

# **Leadership-in-Action Outcomes Report**

## **Tracing the Long-Term Impact of Family Group: Building a Longitudinal Reflection & Outcomes Framework**

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## Introduction: From Spreadsheets to People

One of the first things I remember about arriving at The School & Family Works was not a spreadsheet, a research question, or even a Family Group session. It was the café.

S&FW's office in Richmond sits inside a shared community space used by several social enterprises. Downstairs, a café staffed largely by volunteers, many of them retirees, operates on a pay-as-you-wish, open access basis for the entire neighborhood. During my first week, I kept thinking about how unusual that felt. Here was a small piece of social infrastructure built on the assumption that people would contribute what they could and that community could be organized around dignity and trust rather than a purely transactional exchange. I had come to London intending to study social capital and the long-term effects of a relational intervention; almost immediately, I found myself working in a building that embodied many of the ideas I had previously encountered primarily through academic research.

From March 14th to April 26th, 2026, I completed my Laidlaw Leadership-in-Action placement with **The School & Family Works (S&FW)**. Its flagship programme, *Family Group*, brings children, parents, therapists, and schools together through multi-family therapeutic work. The organisation works particularly with families experiencing social and economic disadvantage, family instability, trauma, and school disengagement.

My original project was called **“Tracing the Long-Term Impact of Family Group: Building a Longitudinal Reflection & Outcomes Framework.”** The question behind it seemed straightforward: S&FW had substantial evidence that families and children changed during the programme, but what happened after they left? Did improvements in relationships, emotional regulation, school engagement, and confidence persist? Could those changes eventually affect wider outcomes such as employment, reliance on public services, or families' ability to navigate institutions?

My project outline set five objectives: understand the organisation and its existing evidence; define priority long-term outcome pathways; build practical follow-up tools; test whether those tools would actually work; and leave S&FW with a credible, funder-facing framework for future longitudinal work.

I achieved those objectives, but not by following the project I had written on paper.

The most important outcome of my Leadership-in-Action experience was learning to distinguish between being committed to a plan and being committed to a purpose. I arrived with a research design. Over six weeks, Mark, Jo, Lindsay, therapists, members of Clinical Governance, parents, children, and school staff helped me—in the best possible way—to turn it into something more realistic and more humane.

## **Objective 1: Listening Before Designing**

My first objective was deliberately about listening. I wanted to understand how Family Group actually operated, what evidence S&FW already possessed, and what the organization itself needed from a long-term evaluation. My original outline specifically anticipated working with Mark, Jo, and Lindsay to define meaningful outcomes rather than designing them alone. That principle became far more important than I expected.

### **Learning the organization through Mark**

Some of my most useful early hours were simply spent talking with Mark Griffiths, S&FW's founder and Chief Executive.

Mark told me about beginning his professional life as a teacher and eventually working at a school in Wales for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. What stayed with me was the way he described learning to look behind behaviour. A child who appeared disruptive or impossible to teach could be responding to instability, neglect, or trauma that the classroom itself could never resolve. That experience eventually led Mark toward clinical psychotherapy, work in government, and ultimately the creation of The School & Family Works.

Listening to that story changed how I thought about the organization. As an economics student, I had initially described the problem almost instinctively as a coordination failure: schools are expected to educate children, mental-health services address clinical needs, families operate in another sphere, and vulnerable children can fall between systems. Mark's career made that abstraction concrete. He had encountered the same failure first as a teacher standing in front of children whose difficulties could not be solved simply by better instruction.

He also made the organization's financial realities tangible. S&FW was not operating with an academic research budget or a large evaluation department. Mark explained how the funding environment had changed dramatically over time, making external fundraising and the ability to demonstrate impact increasingly important.

That affected my own leadership. I could have designed the most sophisticated longitudinal study imaginable, but if it required staff time or infrastructure that a small organization did not possess, it was not useful leadership. Working alongside Mark, Jo, Lindsay, and the rest of the team continually brought me back to a basic question: could someone at S&FW actually use what I was creating after I left?

### **Seeing Family Group rather than reading about it**

That question became much more immediate during my visit to Sparrow Farm Primary School in Feltham.

Until then, much of my work had involved old evaluations. I had been coding statements into categories—“emotional regulation,” “school engagement,” “parenting confidence,” “trust.” At Sparrow Farm, those categories acquired faces.

