A ‘Rochdale Relationships Matter’ Manifesto for the Rochdale Borough

2018–2020

#rochdalerelationshiプsmatter
In 1844, here in Rochdale, a group of businessmen and traders got together to birth a global movement of co-operation, pioneering new ways of behaving and relating that put Rochdale firmly on the map.

Now, Rochdale is ready for new movement – a relationships revolution – pioneered by a broader, more diverse group of women, men and children, working co-operatively to support their wider communities in developing a strengthened focus on relationships – seeking ultimately to improve quality of life for everyone.

Everybody has the right to benefit from good quality relationships at home, in education, at work and in the community. People thrive when their relationships are strong and positive.

This manifesto is a call to action which seeks to set a fresh approach to supporting good quality relationships for everyone. It sets out a bold, pioneering ambition for everyone who lives, works, studies and volunteers in Rochdale, Heywood, Middleton and the Pennines – collectively known as the Rochdale borough.
We are the pioneers of co-operation

This manifesto sets out how together we will...

• Build on the strong foundations we have in Rochdale as the birthplace of co-operation.
• Deliver services with, and for, the people of Rochdale, so that thinking about relationships is at the forefront of everything we all do.
• Raise awareness of everyone’s need for quality relationships and build a greater understanding of the impact, positively or not, that our relationships have on so many other aspects of our lives.
• Promote the values and foundations of quality relationships for all which also outlines how this can be achieved.
• Develop an offer of evidence-based programmes and interventions for those who need it that is accessible, timely and effective led by a diverse group of people who are committed to supporting quality relationships. These people will include citizens and workers who will have the benefit of ongoing training and support.
• Call upon the community; business and systems leaders to prioritise relationships in their areas of work and influence and consider the impact their strategic and delivery plans have on people’s relationships.
• Aspiring to better quality relationships for everyone (students, employees, service users, residents, couples, families, adults, children and young people) that will enhance their quality of life and improve their life chances.

The manifesto will be supported by a clear action plan that includes:

• Engaging a wide range of partners, communities and businesses in signing up to the manifesto, the strategy, the pledge and the action plan.
• Clearly setting out the rationale for a relationships strategy including the national evidence base.
• Developing clear actions to be reviewed annually outlining the ways in which we can support positive quality relationships.
• Detailing the range of evidence based tools and interventions endorsed nationally and available locally.
Why do relationships matter?

Our relationships are one of the most important aspects of our lives, yet we often forget just how crucial our connections with other people are for our happiness.

Relationships make us content and fulfilled; yet poor relationships can also make us feel sad, afraid or lonely. Couple, family and social relationships hold the key to good parenting, educational attainment, mental and physical wellbeing and quality of life in our later years.

Essentially it’s the people around us that will get us through life’s ups and downs.

In 1938, Harvard University began following 724 participants as part of the longest running study on human development in history. This study was developed to determine what makes us happy. The study explored every part of who we are, from physical and psychological traits to social life and IQ, to learn how we can flourish. Findings from the study were published in 2012 in the book ‘Triumphs of Experience’, with key results showing that happiness and health aren’t the result of wealth, fame or hard work, but come instead from the quality of our relationships.

People who are positively connected to family, friends, colleagues and their community are happier, physically healthier and live longer, with fewer mental and physical health problems than people who are less well connected.

It’s not just the number of friends you have, and it’s not whether or not you’re in a committed relationship, but it’s the quality of your close relationships with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues that really matters. Living in any kind of conflict, being socially isolated or being in a toxic relationship is damaging and we know, through extensive research and evidence, that outcomes are not good when children and adults are exposed to this.

This is why it’s crucial that support for people who need help with their relationships, whatever their age, becomes embedded in how we deliver services locally so that relationship support becomes a normal part of day to day working practice.

