Belonging & Attendance

Relational Practice Impact Story

Enable, Share, & Collaborate



CONTEXT

The Belong Programme operates within Trafford's Virtual School offer and wider local authority commitment to trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice. It responds to the significant needs of children with a social worker, Looked After Children, Previously Looked After Children, and Children in Need—all of whom face barriers to education due to adversity, disrupted relationships, trauma, and instability. The programme is embedded in a complex school landscape across Trafford and is part of a broader multi-agency movement to build psychologically informed, relationally driven support for vulnerable learners.

OBJECTIVES

- **Enable** attachment-aware, trauma informed, and
- relational practice in education.
- **Share** knowledge and tools that improve belonging and attendance.

Collaborate to develop consistent practice and drive sustained relational culture change.

INTERVENTION

Belong is a **fully-funded, two-year programme** offering a whole-school, research-driven intervention model, consisting of:

Postgraduate training (two leaders per school) to lead strategic change.

School audits and development plans to scaffold implementation.

Whole-school training for all staff on attachment- and trauma-responsive practice.

Reflective practice supervision and psychological consultation.

Inter-school learning networks and best-practice sharing.

A co-produced relational policy framework to replace punitive models with relational, consistent, needs-led responses.

Multi-agency steering and support through Trafford's Virtual School and partners.

OUTCOMES

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Improved **student attendance** and reduced persistent absence.

Significant reductions in **suspensions and exclusions** (e.g., Trafford College reported a 55% drop in suspensions and 46% drop in exclusions).

Enhanced **staff confidence**, emotional literacy, and relational understanding.

Children demonstrating **reduced dysregulation**, greater trust, and improved readiness to learn.

Schools reporting shifts **from conflict to connection,** more effective behaviour responses, and more positive everyday interactions.

Belong **recognised nationally**, shortlisted for multiple awards and winning regional awards for trauma-aware educational practice.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Cultural change takes time—schools noted 12–18 months is needed for genuine embedding.

Staff mindsets and misconceptions ("lowering expectations" vs. "logical responses") must be addressed.

Consistency across staff is essential when shifting from punitive to relational models.

Understanding triggers and trauma histories requires emotional labour, skilled training, and ongoing supervision.

Initial resistance can occur when established behaviour policies are replaced with relational practice.

OPPORTUNITIES & FUTURE PLANNING

Expansion to Cohort 4, widening the network of trauma-responsive schools.

Ongoing partnership growth, including links with **universities** to strengthen research, evaluation, and national influence.

Multi-agency alignment across health, mental health, social care and education to create system-wide trauma-informed practice.

Further development of leadership capacity and long-term commitment to relational practices across the LA.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Leadership: Senior leaders champion a relational, trauma-informed culture.

Training: Whole-school training plus postgraduate development for key staff.

Practice: Respond to behaviour as communication with consistent, calming relational approaches.

Supervision: Use regular psychological consultation to support staff.

Systems: Audit practice and track attendance, wellbeing, and exclusions.

Collaboration: Engage in cross-school and multi-agency networks.

> *Seeing behaviour as a form of communication and understanding that relationships are key is crucial… the role of the teacher has to change.*



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