




family  
action

"A More  
Positive  
Approach"

supporting families since 1869



All families have a story to tell. The people speaking here come from different backgrounds, live in different places and face different challenges. What they have in common is support from Family Action.

The people we work with could be experiencing a range of difficulties – including domestic abuse, mental health problems, learning disabilities and severe financial hardship. Without support they also often face isolation. 140 years of working practice has given Family Action the breadth of experience and expertise to help families address the diverse needs they face today. Uniquely, we work with the whole family to find a way forward.

We believe that all families have the strength to make positive changes to their lives. We support people to make those changes and to build stronger futures for themselves and their communities.

The families we work with often struggle to get their stories heard. We are committed to ensuring that they have a voice and hearing what they say.



**Ann:** "All of a sudden my little light bulb lit up"

I fled domestic violence in 2004. On me I'd got my mobile phone, my bank card and the car keys. I went round the corner, picked my children up and I went.

I rung the police first because I knew for a fact if he knew where I was, he'd kill me. He always used to hit me where you couldn't see it. His favourite was strangling me until I passed out. But it's the impact on the kids. It's affected my children terribly. When they've seen their mum beat up, when they've been beat up as well, it's hard to get it out their head.

One of my children is now being statemented for Special Educational Needs; my youngest has got a personal support programme. All that lot, if I talk to a normal person, they don't know anything about it. It's Family Action that's helped me become aware of all this.

Family Action run a 12-week rolling course called the Freedom Programme. My refuge referred me. I was just a nervous, gibbering wreck, but I kept

coming and kept coming. All of a sudden my little light bulb lit up and I thought 'yeah, this is what I've been through, and this is what I ain't gonna go through no more.' I asked if I could volunteer to help on the Freedom Programme, and I've been volunteering on it now for 18 months.

You know, it's like an awakening that you're not living on your own. Family Action just puts everything into perspective. It brings your brain back, it makes you, you; not a doormat, not a battering ram, not a piece of meat. All I can say to him is like, bring it on. I am settled here. I ain't going nowhere.

The future's looking good. I've got everything in place that I want. I've got my house, my kids and my bank account.



**Kate:** "My son, he says 'Building Bridges is ace'"

**I was really at a crossroads. Friends had been saying for years 'Oh Kate, get to the doctor, get to the doctor.' I've got bi-polar and I've got alcohol problems. The time I came to Family Action I was just going round and round. I wasn't on any medication; I hadn't been to the doctors and been honest about the situation.**

My world had got smaller and smaller 'cos my self-esteem was getting even lower. I was in this really destructive relationship with another alcoholic and because everything was right in my face I could really see: yes, when I'm manic I don't make good decisions. It might feel fun but the ripple effect of it - on myself, on my son, on my family - it's just not good. So I went to the doctor, and I got in touch with Family Action's Building Bridges programme.

Initially someone used to come and visit me at my house, and they gave me money to get carpets. I'd never got carpets 'cos there's always something, like alcohol instead, you know? I go to AA now.

I've been to dual diagnosis rehab' and I don't drink anymore. I feel a lot more positive now alcohol's not in my life.

Some days, for weeks and weeks, I'm bumbling along quite content, but then a slump'll come and I'll just not see joy in anything really. To have the continual support from Building Bridges through it all is really, really good. I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have this place. For me it's like family. I can ring up and talk to someone when something's happened and I've got really distressed about it. By the time I've come off the phone it feels as though things are manageable.

My son he says, 'Building Bridges is ace'. He knows other people come here, other people do have mental health problems, and that there's help and support, and recognition - and respect as well.

**Loretta:** "The more I talked about it the easier it was"



**I was by myself for a good six, seven years and I did find it really hard. I had no control over my ten-year-old son. Police was knocking at the door for things he'd done, smashed windows... So I got in touch with social services about four years ago and my basic thing was then to say 'look, take him away, I can't cope with him'. So they put me in touch with Family Action.**

I was having problems of my own as well. I've lived on my own since I was 16. I had quite a bad upbringing. My real father weren't about. I was sexually abused. I tried committing suicide twice.