We therefore will need a whole system approach that recognises quality relationships as a core shared objective across all services and businesses. Support for relationships doesn’t need to be just about specialist ‘relationship support’. There is a place and need for this but there is also plenty room for anyone working with children or adults to play their part and offer an appropriate intervention where they can.
When and where relationships matter

Relationships and their quality impact on every aspect of our lives but there are some key areas where the nature and quality of our relationships have particular significance and where research tells us that relationship quality and support, when needed, has a greater impact.

During pregnancy

Pregnancy is a time of huge change in terms of lifestyle and responsibility for both the mother and father and also a time when the parents prepare for a new set of relationships with their new arrival.

The whole dynamic of the couple’s previous relationship/s are about to change as the pregnancy brings a wide range of new considerations including the kind of parents they will be, if the baby will be healthy, will there be enough money coming in and how they will cope with the demands especially if there are already other children in the home.

We also know that during pregnancy those affected by an abusive relationship may find that things get worse.

It is therefore important that frontline workers and employers have the skills and tools to prepare expectant parents for the changes and stresses (emotionally, financially, and relationally) that having a new baby brings. Where a couple’s relationship may be susceptible to relational stress it may well become evident at this very early stage and so we need to make sure that those working with expectant parents are able to recognise the signs and offer help at this very early stage; delivering interventions themselves and referring to a wider offer of support.

The quality of the parent’s relational experience up to the birth of their new child will have a significant impact upon the relationship they share as new parents and the one they build with their child. This in turn will be significantly impacted by their own relational history including how they were parented, their support networks, how they build relationships and how they resolve conflicts.
Early attachment and bonding

The first attachment we make with others is with our parents or other caregivers and is often viewed as the most important relationship in our lives. Human babies are born very dependent on their parents.

They undergo huge brain development, growth and neuron pruning in the first two years of life. The brain development of infants (as well as their social, emotional and cognitive development) depends on a loving bond or attachment relationship with a primary caregiver, usually a parent. There is increasing evidence from the fields of developmental psychology, neurobiology and animal epigenetic studies that neglect, parental inconsistency and a lack of love can lead to long-term mental health problems as well as to reduced overall potential and happiness.

Our early years learning environment and content have a critical impact upon our ongoing ability to learn as well as our learning styles. In the context of relationships we will also learn a great deal at this stage, both positively and negatively, about the value of relationships and how to make them work (or not) including how to effectively resolve conflict. In the early years we also develop crucial relational skills, language and communication, and how to cope with difference and stress all of which form key areas of a child’s school readiness.

Younger children

Children learn about relationships by observing those around them, particularly key others and this will include learning how to resolve differences. Children who are exposed to frequent and unresolved family conflict, experience significantly worse outcomes than their peers.

We have already acknowledged that having a child is a highly significant life changing experience which brings about changes to a relationship that some couples are not prepared for.

More couples split up in the first year of a child’s life than any other time. We need frontline practitioners at this particular transition point to actively support new parents to prepare for this potential conflict and to have a number of strategies to cope when they arise. This will include professionals such as health visitors, midwifery, children’s centre workers, nursery workers and school staff.

The importance of positive peer relationships during childhood is well established within research. Friendships provide children with the opportunity to develop socially through companionship and shared interests. These peer relationships are important in relation to identity, personal growth, communication skills and social adjustment. It’s not surprising therefore that positive peer relationships are associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing and self-esteem. We need everyone who works with younger children to help them develop the skills to form healthy relationships and tackle the problems associated with conflict and bullying.

Relational patterns established in early years and childhood very often set the pattern for adolescence and as teenagers begin to relate to a wider range of people often in more complex ways poor relational behaviours begins to bear fruit during adolescence and the transition into early adulthood. Positive patterns or poor behaviours become compounded.
The teenage years

The Mental Health Foundation ‘Lonely Society’ report states that young people are more likely to say they feel lonely ‘often’ and feel depressed about this situation than the over 55’s.

This may be attributed to the fact that peer relationships are significantly more important than other relationships, including family, at this stage of life. Adolescence is characterised by significant psychological, social and physical transitions during which identity and a sense of self-worth are formed, where we begin to shape our future social world. Higher rates of mental health problems including anxiety and depression are associated with loneliness, isolation and social rejection during adolescence.