We first met the headteacher and two Year 5/6 graduates of Family Group. One child spoke about making more friends and becoming more comfortable at school. I then learned the context that did not fit neatly into the outcome column of a spreadsheet: after witnessing a traumatic event at school, he had once found it extremely difficult even to enter class. Now he was participating actively in school life. Another child's story revealed an impact I had not initially thought to measure: his mother had gained enough confidence through Family Group to begin writing CVs and applying for jobs.

That second story stayed with me. Employment was not the direct therapeutic objective of Family Group. Yet if a parent became less isolated, more confident, or more capable of navigating institutions, employment could become a second-order consequence of an intervention that began with a child's difficulties at school.

Walking through the corridors produced an even less quantifiable observation. Children who were not necessarily Family Group participants greeted the S&FW therapist with obvious warmth and familiarity. The therapist did not feel like a visiting clinician parachuted into the school once a week. She seemed woven into school life.

I remember thinking that I would never have discovered that from a dataset.

The most affecting part of the visit was sitting with parents currently participating in Family Group. They spoke openly—sometimes emotionally—about rebuilding trust in teachers, changing the ways they communicated with their children, managing conflict differently, and feeling less alone. At one point, a parent expressed pride in their child. It was an ordinary sentence, but in the context of the conversation it felt enormously important. These were the kinds of changes that could disappear when “impact” was reduced to attendance percentages or disciplinary incidents.

I also noticed that almost everyone in the parent group was a mother. There was one father. The therapist explained why his presence mattered: an adult man openly discussing the difficulties of parenting created a different kind of space, including for younger boys in the group.

That moment complicated another assumption I had brought with me. Participation itself is not neutral. Who enters Family Group, who feels comfortable speaking, who returns for evaluation years later, and who is missing from the room all affect what an organization can claim to know.

By the end of my first two weeks, Objective 1 had therefore become much more than “institutional understanding.” I had begun to understand the gap between knowing an intervention analytically and knowing it relationally.

## **Objective 2: Working Out What “Lasting Change” Actually Means**

My second objective was to identify a manageable set of long-term outcomes associated with Family Group.

Initially, I imagined this largely as a research exercise. I would review the literature and previous evaluations and decide what variables should be followed.

Instead, the answer emerged from people.

I built an evidence-trawl database from S&FW's historical evaluations, organizing previous findings and quotations into themes including trust and safety, emotional regulation, parenting capacity, confidence and voice, child outcomes, school impact, relationships, community impact, and economic mobility. In my final presentation, I was able to show how much S&FW already knew: families had described feeling heard rather than judged; parents reported greater confidence; children showed changes in behaviour, attendance, friendships, and emotional regulation; schools described stronger relationships with families; and some previous reports even suggested wider employment and stability effects.

But the trawl revealed a striking imbalance. S&FW possessed much richer evidence about what happened during Family Group than about what happened years afterwards.

That made the phrase “lasting change” the organizing idea of my project.

Eventually, I grouped it into four broad domains: family functioning and parenting capacity; child outcomes; the parent-school relationship; and wider second-order outcomes such as employment, reduced isolation, daily stability, use of services, and confidence navigating institutions.

Those categories were partly analytical, but Sparrow Farm had already changed what they meant to me. “School engagement” now made me think of a child who had once struggled to walk into class. “Economic mobility” made me think of a mother beginning to write CVs. “Parenting capacity” made me think of parents talking about changing how they responded during moments of conflict.

That distinction mattered; I did not want the final framework to erase the people who had made the categories intelligible.

## **Objective 3: Building Tools and Learning Why Ethics Changes Research Design**

My third objective was to produce practical tools for capturing those outcomes.

This was where my initial proposal encountered its largest challenge.

I had expected to spend part of the placement interviewing former Family Group participants. From a research perspective, that seemed sensible: find graduates, speak with them about what had changed, and use those accounts to map longer-term trajectories.

But in my first weeks, S&FW's Clinical Governance process raised concerns about the ethics of retrospectively contacting families who had previously participated in therapy. Even a well-meaning request for an interview could carry emotional weight. A former participant might interpret contact from a therapist as therapeutic rather than evaluative; questions could reopen difficult memories; children created additional safeguarding complexities.

Initially, I experienced this as the project stalling.

Then I met Hendrix Hammond, a psychotherapist and member of Clinical Governance.

