionate and responsive to need—sometimes a brief discussion or signposting is enough, while in other cases, more focused work over several weeks is provided. This flexibility ensures that families receive the right support, at the right time, by the right person.

Evidence of Impact

A research evaluation was undertaken after 15 months, focussing on qualitative information (though was limited in scope):

- Staff perspective: 88% reported TAS had a positive impact; all understood its aims and wanted expansion.
- From a parent perspective: 82% knew what TAS was; 66% said things improved for their family and 76% would recommend TAS.
- General findings: TAS Improved collaboration, reduced duplication, offered timely support, and informal peer support was cited as a strength.
- Currently supporting 183 children (114 families) — around 19% of the entire Early Help caseload
- Referrals have surged:
    - 2024–25: 220 children (6.6% of all Early Help cases)
    - 2025–26 so far: 486 children (22% of all cases), more than double the previous year

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- Over time and through the evaluation communication gaps, especially in separated families have been highlighted. Communication and clarity in roles and responsibilities clearly needs to be a focus in the future.
- Case management and information sharing systems have proven tricky. We have considered different solutions – though remains an outstanding action
- Fully engaging Early Years providers, largely due to their capacity, has been an ongoing challenge and as such they are not yet fully embedded into the model
- Despite an objective being the development of the lead practitioner role; in practice this isn't embedded. This is something we will be re-focusing on through planning for delivery of Families First Partnership

Opportunities & Future Planning

- We are currently determining how to incorporate the TAS model into Family Help and Neighbourhood health approaches – TAS preceded the need for a multi-disciplinary team approach.
- Development of a data dashboard, at a neighbourhood footprint, for real-time monitoring of attendance, exclusions, referrals, health priorities, etc.
- Social workers are now holding child in need cases from across the clusters with a focus on neglect to build on existing trusted relationships.

Implementation Guidelines

- Secure leadership buy-in, from schools and partner agencies.
- Define roles & responsibilities; use guidance document to clarify core and supporting team functions.
- Communication and relationships; Explain TAS clearly to families; allow time to build relationships and trust across the cluster.

- Governance; an operational and strategic steering group helped to shape the pilot and capture learning so it could develop.
- Review & reflect; use of qualitative feedback and quantitative indicators to adapt the model.

Feedback or quote from a young person or family:

1) I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for the incredible support you have provided to my son xxxxxxx and our family. Your care, patience, and dedication have made such a positive difference in his learning and overall well-being, making sure he has got the correct support in school and giving me the reassurance that his needs are being met, and strategies for me to support him at home, the meetings with school were invaluable and it was what I needed to be kept up to date. Thank you for going above and beyond for sourcing all the information for different holiday clubs which xxxx attended; he especially loved 'the Brunny'as he calls it. Knowing that he had a team who understands his needs, encourages his progress, and believes in his potential means so much to me. Please know that your efforts do not go unnoticed — our family is deeply grateful for all that you do. Thank you for your support, compassion, and commitment to helping young children like xxxx thrive.

2) "I want to say it has been an absolute pleasure working with you. You've been amazing, you're outstanding and if I am honest, you are the best social worker I have ever had and honestly that speaks volumes. Thank you so much for everything"

3) "I just wanted to praise Jenni for all her support in the process and guidance. ***** has settled into high school life and the transition has been very smooth; with the support he and I have received. I wanted to praise the work and help we have been provided through the service and feel very grateful for the support which has given him the right tools mindset and support to succeed in high school"

4) 'xxxx said her and xxxx had a lovely time with you the other day so thank you so much for all you are doing'