

# What is Heading Home?

Katie Smee Giles, Principal Social Worker

- *"Heading home isn't about returning to where we were it's about growing into who we're meant to be. It begins in the quiet moments after loss, in the courage it takes to keep walking when the road feels uncertain. Home is found in the small acts showing up, forgiving, rebuilding, believing. It's the strength to try again, the grace to begin again, and the love that guides us forward. Because home isn't just a place, it's a transformation. And love, chosen again and again, is what carries us there" - Expert By Experience Parent*
- *"Think of the thing that you wouldn't usually think of and do it" - Care Experienced Young Person*



# Heading Home Strategy and Action Plan

- **Our Vision**

- Children thrive best in their own families; Heading Home shifts the question from “can they go home” to “how do we support them to remain or return home safely”
- Children at the Heart of Decision Making
- Connected Practice
- Risk is part of our work
- Whole Practice Shift

- **Why Heading Home?**

- Moves away from clinical “reunification language towards relational, child centred practice
- Build on NSPCC Framework, Learning from our Foundations service, practitioner and EBE insight and national reform

# How Valuing Care Fits into Heading Home

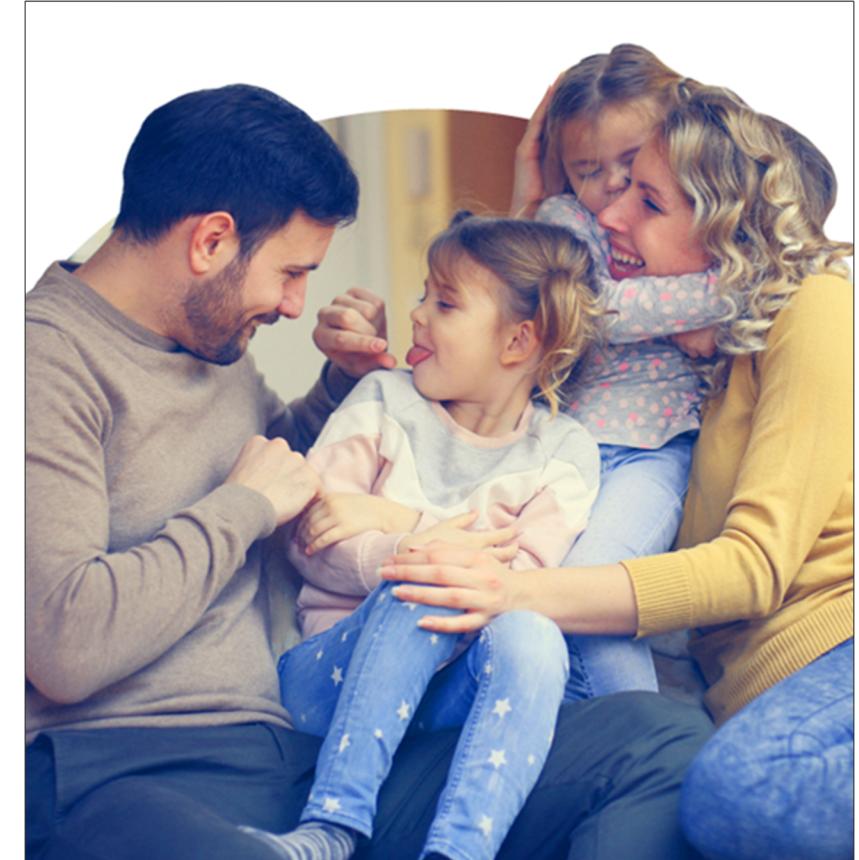
Valuing Care is the engine that powers Heading Home:

- Needs-led evidence base: consistent assessment and tracking
- Decision-making mechanism: multi-agency VC Panels that identify reunification potential
- Quality & safety: robust, transparent planning linked to HH Framework

# Why?

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- Best interests of the child: Coming into care may be the right decisions ‘for now’, but where it is safe, generally children do better emotionally and developmentally within their family networks.
- Improving outcomes and stability: Some children in care experience poorer outcomes and placement instability/unsuitability; supporting children within their family networks can provide greater continuity and suitability.
- Adolescents often start ‘voting with their feet’ it is far better to support Heading Home with a clear plan and work with parents/carers to achieve successful reunification.



# Heading Home Strategy and Action Plan Continued

- **System Readiness**
  - Strong foundations already in place, Reunification Framework, Valuing Care, Connected Practice, Connected Families, Foundations Service, Family Time
- **Workforce and Partnerships**
  - Heading Home Training pathway; Practice Leads; Monthly Drop-ins; relaunch of Valuing Care
  - Strengthened collaboration with health, education, judiciary, Cafcass

# Heading Home Strategy and Action Plan

- **Measuring Impact**
  - Cross departmental outcomes and tracking; thematic audit; lived experience and practitioner feedback loop
- **Progress to date**
  - Launch conference Nov 2025
  - Valuing Care re-launch plan in place – **Review March 2026**
  - Practice Leads Programme – Running, **Review March 2026**
  - Family Justice Quality Circle Dec 25 – working group in place – **Feb 2026**
  - Accelerated pathway for discharge of Care Orders in progress – **Aiming for April 26**
  - We are starting to see practice shift demonstrated through thematic audits and attendance and engagement at workforce development events