I was just sat at home all the time, depressed. The Family Action support worker explained that you need to deal with yourself before you can deal with your son. The more I talked about it the easier it was. Then they said, would you be interested in a parenting course? I went and everyone was really friendly. It lasted about eight weeks; I was given homework and

things like that. I did find it hard to get involved, but after a couple of sessions I was looking forward to it because I was out meeting people, sharing my dealings with my son and thinking well, I'm not the only one.

If it weren't for the parenting course I don't know where I'd be. I mean, we was coming to fist fights, both of us. Whereas now I can talk to him, like I talk to any adult. It made me realise that he has got a point of view. He's doing well at school; he's like a different child. We're getting along so well.

It's like a whole big change around. I'm in part-time work, I'm driving now, I start college in September to be a teaching assistant. I'm really looking forward to everything. Once I'm in full-time employment I'm hoping to maybe get a mortgage and move to somewhere with a garden for my son.

**Rahim:** "I met other people in the same situation"



**I'm 14 years old. For a long time I've had to look after my mum 'cos she's got back pain and problems with her bones – osteoporosis. She can't stand up for that long, she can't walk for that long, so I have to help clean the house, do the shopping, look after the kids. I've got two younger brothers, four and two, and a younger sister who's seven. I put them to bed, brush their teeth, get them ready for school. That kind of stuff. I do the vacuuming, clean the floors, get the rooms tidy.**

My mates get more freedom. I have to help my mum most of the time, so they get to do more fun things than me. Sometimes I don't have enough time to do homework, so I have to do it the next day or do it in school. Mostly you don't have enough time for yourself and next year I start my GCSEs, so I need more time.

I've been coming to Family Action's Young Carers project for about one-and-a-half years now. We also have a Family Action worker who helps my mum fill in forms or helps us financially as well. I get to go on trips regularly and use the Kidstime workshops [for children and parents affected by parental mental ill health]. We've been to Thorpe Park and go to the cinema or theatre. I get away from the house and get some relaxation time, it's fun.

The workers have been really helpful and supportive, and fun. It's made me more confident – I met other people in the same situation, so now I can build my self esteem and talk about it more.



**Michelle:** "It was like all of a sudden I had somebody on my side"

My son has Asperger's Syndrome. He couldn't get up in the morning. It caused so much stress going to school – the chaos, the noise level. He'd physically harm himself not to go to school. Then when he got there he'd shut down and go into a robotic state to get through his day.

He often said, 'I don't want to live. I just want to go to my own world where no schools exist'. One day I realised he had a knife hidden under his bed and I thought right, enough's enough. I was going through the process of trying to get a statement of Special Educational Needs and I was a bit confused by everything. Family Action's Parent Partnership project helped me. We talked through the whole process. They came to the house to get my son's views on what he wanted. It was like all of a sudden I had somebody on my side.

I started going to support groups that they held, to talk to other parents. It was great just to know that there are other people going through the same problems.

Anyway, it didn't work out with the statement at the mainstream school so a support worker from Parent Partnership came to multi-service meetings with me. They obviously knew things that I didn't; the technicalities. In the end the council agreed to put my son in an independent special school.

It's absolutely transformed our lives. He goes to a school that he loves, he gets up every morning happy to go. He's an absolutely transformed child: he eats, he sleeps, he's happy. That's all I ever said I wanted, I just wanted him to be happy.

At his worst I just didn't know how he was going to get through his life, I just thought he's going to be so traumatised, but things have changed now. Parent Partnership actually asked me if they could pass on my 'phone number to other parents in similar circumstances. I support them as a volunteer now.



**Wendy:** "Before I came here, I wanted to hide myself away the whole time"

**I think what started it off was post-natal depression, having my son, and being in a violent relationship with his father. When the baby was due I just completely lost interest, 'cos that's when I first found out he was cheating on me. I dealt with it at the time, but I can't remember the first 18 months of my son's life.**

I attempted three suicides. At the time I was trying to deny everything. It was only when it got to the third attempt that I realised it was going bad 'cos my sister had to take me to hospital. That made me realise my family knew, so I had to tell somebody. Someone from Family Action actually come round to see me the next day.

