

Bristol Belonging Strategy: Belonging in Families

2021 – 2024



BRISTOL
ONE CITY



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Introduction

'Family' is the term we generally use to describe the people closest to us, those we care most about. Families are one of the first and greatest social groups we will ever be part of – they are the sovereign social unit of our society and concern our most important biological, social and emotional relationships. Small wonder then that having a sense of belonging in our family, however we define our family, is critical to our well-being, our ability to learn and develop, to achieving our potential and make a wider contribution in society.

'Belonging' is a simple word for a huge concept. Having a sense of belonging is a vital human need, just like the need for food and shelter. To feel we belong, is to feel accepted for who we are, to be encouraged to be who we are. Developing a sense of belonging starts pre-birth in the way we are responded to and grows as we are loved, accepted and encouraged within our family and later in our school and community. Knowing that we belong enables us to face adversity and survive, it enables us to flex, adapt and thrive in response to the highs and lows that life will bring.

It is within our family that we first develop our sense of identity and belonging, building resilience, testing, learning and exploring who we are and what we want. Families come in all shapes and sizes, and at their

best they help help us understand ourselves in relation to others and the world around. In Bristol, we want to invest in what families need for children to be able to grow up healthy, safe and confident, secure in the knowledge that they belong. It is from these strong foundations that children will go on to belong in their community, to contribute to the life and future of our city, to become the adults they want to be and to have families of their own.

It is within the family that psychological safety is first built, where we learn through relationships, where understanding, acceptance and resilience is exhibited, where success is celebrated and where positive behaviours are modelled. It is within the family that we first learn to have fun, to be playful and to manage our worries. That's

why, if we want children to thrive in our city, we must focus on enabling the family as a whole to thrive.

The emotional and physical family environment has a huge impact on the lives and development of children. Families have the potential to nurture a child’s sense of belonging and provide a secure base from which to navigate the transition through adolescence and into adulthood, but they need the means by which to do so. An affordable, safe and secure home, access to education, training and employment, health care, play and green spaces are all crucial if our children and families are to thrive.

All families are unique and precious, and all will face times of adversity and times when they need a little extra help. The Belonging in Families pillar of the Belonging Strategy sets out how we will support families at such times by taking a whole family approach that starts with understanding and respecting the family in the context of their lives, their story, their culture, ethnicity, gender, disability and other factors. We can achieve so much more when we work together and that is why we will work with children and families to co-construct and develop our services around their aspirations, wants and needs.



“You feel a sense of belonging when you are with family and friends and people around you accept you for who you are.”

The definition of family will vary over time and according to our situation and culture, it may be self-defined and can be nuclear, lone parent, extended, foster, adoptive, blended or reconstituted. One study found that children often included a wide range of people in their description of family with some also including pets, the majority including brothers and sisters whether or not they lived together and, for those not living with birth family or birth parents, often reflected a nuanced sense

of belonging to both ‘traditional’ concepts of birth family and to the family within which they lived.

Bristol is a diverse and tolerant city where there are at least 45 religions, at least 187 countries of birth represented and at least 91 main languages spoken. It is a growing city too which, in respect of families with dependent children, is expected to grow by a further 16% by 2043¹. Whatever the size or shape of your family, whether new to the city or part of a family that has lived here for generations, some things are common: to feel you belong you need to feel safe, cared for, celebrated and loved, you need to know that someone is rooting for you and that you can rely on their help when you need it. When we think about families in this way it is easy to see that there is more that unites us than divides us. We want children and families to feel that they belong in their community and in the city as a whole, we want children and families to contribute to the life of the city, to be able to access all that it has to offer and in-so-doing, to feel that the city belongs to them.

The Belonging in Families Strategy sets out how we aim to achieve this for all children, young people and their families in Bristol. It represents one of four pillars (Beginning, Families, Education and Community) of an overarching Belonging Strategy that will inform the way we work with and for children and young people in Bristol. This strategy has been developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders and our priorities in this strategy reflect what children and their families are telling us is important to them. Belonging in Families starts by describing our vision and principles, includes a summary of feedback from children and families and an overview of challenges and opportunities that are faced by families, and sets out the outcomes we want to achieve and our priorities for action to deliver these.

