

Children & Young People Now

For decision makers and senior practitioners working with children, young people and families

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April/May 2020



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26th June 2020



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Children & Young People Now

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Cover: Ciaran, aged 11, from Surrey



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Williamson moves to whip DfE into shape

Children & Young People Now is a magazine and website for professionals working at all levels with children, young people and families. The magazine provides in-depth analysis, opinion and articles on best practice, targeting managers and senior practitioners involved in the commissioning and delivery of services. The website provides a breaking news service throughout the day for all practitioners and a host of resources, including information on careers and funding.

All the news that matters...

cypnow.co.uk/
earlyyears

Coronavirus: resources advice for professionals



Children's charities, organisations and workers' unions have issued advice to professionals working to support children amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Key topics include advice for social workers, early years and education professionals classed as key workers in combating the crisis.

Coronavirus: free funding to continue

Providers will continue to receive funding for delivering free early years entitlement despite the government advising settings close due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak confirmed the government will continue to pay the funding to councils for providers to offer the free hours entitlements to disadvantaged children.

Disadvantaged 'least likely' to use free hours

Take-up of free childcare is lowest among disadvantaged families in the most deprived areas of England, according to National Audit Office analysis.

It found that just over two-thirds of disadvantaged families are taking up their entitlement of 15 hours free childcare a week for two-year-olds.

Government 'failing a generation' say experts

Early years leaders have slammed a

"total lack" of focus on early years education and childcare in the government's latest Budget.

Organisations including the Early Years Alliance, National Day Nurseries Association and Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years highlighted "the lack of any reference to the early years".

Fears over long-term financial impact

The Department for Education has been asked to set out how early years providers in England affected by coronavirus will be supported amid fears over the long-term impact of an outbreak.

The Early Years Alliance said the DfE needs to give clarity on what financial support will be made available, after members voiced worries about the financial impact of parents removing their children from setting due to illness or on advice to self-isolate.

Brexit 'will deepen recruitment crisis'

The implementation of a new points-based immigration system after the Brexit transition period will increase staff shortages in the early years sector, a major report has found.

The *Early Years Workforce Study 2019*, conducted by sector analyst Ceeda, found that persistent recruitment and retention challenges are already leading to increased workplace stress and longer waiting lists.

Commission to tackle recruitment crisis

Early years experts and sector organisations have joined forces in a bid to tackle issues surrounding workforce recruitment and retention.

The Early Years Workforce Commission is set to undertake a review of issues including low pay, high stress levels and a lack of male employees in the sector.

● See Analysis, p

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education

Schools in England close to most pupils

Schools in England have closed to most pupils until further notice due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Early years provision, private schools and sixth form colleges are also expected to follow government advice, the Prime Minister said while making the announcement.

DfE reveals list of key workers as schools close

The Department for Education has released a list of key workers critical to tackling the coronavirus outbreak whose children will still be allowed to attend school.

Social workers, nursery and teaching staff, and specialist education professionals are among those included, as well as those children classed as vulnerable.

Government plans for free school meals



The government has issued advice for head teachers on how to provide free school meals amid closures.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced that schools will close except for the children of key workers and children with social workers or under education, health and care plans.

School praised over safeguarding plans

A primary school has been praised for drawing up thorough plans to safeguard vulnerable pupils ahead of closures due to the coronavirus.

Parklands Primary School in Leeds published details of its intention to enact "emergency safeguarding procedures".

Coronavirus: Ofsted suspends inspections

Ofsted has suspended all inspections including those involving schools, early years settings and children's social care provision in England.

The decision came following the first of the government's daily press briefings on the developing Covid-19 outbreak.

Parents 'struggling to cope' with uniform costs

Increased school uniform costs are leaving many low-income families struggling to cope and forced to cut back on food and other essential items, a survey shows.

Research carried out by The Children's Society on the cost of uniforms found that one in eight families made cutbacks to pay for their child's primary or secondary school clothing.

Coronavirus sparks rise in racist bullying

Education leaders have written to the government calling for coronavirus advice for schools to be extended to cover a rise in racist bullying relating to the disease.

Teachers' union NASWUT said it had seen an increase in "incidences of abuse, prejudice, xenophobia and racism as a result of the coronavirus".

cypnow.co.uk/
health

£15m Tampon Tax Fund reopens to charities

The latest round of £15m funding from the tampon tax has been opened to organisations supporting women and girls.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport said

charities across the nation can apply for grants to fund projects that directly benefit disadvantaged women and girls, tackle violence and support their mental health and wellbeing.

Praise for children's mental health services

A council has been praised by inspectors for its "highly effective" mental health services to help and protect children and young people.

A report published following an inspection carried out by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HMI Constabulary, Fire and Rescue services and HMI Probation found Bexley Council was delivering "excellent services" in response to children's mental health needs.

UK 'failing a generation of young people'



Public services and government policies are "failing a generation of children", according to the UK's largest analysis of data.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's *State of Child Health 2020* report found that health outcomes are particularly poor for children who live in deprived areas. Child obesity is a major concern, it states.

Calls for 'water-only' policy to tackle obesity

Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has called for primary schools across the capital to adopt a "water-only" policy to tackle child obesity.

He called on all local authorities in London to follow the lead of Southwark, which has announced all 68 primary schools in the borough will ban sugary drinks.

Movers and shakers



Gordon Harold is Cambridge's newly-appointed Professor of the Psychology of Education and Mental Health. He has led several studies that have revealed more about the relationship between young people's domestic circumstances and their mental health. The new post is aimed at strengthening a growing research programme aimed at improving the wellbeing of children and young adults.

Stephen Moss has been appointed as the new chair of London Youth, which supports 500 community youth organisations across the capital. He has held various roles in the charity sector, including founding The Springboard Charity, an organisation helping young people enter training and work placements in hospitality.

Director of children's services at Brighton and Hove Council **Pinaki Ghoshal** is to take over the lead role at Lewisham Council, south London. She has held the position in Brighton and Hove for seven years. She said: "I'm hoping I can make a positive difference to the outcomes for children there."

Kath O'Dwyer, Ofsted's former national director for social care, will leave her post as acting chief executive of Cheshire East Council to take up the same role at St Helen's Council. She is set to be tasked with improving the council's children's services which was rated inadequate by Ofsted last year.

Girlguiding has appointed five new trustees. **Kirtbir Chahal**, policy adviser at Unicef UK, **Hannah Maron**, a Brownie leader in the Hague, and **Selina Armitt**, a Guide leader and social worker are all aged under 30. **Supriya Sobti** joins as a chartered accountant, alongside lawyer **Alison Hampton**.

secretive and ignoring the views of the care experienced movement.

The group, chaired by Sir Alan Wood (pictured), which met for the first time last month, is "essentially providing expert advice to supplement the consultation", he said.

BASW: more support for social workers

Social workers will need clearer guidance and professional support and resources to help vulnerable families and children once emergency legislation to tackle the coronavirus outbreak comes into effect, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has said.

In its response to the Coronavirus Bill, it said that increased support should be provided by government, regulators and employers to help social workers continue their work with those young people and families most in need.

Failures saw care leavers living in tents

Devon County Council has been severely criticised by Ofsted for allowing vulnerable care leavers with mental health problems to live in tents and on the street.

Inspectors expressed concern that the council is failing in its duty as corporate parents to help care leavers, who were being left in poor housing and struggling with mental illness. This is forcing some to live rough on the streets and in tents, Ofsted found..

Croydon services raised to 'good' by Ofsted

A council's children's services previously rated "inadequate" by Ofsted has been raised to "good" in less than three years.

Services at Croydon Council have "improved dramatically" since its last inspection in 2017, Ofsted's latest report, following a two-week inspection in February, states.

News roundup continues overleaf ➤

cypnow.co.uk/socialcare

Workers should visit children with symptoms

Social workers have been asked to continue visits to vulnerable children who are in self-isolation because either they or one of their family are showing symptoms of coronavirus.

Guidance by the DfE states that children's social care departments will be "expected to prioritise support to the most vulnerable" to cope with the pandemic.

Isolation advice for children's homes

The Department for Education has issued guidance for children's homes and residential special schools on managing isolation during the coronavirus outbreak.

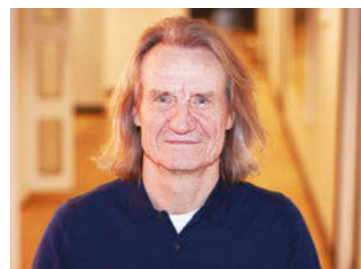
It comes amid the closure of schools for most children except those of key workers and vulnerable children, including those in social care or "in need", and children with education, health and care plans.

Bill could remove duties for care leavers

The Coronavirus Bill could allow the government to suspend key duties carried out by councils including the assessment of care leavers if the virus leaves local authorities unable to meet statutory responsibilities.

The bill is intended to enable authorities to prioritise resources if demand for services spikes and workforce numbers plummet as the pandemic reaches its peak.

Wood confirms mandate of DfE working group



The chair of the working group advising the government on standards for unregulated care settings has moved to allay campaigners' concerns that it is



East Riding Council, based in Beverley, took part in a government improvement scheme

Good practice council rated 'inadequate'

A council that was held up as a beacon of best practice for improving children's services across the country has been rated "inadequate" by Ofsted having previously been judged as "good" four years ago.

Inspectors found that the quality and impact of practice in East Riding Council had deteriorated significantly for specific groups of children since the last Ofsted inspection in 2016

Safety concerns over launch of trust

Plans to launch an independent children's trust in a troubled local authority area by this summer may not allow enough time for it to be set up safely, experts have warned.

Children's services in Northamptonshire are due to be handed over to an independent trust in July to improve standards. But a report by

two commissioners warns the deadline may be too soon.

Williamson promises 'broad and bold' review

The Education Secretary has replied to a letter from children's social care experts reiterating vows to launch a "broad, bold and independently led" review of the system.

A letter sent to Gavin Williamson in January attracted 632 signatories including social workers, foster carers, care-experienced adults, directors of children's services, academics and charity leaders.

Manchester launches five-year workforce plan

Manchester City Council has laid out plans to attract and retain "talented" social workers as part of an ambitious five-year workforce strategy for children's services.

Plans will see Level 1 social workers receive a £2,000 bonus after two years at the council.

ASF demand driven by CAMHS 'stepping back'

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) is facing more demand than ever due to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) "stepping back", according to a report.

The ASF helps adoptive families and those involved in special guardianship orders to access therapy.

Group to draft standards for accommodation

An expert group will draft standards for unregulated supported accommodation alongside an ongoing public consultation, the children's minister has confirmed.

Vicky Ford laid out the group's membership and mandate in response to a parliamentary question submitted by former children's minister Tim Loughton.

'Keep caring to 18' campaign launches

A campaign to ensure all young people up to the age of 18 are not placed in unregulated supported accommodation has been launched by children's charities and groups.

It comes as the government considers plans a crackdown on the use of such accommodation for those aged 15 and under, but not 16- and 17-year-olds.

Care leavers to get higher housing benefits

Care leavers will benefit from higher rates of housing benefit until the age of 25, the Chancellor announced.

Under the current arrangement, a care leaver could be forced to move from their stable home to shared accommodation at the age of 22 following a cut to housing support.

Care providers face inspection fee hike

Social care providers will face a 10 per cent increase in inspection fees from April, despite concerns the move will affect the quality of care for looked-after children.

The government said that despite fee increases in recent years, most social care providers, such as children's homes, do not pay the full cost of inspections conducted by Ofsted, with the taxpayer having to foot much of the bill.

Unaccompanied care leavers hit by funding

Local authorities could suffer a combined funding shortfall of £15m to support former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children leaving care by 2024, new analysis reveals.

Nine councils spend £16,602 per year on care leaving services for every former unaccompanied asylum-seeking child aged 18 to 24 per year, a new report by East Midlands Councils states.

Council pays in failure to support child in need

A council has agreed to pay £10,000 to a family after procedural errors resulted in a child in need not receiving the support they required.

A report reveals that a formal child in need plan drawn up by Sutton Council in 2017 concluded that the family of a boy with a long-term health condition, who is now 17, should have received access to support from the end of July 2017.

Poverty is a key factor in a third of SCRs

More than a third of serious case reviews submitted over three years cited poverty as a key factor leading to the abuse or death of a child, a new government review has found.

MOST READ STORIES ON CYPNOW.CO.UK OVER THE PAST MONTH

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Official advice for schools, nurseries, children's homes and social workers

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School praised over safeguarding plans for closure

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Fears over long-term financial impact on nurseries

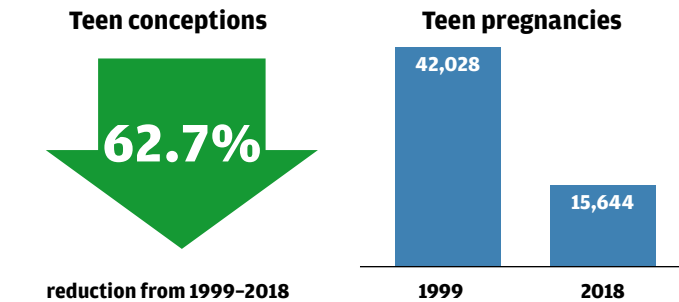
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Council receives 'outstanding' Ofsted rating after reinvesting in children's services

5

Calls for clarity over free school meals in event of closures

Teenage conceptions in England and Wales



Source: Office of National Statistics

Teenage conceptions in England and Wales are down for the eleventh year running, latest figures from the Office of National Statistics show. The figures mark the longest continuous decrease since records began in 1969. Some 15,644 women under 18 fell pregnant in 2018 compared with 42,028 in 1999 – a decrease of 62.7 per cent. Conception rates for under 18-year-olds in England and Wales declined by 6.1 per cent to 16.8

conceptions per 1,000 women aged 15 to 17 years, figures show. In the same year, the conception rate for women under 18 years was higher in the 50 per cent most deprived areas in England, while the percentage of conceptions leading to a legal abortion was higher in the 50 per cent least deprived areas in England. Overall, in 2018, the conception rate in England and Wales fell to its lowest level since 2004.

Moving children away fails to protect them

Moving teenage victims of criminal exploitation away from their local area is not an effective way of protecting them from gangs.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's *It Was Hard To Escape* found that moving children and families affected by gang crime "works for a short period, but is not effective as a long-term strategy".

Medway secure school launch in doubt

The launch of the UK's first "secure school" has been thrown into doubt over regulatory and financial problems, says the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers.

Oasis Charitable Foundation was awarded the contract to open the school on the Medway secure training centre site in Kent last year.

Research just out

State of Child Health 2020, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, March 2020

Supporting disadvantaged families through free early education and childcare entitlements in England, National Audit Office, March 2020

Evaluation of the Adoption Support Fund: local authority and provider experiences, The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University; Department for Education, March 2020

Securing a brighter future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime & Violence Reduction, March 2020

Analysis of Local Authority costs and pressures incurred in support of Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child Care Leavers in the East Midlands, East Midlands Councils, February 2020

Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2017, there were 368 serious case reviews (SCRs) carried out by local safeguarding children boards.

Sharp rise in agency social workers

Hundreds of agency workers were employed by council children's services to fill vacancies and deal with "acute backlogs".

There were 5,750 agency staff employed by children's services across England on 30 September, 2019 compared with 5,360 in 2018 and 4,860 in 2015.

Domestic Abuse Bill will not protect children

The government's legislation to tackle domestic abuse does not go far enough to protect and support vulnerable children affected by the issue, charity leaders have warned.

The draft legislation, published in January 2019, is intended to tackle rises over the past decade in domestic abuse reports, referrals to children's social care services, and requests for refuge placements.

Council receives 'outstanding' rating

A council that reinvested money raised from commercial activities in children's services has been rated "outstanding" by Ofsted.

Telford & Wrekin Council said that in the wake of a "requires improvement" rating in 2016, it devised a plan to address the issues raised, which included reinvesting money raised through commercial enterprises in children's services.

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Chief names YOI 'best in England and Wales'

Parc young offender institution has been described as "easily the best performing in England and Wales", by the chief inspector of prisons.

It received high praise in areas including relationships between staff and inmates, education and resettlement, and rehabilitation, in a report by Peter Clarke.

cypnow.co.uk/youthwork

Youth groups benefit from £1.16m funding



A national youth charity is hoping 80,000 young people will benefit from its share of a £7m government grant to boost opportunities for youth service provision in the UK.

UK Youth, which received £1.16m from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Youth Accelerator Fund, said it would be spread across 168 organisations and community groups.

Coronavirus: Advice for youth work groups

Leading youth organisations have come together to offer guidance to youth workers on supporting young

people and staying safe during the coronavirus pandemic.

