

# Working Together



Sandwell  
Children's Trust

A guide for people working with children and young people



Sandwell VOICE.co.uk



# The first half of this guide...what we have said

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# Working Together

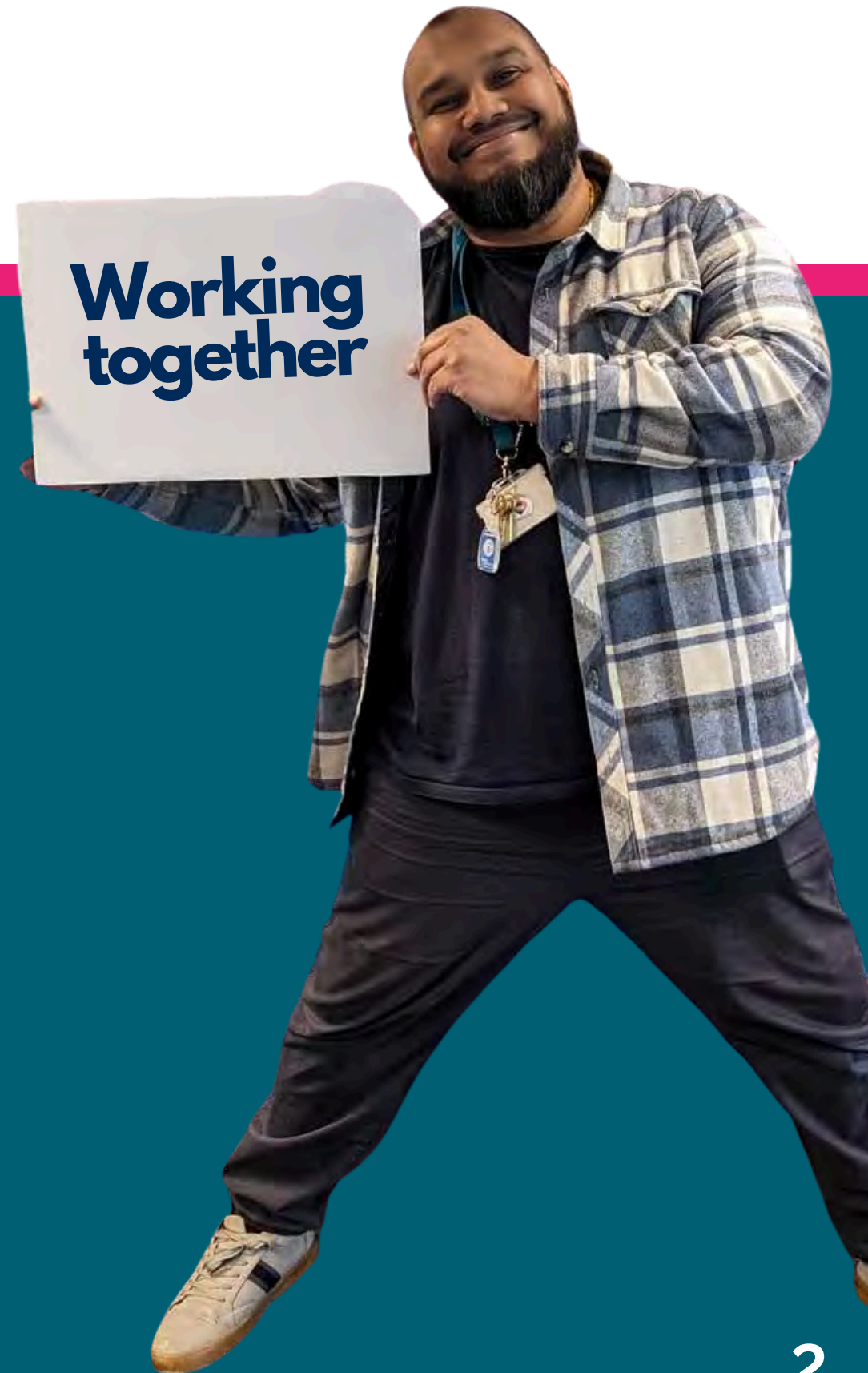
As children and young people, we are the experts in our lives. We know that things are much better when we work together with adults in our lives, whether they are from the Trust, the council, our schools or other places.

