

FAQs

1. Q: Is it fixed that the families have to meet two criteria?

A: Yes. This is a national programme aiming to work with families with some of the most entrenched difficulties. The six criteria allow for a wide range of families to be included in this work.

2. Q: How do the criteria fit if the family already have a child protection plan?

A: Any family with a child on a child protection plan who also meet at least one other criteria would be eligible for Focus Family support.

3. Q: How do I secure Focus Family support?

A: If you are working with a family who meet Focus Family criteria then please discuss with the family and start an Early Help Assessment with them. If you have a statutory assessment then please gain consent and send the relevant information to the Focusfamily@cumbria.gov.uk mailbox. If you are unsure about how to start an Early Help Assessment please contact Focusfamily@cumbria.gov.uk and a Focus Family Area Officer will be in touch.

4. Q: Does each identified family receive funding?

A: The funding is not pledged to individual families; its purpose is to support service redesign.

5. Q: Do the services working with the families receive additional funding?

A: The funding does not follow a particular family or, therefore, the services they need. It is collated centrally and we are working hard to ensure it is used to benefit families by targeting the services most able to divert families from high cost statutory services, or those where they can support families into universal provision.

6. Q: I have noticed the number of key workers you have employed doesn't match the number of families. How does every family get a keyworker?

A: A lot of the families we have identified and are working with already have a keyworker from an existing service. The staff recruited as a direct result of this programme are there to enhance the work with families. For instance, the additional staff may be able to complete out of hours work in the home, help the family learn how to budget, keep their home clean or develop their culinary skills. These tend to be issues that traditional services do not address but they are often at the heart of a problem when a child goes to school hungry, then cannot concentrate and misbehaves, which can ultimately lead to exclusions.

7. Q: Do we have to complete an Early Help Assessment for each family?

A: If the family already has a statutory assessment, for example completed by social care or Youth Offending Team, then it is not expected that another assessment has to be done. However, we would need information showing the family meet criteria.

Any family not in receipt of a statutory assessment will need a whole family assessment. In line with Cumbria Local Safeguarding Board recommendations we support the Early Help Assessment, therefore we would ask that this process has started. This also helps to gain consent for information to be shared. Up to date information on assessments can be found on the Cumbria LSCB website <http://www.cumbrialscb.com/>

8. Q: How long does the work with a family last?

A: We do not have a time limit on the work with families. We recognise that each family is unique and in need of different levels of support at different points in their growth. However, we do need to ensure the families are making progress and they are not allowed to “drift”.

9. Q: How have you got the message into schools?

A: We are working to ensure the message about Focus Family work gets into schools. We have sent information through the schools’ portal and we have directly emailed some key personnel as well as attending some inclusion panel meetings around the county. With over 310 schools and educational establishments in the county it is quite a task to physically visit each school. Therefore, we are looking to work with partners to spread the message and support the Focus Family work.

10. Q: If we were to take on an apprentice from a “Focus Family” family, who would pay for the DBS clearance?

A: Focus Family are working with the county council’s apprenticeship scheme to help our families move toward employment. In posts where a DBS clearance is needed, in line with current practice, this would be paid for by the county council’s apprenticeship scheme. There will be cases where Focus Family is financing the apprentice through the council scheme and other cases where the post is funded 50% by the host organisation. In this situation it would be expected that 50% of the cost would be met by the employer.

11. Q: When I refer the family to Focus Family can I stop working with them?

A: No. In line with Cumbria LSCB guidelines, the person making first contact with the family will stay working with them as long as necessary. The Focus Family team aim to identify all agencies working with a family and help to bring them all together to provide a more holistic support package that meets the needs of all family members.

12. Q: I already complete Early Help assessments and organise well attended Team around the Family meetings. What is different about Focus Family?

A: The main additionality Focus Family brings to existing good practice is in being able to provide an employment advisor for those who are on out of work benefits. The employment adviser can check through the families’ benefits and ensure they are receiving the correct entitlement as well as helping adults build their skills and move toward employment. This is vital if we are to steer families away from poverty.

Additionally, the Focus Family team can help to secure more in depth family support for families who need help with parenting skills and other work in the family home.

13. Q: Will the family know they are a “Focus Family” family?

A: This work is about service reform and not about creating a team of workers who would work exclusively with “Focus Family” families. It is envisaged that improved service provision and a wider understanding of the approach used will allow for benefits to a wider pool of service users.