The National Youth Agency and UK Youth have published guides offering advice to managers as well as frontline youth workers.

Youth groups join volunteering push

Youth groups and charities working with the government to co-ordinate a major volunteering push during the coronavirus outbreak.

Charities including UK Youth and the Scout Association have met with civil society minister Baroness Barran to discuss how best charities can mobilise volunteers to support communities during the outbreak.

Sign up for CYP Now's email bulletins at www.cypnow.co.uk/email-bulletins

Amid the response to the Covid-19 crisis, third sector leaders have called on the government to prioritise

Coronavirus: campaigners warn

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

By Derren Hayes

As the number of people contracting Covid-19 in the UK rises over the coming weeks, it is likely that children's social care and welfare services will be stretched like never before – public health experts predict that up to 25 per cent of the workforce could be unable to work due to sickness or having to self-isolate at the peak of the outbreak.

In addition to meeting the existing needs of vulnerable children and young people, research by Action for Children has highlighted how the economic impact of the crisis could tip many families already existing on the breadline over the edge.

The charity says its frontline workers have been “overwhelmed by the sheer desperation of frightened families”, many of whom are scared they will be unable to properly feed children.

More than four million children were living in poverty in 2017/18, and the charity warns that the impending economic and health crisis “is set to force even more families to choose between feeding their children and paying bills”.

Telephone interviews with workers representing 60 frontline services – including children's centres, services for disabled children and young carers – found that families are most worried about not being able to afford food, followed by utility bills and nappies. Other concerns included access to baby formula and being able to pay the rent if they were unable to work.

Following a commitment from the government, many schools – closed to all but children of keyworkers – continue to provide daily free meals for children in receipt of the pupil premium.

However, Action for Children and 10 other children's charities

have called for the state to do more to support the health and wellbeing needs of disadvantaged families during the crisis.

In a joint statement, charities backed the emergency legislation introduced to minimise the spread of the virus, the charities urge the government to implement it “in a way that reduces the unprecedented strains on families, which could compromise the welfare and wellbeing of children, and ensures that no child is left at risk”.

Increase benefits

Children's commissioner for England Anne Longfield has added her voice to the calls for action, urging ministers to increase child benefit in recognition of the additional financial costs associated with caring for children during the outbreak.

The emergency legislation enables local authorities to prioritise resources if demand for services spikes and workforce numbers plummet. The government has insisted that emergency measures will only be applied if required (see box).

In a letter to social care organisations, Department of Health and Social Care director general of prevention, community and social care Jonathan Marron said: “We need to prepare for the possibility that during the peak of an epidemic, a greater number of people will need social care and many staff may be unavailable due to illness or the need to care for

“You must focus resources to ensure the most serious and urgent care needs are met”

Jonathan Marron, DHSC



As children display rainbows to raise community spirits, professionals have called on the

loved ones.

“This could mean that you need to focus your resources on ensuring the most serious and urgent care needs are met, and defer meeting some less acute needs.”

Campaigners have questioned its emphasis. Kathy Evans, chief executive of third sector umbrella body Children England, says priority must be given to providing councils and children's charities with whatever funding is needed to meet rising demand.

Cost of austerity

In its briefing on the impact of coronavirus, Children England highlights how the voluntary sector provides many essential services on behalf of local authorities “without which many of their statutory needs and rights would not be met”. However, it says a decade of austerity has left both councils and children's charities without adequate funding to meet existing needs and insufficient reserves to call on in a crisis.

“With so many life-critical issues for councils to worry about in the

protection and care of children, families and communities at this time, sufficiency of money should not be one of them,” the briefing states.

It has set out a series of urgent actions needed to alleviate the pressures facing children's charities, including:

- An immediate and nationwide shift from 1 April to payment of all social care suppliers by quarterly grants in advance (rather than individual fees in arrears).
- A very strong message and action to enforce prompt payment of invoices.
- An availability of bridging funds to prevent immediate closure risks or sudden reductions in service capacity.
- Flexibility from government contract managers in how targets and compliance are applied to providers delivering payment-by-results and outcomes-based contracts.

Children England's concerns about the health of the charity

economic assistance for children's charities so they can meet the rising support needs of vulnerable groups

on capacity of children's charities



state to do more to support vulnerable families

sector are borne out by latest research from think-tank NPC. Its survey of 300 charities assessed the sector's financial resilience and its ability to react and use its skills to tackle the crisis. It found that six out of 10 charities delivering public services cross subsidise that contract with money from other sources such as fundraising.

However, the National Council

for Voluntary Organisations has calculated that the charity sector could lose £4bn in fundraising, trading and investment income over the next 12 weeks as a result of the crisis, which NPC says will result in charities being unable to afford to cross subsidise contracts increasing the risk that services fail.

Extra funds needed

NPC chief executive Dan Corry says: "Charities are mobilising to help thousands of people across the country, but they are also crying out for more help and support. Their income is collapsing just as people's need to use them starts to grow. Our research reveals some underlying problems in the sector which the crisis will undoubtedly exacerbate.

"The response from policymakers and the sector to the crisis needs to take these pre-existing weaknesses into account, and ensure issues like the lack of core funding, the weaknesses on using digital technology and the cross subsidy of contracts are not overlooked, or we could see charities fail and thousands of vulnerable people put at risk."

For example, in the children's charity sector, The Children's Society's 106 high street shops

DUTIES AFFECTED BY THE EMERGENCY LEGISLATION

If the measures included in the emergency legislation are activated, there could be a number of changes to local authority duties including:

- No longer required to carry out assessments, including financial assessments of disabled young people and looked-after young people transitioning to adult social care services. The same issue would apply to young carers deemed to be in need of care or support.
- No longer required to assess a child's needs where it appears they will require care and support after the age of 18 and assess a carer's needs where it appears they will

need support after a child turns 18.

- Allows the government to direct a local authority to follow new guidance in relation to Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 which relates to services for children in need and their families, including child protection, children in care, young carers and all aspects of support to disabled children and their families.
- Statutory duties applied to residential special schools that are classed as residential childcare providers could be relaxed, removed and modified.
- Remove rules ensuring children are placed in schools named on an education, health and care plan.

made £11.2m in 2018/19, while Barnardo's 705 retail shops made a net profit of £15.8m in 2018/19, according to its latest annual report.

Action for Children has launched an appeal asking the public for more donations to meet the rising needs of vulnerable families, which has so far raised more than £50,000, and has other plans in place to adapt services to the evolving crisis (see box).

The entire children's sector is working flat out to implement measures to aid the fight against

Covid-19 – from council staff being deployed to support foodbanks to Ofsted scrapping routine inspections; and from the Local Government Association ramping up efforts to recruit lapsed and retired social workers to the Department for Education fast-tracking criminal records checks for trainee social workers.

Children's charities will be a vital cog in the collective response, but need policymakers' support to ensure they can contribute to their full potential.

HOW ACTION FOR CHILDREN IS ADAPTING ITS SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE FAMILIES DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS



Nick Jones,
managing director,
fundraising, policy
and communications,
Action for Children

Most of our services currently remain open, but we're keeping this under constant review in light of public health guidance. Some services have moved provision of support online to help ensure children and families can receive help – and more work on this front is planned.

Our children's centres remain open as community hubs where possible –

for instance, midwives are still holding clinics in some bases and some supervised contacts are still going ahead. In light of the new measures introduced by the Prime Minister, however, we're currently reviewing these plans.

Our residential homes and supported living services – all staffed by key workers – are operating as normal, again under public health guidance, although we are reviewing some short breaks services for disabled children to ensure social distancing rules are followed for those children.

Most of our support staff are working

from home, as are frontline staff who fall into vulnerable categories. Only limited numbers of staff are working together, and they are operating strict social distancing measures.

For a number of our services, we are moving to a digital offering and we are going to launch a new website where parents can go to find support.

For families we know are struggling, we've launched an emergency coronavirus appeal to help them stay afloat. This will support families to cover the cost of basic essentials such as food, nappies, cleaning products, and gas and electricity – and which

has already raised over £50,000.

Like other charities, we've had to cancel or postpone a number of fundraising events and activities, but at the moment it's just too early to say what the long-term impact will be. We have business continuity plans in place aimed at keeping as many services as possible running throughout the crisis and these are being updated on a daily basis. The health and safety of our children, families and staff is paramount and the situation is constantly changing.

● To find out how to donate to the fund, go to www.actionforchildren.org.uk

Consultation to tighten restrictions on the use of unregulated supported accommodation does not go far enough,

Put end to unregulated provision

SOCIAL CARE

By Fiona Simpson

As a Department for Education consultation into reforms to unregulated supported accommodation for children in care comes to a close, controversy surrounds plans to ban its use for under-16s only instead of all under-18s as campaigners want. In addition, the role of an “expert” working group tasked with drafting quality standards for settings has been questioned.

According to the consultation document, 6,180 children were living in independent and semi-independent accommodation not subject to children's home regulations on 31 March 2019. This figure has increased year on year since the same date in 2015 when numbers stood at 1,240.

Providing support for under-16s without being registered with the inspectorate is not illegal, but if care is provided this could be an offence.

When launching the consultation, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson made clear that this practice would be stopped under the proposals – last year, around 100 children lived in independent and semi-independent accommodation.

He said the aim of the reforms is “to ensure that children and young people placed in independent and semi-independent settings are receiving the support they need”.

Yet numerous reports and investigations have highlighted risks from abusers and criminal gangs towards 16- and 17-year-olds placed in such settings. As such, critics say the proposals do not go far enough to protect 16- and 17-year-olds.

A coalition of children's charities and organisations supporting care-experienced young people has launched a campaign in the wake of the consultation, calling on ministers to “keep caring to 18”.

Those involved in the campaign include children's rights group Article 39, The Care Leavers' Association and Just for Kids Law.

Other groups are also involved, including the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) and the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC).

Change legislation

The coalition's campaign calls for legislation to be changed to ensure it is law that every looked-after child receives care until their 18th birthday and that new standards apply for semi-independent and independent accommodation for care leavers aged 18 and beyond, with registration and inspection by Ofsted.

Carolyne Willow, director of Article 39, says: “The legal definition of children is people up to the age of 18 years.

“We know that teenagers don't like to be referred to as children, because this often feels disrespectful and patronising. We're using the word in its legal sense. Everyone under the age of 18 has rights under the Children Act 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, also agreed in 1989.”

Katharine Sacks-Jones, chief executive of charity Become, adds: “We do not believe that establishing a two-tier care system is in the best interests of children and young people.

“There is no similar expectation for those living in foster care or children's homes that they will

“Establishing a two-tier care system is not in the best interests of young people”

Katharine Sacks-Jones, Become



Campaigners are calling for every looked-after child to receive care until they reach 18 and

receive a lower standard of support when they turn 16.”

Jonathan Stanley, children's residential care consultant at NCERCC, says there is a “major disagreement over the needs and rights of teenagers” among sector leaders and the government.

“Practitioners do not agree with the DfE proposal to formalise the absence of care for 16- and 17-year-olds. It is not possible to provide support without care; an absence of care is not support. Under these proposals, it is clear that children and young people would lose their right to care.”

However, Rachel Dickinson, president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), is concerned about a lack of capacity for children under 16 placed in unregulated settings as an emergency.

She says: “If the proposal to ban the use of unregulated settings for under-16s is implemented, we would be interested to hear about what plans are in place to ensure this does not exacerbate capacity

issues the sector is already facing, particularly in relation to finding placements for our most complex children and young people.”

National standards

Proposals also suggest the introduction of national standards for unregulated provision with the controversial government working group confirmed to be drafting these (see box).

National standards would require settings to publish a “statement of purpose” and ensure accommodation meets a specified quality, as well as offering a certain standard of support and protection for young people, the consultation document states.

However, questions remain over how such provision will be monitored, with the chair of the working group Sir Alan Wood suggesting requiring Ofsted to carry out inspections could leave it “overstretched”.

The consultation document sets out two options for monitoring standards:

say campaigners. But children's services leaders call for councils to be given flexibility in finding the right settings

for under-18s, urge campaigners



MARTINIAN/ADOBE STOCK

ones in place for children's homes, reflecting that the nature of this provision is different, though the regime for registration and inspection would be similar. Local authorities would be required to place children in provision which is registered with Ofsted, and Ofsted could take enforcement action against providers that do not meet the standards."

Stricter monitoring

Andy Elvin, chief executive of Tact Fostering and Adoption, agrees stricter monitoring of unregulated supported accommodation should be introduced.

"Many of us already look after 16- to 18-year-olds under appropriate regulations and a robust inspection regime – we do not understand why it would be different for any setting looking after this age group," he says.

"We view the duty of local authorities to oversee these settings as wholly inadequate and that there is very little meaningful oversight. We think that 16-plus settings should come under the same regime as children's homes as soon as practicable and that all under-18s should be in a home that is properly and robustly regulated and inspected as they are vulnerable children.

"Any other solution will simply be a cop-out that values cash and convenience above the safety and care of children."

Stanley says regulations and quality standards "could be adapted so that all 16- and 17-year-olds in residential settings receive care and accommodation".

Such adaptations are not a new idea, explains Stanley, as they already exist for other types of residential accommodation.

The proposals are included in a consultation paper published on 12 February, submissions to which close on 8 April.

They also include introducing new measures so that local

CHAIR DEFENDS THE ROLE OF EXPERT WORKING GROUP

Despite an ongoing public consultation, the DfE has formed a working group to draft national standards ahead of its closure.

Children's minister Vicky Ford confirmed the structure and mandate of the group in response to a parliamentary question from former children's minister Tim Loughton, whose question was posed after *CYP Now* revealed the existence of the group.

Chaired by former ADCS president Sir Alan Wood, it is made up of representatives from: ADCS; Independent Children's Home Association; Association of Chief Police Officers; National Youth Advocacy Service; Ofsted; Commissioning Alliance; Partners in Practice Local Authorities; Local Government Association; and providers of unregulated accommodation.

Ford confirmed the group's three-point mandate is to support the development and drafting of new national standards for semi-independent provision for children in care; further develop evidence regarding the use of these placements for under-16s; and advise on what should be taken account of when considering the implementation of the results of the consultation.

It has drawn criticism from sector leaders who accused the government of "secrecy" and highlighted a lack of involvement of care-experienced young people.

However, Ford says the group is "one way" of "seeking the views of as many people as possible who are

affected by the proposed reforms".

The group's work, including supporting development of new minimum standards, will be informed by consultation responses and it will report after the consultation has closed, Ford confirmed.

Wood says the group has "not been tasked with involving care-experienced people in the consultation" and is "essentially providing expert advice to supplement the consultation".

"The purpose of the group is to discuss key questions and field problems that may arise once the consultation has finished," Wood explains.

"We will meet probably only three times. The idea we have been meeting in secret is somewhat fanciful."

The DfE is in talks with the children's commissioner for England Anne Longfield over the involvement of care-experienced people in the consultation, Wood says.

"The commissioner is working on a report based on experiences of people who have lived in such accommodation. As a group, we have not been asked to come up with any proposals surrounding the involvement of people in care or care-experienced people," he adds.

A spokesman for the commissioner's office says: "We have discussed with the DfE the need to ensure that the direct experiences of children in care play a prominent part in the drawing up of new guidelines. We are also finalising a report into the use of unregulated accommodation, which we will publish shortly."

authorities and police forces liaise before a placement in this provision is made and giving Ofsted new legal powers to act against illegal providers.

Consultation responses from various organisations highlight concerns over support for 16- and 17-year-olds, yet back proposals for more stringent regulations.

However, some argue that independent and semi-

independent accommodation is a crucial step for older looked-after children entering adulthood.

Dickinson suggests there is a need to find a balance. "Some young people thrive in semi-independent living arrangements, where good wraparound support is part of a highly tailored plan," she says. "However, we recognise and share the concern that this is not always the case."

1. Change the regulations to make the standards mandatory for local authorities.

"We would require local authorities to only place children in provision that meets the standards. This would enable Ofsted to assess authorities on their use of independent and semi-independent provision, and compliance with the requirement to only place with providers who uphold the standards, under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework. Under this option, Ofsted would not register and inspect providers."

2. Legislate to introduce a new quality and inspection regime.

"This would require all providers of independent and semi-independent provision to register with Ofsted and be inspected against the new standards, and these could be established, through legislation, as National Minimum Standards, as defined under section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The framework and associated standards would differ from the

Research shows link between rise in youth crime and cuts in youth provision, with experts calling for funding

Violence and youth work cuts

YOUTH WORK

By Derren Hayes

A new parliamentary report on the role that youth work plays in tackling knife crime has called on the government to invest £1.5bn to ensure youth services can offer specialist support to the victims and perpetrators of violent crime.