We have helped write this guide to **working together** because we want to make sure that everyone that works with us and our families or carers is able to hear our voice.

As you read through this guide, you will see that it is written by children and young people to the adults that work with us. We thought it was important to use language that everyone can understand, which means we haven't used words like participation and co-production.

## **Working together** means:

- Doing things *with* us not *to* us
- Giving us the information we need to be able have a say in the things that matter to us
- Listening to our experiences
- Helping us to understand things if they are difficult
- Telling us why things are the way they are
- Being honest, respectful and 'getting us'

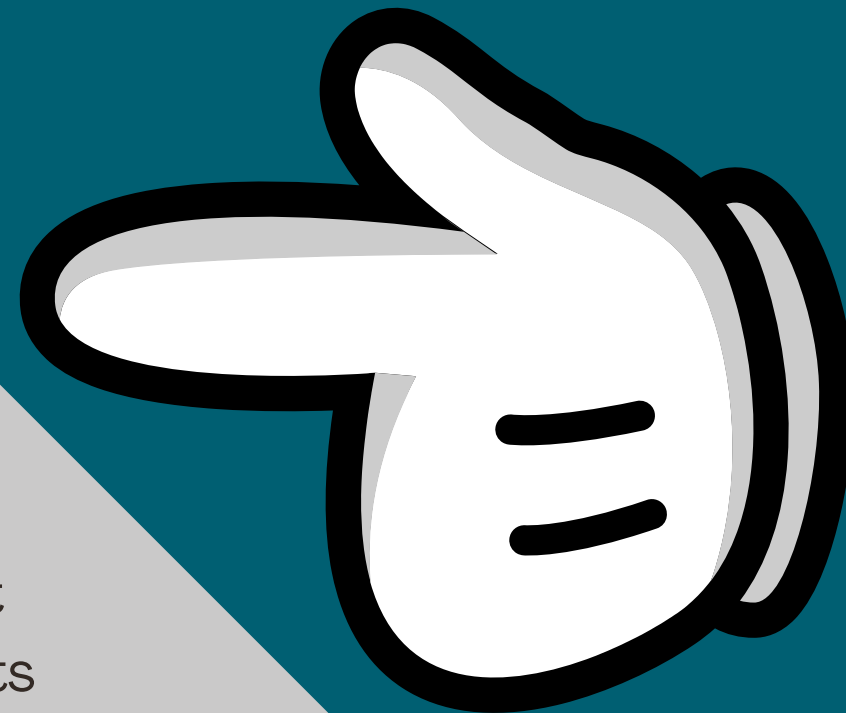


# What we have done so far

Before this guide to Working Together was written, we had the 'How Can I Help You?' Participation Strategy. How Can I Help You was the name that we chose for the four I's of Invest, Inform, Involve and Influence. We have kept the four I's in this new guide and you can read more about them on the next page.

In the three years that we had How Can I Help You, lots of really good things happened in the Trust to make it easier for us to have a say in the things that matter. As the Chairs of the children and young people's groups we are happy that we have had the chance to help write Working Together, and look forward to making things even better in the future.

- We get regular newsletters
- We have a much better local offer
- We celebrate the FIYA awards every year
- We co-chair the Corporate Parenting Board
- We have activities during the school holidays
- We get a booklet that tells us what our rights are
- We are more supported when we make a complaint
- We do interviews, inductions and lots of Trust events
- Other organisations in the West Midlands using our four I's
- We get a coming into care box with loads of useful information
- The National Youth Agency gave us a flagship Hear By Rights award
- We are able to become Young Ambassadors and work with the Trust
- We have our own website with a special area for when we have left care
- The computer systems have changed so our voice can be recorded better
- The Voice Team visit us when we come into care and when we turn 17



**Maddie & Lukas**

# Have you seen the four I's? Invest, Inform, Involve, Influence



“ Making sure that everyone knows how important it is to work together, and that the right things are in place to make it happen ”



“ Giving us the information we need to be able to help make decisions about our life ”



“ All about the different ways that we can work together with adults, on our own or in groups ”



“ How working together can make a difference to all children and young people, now and in the future ”

# What matters to us?

We worked together with adults from the Children's Trust to make a list of the things that are important to us when working together.



