



## Transforming the Front Door

By [Public Digital Holdings Ltd.](#)

Public Digital, a global consultancy specialising in digital transformation, has partnered with local authorities to redesign the 'Front Door' of children's social care. Combining user-centred design, evidence-based practices, and advanced training, the initiative aims to improve the referral process, enhance partnerships, and deliver better outcomes for children and families. By streamlining workflows and embedding conversational approaches, the project has reduced referrals, lowered social work caseloads, and improved service quality across participating local authorities.

The 'Front Door'—the point at which children's services receive and respond to referrals—is critical to ensuring families receive timely and appropriate support. However, **many local authorities face challenges such as:**

- Overwhelming referral volumes leading to inefficiencies.
- Poor communication between social workers and partner agencies.
- Inconsistent application of thresholds, affecting decision-making and outcomes.

In response to these challenges, Public Digital implemented the 'Transforming the Front Door' approach in collaboration with Professor David Thorpe, whose model is backed by over 25 years of research. The program was designed to improve decision-making, reduce unnecessary referrals, and create a proactive, family-focused system.

### The 'Transforming the Front Door' approach includes:

- **Ethnographic research:** Conducting user research with social workers to understand existing processes and challenges.
- **Redesigning processes:** Simplifying referral pathways to ensure families receive the right help at the right time.
- **Training and coaching:** Equipping social workers with conversational techniques and partnership-building skills.
- **Data analysis:** Monitoring the impact of changes through rigorous evaluation and ensuring consistent delivery.

This 12-month program integrates service design, training, and data-driven insights to embed sustainable changes. It draws on Professor Thorpe's research, which has demonstrated reductions in referrals, social work caseloads, and statutory interventions.

### The project has delivered significant improvements in all participating local authorities:

#### Improved quality of referrals

- Partners gained clarity on thresholds and service responses, leading to more appropriate and targeted interventions.
- A reduction in referrals by 25-35% was observed, with more families supported through Early Help services.

### Enhanced partnerships

- Direct conversations replaced written referrals, improving mutual understanding and saving partners' time.
- Proactive collaboration reduced the need for follow-ups and clarified actions.

### Reduced social work caseloads

- Social worker caseloads fell by 20-30%, allowing greater focus on proactive work.
- In Leeds, caseloads dropped from 25 to 18 per social worker, significantly improving capacity.

### Better outcomes for children and families

- Lower caseloads and improved focus led to reductions in statutory interventions, including child protection plans and children entering care.
- Ofsted inspections validated the safety and effectiveness of the new arrangements, with improved ratings for participating councils.

### Sustainable change

By embedding conversational approaches and collaborative practices, the initiative established a model that can be scaled and sustained across other authorities.

**See more: ['How Transforming the Front Door has positively impacted the four local authorities where I implemented it'](#)**