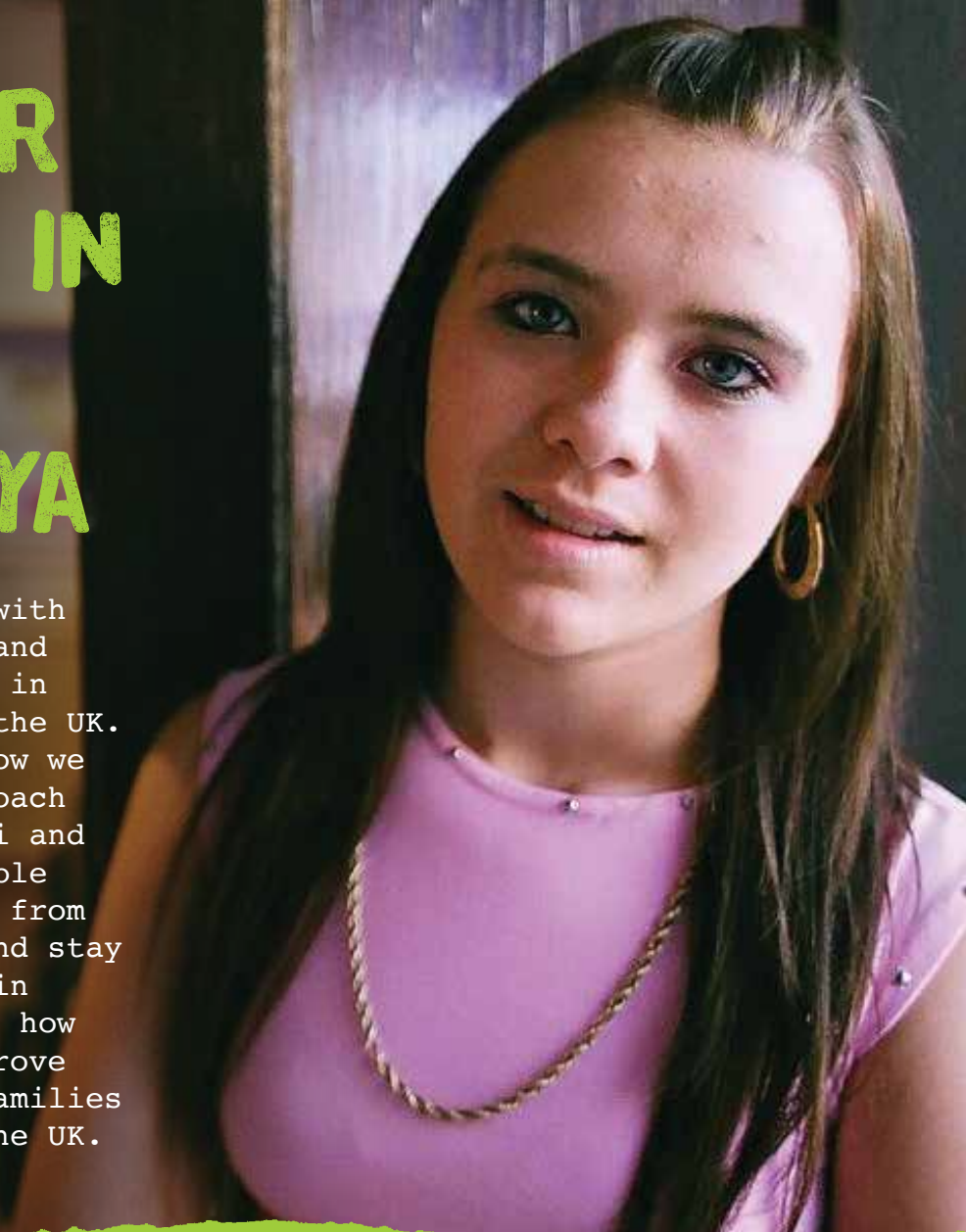


SHAPING STRONGER FAMILIES IN ENGLAND AND KENYA

Railway Children works with children who are alone and at risk on the streets, in India, East Africa and the UK. This briefing outlines how we have used a common approach with families in Nairobi and South Yorkshire, to enable children to return home from the streets in Kenya, and stay out of the care system in England.¹ It illustrates how this approach could improve existing services for families with complex needs in the UK.