During this relatively turbulent time relational conflict and instability can be at their highest. In 2015, 43% of young people aged 10 to 15 in the UK reported having been bullied and they reported the impact as being a lower sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction. Bullying has always been a particular issue in the adolescent years but in recent years new forms of bullying have emerged using online and digital media; cyber-bullying and sexting.

Over 60% of young people attending CAMHS services reported bullying as an important reason for their attendance. The Mental Health Foundation 2015 ‘Ditch the Label’ said that of those bullied, 30% had suicidal thoughts; 29% had self-harmed, 27% skipped school; 14% had used drugs/alcohol; 14% had developed eating disorders and 12% had run away from home.

Children and young people spend significant amounts of their time in education and we therefore need to recognise the impact good or poor relationships with their teachers can have on their whole school experience and their sense of well-being. Good quality teacher-pupil relationships are central factors in the child’s successful development, not only in terms of academic achievement, but also in the development of positive social skills, social adjustment and future attainment.

Parents and schools need to support young people in developing the necessary skills and awareness to build positive healthy relationships and to detect potentially harmful relationships and friendships. Schools and further education institutions should promote pro-social behaviour and anti-discriminatory attitudes and take firm action to prevent and tackle bullying, and abuse in all its forms.

Tackling dysfunctional or non-supportive relationships in the teenage years is crucially important to establishing a firm foundation, setting effective relational patterns and developing an individual’s relational confidence for adulthood. If adolescence is where poor relational patterns begin to bear fruit, adulthood is where they are fully realised and often repeated to the next generation.

Halifax Road Council School, Rochdale, 1907
Adulthood

For many adults, the nature of their relationships change radically, as they progress into adulthood.

The informal networks of adolescence diminish and the social world becomes dominated by couple relationships, new families, and workplace friendships. Where individuals don’t have employment and also where they don’t form or join a new family then often they gradually and increasingly become socially isolated. Life transitions such as family breakdown, changing or losing jobs, bereavement and divorce can also have significant and lasting impact on an individual’s social network or relative isolation. The different ways men and women form and use friendships also become clearer throughout adulthood often leaving men with less friends and less support than women. Social isolation is the most reliable predictor for issues around self-neglect, self-abuse and suicidal tendencies and this is particularly so for men aged 40+ which is when the poverty of their friendships and social networks begins to have an impact.

Couple relationships

The nature and impact of couple relationships have changed radically in the last 50 or more years.

Fewer couples are getting married and the divorce rate is higher (42% in 2015), more couples are co-habiting and there has been a significant increase in same sex couples. Serial monogamy characterises the current pattern. Despite the increased flexibility in couple types, conflict remains a major issue, with increasing numbers of adults living alone (particularly men) and a significant increase in lone parents (particularly women).

Being in a stable positive relationship is closely linked to good physical and mental health and low morbidity and mortality. A good consistent relationship is linked to greater life satisfaction, less stress, lower blood pressure and generally better health. Similarly, living as a couple results in less cognitive impairment in later life. In many ways being in a stable and positive relationship creates a protective factor for the individuals concerned.

However whilst relationships can have positive benefits for all aspects of the couple’s health it is important to recognise that being in a poor quality relationship can be more destructive than not being in a relationship at all.

Intimate partner violence and domestic abuse is a significant issue impacting on high numbers of adults and children on a daily basis. In 2013/14 it is estimated that there were over 1.4 million female victims of DVA in England and Wales with a further 59,000 incidents reported in Scotland and 13,000 in Northern Ireland.

In 2014, reported family breakdown and DVA cost an estimated £46 billion a year to the public purse according to the Relationship Alliance. There will also be a higher number of family conflict incidents not reported. The Relationships Alliance concluded that relationships are a public health concern of vital importance.

The DWP in their 2017 report (‘Improving Lives – Helping workless families’) naming parental conflict as a key concern to a wide range of public services alongside worklessness and family debt.

