

# Learning Example – Family Breaks and Positive Outcomes – Local Authority of Surrey

## Introduction

This learning example shows how Surrey have developed their short breaks provision in their first year of funding from the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Fund. Surrey became involved during the second year of the Innovation Fund, following a successful bid in line with their Short Breaks Statement published in December 2022.

The new [Surrey Short Breaks Service](#) commenced in April 2023, following a recommissioning of their current provisions in addition to commissioning and piloting new provisions. Surrey consulted with parents, carers and the young people using their Short Breaks services, with providers and other stakeholders, and with [Family Voice Surrey](#), to inform how they designed the services available from April 2023. This was underpinned by an in-depth examination of their current offer and using this innovation funding opportunity to test new approaches to how they provide support to disabled children and young people and children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and their families.

This example highlights two themes of innovative practice which Surrey has utilised to transform their short breaks offer and the outcomes for disabled children and young people and children and young people with SEN. Surrey have worked to implement a provision that better supports the wider family in order to provide more wrap-around support, which is being piloted via new 'Family Breaks'. Surrey has also developed a new 'Outcomes Framework', which has informed the design of their Short Breaks provision. They are using this framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision and make improvements. This innovative outcomes-led approach shows how Surrey is focusing on ensuring their short breaks offer delivers positive outcomes for children and young people and parent/carers.

## Aims and Objectives

Prior to putting together their Innovation Fund proposal, Surrey reviewed their support pathways for disabled children and young people and children and young people with SEN including through a Strategic Review of Short Breaks in 2021.

They sought feedback from children, young people and families, along with partners and providers, through regular workshops and public engagement surveys. This informed their plans about how to design and fund their Short Breaks offer going forward. A working group was also formed with council colleagues and representatives from Family Voice Surrey – the official parent carer forum.

This review allowed them to reflect on why some children and young people were not accessing sufficient support from their current Short Breaks offer and the difference that a better and more innovative Short Breaks offer can have on the needs of these children and their families. Surrey is passionate that the services provided reflect the needs of families that use these services, as they know how vital Short Breaks services are. Surrey was subsequently awarded funding from the Short Breaks Innovation Fund in 2023, which created the opportunity for them to implement these findings and reflections.

They want to develop interventions that have a transformative impact on children and their families and ensure that there are tangible positive outcomes for those using the Short Breaks service.

This learning example will be looking at how Surrey's Short Breaks offer aims to:

- Enable children and young people to participate in fun and engaging activities.
- Provide a break from caring responsibilities for parents/carers.
- Ensure positive outcomes for children and young people and their families.
- Create opportunities for inclusive activities for all members of the family to take part in together.

## **Approach**

Surrey has collaborated with families, providers and stakeholders to design and deliver their new Short Breaks service, which enables children, young people and their families to receive support from experienced providers. Surrey wanted to prove the impact of Short Breaks as a vital provision within wider SEND support and recognised a need for accurate information on the impact of short breaks on a child and their family. Surrey is therefore focusing on generating their own evidence of how well their offer is working.

Surrey's approach to planning and designing this new service has been shaped around a number of key themes, two of which we will be looking at in detail:

- The idea of a 'Family Break' where the whole family accesses an activity.
- Taking an outcomes-led approach by using monitoring tools.

## **Family Breaks**

Surrey spoke to families to understand what was missing from their Short Breaks offer and found that improving opportunities and outcomes for the whole family was something that wasn't being addressed. Families explained that they often struggled to find opportunities to do things together as a whole family, as short breaks typically involve the child or young person going to an activity by themselves.

Surrey recognised that by providing additional opportunities for families to take part in an activity-based short break together, this would improve outcomes the whole family. They therefore decided as part of their innovative short breaks offer to place a real focus on this

theme of 'the whole family'. This was addressed both through piloting '[Family Breaks](#)' and thinking about the wrap around support that they could give to families that are at risk of crisis.

The idea behind 'Family Breaks' is providing a space for families to come together, in a supportive and positive environment, to all share an activity and strengthen family bonds. Surrey has created an empowering environment for these families where they can all enjoy an activity together that is both fun and accessible.

This has currently been primarily piloted via [Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development](#) – who are expanding their facilities to enable families to enjoy a combination of day stays and weekend stays. This pilot is currently for children and young people with complex needs and their families to access in the holidays and at weekends. This offer has also been developed by running daytime family activities in partnership with other local providers, with a number of different options being explored.