WHEN RESCUE ISN'T ENOUGH

Children who go missing and/or end up on the streets are at high risk of abuse, violence and exploitation, wherever they are in the world.

It's vital to protect children when they go missing but our experience over 20 years has shown that impact is limited if services don't also address a child's reasons for being away from home. A key to this often lies within families, so wherever possible families must be part of the solution.

¹ Work was carried out by our partners, Undugu Society of Kenya and SAFE@LAST, South Yorkshire.

WHEN EXISTING SERVICES CAN'T HELP

In Kenya, there is not enough funding available to relieve the poverty many families endure, and no services to help them change the family conflict and violence that drive children onto the streets.

In England, the flagship service for supporting families with high levels of need is the Troubled Families Programme. Claims of substantial cost savings and a 99% success rate have been widely met with incredulity.² While many parents respond well to having a single key worker who supports them and takes a whole family approach, there is no common framework for this and no specific method or measure for addressing family conflict and trauma. This means that it is difficult to assess whether the Troubled Families Programme addresses a family's underlying issues effectively.

Although Nairobi and South Yorkshire are very different, in both places conflict and poor communication are reasons that children leave the family home, either repeatedly or for long periods, and in both cases families' needs are often not met by existing services, meaning that children remain at risk. This report outlines an alternative method, developed by a coalition of respected NGOs working with street-connected children.

TAKING AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO FAMILY CONFLICT

Railway Children was part of the Safe Families, Safe Children coalition that produced a toolkit, 'Breaking the Cycle',³ based on the JUCONI model. JUCONI has been reintegrating some of the most violent and excluded families in Latin America for over 25 years,⁴ and its work draws heavily on attachment theory and trauma theory.

In essence, attachment theory says that children need to form a secure attachment with a caregiver, and the type and quality of this relationship informs the way that they expect other relationships to develop in the future. Parents who experienced insecure attachment as children can have difficulty understanding and responding positively to their own children, which can lead to repeated patterns of violence and neglect. Trauma theory explains the way in which exposure to violence and these persistent negative attachment responses affect brain development and make it more difficult to regulate and manage emotions.

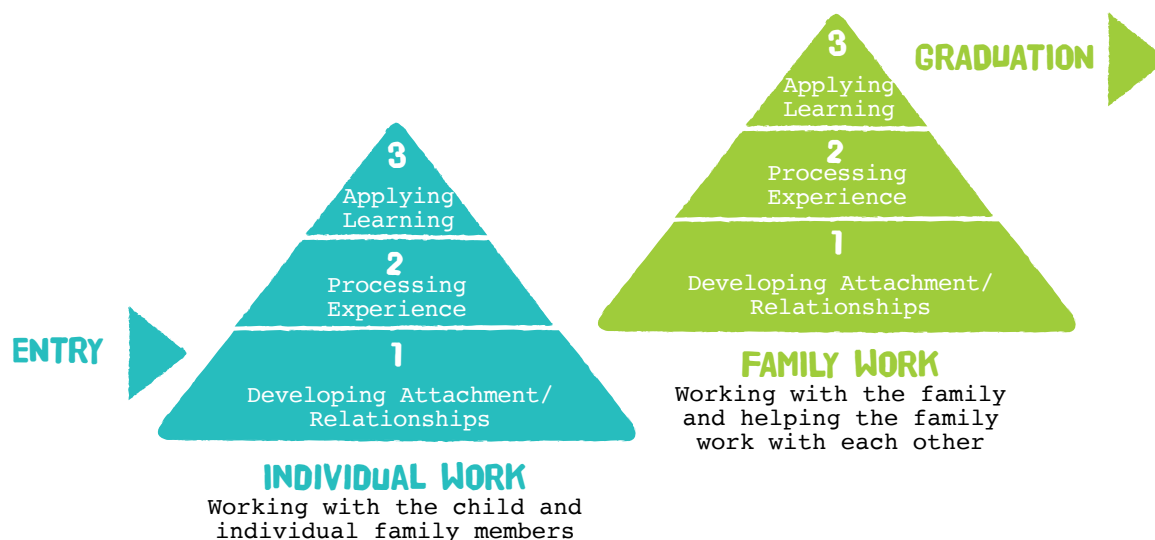
In the model below, workers provide a transitional attachment for each parent and for each child until such time as parents and child are able to begin to shift their own attachments with each other to become more positive and secure. Once a positive attachment has been created, work can begin on processing past traumatic experiences.