1. We know we have a **right** to have our **voices heard**
2. Treat us like **individuals**, we are not all the same
3. We should all have the chance to get **involved in things that matter**, it is your job to make this happen
4. Use **language** that we can understand
5. The things you write about us should be **truthful**, and everything you know about us should be put on our file
6. Our **culture** and **identity** are really important to us
7. Make sure the **places** that you take us or see us are nice and welcoming
8. Be **honest** and try to **understand how we feel**

# 1 - We know we have a right to have our voices heard

- Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says:

“Every child and young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously”

- There is information about our rights on the Sandwell Voice website and in the ‘know your rights booklet’
- It means we need the right space, time and information so we are able to properly speak up, especially in the meetings and conversations about the things happening in our lives
- When we speak, it is important that our voices are heard by the people that can make decisions about our lives



# 2 - Treat us like individuals

- We are all different, remember this when you are working with us
- The people that have made the biggest difference to our lives are those that take the time to get to know us and change the way they work
- Understand my background and my life before you meet with me.
- When we meet, it is sometimes good to do the things that I like doing. It helps us to build our relationship and learn to trust you
- This could mean we go to the park, for a hot chocolate or for a walk instead of just sitting down and talking
- It could also mean that you help me to join a club to do things like football, dancing, arts or anything I'm interested in
- When you get to know me you will find out the things that keep me interested and help me to talk
- We know that sometimes things can be hard to talk about, but please keep trying. It's good when we work out together the best way of talking to each other





# 3 - We should all have the chance to get involved in things that matter, it is your job to make this happen

- Help us to understand things that might be difficult
- We should be involved in our meetings, our plans and everything to do with our lives. Talk to us about how we can do this
- Let us know how we can help you write the notes that you make about us
- As we go along, ask us what we think and if we are happy with the things you are planning
- Working together on our Life and Memories can help us to understand decisions that were made and why
- Help us get ready for the meetings and reviews we go to. Talk us through what is going to happen and what it will be like. Ask us before we get to the meeting what we want to say and help us to say it
- If there are things that will be said at the meeting that you think will make me sad, talk to me about them before we go in
- There are groups where children and young people with similar lives to us meet, tell us about them and help us to attend



# 4 - Use language that we can understand

- Understand that not everyone speaks the same language or uses the same words as you. Sometimes the words you use can be like a code.
- When you use initials and jargon it can be confusing to us.
- Think about how the words that you use could make us feel. This is important when you are writing things down about us that we will read one day, or that other people will use to make a decision about us.
- A good example of this is when we hear you talk about 'cases'. We are children!
- We have looked at some words and phrases that have been used in the Trust and chosen words that we prefer. You can see these here.
- We know language changes, so we have made a list of words and their meaning on the Sandwell Voice website. New words can be suggested and they will be talked about at our groups, and then at the Trust's Voice Board.

 Try not to say	 Say
Birth Parents	Parents
Care Leaver	Care Experienced Young Person
Children in Care	Children We Care For
Foster Carers	Carer
Respite	Sleepover or Break
Leaving Care	Moving On
Placement	Home
Siblings	Brothers and Sisters
Peers	Friends
Participation	Working together

**5 - The things you write about us should be truthful, and everything you know about us should be put on our file**



- Write everything down, and record it on our file properly. It means that we don't have to keep telling you our story again and again
- We will read our files one day, think about this when you are writing about us. Also think about how you can help us when we are ready to read our files
- When possible, use the actual words that I say, not what you think I mean
- The way you write things on our file will make a difference to the way the people will see me and feel about me
- Talk about the good things as well as the other things you have to write
- If you have to write something about me that will make me look bad, try and put the reasons why I acted like I did
- When writing a Life and Memory Book or a Later Life Letter with us or for us, use language that we understand and be kind and respectful
- As well as using words like 'mum' or 'social worker' use names if you can, it helps us to understand the people that have been in our life
- If you are writing about me, write to me if you can. It makes it more personal

# 6 - Our culture and identity are really important to us

- When you are working with us, talk to us about our background and help us learn about ourselves
- Ask us questions to understand our culture and identity
- There are things that can help you talk to us about our culture in the Resource Library
- Encourage us to find out more about our heritage
- When making plans for me, think about my culture, my language and my identity
- If we don't speak the same language, use interpreters or find other ways of making sure I really understand
- The Sandwell Voice website can help me read and understand things if English is not the main language I speak