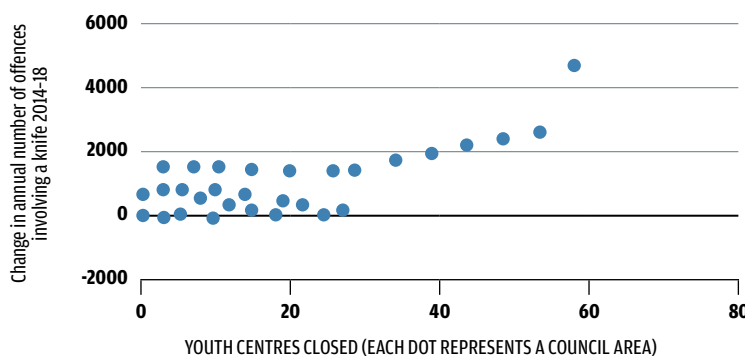
The report by the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on knife crime and violence reduction looked at how trained youth workers can provide vital support for young people affected by violent crime, and identified effective interventions and initiatives.

In addition, the APPG undertook research to identify reductions in youth service spending by local authorities, which it cross-referenced against levels of recorded crime.

A Freedom of Information request to all councils in England asked for data about spending on services for young people over the previous three, five and 10 years. The group received 106 responses enabling it to compare spending by councils from 2014/15 to 2017/18.

It found that 86 per cent of respondents had reduced spending, amounting to a 40 per cent reduction in funding over four years. One in 10 councils had

YOUTH CENTRE CLOSURES AND KNIFE OFFENCES



Source: APPG on knife crime and violence reduction, February 2020

reduced spending by 70 per cent or more.

When asked about how these cuts had impacted on provision, 71 local authorities responded, of which 87 per cent had seen one or more youth centres shut since 2011. In total, there was a halving in the number of youth centres between 2010/11 and 2017/18.

Crime data

This information was compared with police data on the number of offences involving a knife in the years between 2014 and 2018.

Correlations were then sought between changes in knife crime and in youth service provision in the corresponding council area.

The report authors used the “Pearson r correlation coefficient” which has a range of between 1 and -1. A coefficient value that is greater than zero means there is a positive correlation: when one variable changes, the other variable changes in the same direction. A coefficient value closer to one, the stronger the positive relationship between the variables.

In measuring the relationship between changes to youth centre closures and changes to knife crime, the reported correlation coefficient is 0.7.

“This suggests there is a strongly negative association between closures to youth centres and increasing knife crime – every

decline in the number of youth centres is associated with an increase in knife crime,” the report states. This is represented in the scatterplot graph (left).

The findings bear out concerns raised by youth work experts and campaigners for a number of years (see expert view). Earlier this year, Dorset police and crime commissioner (PCC) Martyn Underhill identified cuts to youth services in the county as being responsible for a rise by a third in the number of young people entering the youth justice system.

In a report, Underhill states: “The PCC remains cautious about the current provision of youth services in Dorset and acknowledges the accepted evidence base that has linked this reduction to the challenges of youth offending and serious youth violence, particularly knife crime.”

He calls for more to be done to address the link between cuts to youth services and more young people coming into the youth justice system. To address this, the APPG calls for the government to commission a national audit of youth services in England and introduce a “clear statutory requirement to local authorities for a minimum level of professional youth services provision”.

● www.preventknife crime.co.uk

EXPERT VIEW ‘YOUTH WORK DELIVERS RESULTS AND NEEDS INVESTMENT FOR THE LONG-TERM’



Mervyn Kaye, chief executive, Youth First

While I am grateful to see reports, such as the APPG’s, evidence of the link between reduced services for young people and a rise in the prevalence of social ills such as violence, is not news. Those of us in the sector have known for generations the benefit of youth and play provision, especially to the most vulnerable young people. A sector that countless reports have now shown,

provides, when satisfactorily funded, a range of support which radically benefits society far more than it costs.

From the provision of safe and fun spaces for young people to gather and socialise outside of school hours where they can access trusted professional adults to targeted support for young people with already recognised challenges; youth and play work has long been known to be a societal good.

Youth work is a profession with proven praxis and those of us in the sector – at least those of us left after 10 years of

austerity – can and have offered examples of lives positively changed. We have long argued that youth work must be seen as the other side of the coin to formal education and as such require even a modicum of the level of investment that is put into the former.

This is increasingly true in an economy that increasingly requires a workforce that excels in precisely the soft skills that are so brilliantly imparted in youth and play settings.

This is something Youth First has ourselves argued for from a local

Lewisham context in our own *Futures* report.

So as the words of the APPG’s report gathers dust in the House of Commons Library the questions that require urgent answers are not why is the sector required but how and when will it be adequately funded?

In the post-Covid-19 world, the need for youth and play work will not be diminished. In fact, as this report shows, and as any youth worker will tell you, it will only have increased.

● www.youthfirst.org.uk/future

Gaps in knowledge on ACEs

Review shows negative impact of adverse childhood experiences and says understanding must improve

SOCIAL CARE

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are a set of 10 negative childhood circumstances involving abuse and neglect that are consistently shown to increase the risk of adult mental health problems and physical diseases. Studies show that the risk of poor outcomes is particularly strong when children have experienced four or more ACEs.

These findings have generated a powerful narrative that has increased public awareness of how early adversity negatively impacts children's development.

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) has completed a comprehensive review of the evidence underpinning this narrative to understand its implications for preventing and reducing ACEs.

It confirmed that ACEs are harmful and strongly associated with serious mental health and behavioural problems. However, it also found that many common assumptions about ACEs are not fully supported by the evidence.

"This means that our knowledge about ACEs is not as strong as many have assumed," says the EIF's lead report author Dr Kirsten Asmussen. "It also means that implementing activities that lack clear evidence risks hindering progress and could even make things worse for some families."

The report provides a follow-up to the 2018 House of Commons science and technology committee inquiry on evidence-based early intervention.

The committee report reflected a strong consensus that ACEs are harmful and associated with a range of negative adult outcomes, but also noted scepticism about the strength of this relationship and the extent to which current practice responses are effective.

Here, Dr Asmussen outlines five key areas where knowledge of ACEs still needs to improve.

THE KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ACE



Dr Kirsten Asmussen, head of What Works Child Development at the Early Intervention Foundation

Here are five key things we still do not know about ACEs:

- **We do not know whether ACEs are the root cause of many physical health problems.** Although some researchers have argued that ACEs are causally linked to many life-threatening diseases, more recent and robust evidence does not fully support this claim. The implication is that efforts to prevent or reduce ACEs could potentially improve mental health outcomes, but their impact on physical outcomes remains unclear.
- **We do not know the impact of ACEs on adult outcomes in comparison to other negative childhood circumstances.** Our review found that while ACEs increase the risk of poor mental health outcomes, other negative childhood circumstances also predict poor outcomes in a way comparable to having four or more ACEs. These negative circumstances include low birth weight, social discrimination and chronic poverty. An over-reliance on the 10 original ACE categories thus risks missing vulnerable children who may also need help.
- **The relationship between ACEs, toxic stress and other biological processes is not fully understood.** Recent evidence involving "toxic stress" provides fascinating insight into how negative childhood circumstances could potentially impact the immune and nervous systems. However, most studies to date involve animals or very small samples of humans. More testing is necessary before we understand the implications of this research for child and family interventions.



PHOTOGRAPHEEU/ADOBE STOCK

A better definition of trauma-informed care is needed to test its effectiveness

- **We do not know if ACE screening could cause harm.** Routine ACE screening is increasingly used to identify individuals who may be experiencing symptoms of trauma on account of ACEs. However, we still do not know the accuracy of ACE screening for identifying people who need help. We also don't know whether it could inadvertently re-traumatise some individuals or make them feel stigmatised. Although some studies find that people don't mind being asked about ACEs, these studies typically do not include individuals who have experienced more than one or two ACEs.
- **The ways in which trauma-informed care might prevent or reduce ACEs remains unclear.** Public health agencies are increasingly investing in trauma-informed care as a way of responding to ACEs. However, a wide variety of activities encompass trauma-informed care and the ways in which these activities might improve child and family outcomes is frequently not specified. We therefore need a better definition of what trauma-informed care is and how it helps families so that its benefits can be tested.

What should happen next?

A lack of knowledge about these issues should not stop us from engaging in activities that we do know work. These

include 33 child and family interventions listed on the *EIF Guidebook* with robust evidence of preventing ACEs and reducing ACE-related symptoms. We also know that comprehensive public health strategies that reduce poverty and address social inequalities could also make a positive difference. We therefore recommend that we prioritise these effective interventions and strategies first, before investing more heavily in activities which lack clear evidence.

At the local level, this means increasing families' access to interventions with robust evidence of working. To do this effectively, local areas must understand the prevalence of ACEs within their communities and where ACEs are most likely to occur. This knowledge should then be used to inform commissioning decisions about evidence-based interventions.

At the national level, ACE-related strategies should include policies that specifically address the social and economic conditions which increase children's exposure to early adversity.

This means strategies aimed at reducing child poverty and policies that tackle crime and social discrimination. It also means strengthening frontline workforces so that interventions can be delivered to a high standard.

Without this additional level of national support, local efforts will have difficulty providing sustainable benefits.

● www.eif.org.uk

Electronic tags are to be rolled out across the youth secure estate. How will they work, what are the limitations and

Briefing: Use of tags for ‘at risk’

YOUTH JUSTICE

By Fiona Simpson

Youth courts across England and Wales are now able to order that children aged under 18 involved in, or at risk from, crime be fitted with electronic tags to monitor their whereabouts following a successful pilot in London last year.

The GPS tags are to be used as an alternative to custody, according to Youth Justice Board guidelines, which clearly state they should not be used to toughen sentences.

The tags have been introduced as a “protective, supportive and safeguarding measure” for vulnerable children and young people at risk of reoffending or from county lines gangs and violent crime, guidance from the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers (AYM) adds.

The scheme was piloted in London with eight children receiving GPS location tags after leaving custody since November 2019. AYM reports show six of these are still in use and classed as “live”.

Despite the low number of participants, youth offending team (YOT) case managers have lauded the trial a success. “Using the tags has helped with the management of children in the community,” one case manager said.

How do GPS-enabled tags work?

According to a guide provided to YOTs by HM Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS), children suitable for this type of monitoring will be fitted with a satellite-enabled ankle tag, provided by the Electronic Monitoring Services (EMS).

The tag monitors a child’s location 24 hours a day using GPS technology, while a home monitoring unit (HMU) will be installed in the child’s place of residence. It will allow for “easy communication with the HMPPS monitoring centre” and will provide a place to charge the tag.



STOCKSOLUTIONS/ADOBE STOCK

Electronic tags are used as a “protective, supportive and safeguarding measure” for children at risk of reoffending or gang involvement

How will tags be used?

Tags will ensure a child’s compliance with exclusion zones and curfews, as well as providing YOTs with data about a child’s whereabouts. The stipulations of each individual tag will be decided by the youth courts, with recommendations for location monitoring recommended by YOTs following release from custody.

Exclusion zones can be set using boundaries around specific places or buildings and can be tailored to be active for specific days and times.

“This may be necessary to ensure a child’s attendance at activities or to restrict access to areas deemed to put the child at risk of contact with gangs,” HMPPS guidance states.

How will data be acted upon?

If a child breaks a curfew or enters an exclusion zone, the EMS will be immediately notified. All alerts will be investigated and information will be passed on to a “responsible officer” named by the youth court or youth custody service (YCS).

YOTs can recommend certain children for location monitoring through the youth court as part of post-custody recommendations. If approved, this data can be applied

for retrospectively from the EMS for reasons including breach of curfew or exclusion zone restrictions, and to prove or disprove a crime.

Location monitoring may also be used in cases involving children at risk from county lines drug dealing, gangs activity, knife crime and those with complex safeguarding needs. However, “the vulnerability of the child, including learning needs and health must be taken into account before considering location monitoring”, the guidance adds.

Who is eligible for tags?

Children subject to court imposed bail, remand to local authority accommodation, youth rehabilitation orders, home detention curfews and detention and training orders are all eligible.

However, location monitoring is not available for children subject to court imposed bail, remand to local authority accommodation and youth rehabilitation orders.

HMPPS guidance states they must also have a fixed address with an electricity supply, live in an area where location monitoring is available and have a parent or guardian with them for tag fitting.

However, special circumstances

must apply for children subject to home detention orders and detention and training orders who were not deemed eligible for early release or had their sentences extended.

Guidance states: “Post early release period the child must, in accordance with YCS guidance, be assessed as high/very high risk of serious harm and high/very high risk of reoffending to be considered for electronic monitoring.”

Whether it will act as a suitable option to reduce custodial sentences for young offenders is yet to be seen, with numbers fitted with tags expected to be around 30 per year TO CHECK.

What are the benefits?

According to the Youth Justice Board and HMPPS, location monitoring tags “should offer appropriate response to patterns of offending” if they are “used in a necessary and proportionate way”.

“The support needs of the child will always be the primary purpose for utilisation of location monitoring,” official guidance says.

GPS location monitoring tags will provide additional support for children to “comply with their order, help resist negative

does the sector support them? children

influences and act a psychological deterrent”, HMPPS states.

Tags will also provide additional safeguarding, reduce the risk of exploitation to county lines, increase a child’s ability to “resist peer pressure” and help rule children out of crimes, the service adds.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) says: “GPS tags provide judges and probation officers with an additional safeguarding measure to deter young offenders from crime and exploitation.”

Any negative side effects?

According to an MoJ report into a pilot scheme on the use of location monitoring tags with adults, it was found that a lack of resources and equipment could act as a barrier to the effective use of the technology.

Meanwhile, a group of wearers described how “wearing the GPS tag had led to feelings of increased anxiety, particularly about breaching their licence conditions”, the report states. “Others reported feelings of paranoia due to being monitored,” it adds.

Critics have highlighted issues of stigmatisation, which was mirrored by those taking part in the pilot.

“Concerns around being judged or stigmatised for wearing the GPS tag further contributed to these feelings. Depending on their circumstances, wearers were concerned about having to explain why they were wearing the tag.

“In some instances, wearing the tag left them feeling like they had no option but to disclose information about their offence to those around them,” the report states.

One wearer said it deterred them from looking for work as they felt they would be unfairly judged. Another explained that the physical size of the tag stopped them from wearing boots that were required for working on construction sites.

Despite these concerns, early feedback from YOT managers and government bodies appears positive.

Steps schools and local authorities should take to be LGBT inclusive

EDUCATION



Mo Wiltshire,
director of education
and youth, Stonewall

Stonewall’s recent *Shut Out* report highlighted what life is like for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people who are not in education, training or work.

Growing up as an LGBT person can be particularly hard. Anti-LGBT bullying is still widespread in schools, with our *2017 School Report* finding that 45 per cent of LGBT pupils are bullied because of their sexuality. This combined with a lack of visible lesbian, gay, bi and trans role models can give young people who might be questioning their identity the impression that it is “wrong” or “bad” to be LGBT.

Many of the young people we spoke to for this research explained how being bullied in school, and feeling like they couldn’t be themselves, prevented them from continuing in their education.

Sam, a 17-year-old young man, told researchers: “I knew I was not going to continue in education and that I wouldn’t be able to. I can’t deal with the negative energy tied to my sexuality.”

Others said how having trouble at home or being rejected by family because of who they were made it harder for them to focus on work or education. Previous Stonewall research found only two in five LGBT young people have an adult at home they can talk to.

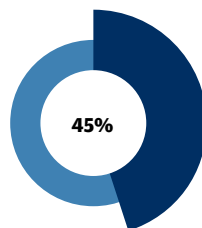
Adela, a 23-year-old bi/pan woman from Wales, said: “At 16, I went to live with my partner. That was good for a while, but we split up when I was 19 so I didn’t have anywhere to live. I wasn’t working or looking for a job at that point. It’s not what your main focus is.”

Mental health impact

Being bullied, rejected by family or friends and feeling different to

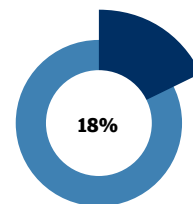
DISCRIMINATION OF LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE

Bullying levels



of LGBT pupils report
bullying at school

Applying for jobs



of LGBT people faced
discrimination trying to get a job

Source: *Shut Out*, Stonewall, January 2020

others affects mental health and self-confidence – previous research found that 52 per cent of LGBT people said they’ve experienced depression in the past year.