The model has three parts: creating and modelling the secure attachment that the person has never had; using appropriate tools and techniques to enable the person to process their painful experiences; and applying the learning from the first two stages to achieve lasting change. This is done both with each individual and then, once people have had their own emotional needs met, as a family group.

² See: Crossley, S (2015) The Troubled Families Programme: the perfect social policy? <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/The%20Troubled%20Families%20Programme,%20Nov%202015.pdf> ; Levitas, R (2012) [blog] <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/troubled-families-misrepresentation-levitas/>; Portes, J (2015) [blog] <http://www.niesr.ac.uk/blog/troubling-attitude-statistics#.V6Bx8m9TH4g>

³ Safe Families, Safe Children (2011) Breaking the Cycle of Violence <https://www.railwaychildren.org.uk/media/11696/breaking-the-cycle-of-violence.pdf>

⁴ For more information on JUCONI's award-winning work with street children, visit www.juconi.org.ec and www.juconi.org.mx For their latest model of practice, visit http://www.juconi.org.ec/?page_id=11



This report argues, on the basis of practical evidence and clear theory, that to achieve sustainable change, family workers need to address the attachment difficulties and trauma children have suffered – both before going missing and while on the streets. Railway Children’s experiences in Kenya and England show that this approach can be transferred to other countries successfully. The following summary of case studies indicates the approach workers took and the changes they observed. More detail about the difficulties families were experiencing, the process and tools workers used, the setbacks and the outcomes achieved can be found in the full report.



CASE STUDIES

MIRIAM - NAIROBI

Entry point

Miriam worked long hours and her children were often left to fend for themselves. Sometimes there wasn't enough money to provide food for everyone. Her relationship with the older boys, Peter (12) and David (13), was very poor with frequent arguments and beatings. The boys had been on the streets for three months, begging and stealing, when our work began. Miriam did not look for them or seem worried that they were on the streets and out of school.



Developing attachment

Peter and David stayed at the Undugu centre, and the same worker visited every week at the same time. At first they did not want to talk about their family, but they loved playing games with the worker. Peter was very quiet and David was sometimes aggressive with other boys. After three months, the boys began to confide in the worker. Miriam got separate visits every week, and also got a food basket to help with the poverty the family was facing. She began talking about a previous violent relationship and the way it had affected her.

When the boys returned home, workers could see a change in the way the family communicated and related to each other. Now when the children are sad, Miriam tries to help them and speaks to them in a kinder tone. If someone is absent at mealtimes, food is saved for them so that everyone is remembered and no-one goes hungry.

Processing experience

Peter and David used artwork and miniatures to talk about their family and their best and worst experiences at home and on the streets.

The family worker helped Miriam to complete a genogram (a family tree that describes the quality of relationships). Miriam started to see the way patterns of behaviour were repeating themselves, for example her children were dropping out of education just as she had. She realised that she wanted a better future for them and found a school that would not beat them.

Peter dislikes school and sometimes goes back to the streets. In the past, Miriam would have been angry, but now the whole family welcomes him back whenever he returns home and explains why they are sad that he's still spending time on the streets. He now returns to the streets much less often.

Applying learning

Miriam now uses different sanctions, for example not allowing the children to choose an item for the food basket. Her communication with them is kinder and more caring, and she takes an interest in their school work.

The family has established clear routines: there is a family meeting each day and a rota for chores. The children keep chickens and rabbits and Miriam has helped them build a hutch. They try to have a special meal on birthdays and to name the strengths of the person whose birthday it is.

Graduation

There is no violence in the family any more. They communicate much more positively with each other and think of each other's needs. The children are all in school, and Miriam's income has improved because of the business training she received. She is active in the community, in the church and in a Chama (similar to a credit union).

Other members of the community see and respect the change in Miriam. Before she was known as Mama Chokora (mother of street children) but she's now known as Mama Watato (mother of children). David says he will never go back to the streets and Peter has not returned for some time.

CAROL - SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Entry point

Carol's 15-year-old daughter, Sophie, was going missing regularly, staying away for days at a time with friends and older boyfriends. There were frequent heated arguments and she was becoming isolated within the family and at risk of exclusion from school when she was referred to SAFE@LAST. She was at high risk of sexual exploitation and both she and her mother were saying that she might be better off in care.