I went into that conversation knowing he had concerns about my proposal. What could easily have become an adversarial meeting became one of the most useful conversations of my placement. Hendrix did not simply tell me what I could not do. He helped me think through what a responsible version of the project could look like.

From that discussion came several principles that eventually formed the backbone of my final output: obtain prospective consent before families leave Family Group; separate therapy from evaluation; use a non-clinical staff member or independent researcher for future follow-up; focus initial longitudinal work on parents rather than directly contacting children; and avoid questions that ask families to relive trauma.

I consequently designed a two-stage consent process. Families could opt in near graduation to being contacted in future, but that consent would not obligate them to participate. Years later, they would be asked again. They could decline, ignore the request, skip questions, stop at any time, or withdraw consent.

The experience changed my understanding of leadership.

My initial instinct had been solution-first: I had identified a problem and arrived eager to solve it. Mark's openness to the project had encouraged that ambition. But the concerns coming from

another part of the organization were not bureaucratic obstacles to overcome. They reflected expertise that I did not possess.

Leadership in that moment meant being willing to say, in effect, the original version of my idea is not the best version anymore.

The project became smaller in one sense—I would not personally conduct the longitudinal interviews I had envisioned—but substantially more useful in another. Instead of collecting a handful of interviews during six weeks, I could help S&FW establish the ethical infrastructure to collect better information for years.

## **Objective 4: Lindsay, the Spreadsheets, and the Difference Between a Good Idea and a Usable One**

If Sparrow Farm taught me that there were people behind the data, my Week 4 meeting with Lindsay Huxter, S&FW's Operations Coordinator, taught me that there was also a considerable amount of invisible labour behind the data itself.

I sat down with Lindsay to understand how information was actually collected across the twelve schools in which Family Group was operating.

For several weeks I had been talking about “baseline data” and “longitudinal comparison” in fairly clean methodological language. Then I opened the actual spreadsheets.

They were organized around real schools, different cohorts, parents, children, goals, reporting practices, and programme years. There was a richness there, but not the tidy panel dataset an economist might dream of.

The feature that interested me most was S&FW's use of self-defined goals. Rather than imposing exactly the same outcome measure on every child, participants could identify things they personally wanted to improve—relationships, behaviour, confidence, engagement—and Family Group tracked progress against those goals.

That immediately struck me as unusually consistent with the programme's philosophy. It respected the fact that the starting point for one family might look completely different from another.

It also created a methodological headache.

How do you aggregate deeply individual goals into evidence that a funder can understand? How do you preserve the meaning of a child's own objective while also asking whether an intervention works systematically across twelve schools?

Working through the data with Lindsay forced me to confront that tension. We also considered differences between parent-reported and student-reported measures and the fact that much of the existing information was structured by school, cohort, and year rather than longitudinally across the whole organization.

I remember this stage of the placement because it was much less dramatic than meeting families or visiting a school. It was simply sitting with operational data and trying to understand how the organization really worked.

But that made it an important leadership experience.

It is easy to propose that a small charity should “measure impact better.” It is much harder to sit with the person who would actually have to collect, maintain, clean, and interpret that information and ask what is realistic.

Lindsay helped ground my ambition. Instead of proposing an entirely separate research infrastructure, I began asking how future follow-up could connect to information S&FW already collected. The eventual framework therefore proposed a three-stage comparison—baseline or entry information, graduation or exit data, and future long-term follow-up—and recommended aligning future questions with existing measures wherever possible.

This was also where I became more conscious of the character of the organization itself. S&FW is small. People do not occupy neatly separated boxes labelled “research,” “operations,” “fundraising,” and “programme delivery.” My original outline named Mark, Jo, and Lindsay as people I would learn from and work alongside precisely because useful evaluation had to cross those organizational boundaries.

The lesson I took from that team was that good leadership frequently consists of making another person's job possible, not simply making your own idea impressive.

## **Objective 5: Letting Parents Redesign My Research**

The most human test of the framework came in Week 5.

I met S&FW's Family Insight Group, a small group of parents who had graduated from Family Group and continued to advise the organization. We met at Kew Gardens.

Even the setting mattered. We began in a lesser-known community garden within Kew where people dealing with experiences including addiction, trauma, and depression can participate in gardening. Then, rather than remaining seated around a meeting table, we began walking.