Mental health challenges can also have an impact on education, like struggling to concentrate on studies or having to take time off school due to mental health reasons.

The young people also explained that once they had been shut out of education, work or training, re-entering became more difficult. Some told us this was because they couldn’t find support that was LGBT-inclusive, while others feared they would encounter the same discrimination again.

Changing the narrative

There are three key steps education leaders can take to make schools and colleges LGBT-inclusive:

1. Make sure education includes LGBT people throughout everything it does – from anti-bullying policies to inclusive

teaching – so that young people know that there’s nothing wrong or bad about being LGBT, and can feel accepted as who they are.

2. Think about how they can make their careers guidance LGBT-inclusive, so that young people know that being LGBT should never be a barrier to pursuing goals. This could include hearing from LGBT role models, as well as discussing what rights LGBT people have in the workplace.

3. Schools and local authorities must ensure mental health support is available for LGBT young people who need it, and that counsellors have training in the specific needs of LGBT people.

This may sound daunting but there are many small changes that can make a difference and Stonewall is always here to help. Through our School, College and Children and Young People’s Services Champions programmes, we work with primary and secondary schools, colleges and local authorities to help them create LGBT-inclusive environments for their students and young people using their services.

By making simple changes to be more inclusive, we can make sure that every LGBT young person is supported through their education and into training and work.

● www.stonewall.org.uk

“Schools and local authorities must ensure mental health support is available for LGBT young people”

Expert says councils must take measures to ensure children in care have leave to remain from 2021

Immigration status and Brexit

BREXIT



Amanda Shah,
policy officer,
Greater
Manchester
Immigration Aid
Unit

For the past year, we have been working with children's services and leaving care teams to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers affected by Brexit immigration changes.

As a result of Brexit, people from the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland – and people from elsewhere but whose immigration status is dependent on a family member from one of those countries – need to make an immigration application to stay in the UK lawfully.

This needs action from every local authority because children in care and care leavers also need to apply to regularise their immigration status. Some councils will be corporate parents to greater numbers of affected children than others, but all need to go through a process of identifying which of their children and young people need Brexit immigration support.

If local authorities do not step up to support them, from 2021 the future for these young people could include homelessness, immigration detention and removal from the UK.

Here are five best practice tips for local authorities, gleaned from our work with social workers, personal advisers, service managers and legal staff, to make sure their children are protected through the Brexit immigration change-over.

1. Collect nationality data

The biggest barrier to local authorities being able to support young people with immigration needs is that they are unable to identify them. Data on nationality is not routinely collected and so, for most councils, Brexit has meant



Councils must be able to identify which children are in need of immigration support

manually trawling through individual case files. As a result, too many are being missed. Having accessible information on children's nationality as an integral part of their care planning is key if councils are to know which of their children need immigration support.

2. Set up referral protocols for immigration advice

All young people identified as affected by Brexit should be automatically referred for independent legal advice. Authorities should consider commissioning arrangements where necessary to enable this. The Home Office has pushed people towards the EU Settlement Scheme but that may not be the only or most secure immigration application. For many children, rights to British citizenship also need considering. Given that children in care and care leavers are disproportionately likely to end up in contact with the criminal justice system, citizenship, where appropriate, means matters stay in the criminal justice system and don't leach over to immigration.

3. Use an immigration tracker

We developed a colour coded "Brexit immigration tracker" with one leaving care team so that they could see in one place corporate

progress towards resolving the immigration needs of all affected young people. It is a simple Excel spreadsheet which highlights support required from local authorities before applications can be made – particularly getting valid nationality documents.

4. Use electronic flags before immigration status expires

A young person's immigration needs can last longer than their involvement with a particular social worker, and can crossover with them from children's services to leaving care. Using electronic flags on casework management systems, that trigger six months before a young person's immigration status runs out, is one way of ensuring immigration needs do not get lost. For Brexit, this is important because those who get Pre-Settled Status will need to apply for Settled Status at a later date. There is a risk of this subsequent application being missed for children in care and care leavers unless it is owned by corporate parents.

5. Keep copies of immigration status documents

To facilitate this long-term support, electronic copies of a young person's immigration status documents should be part of their

IMPACT OF BREXIT

900,000

EU national children live in the UK

10,000

Children in care and care leavers are at risk of becoming unlawfully present

31

December 2020 is the deadline for the UK's Brexit transition period

local authority records. Not only does this mean the authority is clear about what status young people have, but it also safeguards against documents getting lost, particularly for young care leavers.

Our work has led us to believe a strategic response is required from local authorities, owned at a corporate level, rather than relying on good social work practice from individuals. Best practice measures put in place to adequately support around Brexit will identify and support a wider group of children in care and care leavers with insecure immigration status; young people born in the UK who think they are British but have no documents to evidence it or children from families who have no valid immigration status.

Several local government and social care ombudsman investigations have found against authorities deemed to have acted in an inappropriate or untimely manner to support looked-after children with immigration issues.

This approach puts authorities on the front foot, means they are better able to plan and ultimately means they are best placed to do the right thing by their children.

A one-day conference

NEW DATE:

30th September 2020

10 Union Street, London.

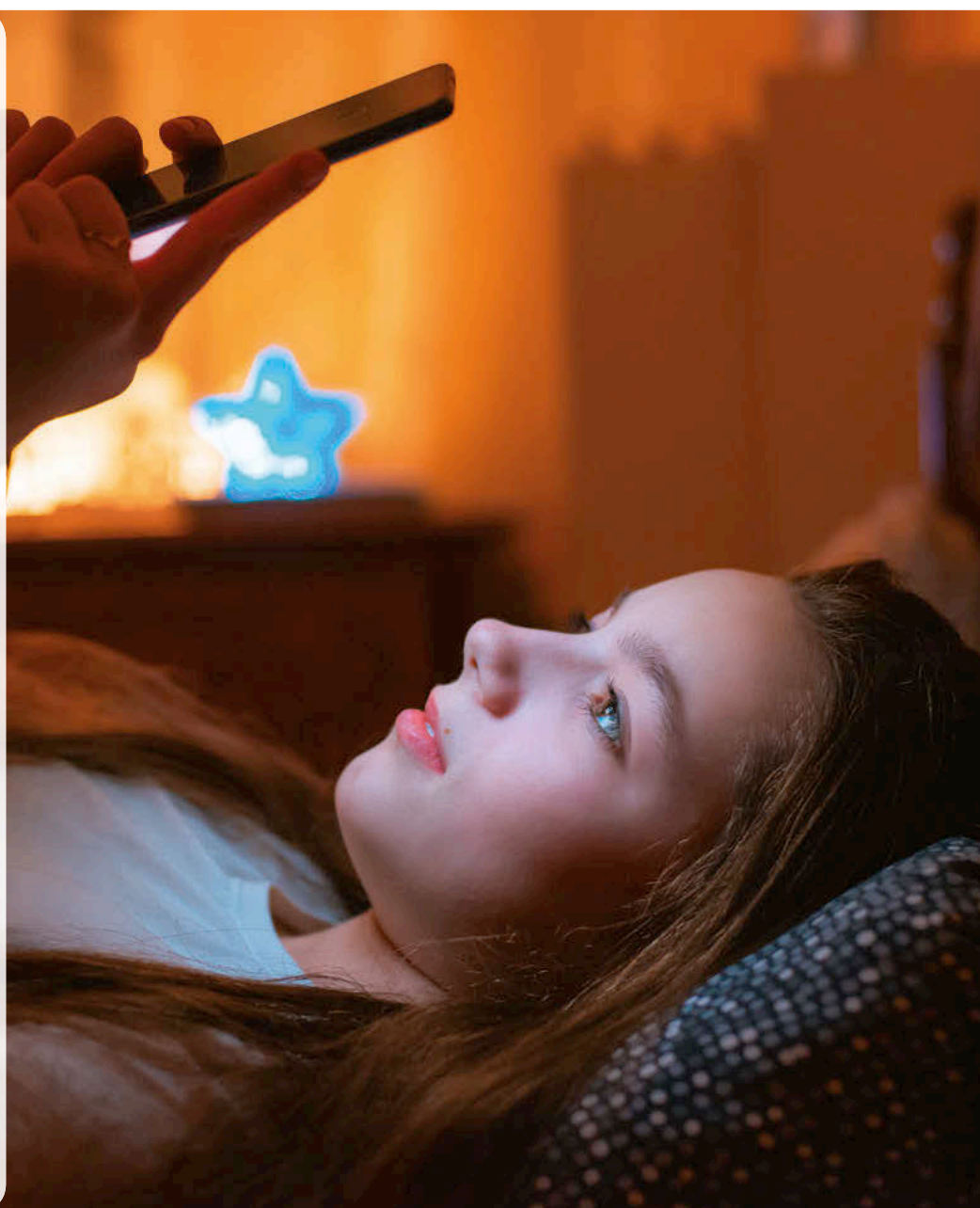
Safeguarding Children in the Digital Age 2020

Digital technology continues to evolve at an extraordinary rate, providing children and young people with countless opportunities for learning, development and socialisation. It also presents ever increasing threats to their wellbeing and safety.

The 4th national conference on Safeguarding Children in the Digital Age will provide essential learning for the entire children's workforce.

The conference, on Wednesday 30th September 2020, will enable delegates to:

- Understand how the Online Harms White Paper impacts on the practice of education and safeguarding professionals
- Get up to speed with how young people are interacting with the full range of current digital platforms
- Encourage children and young people to think critically about their lives online and build digital resilience
- Support professionals to risk assess incidents of sexting and identify the most appropriate ways to respond
- Allow young children in their early years to take age-appropriate risks online so they can learn how to navigate the digital world safely
- Employ a whole-setting approach to teach online safety and embed digital skills in the workforce
- Understand the digital experiences of vulnerable young people including those in care, not in school, and young carers, and enable them to stay safe
- Have difficult conversations about online grooming risk that are relevant and engaging for children and young people
- Deliver age-appropriate advice about the risks and consequences of gambling and gaming



Derren Hayes speaks to the Nacro chief executive about reducing youth crime

Campbell Robb

There can be few more experienced chief executives in the voluntary sector than Campbell Robb, who took on the top job at crime reduction charity Nacro last July. Robb has been in charge at Shelter, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Office of the Third Sector over the past 15 years, as well as fitting in a stint as a government adviser. Robb will need to draw on his vast experience to help reinvigorate Nacro – which by its own admission has seen its policy influence “diminish” – at a time when the youth justice system is going through great change.

Your first major report as chief executive of Nacro was January’s Lives Not Knives. Why that topic?

It is centred on the voices of a group of young people from our education centres who may have attended multiple schools and pupil referral units. They are the kids flirting with the justice system or currently in it. It talks about [how] knife orders and longer sentences will not deter young people carrying knives – they do that because they are scared. We have this dichotomy of tougher sentencing policy against a smaller number of young people who when you talk to them say that isn’t going to stop us.

We have a lot of contact with young people who are not in school or college and who operate outside the mainstream as we are trying to get their voices into the discussion. If the system is going to keep putting the pressure on sentencing, how can we improve the practice on the ground and work better together to get their voices heard?

Your education centres support those aged 16 plus who have struggled in school and are on the edge of the justice system, but should we be working with them earlier?

Absolutely. The earlier you get to young people then the better chance you’ve got of diverting them. Once you’re in the justice system, it changes your pathway. It’s then very hard to get off of that. When we work in our education centres, that’s pupils at the last stop.

We are seeing children off-rolled. They come to us and to other charities. Children are at the end of their tether – the system is almost expecting them to start causing trouble.

We were proud to get an Ofsted “good” for our service at Medway young offender institution – to create an educational environment as close as possible to a school where young people learn properly – that is a model that should and could be replicated.



Robb: “Fewer young people should be in prison”

Will the new secure school do that when it opens?

I don’t know. It’s unproven. They are at least 18 months off that coming into place. We felt we did a good job in Medway in difficult circumstances.

I believe that fewer young people should be in prison; short sentences don’t work...but we have a system that incarcerates more people than we’ve done before in the adult estate. We should be doing the best we can for young people while they are in there and give them the best chance when they come out.

What happens when they’re in there is really important but so is what happens when they come out – are they getting a key worker, housing, access to education etc. It’s about tracking them and sustaining the support.

You led the Social Exclusion Taskforce under Gordon Brown’s government. Do we need a similar approach to address youth knife crime?

There’s a saying that goes “you spend your whole life trying to get your hands on the levers of power only to discover they are not attached to anything”. There’s a little bit about central government that is like that. Yet my lessons from running the taskforce is that sustained government intervention in social policy works when it is funded properly and is based on evidence. Governments can fix stuff.

Some of the best practice comes from councils working in partnership with local charities, groups, schools to build up a model of good

practice. Do you need a central unit in government to do that? Probably not. But you need someone to help them share good practice, find ideas and put them out nationally.

So we need a what works centre for youth justice?

It’s almost applying the culture that exists across a lot of tech and business now – identify good practice, give it seed funding to see if it works and then back it and take it national. That was something that governments used to do, for example Sure Start. That seems to me where we can get government to find good practice and help it spread.

What attracted you to the role at Nacro?

The thing I feel passionately about is the belief in rehabilitation and that people should get a second, third or fourth chance. I also like working in organisations that make a tangible difference to people’s lives and use that knowledge to change the wider system. Nacro has been doing this for 50 years.

Nacro is well known for having a big policy influence but for a number of reasons that has been diminished over recent years. What I’d like to do is increase our capacity to bring that knowledge to people at the front line and turn that into evidence and recommendations and start working with politicians to make a difference.

Bringing the voices of young people forward is something I did at Shelter. We all know if people listen to us then things happen. We are working with people that have never been listened to. What we can do is really listen to their problems, take them seriously and try and fix them.



CAMPBELL ROBB

- July 2019 - Chief executive, Nacro
- January 2017 - Chief executive, JRF
- 2010 - Chief executive, Shelter
- 2009 - Director, Social Exclusion Taskforce
- 2007-10 - Director general, Office of the Third Sector
- 2006 - Adviser HM Treasury
- 1998-2005 - Director of public policy, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations



The levy should be reformed to cover all training needs

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Email cypnow@markallengroup.com or write to
The editor, CYP Now, St Jude's Church,
Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB

Levy pot should include apprenticeships

At Derby, our apprenticeship provision is growing, with 1,000 plus learners coming through our September cohort and further cohorts planned for January and beyond. We will have 1,400 apprentices by the end of the current academic year. The impact on the businesses we work with is significant, allowing them to bring new talent into their workforces and enhancing existing staff through the development of new skills.

However, despite the strength of our apprenticeship offer, I do still believe there is room for a reform of the levy. When it was first introduced in April 2017 by the government, the levy was presented as an employer-led initiative, but lobbying by private organisations threatens to change that. Employers should be allowed to specify and use degrees and professional qualifications in apprenticeships that their sectors and organisations need to address the widening skills gaps.

There is an argument that the levy pot should actually cover all training needs, including apprenticeships, to give businesses greater flexibility in how they use funds, allowing them to support a broader range of training activities, and how funds are transferred to other firms.

The initial motivation for the levy was about putting the choice into businesses' hands. Perhaps the answer is to keep that sentiment but ringfence proportions of the funding to ensure there are pathways for young people and the ageing workforce, and to upskill and reskill the workforce to keep up with digital technology.

Julie Stone, director of online learning, Derby University

The benefits of peer support

In 'School pupils with mental health issues "reluctant to receive peer mentoring"' (cypnow.co.uk, 10 February), you pay important attention to the issue of peer support. This was prompted by work that we at the Anna Freud Centre have been carrying out since 2018 as part of a pilot scheme, funded by the Department for Education and independently evaluated by Ecorys.

This work involved delivering training in 100 schools, colleges and youth organisations to set up bespoke peer support programmes in their settings, and to identify how they might help children and young people to support each other's mental health and wellbeing. The evaluation sheds light on the factors which need consideration when setting up a peer support programme.

The findings indicate that more research is needed to better understand the full impact of peer support on pupils' mental health. However, we would not want your coverage to discourage education and other sectors from considering an approach that many young people themselves may adopt instinctively when they turn to their friends as a trusted source of support. Furthermore, your title (above) suggests that the mentees themselves had mental health difficulties, which was itself not measured.

Peer support may be a sustainable and positive option for schools. We should openly explore the challenges, as well as the potential benefits. We believe that there is much in the report which schools could find useful, should

they be inspired to set up their own peer support scheme.

Jaime Smith, programme director - Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools, Anna Freud Centre

YOUR VIEWS ON...