**Look at the Trust's EDI Strategy for more info**

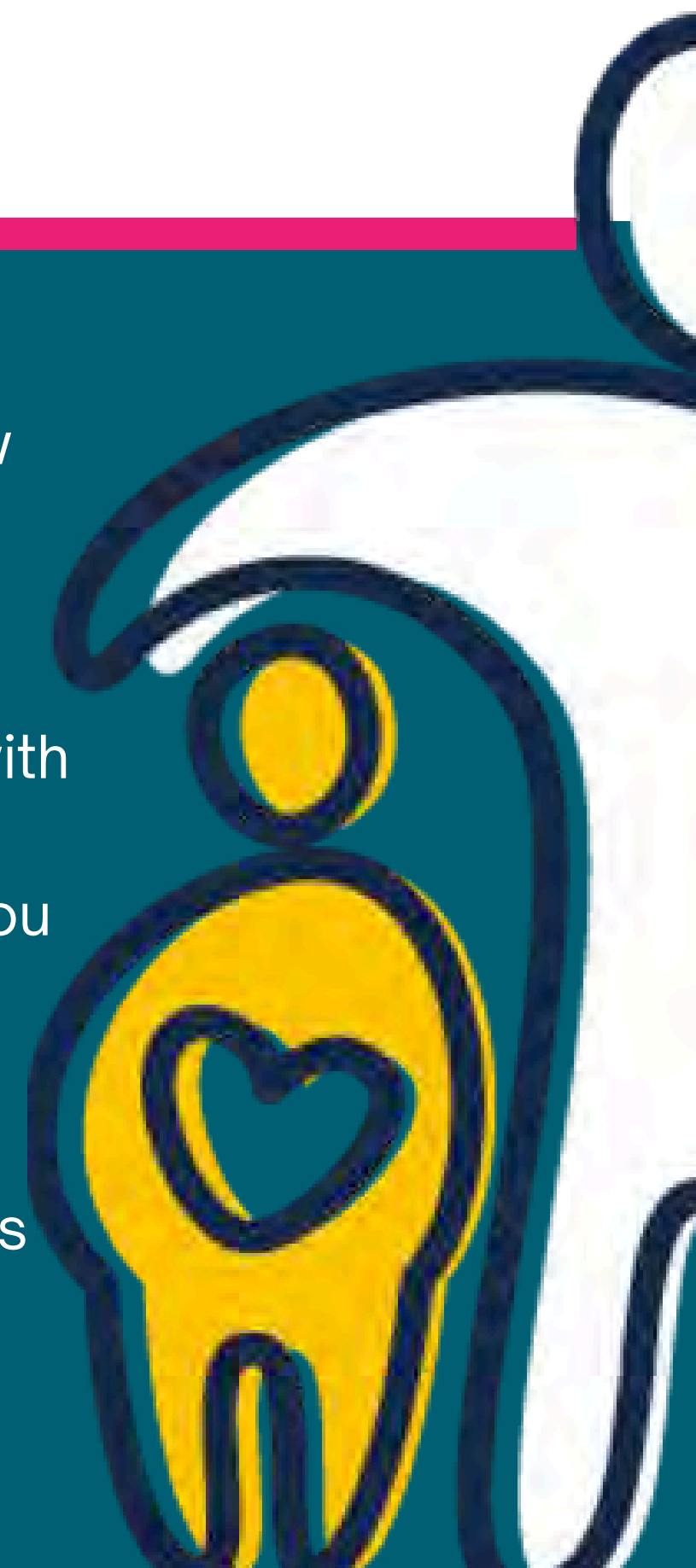
- If it's possible, ask me where I want to meet you
- The Metsec is nice, but some of the other places we have meetings don't feel like they are meant for children or young people
- If you are going to tell us bad news, think about where you are taking us. I don't want to get upset in a public place
- Don't just think we want to be taken out of lessons at school. It can be really embarrassing when people in our class see us go to a meeting
- We may need help getting to some of the places we need to go to, let us know how you can help