¹ Care Pathways and Outcomes Study Phase 3, Queens University of Belfast

Vision

The Belonging Strategy vision is:

- For our children and young people to have the best possible start in life, gaining the support and skills they need to prosper in adulthood.
- For our children and young people to be welcomed into a city with a culture of nurture and care, with opportunities to grow with support from their community
- For our children and young people to have their needs recognised at the earliest point in a system that collaborates to help them thrive.
- For our children and young people to have a home which sustains, nourishes and protects them in safe and healthy families
- For our children and young people to have a confident sense of self and identity in a cohesive and diverse city.
- For our children and young people to access education that is inclusive and values diversity, where they learn from each other and benefit from an understanding of their different experiences.
- For our children and young people to own the whole city and experience and benefit from all that Bristol offers.





Principles

We want every child and young person to feel a keen sense of connection to their city and a freedom to be themselves. The work required to help grow a sense of belonging is wide-ranging and will be delivered by a broad range of partners. This is set out across four related strategies that all commit to shared principles and ways of working.

Our focus on belonging is underpinned by the recognition that the quality of our relationships is crucial to ensuring that every child, young person and parent and carer feels themselves to be an integral, valued, and visible part of their community.

Our work on belonging supports our city-wide work to develop and implement a system-wide, **trauma-informed approach**. Trauma Informed approaches recognise the prevalence of trauma in people’s lives and acknowledge the potential effects that this can have on individuals and their families, networks, and communities. They are non-labelling, respectful and hopeful approaches that recognise people’s strengths and resilience and their potential for healing. We will work with partners and communities to deliver this strategy in line with our agreed **‘Principles for Trauma Informed Practice’**.

A trauma informed approach is aligned with our ongoing commitment to ensuring that we **Think Family**; that we ensure we consider and take account of the needs of children and adults in all our work. We will also continue to focus on identifying risk and vulnerability at **the earliest opportunity**.

Children’s needs are usually best met by supporting their parents and carers, and preventative and early help responses are critical to avoid issues from escalating. We will focus on **families’ strengths** and seek to develop the family’s capacity to look after their own needs; we will work to enable parents and carers to access universal and community services wherever possible, and appropriate.

These approaches require us to **listen**, understand and **work together** with children, young people, and their families. Understanding and responding to individuals’ **views and experiences** is essential to this way of working.

We will continue to improve our **partnership** working. As we create joined up systems so that there is **no ‘wrong door’** to services we will also build **social capital** by ensuring our systems and interactions are based on shared values, understanding, and trust.



Challenges and opportunities

“You choose your own friends, so you choose your own circles, whereas you don’t really choose your own worker or you don’t choose the government to be your parents.”

In many of the measurable aspects of children’s lives, Bristol children as a whole fair as well or better than their peers across England. However, the data tells us that there continues to be large disparities in the experiences and outcomes for our children and families. This is particularly true for children who grow up in families that experience deprivation and disadvantage, for children that have special educational needs and disabilities, for children who are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and for children in need of help and protection and who may go onto become children in care and care leavers.

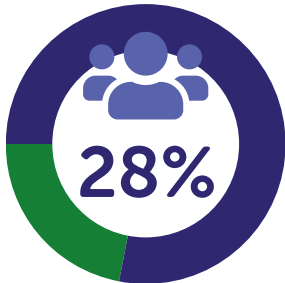
We know that the Covid-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on children and young people. This is amplified for those children, young people and families who face the additional adversity

of disadvantage or discrimination as the pandemic exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and structural disadvantage they face. This strategy provides the opportunity to focus our recovery on closing the gap that our most disadvantaged families face, tackling the systemic and structural challenges, focussing our efforts on social justice, inclusion and human rights. We must use our resources carefully to reduce inequality, to build independence and resilience, to enable economic inclusion and embed trauma-informed approaches. To do so we will meet emerging needs at the earliest point and work in strong partnerships at a local level.