Developing attachment

Sophie got support from her own key worker, while a separate family worker supported Carol - staying in particularly close contact and changing her schedule at short notice whenever Sophie went missing.

One evening when Sophie had gone missing, she answered the phone to her key worker, who persuaded her to come home. Both workers then stayed with the family, modelling a calmer way to resolve conflict. Over time, Carol's language changed from 'I'm going to kill her' to 'I'm worried about her'.

Processing experience

The guided activities that Carol and her family worker did together made Carol realise that Sophie had lost two father-figures: her birth father, who had alcohol problems and did not make time for her, and the father of her younger siblings, who had been a positive presence in her life when she was younger. He had stayed in touch with his own children, but not with Sophie. After this, Carol was able to better understand some of Sophie's actions and see them as reactions to the losses she had suffered.



Applying learning

Although Sophie's relationships with her two father-figures were not repaired, the insight that the processing activities had given Carol improved her relationship with Sophie and their ability to communicate. While there were setbacks, a year on Carol was more likely to explore both sides when there was conflict, to use less emotive language herself, and to not assume that Sophie was the cause of any trouble. This greater understanding dramatically improved family life.

Graduation

At the end of the contact, Sophie was no longer going missing and ending up in risky situations. She was back in education and achieving well. Her relationship with Carol was much improved, as were relationships with most other family members, and there was no likelihood of her entering the care system.

WE CAN BREAK INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLES OF FAMILY TRAUMA - BUT ONLY WITH AN EFFECTIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Railway Children believes that effective interventions should:

- be based on tested models
- have a clear framework
- take a strengths-based approach
- be shown to achieve sustainable change

The Troubled Families Programme is the main vehicle for engaging with families with complex needs, many of whom will have children who are going missing. It was allocated £448 million between 2012 and 2015, with a further £920 million committed up to 2020. No independently evaluated results have yet been published, and recent news reports have claimed that this is because the evaluation showed that the programme had not achieved its stated aims of reducing unemployment, truancy and offending. While many parents find having a key worker beneficial, there is no consistency or agreed intentionality in the way the key worker role is carried out. The emphasis on blame and guilt is also at odds with strengths-based models such as Safe Families, Safe Children that seek to empower families.

To break intergenerational cycles of abuse and trauma, families must be fully engaged in working through their emotional and behavioural issues. There may be many local authorities who are using Troubled Families funding to deliver and commission such services, but the fact that the programme does not have a well-tested, clear and easy to evaluate framework makes it impossible to assess.

⁵ Bate, A (2016) The Troubled Families programme (England), House of Commons Library Briefing Paper [online] <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7585/CBP-7585.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37010486>

⁷ Eric Pickles, Communities Secretary, 9 June 2012 'Sometimes we have run away from categorising, stigmatising, laying blame. We need a less understanding approach'. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/ios-exclusive-problem-families-told-stop-blaming-others-7834235.html>. Louise Casey, Director General of Troubled Families, 20 Jul 2012 'I think we should be better at talking about things like shame and guilt'. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9416535/Problem-families-have-too-many-children.html>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our use of a common approach in England and Kenya has achieved change in families with high levels of conflict, whose children were going missing or on the streets. Many of the parents had suffered abuse themselves as children or adults, and addressing their trauma, as well as their children's, was an essential part of the process. We believe that this approach could have wider application, not just to families of children who are going missing, but to any family living with violence and conflict.

Based on our experience, we recommend that work with families should:

1. Measure the things that matter

In England, the Troubled Families Programme (TFP) has focused on work, education and reduced offending as success measures. These are important, but unlikely to be sustained unless there has been clearly focused activity to improve relationships, address trauma, and reduce violence within the home. It is this change that will make the difference and therefore this change that should be measured.

2. Use well-tested models

Measuring sustainable change is far easier when using a well-tested, transparent and replicable model, such as Safe Families, Safe Children. Our work has shown that it can be effective in entirely different cultural contexts.

3. Focus on strengths not stigma

The rhetoric of blame and coercion that accompanies TFP is unhelpful. With no sanctions whatsoever at their disposal, family workers in England and Kenya achieved outcomes that kept children out of the care system and off the streets by modelling attachment, working through trauma, and supporting families to find their own solutions.

Download the full report at www.railwaychildren.org.uk/familywork

Images are not of the families featured in this report
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