As a result of their findings the DWP and partners have launched an innovative programme aimed at reducing parental conflict by delivering a local offer of evidence-based interventions designed to help couples and parents access the right support when they need it before things get worse – and that this offer should include parents who have separated as well as those remaining together.

The DWP and all agencies linked to their new programme are promoting training to a wide range of frontline staff and volunteers that will enable them to recognise relationship distress, offer support where appropriate and connect to more specialised support when needed. In Rochdale we fully support and welcome this work.
Relationships at work

According to a 2014 report by Relate, most workers spend more time with their colleagues than with family and friends. Good workplace relationships are therefore key to a person’s wellbeing and job satisfaction which also impacts on productivity.

Employers need to consider the overall wellbeing of the people within their teams and organisations and how people get along with and support each other. It is crucial that employers and managers set the tone for the quality of relationships in the workplace. Research tells us that when people leave a place of work, they more often leave poor work relationships particularly with their manager rather than the job itself.

Employers and managers play a key role in developing the workforce to support each other through times of difficulty such as family stresses and breakdown, domestic abuse, bereavement and loss. Employers and managers will have access to a range of training opportunities and toolkits that will help to better support and develop their employees.

Another work related area impacting on and affected by relationships are those between organisations and their customer base. This is particularly so for public service bodies and their ‘harder to reach’ service users.

Family life

Family life means different things to different people. Statistically, what people refer to as their family is much more varied now than it was in 1960 when 85% of families were made up of children living with two married parents. This has fallen to 65% in 2015.

Parents may not be married, with 3.3 million couples with children under 18 cohabiting. In an ever changing, modern society we need to ensure that regardless of who you call ‘family’ you have the best relationships you can. A quarter of all families now live in mother only households. 7% of children live with grandparents and more children than ever are living as part of a ‘blended family’. In Rochdale, there are currently 458 children who are cared for by the local authority and will be living with someone other than their birth parents.

We want frontline professionals, who already work with families, such as social workers and health visitors, to have the skills and tools to be able to support the adults and their children through these tough times. Therefore, families don’t feel they need to resort to the family courts in the first instance because of a lack of alternative help.

We know that family life can be challenging, and whatever family structure we live in, it’s the degree of harmony that is more predictive of our mental well-being, than the family structure itself. We therefore need to make sure that families have the best possible support to help them through the difficult times. In order to do this, we need to train the workforce in the use of a range of toolkits and programmes that we know can help. We will make sure that the workforce have the skills to enquire about the quality of relationships between parents - whether they are together or not - and between the children in the family.

Again, within our wider offer we would want to include more widely available mediation interventions, convening family problem solving processes and interventions for families where children are violent, abusive or controlling towards their parents or other caregivers.
The later years

Having already established how important couple, family and work relationships are in adult life, it becomes clear that as people enter later life, family breakdown, divorce, separation and retirement create a much bigger potential for isolation.

An Age UK report in 2014, stated that 3.6 million over 65’s live alone and the number of older people in our population is increasing. This stage of life brings about changes in the roles and responsibilities that individuals have. While many people are able to continue to play an active role well in later life, loneliness and social isolation in this age group is higher than in any other period across life.

Age UK report that 1.2 million people over 50 reported that they felt lonely and socially excluded from society. Conversely we have also noted that increasingly grandparents are playing more of a role in caring for their grandchildren, including becoming the main carer. Family courts are also reporting an increase in grandparents using the court system to gain access to their grandchildren following relationship breakdown.

Services for older people, as well as communities, generally need to be more focussed and creative in designing opportunities, not only to increase social networks for older people, but also to include them in mixed age communities where others can benefit from the wealth of their life experience.

Online relationships

In 2014 it was reported that 38 million adults accessed the internet daily (76%).

For young people and a large proportion of the adult population, social media has become a major medium for initiating, maintaining and building relationships. Early research indicates that this is having positive impact for the majority in terms of improved social networks and a sense of connectedness. For the over 65’s, however, 39% reported (in 2015) not having internet access and even higher proportions report not using the variety of social media platforms for communicating and keeping in touch.