City Snapshot

The population of Bristol is growing and diverse, especially so for children. People are from 187 countries of birth, speaking 91 languages and practising 45 religions.

94,016 Children under 18 years live in Bristol (20% of total population)



of children are Black, Asian or belong to and Minority Ethnic group



of children have free school meals



of children live in poverty (after housing costs)

- 50,900 households with one or more child

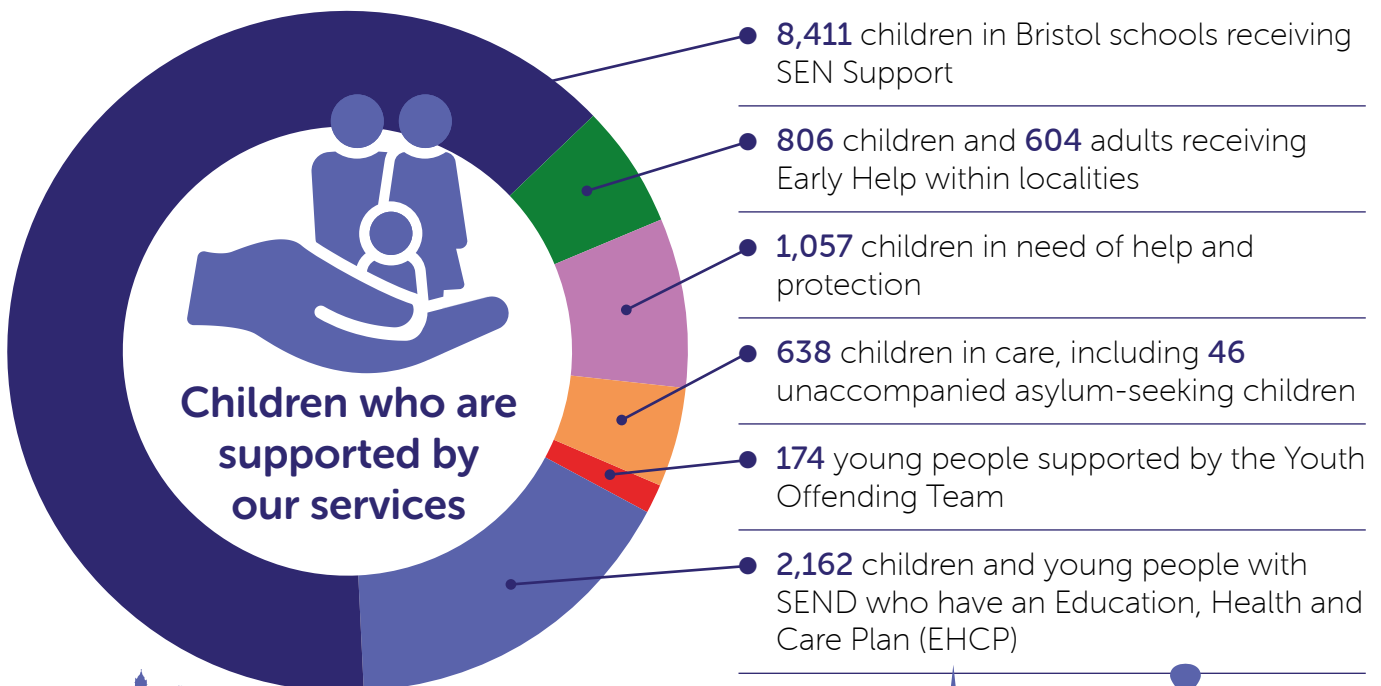
- 62,911 pupils in our schools of whom 20% have English as an additional language

- 14,600 children under 16 live in low-income families

- 19,000 children live in the 10% most deprived areas in England

- 18,700 children estimated to live in households that are suffering from drug/ alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, or suffering from mental health problems

Snapshot of children who are supported by our services (as at 31 March 2021)





What Children, Young People and their Families have told us

We asked children, young people and parents what helps and hinders a sense of belonging within their family, community and Bristol as a whole. Their responses have shaped our strategy and are summarised below:

What children and young people said they need from their family to feel a sense of belonging



"I feel I belong when I'm with my friends, my family, at home. Because I know the people I am around and that allows me to feel a sense of comfort. I guess because I know that they're not gonna judge me."