## 7 - Make sure the places you take us or see us are nice and welcoming



# 8 - Be honest and try to understand how we feel

- Show up when you say you are going to
- Let us know what has been happening since you last saw us – sometimes we don't know what's going on
- If you can't do something that I have asked for or that we have agreed, tell me why
- If you are leaving to get a new job, tell us and say goodbye
- Try not to make me feel different from other children, especially when I'm at school or with other people
- We know you have to have your ID card on you, but when other children at school see you talking to us and you are wearing it round your neck, they know we are in care
- Try and put yourself in my shoes
- Tell us a bit about yourself, we have to share our stories so it's nice to get to know you. We meet so many people so you might have to remind us how you will be helping us
- When sharing our story with us, give us the time and space to do this, do not rush it and make time to explain and answer our questions



# The second half...how we make it happen

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# The Voice Team

The Voice Team work with the children and young people that are cared for by the Trust, or that have left care and are now care experienced young people.

They run groups which you can read about on page 17 of this guide, but they also do lots of other things to try and make our lives better. There are activities and trips that happen in every school holiday, and they also have parties and fun days throughout the year.

The Voice Team also come and visit children that have just started to be cared for by Sandwell to talk about the help that is there for us. They also speak to young people who are turning seventeen and help them get ready to leave care.

They make sure we have the information we need, and will also help us when we make a complaint.



# Young Ambassadors



Young Ambassadors work with the Voice Team to help make sure the voice of the child is heard across the Trust and other organisations.

As Young Ambassadors, we get paid to help the Trust by doing the following things:

- Interview new social work staff that want to join the Trust.
- Talk to new staff about the voice of the child when they do their induction.
- Attend and chair meetings like the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Speak about our experiences at events.
- Help the Trust with their celebration events and other large meetings.
- Do the Coming into Care and Transition visits with someone from the Voice Team.

If you are working with a care experienced young person and you think they would like to become a Young Ambassador, talk to the The Voice Team.

# Our groups and forums



Voices of Sandwell (VOS) is a group of children we care for. It is a place to get involved in lots of exciting projects, learn new skills and make some great friends.

VOS is for children and young people aged between 11 and 17 years old.



The Forum for Independent Young Adults (FIYA) is for care experienced young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. They do loads of activities and work with people in the Trust and other organisations to make things better.



These groups really are like a **big family**. We meet every other Wednesday evening between 5 and 7pm at the Trust Building in Broadwell Road, Oldbury.

If you know any children and young people that would like to come along, speak to the Voice Team.

# Other groups of children and young people that should have a voice

When you are working with children and young people, think about how you can make sure they all have the chance to have their say.

If you want to set up a group, speak to the Voice Team who will be able to help you.

- Children we care for
- Care experienced young people, including those that are over 25
- Children that are on *Children in Need* plans
- Children that we are working with on *Child Protection* plans
- Children with disabilities
- Separated Children
- Children with no recourse to public funds
- Children and young people working with the Youth Justice Service or in custody
- Children and young people working with the Strengthening Families teams
- Young parents
- Children of travelling families
- Children that go missing
- Children and young people at risk of exploitation
- LGBTQ+ Children and young people
- Children and young people from minoritised backgrounds

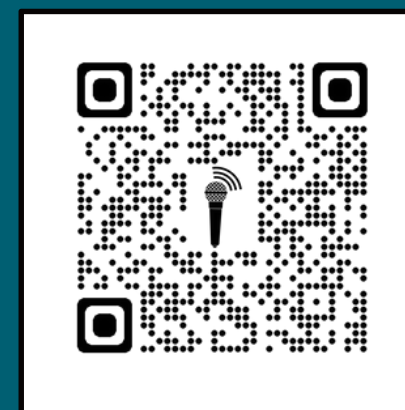
# Did you know about our website?

Sandwell Voice is the website that we helped create for children and young people in Sandwell. There is loads of useful information on the site and it is where the Local Offer for care experienced young people can be found.

As well as all the information we can find on the website, we can also use it to make complaints and give out compliments about the people that work with us, it is an easy and safe way for us to get in touch.

The Voice Team will tell all new children that come into care about the website, and also remind any young people that are turning seventeen when they do the Transition visits.