There are also dangers inherent in the anonymity of the internet: we can relate ‘virtually’ to people who aren’t actually who they claim to be and can be an actual threat to people’s safety and wellbeing.

Mr and Mrs Edmund Fitton, Rochdale

Seven out of ten young people report being the victim of cyber-bullying; a high proportion of grooming for sexual exploitation takes place on line and sexting, revenge texts and trolling are on the increase. High proportions particularly of young people’s social media’s ‘friends’ are not people they meet regularly or at all and not likely to be ‘friends’ who will provide support in a crisis.

Research also indicates that however positive online relationships can be they cannot replace offline face-to-face interactions.
In our communities

We know more about the changing dynamics of relationships amongst communities, we’ve worked with citizens to define cooperation in our neighbourhoods.

A sense of belonging and cohesion is important to our health and well-being. Knowing you belong in a community is linked to a stronger sense of social identity and feeling connected which increases psychological and social wellbeing.

Being cooperative, the presence of trust, love and hope within communities is vital to the overall wellbeing of our borough, which we seek to measure. In 2014 the Community Life Survey found that 85% of over 16 year olds in England felt their community was cohesive, an increase from 80% in 2003.

We feel that building on this strength can only draw out the benefits of a cooperative society.

We know that where there are neighbourhood disputes and anti-social behaviour cooperation and social action is negatively affected, along with individual wellbeing and higher costs for public services. Community dispute resolution interventions need developing and promoting to lessen impact and cost.

2014 saw 3 million internal migrations between local authority areas, an increase of 5% from 2013. We know from research that social and geographical mobility means that families are now more widely spread previous generations and can have less regular contact than people now have with friends and neighbours.

We’ve a clear and developing vision of what strong relationships would be like in our communities, co-designed with a dedicated group of citizens. By working cooperatively, and co-designing actions, we will build hope and trust, tackle the challenges that exist and strengthen the good practice.
So what do we need to do?
How will we make a difference?

The evidence is clear and indisputable: good quality relationships not only give our lives meaning; they are also critical to a vast array of outcomes, positive and negative, for everyone concerned.

The quality of our relationships is of interest to every single resident in the borough, as well as to strategic system leaders and policymakers. We therefore need to embed a new comprehensive approach to relationships across our communities and the agencies that serve them; a wholesale culture change that works from senior leaders to the grass roots - as well as bottom up.

Launch a manifesto that everyone can sign up to and feel part of

Establishing new approaches and embedding wholesale culture change is a massive process that needs to be pursued over a significant period of time, engaging a wide range of partners at all levels. It is for this reason that we have decided to use the title of Manifesto - ‘a public declaration of intent’ that encompasses values and beliefs, as well as aims and actions. A manifesto also represents a call to action in a new area of focus where pioneering, entrepreneurial and experimental work is needed.

A Rochdale ‘Relationships Matter’ Manifesto.

A pledge and an action plan

In order to deliver the strategy, we will need a wide range of agencies and groups to detail specifically what they will do, who will be responsible for making it happen and within which time frame. The lead group will develop and monitor the action plan which will be updated annually.

Partner agencies will also sign up to a pledge, stating their intent to deliver the strategy via the action plan and to contribute to the lead groups steering, reporting and monitoring activities.

Develop a clear strategy

This document also incorporates a strategy - flowing from the call to action is the clear outline of what we need to do and why.

Our strategic objectives are listed at the beginning of this document.
A lead group

We have established a lead group representing a wide range of partners and interested parties from all sectors of the borough, including the local authority, health, schools and colleges, the police, the voluntary sector and the community itself.

Agreed terms of reference will require the group to meet at least six times each year and the group will initially report to the family service model operational group.

The lead group will also monitor progress via two key methods: by developing a comprehensive performance framework that incorporates measures from a range of different partners as well as shared actions; and, by using a maturity model as a tool for self-assessing progress and informing next steps as we aspire to become a mature partnership delivering an effective plan.