"I had a good connection with one of my key workers after I left care when I was 16. I guess she made me feel wanted and belonged and because she generally took time out of her day to see how I was."

- Trust and love were selected as the top priorities amongst most children and young people, including amongst children in care or with SEND, young carers and from BAME groups.
- 'Being accepted as who you are', 'positive relationships' and 'spending quality time' were also selected by the majority of respondents.
- The top response selected by gay or bisexual young people was 'being accepted as who you are'.
- Most young people said 'family' when asked where they belong.
- In contrast, young people with care experience, in particular care leavers, shared that they sometimes lacked this sense of belonging to their foster families. Some felt happier and more cared for as a care leaver due to having more control over their own situations, including having choice over who they wanted to work with.

What parents/carers said gives them a feeling of belonging

“Belonging as a parent to me means being able to be the parent that I need to be and want to be as well and having the support to do so.”

- The most common response was friends and family.
- Being a part of the local community was also a popular answer, with parents/carers talking about the importance of local baby and children groups, local shops and local parks.
- There were also a wide variety of answers from parent/carers describing things or places that give them a feeling of ‘belonging’ including shared beliefs and ethos, having a good relationship with the school, being with like minded parents, the street WhatsApp group, and community activities such as church and sports and using shared community spaces.



What parent/carers said helps their child to develop a sense of belonging

“Family needs to offer children and young people a sense that their opinion is valued and that a family’s love is not conditional.”

- Friends and family were once again highlighted as an important factor but there was less focus on the local community and more comments referring to home and school.
- Love and acceptance was cited by many parents/carers.
- Stability in their lives – having the same home, staying in the same school, growing up with the same friends.
- Particular professionals with whom a child engages, especially teachers and school staff and health professionals such as health visitors, doctors and nurses.
- Helping your child to engage in the local area and be a part of the community by joining local groups, taking an interest in the local area and visiting the local park.
- Several parent/carers referred to the importance of talking to their children, asking them about their day and sharing updates about friends and family with them.
- Encouragement in all its forms – be this to make friends, to learn, or to get involved in activities.
- Consultation reports for children and young people and parents can be found on the [One City website](#).

Priorities

‘The home environment has an enormous impact on how children and young people develop, their outcomes and ultimately their life chances. Therefore parents, carers and the community in its broadest sense should feature in plans to improve outcomes for children and young people. This extends to a focus on taking action to minimise the impact of child poverty and improve housing conditions for families in poor quality housing stock²’.

For children and young people to feel they belong, they must be loved and accepted, they must grow up in households that are warm, safe and nurturing and where all of their basic needs are met. As they grow up, we must ensure there are opportunities beyond the family to pursue interests and ambitions, to explore, take risks and develop as individuals.

Children, young people and families in our city need safe streets and green spaces so that children can play out as well as other opportunities for children to come together to build friendships and explore their environment through play. To do so, parents must have access to safe and affordable housing, to employment and training opportunities and to opportunities to develop as people in their own right as well as opportunities to meet with other parents and to learn what it means to be a great parent.

Families need to have agency, to feel they can contribute to what is happening and can make decisions about their future and the shape of their city, including the services they access. We will co-construct and work with respect, including, as a city, acting together to reduce risk for children and young people.

This strategy and our priorities are not designed to be an exhaustive list, they will evolve over time and are intrinsically linked to support the delivery of other strategies and plans for children and young people such as:

- Information on housing - bristol.gov.uk
- Information on clean air and the environment (one-city-climate-strategy.pdf - bristolonecity.com; Bristol’s Clean Air Zone (CAZ) - bristol.gov.uk)
- Playful Bristol - playfulbristol.org
- Early Help Strategy ([Think Family](https://www.thinkfamily.org.uk) - bristol.gov.uk)
- Community Safety / KBSP plan (Welcome to the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership website. (bristolsafeguarding.org))
- Corporate Parenting Strategy and Pledge (Bristol Corporate Parenting Strategy - bristol.gov.uk)
- Young Carers Strategy
- Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Inclusion Strategy - bristol.gov.uk