Jill Thorburn on 'Ofsted suspends inspections amid coronavirus outbreak'

"The staff from Ofsted should be deployed to frontline social work during this time. Services and children could benefit greatly from their expertise. Any plans for this?"

Andi Brierley on 'Chief inspect names YOI best in England and Wales'

"How do we 'rehabilitate' young people? It implies we are taking them back to 'normal life'. By way of them being 'young' and in 'prison', why would we make an assumption that they have ever had a 'normal life'. #Narrative is important to ensure the public understand the issues."

Kidscape on 'Coronavirus: teach children about outbreak to stop bullying in schools'

"It is vital that schools explain the facts surrounding the outbreak of Coronavirus to pupils and make it clear that the outbreak 'does not justify racial discrimination'."

Marie Tucker on 'DfE group to draft standards for unregulated accommodation, minister confirms'

"There are many task and finish groups in action all of the time. Many not publicised. Not because they are intentionally secret. But because comms in our sector is awful & also because people worry about lack of capacity to manage the info traffic."

Article 39 on 'DfE group to draft standards for unregulated accommodation, minister confirms'

"This is untypical though in being a group of organisations from outside government brought together to work on matters which are the subject of a public consultation. Would we have known about this group without @cypnow?"

Hempsalls on 'Coronavirus: Free childcare funding to continue'

"Good news, but we need more detail about the impact on the settings of reduced or increased demand. This is clearly something to watch."

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The editor, Children & Young People Now,
St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB

Letters should include an address and phone number. All letters may be edited for publication.

OPINION POLL

The question Should government proposals on reforms to unregulated children's homes include banning their use for all young people under 18?

THE RESULT

No 19%

Yes 81%

Next question What should happen to statutory requirements for children's services during the Covid-19 crisis?

Vote in the poll @ www.cypnow.co.uk

Councils and charities on frontline of virus fight

Derren Hayes editor, *Children & Young People Now* derren.hayes@markallengroup.com



As the health and social care system enters a period of pressure unprecedented in modern times, there are growing concerns about the ability of already stretched and cash-strapped councils and children's charities to meet the expected rise in demand for support from disadvantaged families (Analysis, p8).

At this stage, the extent of the challenge posed by coronavirus remains unclear. But if we follow the path of other countries further ahead on the outbreak curve, it looks like this crisis will threaten the very fabric of the children's social care and welfare system.

Children's services departments face the prospect of significant chunks of the workforce being off sick at the same time. If that happens, emergency legislation has paved the way for councils to temporarily drop some social care duties and prioritise those most at risk, while sector bodies are trying to bring lapsed and trainee social workers in as a form of reserve workforce. While welcome, these measures are unlikely to be sufficient to deal with the large influx of vulnerable children and families campaigners are warning could arise as a result of economic hardship and social isolation pressures.

Looked-after children's services are particularly vulnerable: many foster and kinship carers are retirees, a group at most risk of developing severe symptoms, while

residential care providers are warning that homes may need to be closed if staff numbers drop. What happens to the children they care for if there's a shortage of alternative placements? Faced with such worrying possibilities, the voluntary sector has never been more needed to supplement and support the work of children's services. Yet analysis by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations shows the voluntary sector is set to lose £4bn in income over the next 12 weeks, with think-tank NPC warning this could see many charities close provision for vulnerable groups or collapse altogether.

In delivering on the Prime Minister's pledge to "do whatever it takes to get the country through this", Children England has called on the government to guarantee councils and the voluntary sector get the funds they need to support all vulnerable families during the crisis. The PM needs to listen and act urgently. In the Commons, he said a "package of measures to support the voluntary sector" is being looked at. This should involve the government underwriting the losses charities will incur over the coming months and giving councils the funds to pay third sector organisations in advance for delivering vital provision. Without such intervention, the system will struggle to cope, and many vulnerable children and families will suffer.

To all our readers, stay well and keep up your fantastic work.

● *CYP Now will be publishing bi-monthly as a temporary measure during the coronavirus pandemic. The next edition will be the June/July issue, published on 26 May 2020. We will return to publishing monthly as soon as conditions allow. You can of course continue to access our resources and the latest news as events unfold on cypnow.co.uk. We shall ensure you receive the correct number of editions in your subscription, so for example, annual subscribers will receive 12 issues.*

BLOGS

"We are experiencing a phenomenon few of us have experienced before. We are adapting and learning every day and getting used to doing things differently. During these challenging times, the safety of our staff and all those who use our services has been paramount. We have moved all our appointments to online platforms and staff are working from home. Having delivered appointments through these platforms to families over the past five years, we were in a fortunate position to have the main systems in place and are now supporting families who have not experienced sessions delivered in this way."

Noel Kenely on supporting families of deaf children online during coronavirus pandemic

"It's a difficult time for many charities right now. Nobody could have predicted that we'd be in such strange circumstances. The Become staff team is working at home to ensure we are all kept safe and well, but we are as present as ever with each other and the young people we work with. The Care Advice Line will continue to operate as usual and our coaching is being delivered online. In addition, we have created a new web page - with some advice for care-experienced young people around coronavirus, including some FAQs on how it might impact the care and support they receive."

Katharine Sacks-Jones on coronavirus advice for looked-after children and care leavers

"We would all agree that it's been a particularly challenging start to 2020. Emergency services and public servants have been working tirelessly to support local communities deal with the devastating effects of recent flooding and now Covid-19, which has just been classified as a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation. Among all of this, the government delivered its first Budget. There were some positive announcements for local businesses and about infrastructure. Unfortunately, the needs of children still do not seem to have the same profile as railways and roads."

Rachel Dickinson says let's invest in children

"It is important there is sustained focus that the core issue is 'care' as determined by care-experienced people and child-centred theory and practice. We want children to have the best possible care, according to their individual needs, whatever their age. In this consultation, there is a major disagreement over the needs of teenagers. Many care-experienced people, organisations and practitioners do not agree with the Department for Education proposal to formalise the absence of care for 16- and 17-year-olds: it is clear children and young people would lose their right to care."

Jonathan Stanley on all under-18s need care

Young people need an outward-looking UK

Denise Hatton is chief executive of YMCA England and Wales



As the post-Brexit dust begins to settle, now is an opportune moment to focus on what the implications will be for young people. Ahead of last year's general election, a significant part of YMCA's

manifesto emphasised that regardless of the outcome of Brexit, young people must have the opportunity to be global citizens. As we know, 72 per cent of young people voted to remain in the European Union (EU), and countless others – whom this decision will affect dramatically – were too young to have a say at all.

Every election produces consequences that those too young to vote will have to deal with in their futures, but this particular decision has had such an immediate impact on young people's lives. At the heart of the European vision was collaboration and by removing the UK's place within that, a large number of the programmes and opportunities designed to

help shape the lives of young people in the UK will be lost.

One of the most notable opportunities to consider in relation to this is Erasmus+, which has enabled thousands of young people to study abroad, learn different languages within new cultures, and develop vital experience to further themselves and their careers.

Likewise, funding from EU institutions has provided opportunities for organisations to run exchange programmes or intervention work within the UK. Some of the most deprived communities in the UK have benefited from EU funding over the years, positively impacting the lives of many young people.

Without Erasmus+, we need to ensure that opportunities to help young people at home and in their ventures abroad are not missed, and so a suitable replacement must be created.

There has been government discussion on what a replacement might look like, with some stressing that a UK version could be more beneficial by tailoring to the specific needs of young people in the UK. While this is an

exciting possibility, we must ensure that this discussion develops into reality, and with the same haste in which these opportunities are being taken away from young people.

If the government it true to its word it is imperative that young people are not short-changed. An adequate replacement must provide opportunities to engage with different countries and offer better employment outcomes, increase confidence, develop independent thinking and establish greater cultural awareness.

As a global movement impacting the lives of more than 64 million people in 120 countries, YMCA has seen young people thrive and grow when meeting new people and sharing similar experiences.

If the government's agenda is to create a modern United Kingdom ready to do business with the rest of the world, then it should be equipping young people with the experience of being global citizens, and the skills to recognise the benefits of different cultures and how we can work together for a wider goal.

Oasis Restore must be fresh start for children

John Drew is former chief executive of the Youth Justice Board



Steve Chalke, the founder and leader of the Oasis Charitable Trust, is someone for a challenge. Putting to one side for a moment what Oasis has achieved in the fields of housing for 16- to

24-year-olds, healthcare and education, there is the not inconsiderable matter of his record in the London Marathon. Anyone who can run, or run/walk, for more than 26 miles is a heroine or hero to me. Steve's record is of an altogether more impressive order. Three times since 2005 he has held the Guinness World Record for the most sponsorship money ever raised by an individual, topping out at £2.32m in 2011; some achievement.

It is fitting then that someone like Steve, along with his team at Oasis, should be taking on the challenge of changing the course of custody for children. His project, Oasis Restore, will open in 2021 in Rochester. It will

be the first pilot for the new model of secure schools that the government plans should eventually replace the prison-like young offender institutions (YOI) and secure training centres (STC). The title, "Oasis Restore", holds promise of something different; no mention of "institution", "centre", or "offender".

When the plan to create secure schools was first announced it was met with an understandable degree of cynicism. Those with long memories compared the language being used with that when STCs were first invented. I shared the concern of many over key details like the location – on the site of the former STC in Medway – and the size – at up to 70 children surely too large to provide the tailored care needed?

These problems still need resolution, and the detail of what a secure school will be in practice needs to be hammered out and then tested in reality. However, the most recent round of Prison Inspectorate reports highlight the desperate need to try different models.

Let's be clear: Our YOIs and STCs are not run by bad people. There are only very rare exceptions to this. But for a number of reasons these models are not working. The fact that the Youth Custody Service's own safeguarding action plan has more than 110 recommendations for change tells us something.

Attending a meeting of the Standing Committee for Youth Justice in January, Steve Chalke and Clare Wilson, the project lead for Oasis Restore, made a strong start in convincing the doubters. Of course, everything is theory at the moment. At the heart of their presentation was their open acknowledgement of what is not working in the current YOI and STC models.

As a friend of mine, a prominent campaigner on this subject, cautiously observed "Steve and Clare were great advocates for the abolition of child imprisonment".

It falls to all of us in the justice world to link arms with Oasis Restore and make this new model work. Critical friends have never been more needed.

GIVING CHILDREN A BETTER START IN LIFE

The National Lottery-funded A Better Start programme to boost early child development celebrates its fifth birthday this month. Those involved in the programme highlight its achievements to date



By **Dawn Austwick**, chief executive, The National Lottery Community Fund

The foundations for a happy, healthy life are laid during pregnancy and a child's first few years. This is why The National Lottery

Community Fund set up and funded A Better Start – a 10-year, £215m programme, designed to improve the life chances of babies and young children from pregnancy to four years old. This month, the programme celebrates its fifth birthday and half a decade of National Lottery funding aimed at transforming the lives of thousands of children across England.

Multi-agency partnerships

A Better Start works through five local multi-agency partnerships in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham, and Southend that develop and test new approaches to boosting child development in their most deprived wards. It covers three key areas of child development – social and emotional development; speech, language and communication; and diet and nutrition. Each partnership works closely with statutory services, voluntary and community sector organisations, and, most importantly, local families to devise and implement services the area needs. From Southend's Fathers Reading Every Day scheme to Blackpool's support services for mothers who experienced childhood trauma, no two partnerships are the same, as illustrated by the examples over the next three pages.

So far, more than 23,000 families have engaged with the programme and this has demonstrated that when it comes to boosting child development, parents are best placed to shape solutions. That is why they are involved

in every aspect of A Better Start – sitting on partnership boards, making decisions, delivering and promoting activities, and encouraging other local families who could benefit to get involved.

One such parent is Salma Nawaz, a mum of four, who sits on the Better Start Bradford Partnership Board. She has a range of skills, as well as personal experience of mental health issues, so her insights are invaluable to the partnership. According to Nawaz, her involvement in the scheme is “helping me to find myself” again. Involving parents and carers like Salma as equal partners is critical to the success of A Better Start.

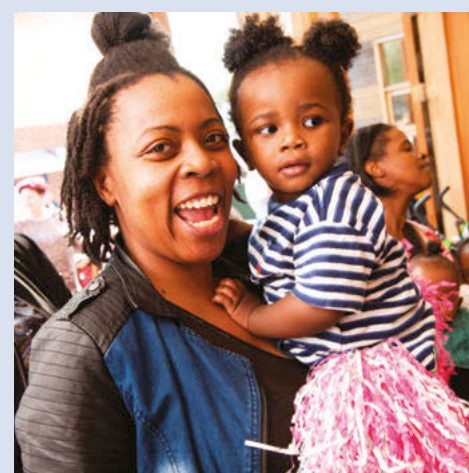
There have been challenges. Some families have engaged more readily than others and the programme has not reached all those it would have liked to have reached. With more than 200 partner organisations involved, referral pathways and communication between services have not always been clear. Finding frontline staff with the skills not just to deliver but also to measure and evaluate services has also been tricky.

Monitoring performance

At a national level, The National Lottery Community Fund is regularly collecting data and monitoring performance to support the development of local services. Meanwhile, the National Children's Bureau leads on gathering and sharing knowledge and learning from A Better Start. Locally, partnerships have commissioned their own evaluations, tailored to what matters to them and their community. Most of the individual services are evidence-based with targets that are monitored quarterly.

The next five years will see the partnerships continue to refine their pathways and services, sharing what works with local authorities and building sustainability into their plans so their knowledge and learning can influence and improve child outcomes for years to come.

FIVE LESSONS FROM A BETTER START



Families shape the design and delivery of services

With more than 800 volunteers involved, 4,000 practitioners trained, and 20,000 children engaged, there are numerous lessons from A Better Start. Five in particular stand out.

- 1** Effective preventative services require not just allocating resources but fostering a culture centred on identifying problems before they occur.
- 2** Better trained, informed, and supported employees and volunteers mean better, more sustainable services for local families.
- 3** Working in partnership is not just about delivering a service together – it is about sharing information and data too.
- 4** Building parents' skills and confidence will help to ensure the legacy of a project – beyond its lifetime.
- 5** Real co-production means ensuring families' voices and ideas – including those of children – genuinely shape how services are designed and delivered.



A Better Start works through multi-agency partnerships, exploring innovative approaches in boosting child development in some of the most deprived communities

LAMBETH AWARD SUPPORTS SETTINGS TO BECOME COMMUNICATION-FRIENDLY

Early years settings in Lambeth are being supported to become “communication-friendly” through an awards scheme.

The Evelina Award is delivered by the Evelina London Speech and Language Therapy Service – part of Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust.

The award existed before the Lambeth Early Action Partnership (Leap) was formed but was mainly used with children’s centres, explains Cathy Johnston, one of the speech and language therapy team leads for early years and community.

Additional funding from Leap has enabled the service to develop and deliver the award for private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector settings.

The award includes an audit to identify how well settings promote early speech, language and communication skills.

It also includes training and coaching for early years practitioners to help them identify

and speech, language and communication needs and improve children’s skills through everyday activities.

“To date the main challenge has been getting our practitioners confident to make referrals,” says Johnston. “Many can identify the children, but actually completing referrals and having those tricky conversations with parents has been a huge part of coaching sessions.”

The award has two stages – a foundation and an enhanced level. Currently, 17 out of 20 PVI settings in the four Leap wards are involved with three planning to progress to the advanced award. The offer has been extended to some statutory and maintained nursery settings.

The scheme, now coming to the end of its second year, has seen a steady increase in referrals from nurseries to speech and language therapy services.

“We weren’t having any referrals from many of the PVI nurseries we’re going into so our



Practitioners get training on speech and language needs

referral rates from those settings has increased significantly,” says Johnston.

Thanks to Leap, the service has also been able to offer three extra weekly drop-in Chattertime sessions run jointly by speech and language therapists and early years workers for children with moderate communication needs and their parents as well as a Baby Chattertime session for children under 18 months old.



A flower festival was just one of a range of family events staged in parks and open spaces across Blackpool

SOUTHEND EARLY SCREENING IS HELPING REDUCE GAPS



Let's Talk groups boost early communication skills

A Better Start Southend is starting to see some exciting early results from investment in services to boost children's early speech, language, and communication, according to director Jeff Banks.

It commissioned Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust to deliver the Let's Talk project in March 2016.

The programme – delivered by highly specialist speech and language therapists – comprises a range of services including early screening, weekly courses, workshops and home visits for families, and training for early years settings.

To date the programme has worked with more than 1,200 children aged from birth to four in A Better Start Southend's six wards.

For children in those wards there is evidence of a "marked closing of the gap" in

speech and language skills at the end of reception compared with those in more affluent areas.