To further the innovation at the heart of this new provision, Surrey have looked at how short breaks can provide more wrap around support to families that are struggling or at risk of crisis. This is being addressed in a few ways, including examples such as advice drop-in sessions as a bolt-on offer while the child or young person is in a short break activity, telephone support and peer support groups.

The aim of this innovative work is to broaden the typical service provision of short breaks to better link into the wider family unit and bridge the gap between the short break and what is happening at home. This wrap around support will hopefully better support families that are at risk of breakdown or crisis.

### **An outcomes-led approach**

From the start of thinking about how they wanted to make their Short Breaks provision innovative, Surrey wanted to ensure that they were generating evidence on how well their Short Breaks offer was working. Surrey identified a need for accurate information on the impact of short breaks on children and young people, and therefore used an innovative technological approach to address this. Short breaks are incredibly important to how a family thrives, and therefore we need clear data to show the impact that this provision has and the need to continue developing and strengthening the provision.

Their Strategic Review of Short Breaks identified that enabling positive outcomes for children and families is not always as central to the design and delivery of short breaks service as it should be. This connects to a lack of sophistication in our ability to report on outcomes that children and young people, and their parents and carers, are experiencing due (at least in part) to the short breaks they access. Furthermore, there is lack of thought around how data

and technology can be harnessed within Short Breaks, to better the design and delivery of these services.

Surrey have taken a new outcomes-led approach, which has been built in from the start of the new provision delivery, including in the design and commissioning stages. They realised that there was rarely sufficient thought being placed on what outcomes we are trying to achieve for children and families. They are now asking providers to consider what their theory of change is for their service and how they are embedding this into their activities.

Surrey have developed outcomes-based monitoring tools – these tools were co-produced with parents and providers following a discussion around the best ways to measure the impact of short breaks on a children or young person. There are three different outcome monitoring tools being used so far – one is embedded in monitoring children and young people's progress; another is focused on family progress.

Surrey recognised that by shifting the focus from the current activity onto the longer-term impact, there is the ability to better explore and be innovative towards how they approach short breaks. This will ensure that they are sufficiently focused on progress towards the outcomes and ultimately the impact that short breaks seeks to achieve for children, young people and families.

## Challenges and Successes

### Key challenges

- Surrey acknowledged the potential difficulties around providing family breaks, as it means that the parents/carers and wider family may not be receiving enough of a break from their caring responsibilities. While continuing to tap into the innovative thinking behind family breaks, Surrey is looking to refine the design of family breaks, including exploring additional wrap-around support options, that enable parents/carers to feel like they are benefitting from more of a break, alongside their children, when they participate in these whole family activities.
- Tackling the difficulties around information sharing and ensuring wider understanding of the changes and additions to the Short Breaks provision is challenging, particularly when wanting to make sure that services are being well-utilised and engaged with throughout the region.

### Key Successes

There have been many successes in the first year of the programme:

- **The provision of Family Breaks and wider family support:** Through thinking about the wider network that can provide wrap-around support for the whole family, Surrey have created a culture of joined-up working that means these families are hopefully less likely to reach crisis point.

- **Strong processes of co-production:** Surrey established the importance of co-production from the beginning of designing their Short Breaks provision, to ensure that children and young people and their families were directly involved in shaping the services they access.
- **Taking an outcomes-led approach:** By emphasising the importance of monitoring outcomes, Surrey has encouraged providers to seriously consider the theory of change, and what outcomes they are seeking for the children and young people that use their services.

## Key Learning

Surrey have embedded a family focussed and outcomes-led approach into the design and delivery of their new Short Breaks offer, and have utilised sector intelligence from families, providers and stakeholders to ensure that co-production lies at the heart of the provision.

- **Evaluation and improvement:** Continuously evaluating, monitoring and improving Short Breaks services is crucial to ensure that it delivers the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families.
- **Collaboration and engagement:** by encouraging co-production and collaboration with children, families and providers, the most high-quality Short Breaks can be designed and delivered, and it is a provision that best utilised strengths within the sector and best meets the needs of those using the services.
- **Thinking beyond Short Breaks:** By going beyond the service itself, such as thinking about the additional support that can be provided surrounding the service, Short Breaks can establish more joined-up working that ensures families are receiving all the support they need.