You can tell the children and young people that you are working with about Sandwell Voice, just tell them the web address or ask them to scan this code with their phone.



Sandwell VOICE.co.uk



# When we need a bit more help

There are lots more people that can work together with children and young people when we need a bit more help. We have listed a few organisations here and have put all of the information on the Sandwell Voice website. This is so we can make sure that staff from all organisations have the most up to date information when things change.

- **Barnardo's** can help children and young people that have been in care make plans for the future and come to terms with some of the things that we have been through.
- There are **advocates** that can help us have our say and sort things out for us if we are in care, are care experienced or have a social worker.
- **Independent Visitors** can meet with us regularly to talk to us, do fun things with us and give us extra help, advice and support if we need it.
- The **Named Nurse** and other nurses can help to keep us healthy and give us easy access to health services.
- The **Virtual School** provides advice, guidance and support to children that are cared for in Sandwell.

Find out more about all of these services by visiting [sctnet.uk/help-support-children-young-people/](https://sctnet.uk/help-support-children-young-people/)

# Working Together and the Partnership STAR Practice Model

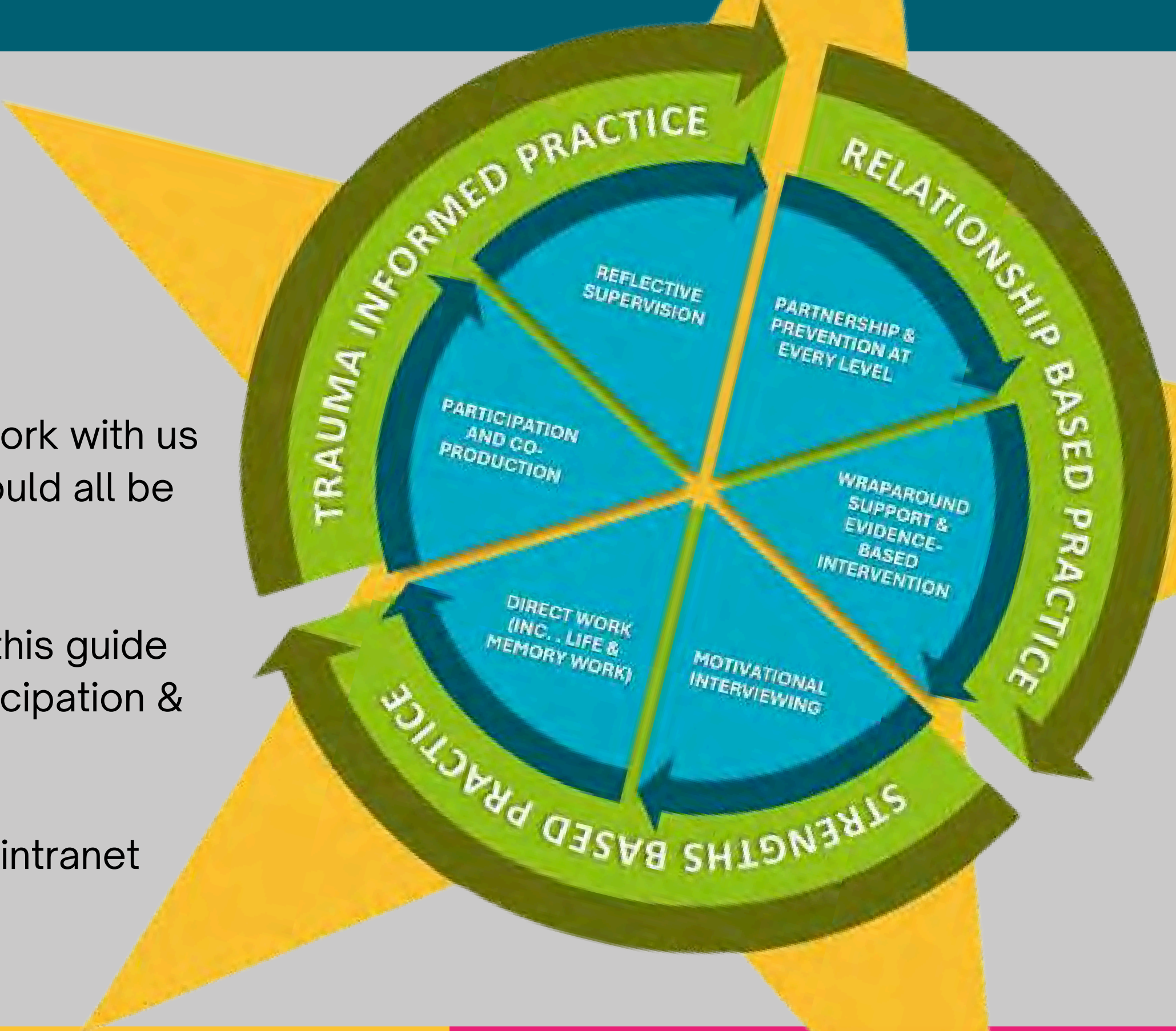
The Trust and its partners have worked together and developed a shared Practice Model for all staff working with children and young people in Sandwell.