Results for the Early Foundation Stage Profile in 2019 show a 7.7 per cent increase in children achieving a good level of development in speaking to 86.5 per cent and a 6.5 per cent increase in the proportion achieving a good score in listening and attention to 86.4 per cent.

The project also appears to have led to a 25 per cent reduction in inappropriate referrals to specialist speech and language therapy services, which have "almost disappeared", says Banks.

"On the other side we have seen a marked increase in appropriate referrals," he adds.

Where there is a low-level concern about a child's language development families can join a group or activity designed to boost early communication and language skills such as Talking Toddlers for children aged 12 to 18 months.

"It is freeing up significant resources in the system so specialist services can focus on those who need them," says Banks.

The Let's Talk programme has informed other local and national initiatives including the Department for Education-funded First and Foremost project run by the Early Years Alliance in seven other areas.

It has also led to the Talking Transitions scheme in Southend to forge partnerships between early years settings and feeder primary schools.

BLACKPOOL INVESTMENT IN PARKS REAPS REWARDS

A £1.8m investment in parks and open space by Blackpool Better Start has led to a host of positive outcomes, according to Sharon Mather, senior community development manager at the Centre for Early Child Development.

Public consultation revealed families felt disconnected from touristy areas including Blackpool's seven mile-long beach and some of the larger parks and were keen to see facilities on their doorstep improved.

As well as investing in measures to enhance 11 parks, outdoor space at seven children's centres and four open spaces, the project has included the creation of an early years park ranger service delivered by Blackpool Council.

The rangers are qualified to deliver Forest School activities and run events in all seven A Better Start wards designed to get children and families enjoying nature and outdoor play together, including a flower festival.

Between April 2017 and December 2019, more than 3,700 children aged 0 to 3 accesses park ranger activities.

A junior park ranger scheme, jointly funded by the partnership, council and Headstart programme, gives young people the chance to learn gardening skills and get involved in running park-based activities.

This is one of a raft of spin-off projects to come out of the investment, which also include a new volunteering pathway and community group called Park Voice.

"We did not expect our park project to blossom in the way it has," says Mather, who says the project has helped make parks "focal points for our community".

There is evidence the project has led to a drop in antisocial behaviour in parks and surrounding areas and that families are using parks and outdoor spaces more.

"It has changed their behaviour because they didn't engage in park spaces before," says Mather.



Parks have become a focal point for the community



Clover Team midwives provide continuity of care

BRADFORD MIDWIVES GIVE CONSISTENT CARE

Better Start Bradford has invested in a number of schemes around pregnancy including a new midwifery model to ensure continuity of care for women.

“While doing research for our bid we found women in our area often didn’t take up antenatal care, rarely attended antenatal classes and were often late in presenting with their pregnancy,” says Better Start Bradford head of programme Gill Thornton.

The project builds on a three-year personalised midwifery scheme, which saw promising results especially when it came to reducing maternal mental health problems and missed appointments.

It has seen the creation of a new team of midwives – the Clover Team – who work in a small area in Bradford with caseloads of 150 to 180 women.

The idea is each woman has “continuity of carer” – a named midwife who supports them during and after pregnancy and – whenever possible – with the birth itself.

Better Start Bradford is also funding work to share learning from the personalised midwifery and continuity of carer schemes with midwifery teams across the city.

The midwives, who are employed by Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, provide a mixture of clinics and home visits.

The hope is that consistent support and advice will lead to an increase in straightforward births, more mothers starting and continuing to breastfeed and improved maternal mental health.

The partnership is working closely with local maternity services to look at ways of rolling out continuity of carer models.

“Hopefully they will see this model works and can be done within existing resources or by slightly re-designing the system so continuity of carer can be offered – if not across the entire system – then to the vulnerable women who will benefit most,” says Thornton.

CAMPAIGN TO ENCOURAGE FAMILY INTERACTION

There is no shortage of advice for parents and carers on topics from screen time to nutrition. However, this often focuses on what families must do rather than why it is important.

The Big Little Moments campaign, part of the A Better Start programme, aims to do things differently by equipping families with a better understanding of why the early years matter.

The campaign, run across the five A Better Start areas, is designed to boost interactions between children and parents by highlighting everyday activities that help build social, emotional and language skills.

Crucially, it explains in clear terms why these “big little moments” are key to young lives.

The campaign, which was launched last year, is based on evidence of how brain development takes place in babies and very young children and presents this information in a fun format that is easy to understand.

Developed by advertising agency 23Red,



Mascots help the campaign to reach families

it used targeted digital and social media advertising to prompt parents and carers to do 15 basic activities such as sharing stories, singing songs and making time for play.

The campaign has been taken forward by each A Better Start area and their partners using posters, leaflets, colourful mascots and banners on buses. An evaluation is due to be published this summer.

Resources from the campaign can be downloaded for free at

www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

NOTTINGHAM FAMILY MENTORS OFFER VALUED SUPPORT

A family mentor service commissioned by the Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) partnership in Nottingham is having a positive impact.

The project was informed by feedback from parents who said they wanted a “different kind of workforce” to help them, explains SSBC programme director Karla Capstick.

“They wanted people who lived in their community, understood what it was like to raise children and live and work in those areas and some of the challenges they face.”

The service has been running since 2015 and involves paid mentors working with families to deliver the bespoke Small Steps at Home programme – developed by experts at SSBC and covering all three of A Better Start’s key child development outcomes.

It is delivered by trusted local voluntary sector providers who recruit mentors “based around personal qualities and values and lived experience rather than professional qualifications”, explains Capstick.

Mentors undergo a two-day interview process and extensive training. There are just over 70 mentors working in Nottingham’s four A Better Start wards where the service is offered to all families expecting a new baby.

Mentors visit once a week for the first six weeks, moving to fortnightly visits until the child is six months old then monthly visits to



Mentors work with families to deliver the programme

age two. After that the service, which continues until a child is four, generally moves to phone chats.

Evaluation by Nottingham Trent University found families value their relationship with mentors and the consistency of support, and report increased confidence in parenting.

Other early positive results include a drop in obesity rates at reception – with a greater drop in A Better Start wards. Three out of four wards have also seen an increased narrowing of the gap in speech and language scores compared with other areas.

The scheme is also seen as a valuable stepping stone for mentors to progress their careers and embark on professional training.

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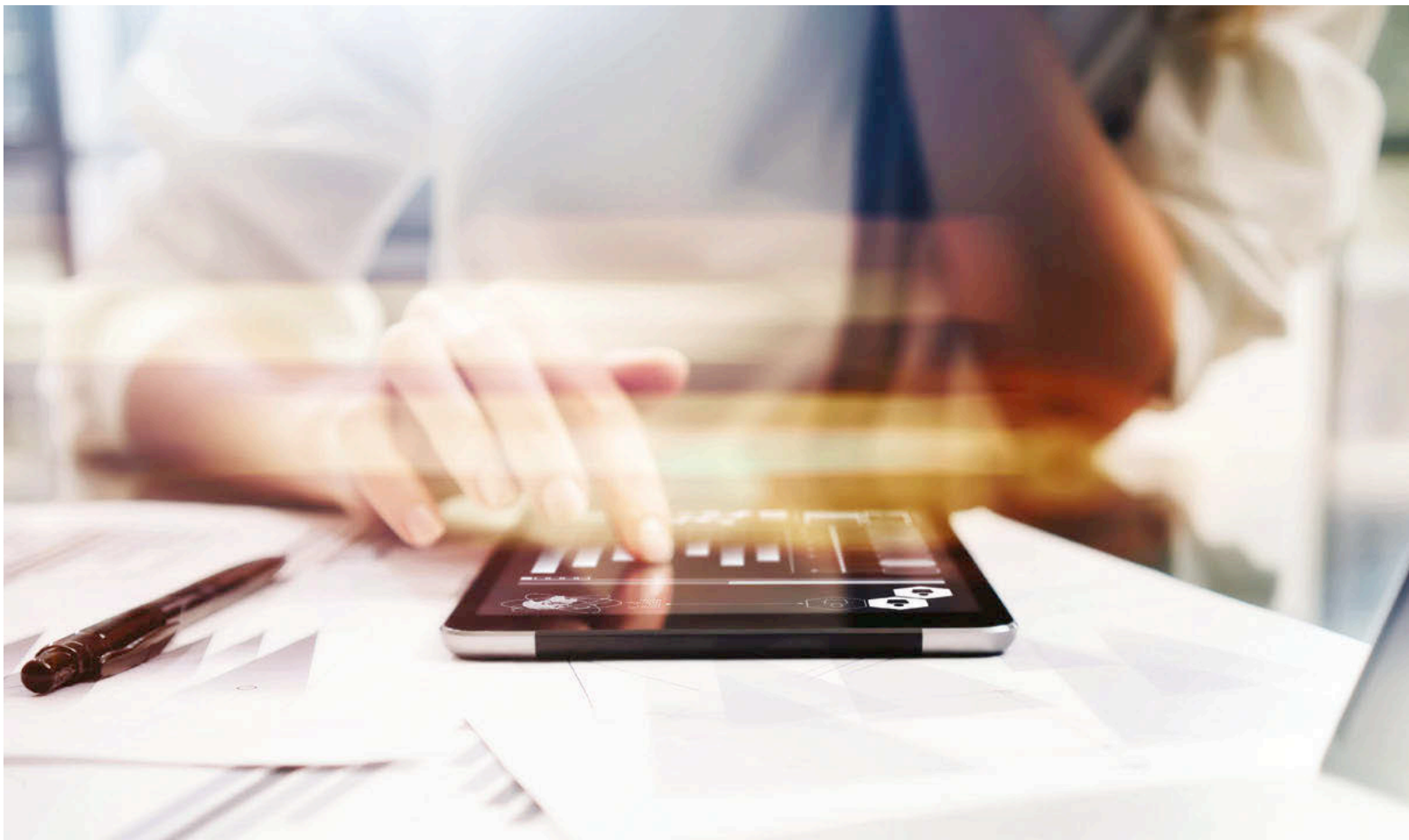
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TECHNOLOGY IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

From virtual reality for practitioners to the use of big data systems to share information between agencies, technology is changing the way children's services intervenes in the lives of vulnerable children and families



SFTO CRACHO/ADOBE STOCK

It is now standard practice for children's services leaders and practitioners to use technology to enhance support for vulnerable children, young people and families.

Whether it be electronic systems to record information and share that with other agencies, software to analyse trends in the use of services and the impact they are having, or mobile applications that enable better communication between worker and young person, technology is increasingly changing the nature of children's services.

It is an integral part of many aspects of children's services provision from safeguarding, information sharing between agencies or using virtual reality headsets for practitioners to experience what life is like for a neglected child.

Despite this, latest research suggests training for children's social workers is failing to prepare them for utilising technology to its best effect, while experts say that policymakers should do more to ensure practitioners have the knowledge and skills to use tech-based solutions to improve the care of vulnerable children.

Meanwhile, research has highlighted ethical concerns around machine learning – now widely used by local authorities to identify children and families at most risk – which could act as a warning for commissioners and leaders to use technology appropriately.

CYP Now's special report on technology in children's services assesses latest research on the use of technology to support vulnerable children and families, a summary of key policy drivers and issues, and three examples of innovative tech-based interventions. »

Policy context

At its best, technology speeds up laborious inputting of information, enabling children's services practitioners to spend more time with their clients, helps commissioners to identify trends so they can prioritise resources, and enable leaders to make informed choices on how services are structured.

However, it is no panacea. When implemented badly, technology can become an additional barrier for staff to overcome, hindering the sharing of information and the development of professional relationships and resulting in children receiving a poorer service, often at great expense to providers.

APPLICATIONS

Research last year by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), set out the different types of digital technology in social work settings:

- Electronic systems – messaging apps, record systems, business software
- Online resources – apps and websites used by workers and service users
- Assistive technologies – communication aids for service users

- Social media – popular social networks such as Facebook and Twitter
- Informatics and data – analysis that helps monitor and improve services
- Hardware – mobile devices and web-enabled laptops
- Online learning – professional e-learning, online courses and webinars.

The Digital Capabilities for Social Workers project looked at how technology-based applications are used across children's and adults social care services, including child protection, workers' all-round digital skills, and foster care services. Examples include:

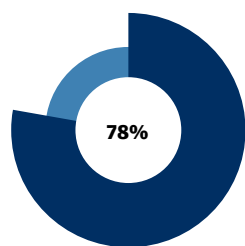
- Action for Children is rolling out the use of Mind Of My Own (Momo) apps across their fostering services. The Momo apps use child-focused language, design, emojis and text to encourage children and young people to share their thoughts from a tablet or phone screen, with their social worker or lead worker. The apps enable children to share information based on structured scenarios such as "Prepare for a meeting" or "About my wellbeing", confidentially, 24-hours-a-day. Statements are sent to a central administrator

who ensures that the allocated social worker reads and follows up on the statement received. Action for Children has found that the apps enable children to share information when and where they feel ready, as well as celebrating successes, while improving communication with social workers, enabling them to respond more rapidly to emerging issues.

- The University of Birmingham has produced resources to develop social workers' and students' understanding of social media in social work practice, and the related ethical issues. A freely-available video on YouTube reports how social workers provided researchers with a rationale for their use of Facebook and analyses the ethics of such practice. The aim of the video is to trigger discussions about the ethical uses of social media in social work practice. It features a fictional team manager who is facing ethical dilemmas around social media use. The university has also produced an app that tries to help the manager make the right decisions to ensure the team's practices are consistent with social work ethics and values. Users are encouraged to reflect on those decisions and consider the potential impact these may have on day-to-day practice.
- East Sussex Council's children's services has developed a range of approaches to improve social workers' confidence, skills and use of digital technology. Led by the principal social worker, the council has developed a digital resource toolkit providing access to advice, guidance and resources for social workers to use. East Sussex has developed its own digital resources including an e-booklet called *How to do a Digital Assessment* (based on work by the South West Grid for Learning Trust), enabling social workers to assess children and families' digital lives and potential risks. One of East Sussex's digital leads used the assessment triangle and mapped out digital needs using the three dimensions of the triangle: child development; family and environment and parenting capacity. East Sussex have called this the digital triangle and it is a key tool in the e-booklet. Social workers now routinely check for online safety concerns as part of their assessment.

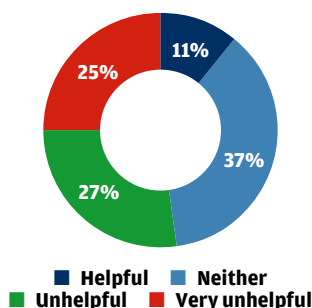
DIGITAL SKILLS OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Respondent-rated tech skills



rated their tech skills
'good' or 'very good'

Did training prepare for tech in practice?



■ Helpful ■ Neither
■ Unhelpful ■ Very unhelpful

What tasks is tech most useful for?

Assessments, care, planning and/or reviews	63%
Safeguarding children or adults	47%
Routine communication with service users	47%
Sharing information between agencies	41%

What training in digital tech will be most useful?

Individual coaching and advice on site	55%
Classroom face to face teaching	55%
Self-teaching	17%

Source: Digital capabilities of social workers project, SCIE and BASW, October 2019. Survey completed by 647 respondents practicing in children and adult services across a range of sectors.

EXPERT VIEW TECH IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES: THE NEXT DECADE



Helen Costa, Antser Group business development director and founder of Cornerstone

The last decade saw a 28 per cent rise in the number of children in care. Against that backdrop, it's more important than ever to look at ways to "do more with less" through innovation and technology.

In the next 10 years, I expect children's services to extend the performative potential of social virtual reality (VR) – i.e. the ability to meet with multiple people within virtual environments – towards remote support and therapy, virtual contact, supporting transitioning from foster care to adoptive homes, video interactive guidance and so on.

These could become commonplace in the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) toolkit; offering a multi-dimensional programme that combines therapeutic practice with therapeutic environments. These rooms will be without boundaries, where virtual "avatars" and sensory spaces can form optimal conditions for greater or more rapid disclosures.

Virtual rooms will also be useful when considering the idea of contact, especially that between children and birth parents. Transmitting contact into VR may shift the

power balance in favour of children, providing safe spaces for contact in potentially damaging circumstances.

Schools

VR is useful in "making real" social constructs, that are otherwise suspended in belief. Therefore, I see valuable application in schools' trauma training, helping teachers grasp social constructs symptomatic of trauma, such as hypervigilance.

For example, immersing teachers in episodes of domestic violence – from an onlooking child's perspective – may provide them with a heightened sense of alertness, and an experience, first-hand, of hypervigilance.