We talked while passing cherry blossoms and fields of tulips. The contrast stayed with me: we were discussing families' difficult histories and the mechanics of consent and longitudinal research in one of the most peaceful places I had visited during the placement. The conversation felt different from a focus group in a conference room. People had space to talk, walk, stop, and think.

I asked the parents what had actually lasted from Family Group.

Their answers challenged some of the emphasis I had initially placed on children's measurable outcomes. Again and again, they returned to parents: confidence, language, practical tools, ways of responding to children who had once become withdrawn, isolated, or physically reactive. They described the importance of meeting other parents who understood their circumstances without needing every difficulty to be explained from the beginning.

One of the most important ideas was community itself. For some parents, Family Group had created relationships with people who understood what it meant to navigate disability, single parenthood, social isolation, or challenging behaviour. The support network mattered even beyond the formal intervention.

Then the parents began redesigning my methodology. I had been thinking primarily about interviews. They pointed out that an interview with someone connected to S&FW might subtly encourage a participant to tell a positive story. An anonymous survey could sometimes produce greater honesty.

Their solution was to offer people options: in-person discussion, telephone conversation, or anonymous online response. Someone might even have a conversation and later remember something they wanted to add privately.

They also emphasised something that could easily have escaped a conventional research design: who contacts you matters. They agreed that a former therapist should not be the evaluator. But complete impersonality was not necessarily ideal either. A recognisable, trusted person from S&FW might make someone more comfortable responding.

That created an interesting tension between two values: professional boundaries and relational continuity. No textbook methodology chapter could have resolved that tension as effectively as the people who would actually receive the email or answer the telephone. I left Kew realising that co-design was not merely a gesture of respect; it produced better research.

I also left aware of my limitations as a facilitator. The conversation had been so rich that I sometimes struggled to document everything while participating naturally. In my reflection that week, I wrote that I should have had a more systematic way of capturing comments in real time.

That remains something I would change. Leadership did not mean pretending every part of the placement had gone perfectly; it meant noticing where my own processes had fallen short.

## **Final Outcome: Turning Six Weeks of Conversations into Something S&FW Could Keep**

My final week was spent turning all of these experiences into something coherent.

By then, the project no longer felt like one research exercise. It was Mark explaining how he had moved from teaching to psychotherapy. It was Jo and the rest of the team reminding me that the framework had to belong to the organisation rather than to me. It was a child at Sparrow Farm talking about making friends. It was the warmth between pupils and their therapist in a school corridor. It was Hendrix questioning my ethical assumptions. It was Lindsay opening twelve schools' worth of data. It was parents walking beneath the blossoms at Kew and telling me that anonymity mattered.

The challenge was synthesis.

My main output became a **Longitudinal Outcomes Framework** setting out how S&FW could eventually investigate long-term impact without compromising the relationships on which Family Group depends. I completed the evidence-trawl database, draft future consent materials, proposed question structures, outcome domains, and implementation recommendations.

Then I had to present it back to the people who actually did the work.

I first presented to S&FW's Practice Development Consultants, the senior therapists. That audience mattered because they could immediately distinguish between something that sounded elegant in a report and something that would survive contact with therapeutic practice.

Afterward, I presented to the organisation's board.

I was conscious during those presentations that I was a student who had been there for six weeks speaking to people who had spent years working with these families. Earlier in the placement, particularly during the strategic communications workshop, I had sometimes hesitated to speak because I was the least experienced person in the room. I had been trying to learn when humility meant listening and when it could become an excuse not to contribute.

The final presentation required both.

I had to speak confidently enough to explain why S&FW should invest in longitudinal evidence, while remaining humble enough to make clear that the framework was not solely mine. It had been shaped by Mark's strategic perspective, Clinical Governance, Lindsay's operational

knowledge, parents' lived experience, therapists' clinical expertise, school observations, and years of evidence that existed before I arrived.

That may have been the clearest Leadership-in-Action moment of the placement: my role was not to be the expert on everything. It was to connect different kinds of expertise into a useful decision.

## Outcomes Against My Original Objectives

Looking back at the objectives I wrote before entering the organisation, the project succeeded, although success looked different from what I originally imagined.

I achieved **institutional understanding** not only by interviewing staff and reading evaluations, but by sitting in the Richmond office, learning from Mark, working alongside the wider team, visiting Sparrow Farm, observing parents and children, and understanding the funding and operational pressures surrounding Family Group.