² What Good Children and Young Peoples - Public Health looks like.pdf - adph.org.uk

Themes	Outcomes (what children and families want)	Priorities for action (what we will do in response to what children, young people and their families are telling us)
<p>1. Loved and Accepted</p>	<p>Families understand their child’s strengths, abilities and special needs.</p> <p>Children grow up warm, fed and listened to – their voice is important.</p> <p>Parents are role models with the skills to nurture and care for their children.</p> <p>Good relationships, human connection within families and quality time spent together create feelings of self-worth in both children and adults.</p>	<p>Progress integration with health and community partners at a community level through development of a Family Hub approach in each area of the city that incorporates children’s centre services, health and education services, youth and play services and more in a model that supports families to grow and that is underpinned by a system wide approach to reducing Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma.</p> <p>Family and parenting support will be available for every family, with a comprehensive universal and targeted core offer available from each hub and a differentiated offer delivered flexibly to meet local need.</p> <p>Develop an online resource accessible to every family, so that whether you’re new to the city or have always lived here, it’s easy to find what’s available to support families, where it’s delivered and when. This will include access to play and youth services, family support and parenting.</p> <p>Work with One City partners to tackle digital exclusion and improve digital access so that resources and information for children and families can be accessed more easily.</p> <p>We will ask children and families about the support they need and will design our services around what families tell us.</p> <p>We will work with families when they need us, building on family strengths to tackle challenges together and build resilience. Early help will prevent the need for specialist services.</p> <p>When specialist services are needed, they will step in and join with universal and targeted services. Social Work Services will help families to build their network of support using Family Network Meetings.</p> <p>When a child/ren cannot live with their birth parents, we will always seek family or friends carers who know the child. We will be ambitious corporate parents, delivering our Pledge and Strategy for children in and leaving our care. We will maintain family and community links where it is safe to do so and help children in our care to continue to feel they belong.</p> <p>Be committed to children growing up in the city and the communities where they feel most comfortable and to which they ‘belong’. This means doing everything we can to avoid children moving out of the city when they need our care and keeping children at their school, in touch with family and friends and continuing their hobbies and interests.</p>

Themes	Outcomes (what children and families want)	Priorities for action (what we will do in response to what children, young people and their families are telling us)
<p>2. Safe and Nurtured</p>	<p>Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children.</p> <p>Families help their child develop and learn.</p> <p>Families have the means to provide for their children and can access support when needed.</p> <p>Young carers receive the support they need when they need it.</p> <p>Children’s develop good emotional health and wellbeing, supported by their family and those around them. Families are equipped to provide the psychological and physical safety that enables children to grow up confident in the knowledge that they can be themselves and can try, fail, succeed, take risks and make mistakes within a safe environment.</p> <p>Children grow up free from violence and abuse, in neighborhoods and communities where they feel safe and ‘at home’.</p> <p>Families are able to care for children with additional learning needs, disabled children and those with complex health needs, supporting them to develop the skills that will maximise independence and enable participation in all the city has to offer as they grow up.</p> <p>Newly arrived children and families, including those who are seeking asylum are welcomed into the city and supported to join their local community.</p>	<p>We will work with the Homes and Communities Board to shape the development of the new Local Plan to deliver safe, affordable homes for children, young people and adults of all ages. Families that can adapt to meet the growing needs of a family.</p> <p>Working with partners we will develop a new Child Poverty Strategy for the City that will help us navigate the route out of COVID and reduce the impacts of poverty on children.</p> <p>We will work with the Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service and the Economy and Skills Board to ensure families maximise their income and have access to high quality training and employment opportunities that will enable them to provide for their children.</p> <p>We will work with voluntary, community, faith and schools sectors to ensure children are supported from the earliest point to develop good mental and emotional health and to secure early support when needed.</p> <p>Work with Keeping Bristol Safe Partners to deliver to ensure children are protected from harm and to reduce abuse, exploitation and hate crime through our integrated Safer Options Approach. By working at all levels and taking a whole family approach we will promote family resilience and community cohesion.</p> <p>We will work through the Adversity and Trauma Health Improvement Team to continue to promote system wide understanding and response to trauma. We will use strengths based, trauma informed approaches to build resilience and give children and young people the best start in life.</p> <p>We will use the information data and analysis available to us to identify those most at risk as early as possible and ensure access to the most appropriate level of support to prevent needs escalating.</p> <p>We will design Safe Streets and Safer Communities with families, and will work with Bristol’s Transport and Climate Teams to deliver safe, affordable and sustainable travel options for families and opportunities to access play and green spaces.</p> <p>We will work with the Domestic Abuse Board to deliver the Mayoral Commitment to ending domestic abuse and enable children to grow up free from violence. We will focus our family work on reducing interparental conflict and will develop new, evidence informed and integrated approaches to reducing domestic violence that enable children and families to stay Safe and Together™.</p>