Here, VR enables a different perspective. Hypervigilance – often seen in classrooms – can be approached, and experienced, as symptomatic of trauma, rather than of distraction or naughtiness.

In the coming decade, VR can enrich teachers' understandings of trauma and its symptoms.

Communications

We will see further changes in the way social workers and children in care communicate.

We have seen this with the development of mobile applications, and I believe that the

sector will continue along this trajectory, looking towards digital networks that bridge communications between children and professionals within the care system, particularly outside of core hours.

I wonder how mobile applications might play a role in the future of contextual safeguarding, too. The immediacy of digital communications presents an opportunity for us to monitor contexts that pose risk, generate rapid responses and make place-based interventions with a higher degree of efficacy.

Conclusion

Innovations can add value to children's services but, given the sector's humanist essence, must be used alongside human capacity. It is when these new technologies are incorporated into professionals' toolkits, and deployed both ethically and at the right moment, where we will yield results.

Digital training in the sector is also structurally low, and a cultural barrier will need to be lifted. However, if these solutions can enrich CAMHS, inform trauma training in schools and evolve our approach to safeguarding, I believe that structural change is a natural progression. In the next decade, tech-for-good can enrich the sector, driving improved outcomes for children and families in and around care.

types of scenarios that induce anxiety in young people so they can improve support and coping techniques (see practice example, p38).

VR is also helping dozens of local authorities to better understand the trauma that abuse and neglect can have on children so that practitioners can improve their response and better meet their needs (see Cornerstone Partnership practice example, p36).

Away from the front line of practice, work has been going on to improve the way different systems share information between each other. Often, different systems used by agencies don't link well, resulting in practitioners not having the full picture of a child's circumstances and needs. In one innovative project, two providers have worked together to interface their systems so that education and care practitioners can access each other's information (see Servelec and Cheshire East practice example, p35).

TECH SKILLS

SCIE and BASW's Digital capabilities for Social Workers project undertook a literature review and survey of practitioners to understand their

skill levels. The survey of 647 practitioners working in children's and adults services across councils, the NHS and the voluntary sector found that two thirds rated their digital skills as "good" or "very good". Yet, literature on the subject suggests a more mixed picture of social workers' capabilities (see research evidence).

All stakeholders involved in the project supported greater utilisation of technology in the sector, believing it can assist with better integration of services and work. However, social workers believe that new systems in workplaces should prioritise relationship-based practice and person-centred care over performance management.

"They do not want their role to include data collection for performance management and other organisational objectives," the report states. "Organisations need to collect performance management and other data, however this should not all be included in social workers' tasks."

Despite this positive view of technology and its potential to improve how social workers support children, stakeholders believe the sector

is not utilising the full potential of current technologies because of restrictive local data governance protocols.

In addition, the social work degree training does not address their digital readiness for practice. Skills, ethics, and policy should be taught in qualifying programmes. This is borne out by the survey findings which found that 52 per cent of social workers rated their training "unhelpful" or "very unhelpful" in preparing them for using digital technologies in practice.

Stakeholders said the national policy framework on digitisation in social care is fragmented, and called on government departments with social care responsibility to develop a unified framework with integration a key priority.

"There is a desire within the sector for stakeholders to engage with each other," it states. "Technology providers should understand social work and involve social workers in all aspect of their work."

Social workers surveyed were asked to rate the tasks they use digital technology for most. The most common was for assessments, care,

EXPERT VIEW DIGITAL PATHWAYS IN CARE SERVICES



Tanveer Sian, community manager for the Leaving Well tool, Social Finance

About 11,000 young people leave foster and residential care every year, and many of them face what has been described as a “cliff-edge” of support. This cliff-edge can be compounded by potentially difficult life experiences, which can lead to disproportionately poor life outcomes compared with their peers. Transitioning to adulthood is always difficult but the current system does not always adequately support workers to help those young people leaving care.

The good news is that, as my colleague Meg Brodie discussed live on a webinar last month at the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), we can use digital to help put care leavers at the heart of decisions that are made about their future.

Pathway planning

Our experiences of engaging with young people show that the pathway planning process is something “done to” rather than “with” them. For us, co-production is vital. Young people need to own their own plans so that they can be there, guiding themselves to independence. Also, it appears that personal advisers (PAs) spend a huge amount of time fire-fighting and tackling paperwork. It's important to make pathway planning a dynamic process, to cut down on admin and to let PAs spend time focusing on the needs of the young people they support. And on a broader level, managers and heads of services tend not to have the

right data to understand how to support the young people in their service.

At Social Finance, we've worked with local authorities, young people and other experts to co-develop a digital tool that is all about co-production. It's called Leaving Well. It's a digital pathway planning tool that puts young people leaving care at the heart of their transition to independence.

What we've learned

Embedding a digital tool in social work has been central to achieving the change we care about. We identified three key learnings that are relevant for other organisations looking to embed digital into their teams:

- Developing “best practice” around a tool is crucial: People must be clear on how to get the best out of the tool. Leaving Well has brought together digital expertise with practice expertise from SCIE to enhance the relationship and experience of young people.
- Understanding the diversity of your young people: understanding what “good” engagement looks like for different groups, and the blockers of that, through regular user research.
- Finding frontline champions in the workforce for your tool can really improve wider uptake.

By sharing what we've learned, we hope to broaden the conversation. We believe that bringing new skills and insights together can help transform the care leaving experience to ensure young people – and best practice – are at the core of those services.

planning and reviews; safeguarding children; and sending and receiving routine communications. With this in mind, the report authors recommend that employers should focus training and continuous professional development on these tasks (see graphics).

Technology is also being used to support children's services practitioners in their decision-making. Machine learning is a general approach in computer science that allows algorithms to carry out tasks on the basis of data, without being explicitly and completely pre-programmed by designers, researchers said. This means systems may use data mining to flag up children deemed to be “at risk”, which social workers will then use to base decisions on what levels of intervention are needed.

Machine learning is an approach now widely used by councils, but a recent review by the University of Oxford's Rees Centre and The Alan Turing Institute for What Works for Children's Social Care, called for the approach to be used “cautiously”. The report warns that inaccuracies in machine learning systems could lead to “false negatives” that miss children in need of protection”. If used “without proper ethical

oversight” machine learning risks reinforcing biases, particularly concerning families noted as facing poverty or from deprived areas.

“Low data quality may mean either that risks are missed, or that families are subjected to assessment or interventions that they don't need,” it states.

Researchers have called for a national standard for design and implementation of machine learning system to be rolled-out across the UK. Local authorities should also work to improve data quality and staff understanding of systems through professional development and training, they added.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

There is little government guidance or legislation specifically focused on the use of technology in children's social care, although general policies on the digital economy are being used to shape local practice.

The 2017 Industrial Strategy white paper outlined plans to put the UK at the forefront of artificial intelligence and the use of data and identified the health and care sectors as potential areas of innovation.

ADOBE STOCK



Technology can be used to support personalised care

The 2018 Department of Health and Social Care policy paper *The Future of Healthcare: Our Vision for Digital, Data and Technology in Health and Care* highlighted the “huge potential” of cutting-edge technologies to support preventative, predictive and personalised care.

Meanwhile, the Health and Care Digital Capabilities Framework outlines generic capabilities that support individual professional development. The framework promotes positive attitudes towards change, technology and innovation. However, for social workers, digital capability is now a measure of professional capability as this is included in the Professional Capabilities Framework.

Under the Local Digital Fund, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government funded skills training and infrastructure for local authorities and the third sector resulting in a number of key developments including the Family Context in Children's Services programme. This helped join-up information on a child's family context across social care, education and housing agencies, which was used to help assess safeguarding risk.

This form of contextual safeguarding is likely to be enhanced further by greater use of technology over the coming decade, explains Helen Costa, an expert in children's social care technology (see expert view, p29). She also identifies the wider applications for VR. ■
By Derren Hayes

FURTHER READING

Ethics Review of Machine Learning in Children's Social Care, Alan Turing Institute, January 2020

Digital Capabilities Project, SCIE and BASW, October 2019

Local Digital – Family Context in Children's Services, MHCLG, May 2019

Transforming Social Care Through the Use of Information, LGA, 2016

Building a Digital Ready Workforce Programme, Health Education England

Research evidence



social care
institute for excellence

Author: Deanne Mitchell,
information specialist,
the Social Care Institute
for Excellence (SCIE)

STUDY 1

ICT-Supported Social Work Interventions with Youth: A Critical Review

Chitat Chan, *Journal of Social Work* 18(4), (2018)

This study conducted a systematic review of information and communication technology (ICT) supported social work interventions with young people. This included tailor-made project websites, computer hardware, mobile phones and general internet use.

The review included research published between 2000 and 2014, and on the specific exclusion and inclusion criteria for the review; 13 studies were included in the review, where 54 per cent of them were Level One Evidence, the equivalent to a randomised control trial; 15 per cent were Level Two Evidence (that is, case-control trials without randomisation); and the remaining 31 per cent were Level Three Evidence (case reports).

Findings

The most popular ICT type was tailor-made project websites, for example, Vstreet.com (now closed) for young people deemed at risk; designed to teach life skills and build community. Or the MoodGYM platform, an online cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) programme. Next popular were computer hardware, mobile phones and general internet use. Examples included web-phone intervention where interventions took place for things like changing smoking behaviour or using mobile phones to maintain contact with homeless young people.

Outcomes

There were only three studies which could provide direct evidence indicating that interventions using ICT were more effective than interventions without using ICT. These were:

- A programme teaching cyber-safety (Chi & Frydenberg, 2009)
- A web-phone intervention for changing smoking behaviour (Peng & Schoech, 2013)
- An online counselling programme called MoodGYM (Sethi et al., 2010)

The remaining studies in the review could only provide

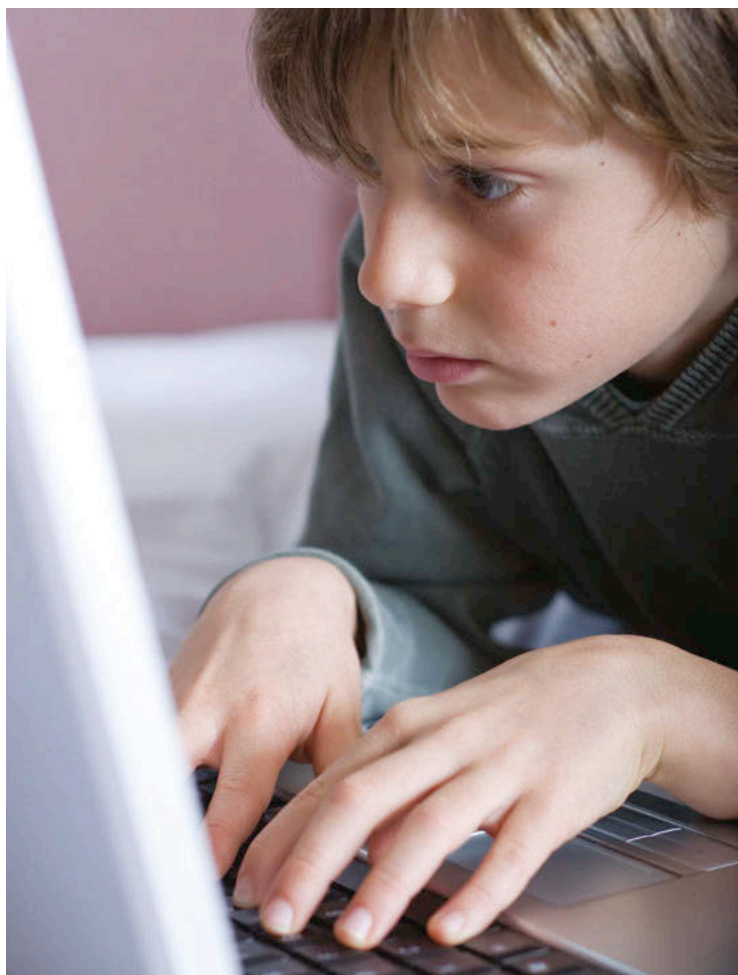
evidence implying that ICT-based interventions might be associated with positive intervention outcomes. For example, Holden et al. (2000, 2002) evaluated a multi-user virtual environment, indicating that children experienced less pain intensity and anxiety in the virtual environment condition.

However, the study did not mention the ways in which essential features of the Starbright World platform are common to, or different from other, multi-user virtual environments. Likewise, in the study about Vstreet.com (Pacifci et al 2005) – a website for at-risk young people designed to teach life skills and build community – was found to be effective in increasing users' knowledge and feelings of peer social support, but the study did

not explain what are the essential features bringing these positive effects.

Implications for practice

- There are very few ICT social work interventions designed for use with young people with an evidence base to show that they are more effective than interventions without using ICT
- While some interventions, such as the MoodGYM platform, provide positive outcomes, we cannot easily determine whether the findings can generally apply to all online CBT platforms or merely apply to the MoodGYM platform
- This review suggests that ICT use in social work is not usually conceptualised as an independent intervention, but is usually bundled with specific ICT products; which can make it difficult to unpick, in evaluations, which aspects of the evaluation have been effective
- Rather than evaluating a specific ICT product that may easily become outdated, research should address relationships between respective ICT capabilities and respective social work processes. For example, instead of solely focusing on social media, research can evaluate a particular ICT function, and use Facebook as an illustration
- This review also reflects a gap between different ICT generations: The ICTs researched in the included studies are not the prevailing ICTs used among young people or frontline youth workers nowadays, such as WhatsApp or Facebook.
- This paper suggests that a proper understanding about the potentials and limits of different types of ICT may be an essential professional competence; thus enabling social work practitioners to make informed choices when working with young "digital natives".



SHOCKY/ADOBE STOCK

Understanding the potentials and limits of ICT could be useful for social workers

STUDY 2

Evaluation of the University of Kent's Consortium Project to Explore How Technology Can Support Young People in Care

Emily Fu et al, Department for Education (2017)

This project, led by the University of Kent, brought together a consortium of technologists, designers and academics to understand how to leverage advances in technology for the benefit of young people in care. The overall aim of the project was to find out how young people in care, who might have experienced traumatic events in their lives, linked their context and experiences with their emotional state and behaviour. It also looked to discover whether the young people could co-design behavioural and support technologies and then integrate them into a service to help improve their lives.

The project included four waves of co-design workshops held with young people, their carers and

social workers, to scope out a new digital service for vulnerable young people. The co-design strand of the project employed design studio Snook's citizen engagement and co-design methodology, which is drawn from the Design Council's "Double Diamond" methodology – in this, two diamonds represent a process of exploring an issue more widely or deeply (divergent thinking) and then taking focused action (convergent thinking).

Findings

Overall, participants interviewed said they thought the process was creative and interesting, and identified several positive impacts of taking part. The co-design process was effective and allowed the views of young people and carers to be captured and incorporated into the development of new technology.

Seven concepts were developed and tested with young people during the co-design process. The two that had the most traction were:

- "Real World". A virtual flat that teaches young people the skills

they need to move into independence

- "Wall of care". An online platform for information to be collated and shared between young people, carers and social workers.

These concepts responded to genuine issues and information gaps which young people identified, and young people could imagine themselves using them. Other concepts had more of a mixed reception, because participants could not see what they offered over and above existing tools and resources; and there was a fear that the tools threatened to replace face-to-face contact with social workers.

Young people also felt that while they might engage initially with the technology, they were likely to stop engaging relatively soon. Carers felt there would need to be incentives for using the technology to keep young people interested and engaged.

What is important to young people?

Here are some other key themes

raised by participants across the co-design workshops:

- Preference for face-to-face support. Young people expressed major concern about inadequate face-to-face contact with their social workers
- Social skills vs. insularity. Carers echoed the view that face-to-face care is important to retain, not only because it facilitates better relationships, but also because it helps build young people's social skills
- Who pays? This point was raised a number of times in the workshops, both by young people and carers, who were quick to ask who would pay for the technology, and smartphones more specifically for app-based concepts; as not all young people had access to these.

Learning in relation to co-design

The research also identifies some useful learning in relation to co-design with young people, which includes:

- Technology can be determined by the outputs of the co-design process, rather than having any pre-conceived problems or issues to address.
- Young people can contribute most meaningfully at the start and end of the process, i.e. in understanding current use of technology.

Implications for practice

- The co-design process followed in this review was effective and allowed the views of young people and carers to be captured and incorporated into the development of new technology.
- To increase young people and carers' sense of input into, and ownership of, product design, make sure they are involved in, or have greater visibility of, some of the design process, such as attending workshops with the development team.
- Any new technology needs to add value over existing tools, and demonstrate a clear case for how it could support them.