I achieved **outcome mapping** by developing four major domains of lasting change, but those domains were transformed by lived experience. Parenting capacity, school trust, employment, isolation, and belonging became more than variables.

I achieved **tool development** through the longitudinal framework, consent form, evidence database, and proposed question structures. The consent model explicitly gives families the right to decline future contact, skip questions, withdraw, and avoid revisiting difficult experiences.

I achieved **feasibility testing**, although not through the pilot interviews envisaged in my original plan. Governance review, conversations with Hendrix, operational work with Lindsay, Family Insight Group feedback, and review by senior therapists were ultimately more rigorous tests of whether the system could actually work.

And I achieved the goal of producing a **funder-relevant framework**. It asks questions commissioners and donors understandably care about: Do improvements last? Do school outcomes improve? Are families more resilient? Is there evidence of reduced demand on other services? It also creates groundwork for stronger future impact reporting and potentially Social Return on Investment analysis.

Importantly, however, the framework recommends resisting the temptation to convert every positive life event into a causal claim about Family Group. Participant-reported impact, case studies, administrative indicators, and previous evaluations should instead be triangulated.

That restraint is part of the outcome too.

## **What I Learned About Leadership**

Before this placement, I associated leadership partly with taking initiative: identifying a problem, creating a plan, and moving it forward.

I still believe in that version of leadership. But S&FW added something more important.

Leadership can mean arriving with a strong idea and then allowing other people to change it.

It meant listening to Mark tell me why the organisation existed before deciding how its impact should be measured.

It meant entering a school and paying attention to the child greeting a therapist in the corridor, not just the outcome figures I had come to collect.

It meant recognising that Hendrix's concerns about my proposal were not opposition to overcome but expertise to incorporate.

It meant sitting with Lindsay's real spreadsheets instead of designing an imaginary data system from afar.

It meant walking through Kew Gardens and allowing parents to tell me that the survey methodology I had designed for them should work differently.

And it meant presenting confidently at the end while understanding that the strongest ideas in the presentation belonged to many people.

My own academic background made this especially meaningful. I had entered Laidlaw interested in social capital—the networks, trust, relationships, and institutions that help people flourish. Much of my previous research involved trying to capture those ideas quantitatively.

At S&FW, I saw what they looked like before they became variables.

Social capital could be a parent who no longer felt alone.

It could be a child who once struggled to enter a classroom and later felt that school was somewhere they belonged.

It could be a mother becoming confident enough to write a CV.

It could be parents learning a shared language for communicating with their children.

It could be the familiar therapist whom children stopped to greet in the corridor.

It could even be a pay-as-you-wish café staffed by retirees in Richmond.

Those experiences have changed the questions I want to ask as a researcher. I remain interested in whether interventions “work,” but I am now much more conscious of what can be lost when impact is defined only as the outcome that is easiest to count.

## **Conclusion: Making Invisible Gains Visible**

The final slide I presented to S&FW said that many of the most valuable gains of Family Group are currently under-measured, and that my framework was an attempt to help make those invisible gains visible. That sentence means more to me now than it did when I first began the placement.

At first, I interpreted “invisible” mainly as a measurement problem. If S&FW could collect better data, the impact would become visible. After six weeks, I understood that invisibility was more complicated.

Some changes are invisible because nobody follows families long enough to observe them. Some are invisible because organisations lack the resources to collect data. Some are invisible because a mother becoming confident enough to apply for a job is not an outcome that a children's therapeutic intervention would normally record. Some are invisible because trust, belonging, confidence, and the ability to ask for help do not fit naturally into a spreadsheet. And some should never be made “visible” without the permission of the people whose lives they describe.

My Leadership-in-Action project therefore ended somewhere different from where it began. I did not leave S&FW having conducted the longitudinal study I initially envisioned. Instead, I left behind a possible architecture for doing that work responsibly in the future: prospective consent, participant-informed design, clear ethical boundaries, integration with existing data, realistic outcome domains, and an evidence base organised for future use.

More importantly, I left with a different conception of how leadership and research fit together. When I arrived, I wanted to produce something valuable **for** The School & Family Works.

By the end, I understood that the most valuable thing I could produce had to be built **with** the people who understood the work from different angles: Mark, Jo, Lindsay, therapists, governance staff, schools, parents, and children.

The framework may have my name on its cover. But the six weeks taught me that the best outcome was precisely that the thinking behind it was never mine alone.