Promote a joined up coordinated approach

Bringing together a lead group around a strategy and agreed action plan is intended to significantly improve joint planning and working together; sharing responsibility and promoting mutual accountability. This partnership approach will also facilitate more effective working with regional and national bodies such as GMCA and DWP.

A shared and coordinated plan and a structured partnership group will also facilitate funding bids or joint commissioning should the opportunity arise and will also encourage all partner organisations to consider how in the future they might re-think resource allocation, job descriptions, new policies/guidelines, etc.

One of the ways we will support and coordinate communication between all concerned will be by promoting use of #RochdaleRelationshipsMatter.

Develop and promote the use of a ‘relationships’ test

In 2014, the Home Office launched a ‘family test’ for policy makers to measure the degree to which their policy developments supported families, in the proposals they were developing. This proposal is to do the same for relationships.

The aim is to introduce a template by which policy makers would consider a relationships perspective when developing or amending policies or guidelines, in order to anticipate the potential impact their policies would have on relationships – either positively or negatively. The ultimate aim is to encourage system leaders and policy makers to ‘think relationships’ in their decision making just as we have sought to embed ‘think family’.

Named relationship champions

As part of the agency pledge, we will encourage individuals to become relationship champions and advocates, either on behalf of their organisation or in their own right.

These champions will act as key points of contact within their organisation for colleagues, will act as system leaders to promote change and development, and/or will lead on specific relationship related projects.

A relationship champion can be anyone working or volunteering in a supportive role. To be recognised as a champion - a worker, volunteer or student will be trained in a programme or a toolkit that supports the improvement of relationships in their work, in the community or in their educational setting. All relationship champions will receive a pin badge so that people know they support the Rochdale Relationships Matter movement.
Promoting quality

A central aim of the strategy is to raise awareness on the impacts of relationships - both positively and negatively - and promote good quality relationships for all - across a wide range of circumstances. Ultimately we aspire to Rochdale becoming a ‘relationships matter’ place to live, work and study.

One key area of promoting positive relationships for all would be to start in schools and support ‘healthy relationships’ in the curriculum. A similar offer to adults would be equally positive but harder to achieve.

Secondly, we would promote the manifesto as a reference document seeking to influence a wide range of other strategies and agenda’s so that system leaders and service heads would automatically think of the impact upon relationships of any decisions or plans they consider.

Thirdly, we seek to develop a comprehensive local offer that aims to address common relationship issues and to offer accessible and appropriate interventions and support when it’s needed.

As far as possible the offer needs to be preventative and delivered as early as possible; when or before issues first arise; but also include interventions for situations with higher level needs or closer to crisis.

Whilst the core of the offer will draw upon the range of evidence-based programmes, particularly those supported by the DWP and EIF, we will also support and pilot innovative approaches informed by good practice principles, that will enable us to ‘do things differently’ and test new ways of working.

A comprehensive training package

All frontline practitioners delivering public services should receive training about family relationships support so that they are able to recognise that good relationships are an asset; identify relationship distress; offer initial support and sign-post to relevant other support; screen and risk assess for domestic abuse/child parent violence and abuse. This should take into account couple, family, social and workplace relationships.

Using the people, buildings and resources we already have we will use an asset based approach to ensure all staff and volunteers, in any service, are trained in the appropriate responses to relationship distress disclosures and have key knowledge of interventions and services that can help. We will ensure that everybody has access to the right training and toolkits wherever they work or volunteer in the Rochdale borough.

A clear and effective communication strategy

We will commit to a diverse range of communication materials and engagement strategies with the workforce and residents of the Rochdale borough so that everyone can see that we are serious about our commitment to improving the way we all work so that it’s clear to everybody that...

‘Rochdale Relationships Matter’

We will ask all partners to adopt the ‘Rochdale relationships matter’ logo and whenever they promote their contribution towards improving relationships use the #RochdaleRelationshipsMatter tag in and around social media.
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This manifesto has been written by Emily Nickson-Williams and Dave Baker of Children Services, Rochdale Borough Council.

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