When I was really suffering, before I came here, I wanted to hide myself away the whole time. I thought everybody was literally looking at me thinking, 'what a stupid woman. We know what's happening in there and she's still putting up with it'.

In the beginning I'd come to the morning sessions, to build up my confidence because I wouldn't go out. My little boy was suffering because he never interacted with other children, so going to the crèche helped him. The other facilities I use now is all the trips they organise for the children – because I can't afford holidays – so trips to the seaside, the zoo, all those things.

Coming here made me feel like I wasn't alone. It gave me the confidence to pack his bags and say 'go'. I made a lot of friends who've been there to support me. I was on medication in the beginning, but I come off that after about a year through my choice.

I just come to the afternoon sessions now. Sometimes I do let it all out, have a good old cry, but they're there to listen and give you their advice. More often than not I'm more ups than downs now.

**Anika: "It's a big difference, what I was to what I am now"**



**I'm 21 and I'm a single mum. I haven't had any support at all from family. I was subject to sexual abuse in my home country, by my stepdad. My dad won the rights to get me over here when I was 15, but he kicked me out after I just come into the UK. It was really hard for me, thinking I'm leaving a difficult situation and coming into another difficult situation, so that send me into depression. Now that I'm turning around my life I'm off anti-depressants, I used to have counselling too.**

They put me in emergency accommodation. When I got heavily pregnant I found it so difficult just to walk up stairs. When I went to the hospital I was so depressed they called social services. They're thinking I'm kind of at risk, so they referred me to Family Action straight away.

I got a two-bedroom property before my baby was born, and I come to Family Action to get their support. If I never come to their Young Families project I'd probably still have social

services on my back. I didn't know nothing about the system. They help me fill out forms 'cos I'm dyslexic. I got home visits. If I need anything for my baby and I can't afford it they tell me what grants I can get - any little thing that I need. I thought they was like a lifesaver.

I did a parenting course with Family Action. When my kid goes to school I'll be volunteering at a Children's Centre and I'm gonna do my NVQ Level 2 in Childcare. I'm gonna get my Maths and English GCSE, 'cos I want to be a Maths teacher.

It's a big difference, what I was to what I am now. People do look at you and think 'oh, kids having kids', but they don't know what I've been through. All I keep in my head is: you know what, I'm a good mum; I know how to look after my child. I don't get angry now; I have a more positive approach to everything.

## How We Work

**Family Action (formerly Family Welfare Association) has been supporting families across the country since 1869. Working alongside the communities we serve, we provide a unique blend of practical advice, financial help and emotional support to people facing a range of complex challenges.**

Family Action believes that strong relationships are at the heart of stable, resilient families, and that wherever possible children should be supported to achieve their potential within their own family.

Our services are diverse, based in places where people feel comfortable and responsive to local needs. We work in partnership with others, including schools, councils and health services, providing tailored support to over 45,000 families each year.

Using this wide-ranging, flexible and holistic approach, Family Action is able to plug the gap through which families can fall, keeping children safe while addressing the long-term needs of all family members. Working alongside us, the families whose stories you have read here have created more positive futures for themselves. We are particularly proud of the fact that many of the individuals who have accessed our services have gone on to volunteer and support other families.

## What We Offer

**We provide services, including parenting programmes and one-to-one support, to families in their own homes as well as through schools, Children's Centres and our own service bases.**

Our mental health services are unique in working with adults who are experiencing mental health difficulties and with their children – ensuring both get the support they require. Family Action supports families who are currently experiencing or who have in the past experienced domestic abuse. We deliver a range of services, providing practical and emotional support.

Family Action works with young carers and their families. We also provide in-home support for families affected by parental learning disabilities. In partnership with local health services, we support individuals and families to tackle the social problems that often underpin medical referrals, such as housing, benefits and relationship issues.

Each year Family Action provides almost £1 million through our grants programme to individuals and families in need, assisting with essential items such as beds, cookers and children's shoes.

If you would like to find out more about Family Action's services, or you are interested in volunteering or supporting our work, then please go to our website [www.family-action.org.uk](http://www.family-action.org.uk) or phone us on 020 7254 6251.

\*All photos are for illustrative purposes only.

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