What is the STAR Practice Model?

The STAR Practice Model sets out how you should work with us and our families and the kind of language that we should all be using.

There are six parts to the STAR Practice Model, and this guide to *Working Together* forms the main part of the ‘Participation & Co-Production’ section.

You can see the STAR Practice Model on the Trust’s intranet site.



# Working together to make things better (some people call this co-production)

There are times that you will want to ask us what we think about the way that things are done at the Trust and other organisations. This is important even if you don't work directly with us.

It is always better when we have the chance to work with you from the start - instead of just looking at something that is already nearly finished.

We have listed the things that we think are important on the working together checklist.

- We should have the time and space to be able to discuss things properly
- We should agree the outcomes we want before we start to work together
- We should have an equal voice when working together, we are experts in our own lives
- We should be able to make a real difference, don't ask us to work with you on something if you have already made your mind up about it
- We should get something back in return for the help that we give you
- We should always be included, even if we struggle to communicate with you. You will be able to find ways to do this
- We should always be told about what has happened with the work we have done

**If you want to come and see our groups, please fill in the request form.**

<https://sandwellvoice.co.uk/young-people-engagement-request/>

# Hearing our voice when you don't work directly with us

There are lots of people that work in the Trust and its partners that do not have any contact with us. We think that it is important that anyone working for an organisation that supports children and young people understands what we think and how we feel, and there are ways that we can work together to make this happen.

When you think about it, there is a child, a young person or a family that will be impacted by everything you do. This means that we could help you to check that the way you do things works for us.

We have thought about some examples and listed them here.

Whatever part of the Trust you work in, we would love to help you make things better. You can speak to the Voice Team about how we can do this.

- Making sure we get any money that you give to us
- Helping us get copies of the information that is written about us
- Making sure there are enough social workers and other staff to look after us
- All the work that is done to find us safe places to live
- Making sure we have nice buildings to go to
- Dealing with our complaints and other questions
- Writing up all the notes from meetings
- Answering the phones



# Where can you hear our voice?

There are lots of ways that you can use things we tell you to make things better.

Data about us from the systems you use

# Using our voice to make things better

1

Take all of the information that you have, put it together and pick out the main things we are saying

2

Bring it to our forums and talk to us about what you have found out

4

The Trust and other organisations can use this information to help make decisions in the future

3

We will then have a really good idea of what children and young people in Sandwell are saying



# Celebrating the things we are proud of!

It's important that we celebrate when things have gone well or we have done something that we are proud of.

When Voices of Sandwell and the Forum for Independent Young Adults meet we always talk about the things that have gone well, and we help arrange events and activities throughout the year to celebrate all of the great things that we have achieved. We also like it when the people that work with us make an effort to say well done.

The things we celebrate are different for different people. Some people do really well at school or college, or are good at playing sports. For some people, it is more about how we have coped with living on our own or kept a job.

Saying well done to each other means a lot to us. If you can think of any ways you can help us celebrate, speak to the Voice Team.



# Working Together

A guide for people working with children and young people



**Produced by young people from the Forum for Independent Young Adults and Voices of Sandwell, along with staff, managers and the Voice Team from Sandwell Children's Trust.**



[www.sandwellvoice.co.uk](http://www.sandwellvoice.co.uk)



[voice\\_team@sandwellchildrenstrust.org](mailto:voice_team@sandwellchildrenstrust.org)