Themes	Outcomes (what children and families want)	Priorities for action (what we will do in response to what children, young people and their families are telling us)
<p>2. Safe and Nurtured</p>	<p>Families are predictable and provide a secure foundation - children grow up knowing what comes next.</p> <p>Children are supported to navigate transitions of all kinds - from nursery to school, from school to college, from college to work, from childhood to adolescence and into young adulthood.</p>	<p>For disabled children, we will work with city partners to become an accessible, inclusive and autism aware place to live. We will deliver an early intervention team to support parents who have questions about how to support a child with emerging additional needs and will continue to strengthen our offer and information on the <u>SEND Local Offer website</u>.</p> <p>Work with the Healthier Together Children and Young People’s Board to improve joint commissioning and strategic planning arrangements for children with complex health, care and education needs, preventing the need for care or hospital treatment through integrated family, schools, health and community support.</p> <p>For those disabled children who do need local authority residential care, we will build on our fostering base and open a small children’s home so that children do not need to leave the city and can stay close to their family and at their school. Through our regional work we will develop a commissioning plan to secure the right services able to meet future need.</p> <p>We will welcome new families to the city, including asylum seeking families and will work with the voluntary and faith sector to promote diversity and inclusion across our communities. We will challenge discrimination, and champion those who face additional disadvantage to create a city in which every family belongs.</p> <p>Invest in and develop an increasingly skilled and diverse children’s workforce so that families and the city benefit from the skills and experience everyone has to offer.</p>



Themes	Outcomes (what children and families want)	Priorities for action (what we will do in response to what children, young people and their families are telling us)
<p>3. Healthy and Active</p>	<p>Families enjoy time together accessing a range of affordable cultural, sports and leisure activities.</p> <p>Parents are good role models for children and value their own health – helping develop healthy behaviours in their children.</p> <p>Children and families have easy access to green space and safe streets for play and other activities.</p> <p>Children are active, have access to nutritious meals and are a healthy weight.</p>	<p>Deliver the Healthy Child Programme – the bedrock for health improvement for children aged 0-19. It provides the framework for prevention and early intervention services for children and young people to promote good health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Work with partners to ensure our Parks and Green Spaces Strategy works for all families, maximising accessibility and use for a range of play, sports, leisure and cultural activities.</p> <p>Work with the Feeding Bristol consortia to tackle food poverty and inequality, ensuring access to affordable, healthy food and opportunities to develop cookery skills in their local area.</p> <p>My Holiday Hub (Bristol’s Holiday Activities and Food Fund Programme) provides a range of activities and nutritious food for all children in the city entitled to Free School Meals and their friends.</p> <p>We will support the development of youth zones and work with voluntary and community group to offer diversionary physical activities, focusing on those areas with less facilities and supporting community groups operating adventure playgrounds.</p> <p>We will support and enable the play sector to develop a comprehensive offer across the city, promoting the benefit of play for the development of younger children.</p>



I want a city

That is equal between girls
and boys

I want a city

Where there are no
judgemental people

I would love a city

That has lots of friends and family

And, I would love that city to
be Bristol

Because I never want to leave.

Member of Barton Hill Girls Group