Further information:
<https://wearesnook.com/>



The co-design process allowed the views of young people and carers to be incorporated into the development of new technology

STUDY 3

A Review of the Risks Associated with Children and Young People's Social Media Use and the Implications for Social Work Practice

Mark Willoughby, *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health*, 33(2), (2019)

This study reviewed the research literature to understand what the research tells us about the nature of the risks posed to children and young people by their social media use. The review included research published since 2010 and based on the specific exclusion and inclusion criteria for the review. Fifteen studies were included in the analysis.

Findings

Four areas were identified where there is a risk that children and young people can be exposed to harm through their use of social media:

- 1. Cyberbullying and online abuse.** This was a theme identified in seven papers. Despite the research studies being conducted in several different countries – Norway, Singapore and five in America – the widespread prevalence of cyberbullying highlights this as a global issue, reflective of the transnational nature of social media platforms. No studies were found that explored social work practice responding to cyberbullying, suggesting a gap in the research.
- 2. Exposure to negative forms of user-generated content.** EU Kids Online research suggests that 14 per cent of nine to 16 year olds have viewed sexualised images online in the past 12 months; and 15 per cent of 11 to 16 year olds have been recipients of sexual messages or images from peers (Livingstone et al. 2011).
- 3. The converging of offline and online networks.** Several studies observed the convergence of offline and online networks as a developing area of risk for



JELENA LOSKINA/ADOBE STOCK

Studies observed the convergence of offline and online networks as a developing risk

children and young people, with one study suggesting that 59 per cent of nine to 16 year olds have a social networking profile (Livingstone et al., 2011). The behaviours and safeguards of the 'real' world are not always applied in a 'virtual' world where friends can be added at the click of button and information shared

in an instant (UK Council for Child Internet Safety, 2010).

- 4. Developing interpretations of privacy.** Analysis of children's online activities by Livingstone et al. (2011) suggested some evidence of personal privacy on social media being understood, with 43 per cent maintaining privacy settings so that only friends can see their profile; 28

per cent making it partially private so that friends of friends can see it; 26 per cent making their profile visible to anyone; and three per cent unknown.

Other findings

The research also highlighted how the extent of the risk depends upon the developmental stage and social circumstances. The findings suggest that children aged approximately nine to 11 begin exploring the question of what is real or fake; by 11 to 13, what is fun, even if it is transgressive or fake; and by 14 to 16, what is valuable for them in their increasingly complex social and emotional lives (Livingstone, 2014).

The evidence arising from most of the reviewed literature suggests that in general, those with offline vulnerabilities are most at risk of being harmed by their online activity and that as offline and online social networks converge, so do offline and online problems.

Conclusion

This study concludes that social media use is still an under-researched area and the harms caused by social media use are in particular relatively unknown. This study suggests that rigorously evaluated tools are needed for social workers to use in assessing risk arising from social media use to assist safeguarding practice.

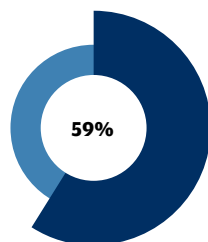
Implications for practice

Social workers can:

- Develop their understanding of different social media platforms in order to identify risks and maximise opportunities.
- Tailor assessment approaches to ensure social media use and its effect on those of different ages and backgrounds is considered
- Consider their role in educating children and their parents about the risks of social media use
- In relation to cyberbullying, the literature suggests that social workers and practitioners need to do things like raise awareness of what cyberbullying is and to help young people to reduce the amount of time on social networking sites.

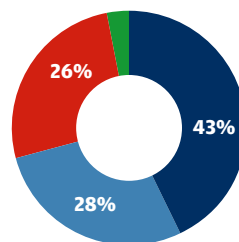
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Use of social networks



of nine- to 16-year-olds have a social network profile

Child privacy settings



■ Private
■ Partially private
■ Public ■ Unknown

Source: Livingstone et al, 2011

STUDY 4

Preliminary Evaluation of the Virtual Reality Pilot Programme: The Cornerstone Partnership

Alma Economics (2019)

This study provides summary findings from a preliminary evaluation of the Cornerstone Partnership's Virtual Reality Programme (CVR), which aimed to improve outcomes for children in care and children who have experienced attachment-related trauma.

About the intervention

The programme uses virtual reality (VR) technology to change how professionals (including social workers), adopters and foster carers understand and interact with vulnerable children. By viewing 360-degree films through virtual reality headsets, the viewer can engage with several scenarios that provide insight into the lives of children who have experienced abuse, neglect and trauma. The programme includes two key elements:

- Trauma awareness training delivered to professionals using VR
- Training delivered to professionals to allow them to administer VR to support adopters and foster carers.

Findings

This preliminary evaluation found that using VR programme achieved a positive impact in the following ways:

- Improved understanding of trauma and children's emotions
- Skills and knowledge to enable quicker decision-making
- The potential to improve placement stability
- Changes in the type of support offered to children and carers
- Help in the recruitment of adopters and foster carers.

Cost savings

Using fairly conservative assumptions, this study estimates CVR can help generate savings in the tune of £70,000 - £190,000 on average for each local authority, solely through improvements in



Virtual reality technology is used to give professionals trauma-awareness training

matching speed and improvements in preventing adoption breakdown. This study focused on two key outcomes that have a clear, measurable financial impact through improved placement stability and quicker matching.

In terms of what worked well in the implementation of the sessions, virtually everyone who completed the training reported they were confident using the VR equipment and knew where to go if they needed help with the equipment.

In terms of learning about how the content of the sessions could be improved, key suggestions included the need to consider whether including additional attachment theories would add value to the training and exploring ways of ensuring that empathy for birth parents is also created through the VR experience.

The findings also suggest that ways to improve training could be to issue a certificate of completion to training participants and to continue to deliver the full course over two days.

Implications for practice

While further work is needed to provide definitive evidence on impact and financial benefits, the preliminary results from this study suggest a very promising picture of CVR's potential to improve outcomes for children in care and children who have experienced attachment-related trauma

- The potential applications of the VR technology are numerous. In this study, local authorities reported using the virtual reality kits beyond the adoption and fostering teams to areas such as:
 - Special guardianship orders and kinship carers – similarly to adoption and fostering, CVR could be used as a tool to examine parenting approaches and behaviour management
 - Teen parents – to provide insight into how environmental factors can affect child development.
 - Administrative and management staff – providing a more realistic look at the issues encountered by frontline staff.

- VR films could add value if embedded in social worker training programmes as they provide strong empathy and insight for students coming into the workforce who may not have been previously exposed to the issues facing children in care.
- This study suggests that when deciding on areas to expand into, issues worth considering include:
 - How can the programme be targeted to achieve the greatest impact (e.g. targeting professions with greater contact with children, key decision-makers)?
 - Where are the key training gaps?
 - What are the current policy and funding priorities?

FURTHER READING

Related resources by SCIE

[How Digital Technology Can Improve Social Work - A Young Person's Perspective](#), Jordan Wosik (2019)

[Digital Capabilities for Social Workers](#), SCIE (2019)

[Digital Social Work Practice and Development](#), East Sussex County Council, Children's Services, SCIE (2019)

[Mind of My Own App](#), Action for Children practice example, SCIE (2019)

Use Social Care Online to keep up to date and search for new research, policy and guidance related to digital technology in children's services. www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk

Suggested references

[Ethics Review of Machine Learning in Children's Social Care](#), D Leslie et al, What Works for Children's Social Care (2020)

[Leaving Well: A Digital Tool to Improve Support for Young People Leaving the Care System](#), Social Finance (2019)

Want more? Health Education England, BASW and SCIE: [Digital Capabilities for Social Workers](#) www.scie.org.uk/social-work/digital-capabilities

Practice examples

System links council's education and social care data

- Cheshire East Council wanted education staff to have access to social care data
- System supplier implemented solution across all 155 local schools
- Visibility of children's wider needs has helped care and education staff make better decisions

ACTION

Interoperability between systems in different aspects of council children's services has been something of a holy grail for years – often different systems don't talk to each other, which can result in duplication of information or, worse, staff not having access to the fullest picture of a young person's needs and circumstances.

Cheshire East Council has implemented a solution that overcomes this obstacle, increasing efficiency in the education and social work teams in the process.

For some time, the council had wanted to improve the interface of its education management system with its 155 local schools, as well as the multiple platforms it was already using to gather data.

In March 2018, the council commissioned Servelec, which already provided education management software to the council, to implement its Synergy product – a pupil-level education database that stores information about every child in the local authority.

Synergy automates information fed by schools and other systems to provide a regular stream of information for the local authority, says Lee Coomer, account manager at Servelec. During a seven-month period, Servelec linked its education



Synergy improves young people's outcomes in ensuring that data is visible to practitioners, supporting their decision making

platform with several other software providers to collate data from all 155 schools. Servelec's Synergy team worked with multiple providers to ensure the council could rationalise its systems and gather data accurately and record and manage all aspects of children's services.

“The need was driven by practitioners being able to find information quickly in as few clicks as possible”

Jacky Forster, director of education and 14-19 skills, Cheshire East Council

It is also relatively easy to integrate Synergy with other third-party systems such as Liquidlogic that are used within the council, Coomer adds. “The most difficult part is matching the children recorded in another software system to Synergy because the children's records are not identical in the systems.”

The implementation of Synergy was driven by Cheshire East Council. “They asked us if we would work with Liquidlogic and we said yes, and they asked the same of them,” says Coomer. “They contractually obliged us to work together and provide what they wanted, which was a link between the systems. They published how they wanted to do it and we both signed up to do that for them. Having two rival providers working together for a customer is something that should be celebrated.”

IMPACT

For staff at Cheshire East Council, there have been a range of benefits of using Synergy. Before it was implemented, children's professionals wanting to access social care records had to log in to multiple systems to find information about a young person. “Our education users needed an easier way to identify involvement with social care teams,” says Jacky Forster, director of education and 14-19 skills at Cheshire East Council.

“The need was driven by practitioners being able to find information quickly in as few clicks as possible. Synergy has helped practitioners quickly review education data within our case management system at Cheshire East Council, using the Synergy tab and helped education users see social care indicators within Synergy.”

Prospective adopters use technology to see

“Linking all of these systems together allows faster decision-making, more accurate forecasting, and it allows us to react quickly to potential situations around exclusions and attainment checkmarks.”

The system has also helped bring pupil data together so that everyone is working on a single record for each child, offering a more complete view of the child's experience and history.

“The link between Synergy and the social care system has proved useful to staff assisting them in identifying where there may be more relevant information that would not normally be available in the education system straight away rather than having to spend time opening, logging in and searching a separate application,” says Forster.

OUTCOMES

She adds that Synergy has helped outcomes for young people in ensuring that data is visible to practitioners supporting their decision making. “Practitioners have the information they need quickly without the need to go trawling through the different systems that Cheshire East Council have in place.”

Other spin-off benefits of using Synergy have included a reduction in administration and time spent writing reports, closer interaction between families, schools and other providers, and a reduction in complexity and overheads that come with onsite data management due to critical data being held in a secure offsite hosting service.

Coomer says this type of partnership was the first of its kind in local authority social care, although other authorities have installed similar systems since, including Norfolk County Council and Kirklees Council, and says it is something that could be replicated elsewhere.

By Dan Parton

■ **Virtual reality technology used to improve understanding of child trauma**

■ **Users experience increased empathy towards children in care**

■ **Programme aims to increase placement stability in care system**

ACTION

Immersive technology that enables abuse and neglect to be experienced through a child's eyes is being used to increase understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment on children in care.

It forms the basis of a virtual reality (VR) programme set up by The Cornerstone Partnership, a social enterprise launched in 2015 to improve the lives of families involved in the care system.

The groundbreaking initiative aims to use VR to accelerate learning and understanding of the needs of foster and adopted children as well as providing therapeutic support to them.

It seeks to do this by generating “emotional understanding” and increasing empathy among the wide range of professionals that come into contact with children in the care system.

The VR content, which allows users to experience life from as early as an unborn child onwards, was developed at a cost of £250,000 to the social enterprise.

The films, which feature “real” scenarios, are watched using VR headsets which completely immerse the viewer in a “360° experience”.

The programme is sold to local authorities in bundles containing 12 headsets and 13 films but the partnership is currently developing 11 more pieces of content for the package.

In one such film, the viewer is allowed to experience abusive and threatening behaviour from one parent to another through the eyes of a two-year-old child.

Other clips involve older children being abused by a parent in the family home or having to comfort a younger sibling after being left alone by their parents.

The project has been designed to create more resilient adult-child relationships – with the aim that more families can be kept together – as well as reducing the number of placement breakdowns.

Cornerstone says it also wants to enhance the assessment process for potential adopters, foster carers and special guardians, by offering opportunities for “authentic responses” to the scenarios shown within the VR content.

“Initially, I thought that it could potentially put people off, especially when it came to adoption,” explains Jo Hines, service manager for placement and resources at Southend Council, one of the first councils to take part in a pilot of the VR project around two years ago.

“But it's had the opposite impact in terms of our prospective adopters as it has made people more determined and more aware of what they are taking on.”

She says using VR in such a way reinforces issues such as pre-birth trauma, which is commonly seen in many of the children in the care system.



The Cornerstone Partnership uses virtual reality to aid in the understanding of the needs of fostered and adopted children

the reality of childhood trauma

"Our prospective adopters are definitely more equipped [having seen the films] and keen to support a child by helping them to retrain their brain with positive experiences which is what we need from adoptive parents," she explains.

As a trailblazer authority for the project, Hines says Southend initially rolled out the project to its senior leaders to assess their emotional responses to the VR content.

"From the very beginning, we realised how powerful it was and we found quite quickly that it had a big impact on them emotionally.

"We felt we then needed to do this responsibly and in the context of our commitment to attachment and trauma training," she says.

A rolling programme has been implemented for the council's social work team to ensure all members of staff are up to date with the objectives of the VR project.

"From the feedback I've seen quite consistently for social workers, the training provides a pause for them and reminds them why they are in this job.

"The reality of working with families that are impacted by trauma is that you can become quite desensitised because you've got to protect yourself emotionally," says Hines.

She says the "power" of the VR content lies in its ability to remind all professionals working with looked-after children that they are the central focus of their work.

Hines says the council has delivered VR training not just to social workers but also educational psychologists, virtual school leaders and mental health workers.

"We've also shared it with our guardians within the court service as well as our legal representatives.

"They read all this paperwork about children time and again but to actually be able to put themselves in that position is very powerful," she says.

Hines believes the VR project



CORNERSTONE PARTNERSHIP

VR headsets give professionals an immersive, first-hand insight into the lives of children who experience abuse or neglect

could prove hugely beneficial in helping schools to understand challenging behaviour among its pupils with adverse childhood experiences.

"I'm very clear that a lot of our behavioural approaches not just in schools but in society – such as reward and punishment – just don't work with children that are impacted by trauma.

"They read all this paperwork about children but to be able to put themselves in that position is very powerful"

Jo Hines, service manager for placement and resources, Southend Council

"The VR content is very useful in helping people to think about it differently," she explains.

The council helped one school in Southend to undertake training for its 140 staff over a two-day period, including everyone from teachers to lunchtime assistants, to ensure a whole school approach was achieved.

"No matter whom I've shown the VR content to, the same response is that everyone should see this. Once you get the headset on someone, they become very good advocates for the project," says Hines.

IMPACT

Southend is now one of around 50 English local authorities that have signed up to use the VR training with their staff.

Hines says measuring the impact of the project is complicated by the different factors involved.

"What we've definitely

measured is that we've asked people what their understanding is of various issues such as trauma at the start.

"We've then asked them the same sort of questions at the end and their levels of empathy and insight have increased."

She says using VR in "isolation" is not necessarily the right approach but it serves as a "great tool" to support work done with looked-after children.

In terms of placement stability, she says VR has been successfully used as part of an intervention for foster carers or adoptive families that have reached a crisis point.

"It helps to remind them what's behind that child's behaviour," she says.

"If we can increase their empathy, they are more likely to feel it's not personally directed at them. So it's very useful to increase the stability of placements for looked-after children."

By Nina Jacobs



Tech solutions help young people overcome anxieties

- The Children's Society is using virtual reality with practitioners and young people
- Tool to help reduce mild anxiety by encouraging familiarity with scenarios
- Mental health pilot completed and care-based pilots ongoing, with plans for wider application

ACTION

Virtual Reality (VR) is not in itself a therapy, explains Kirsten Naudé, director of new ventures at The Children's Society, but a "useful tool in the practitioners' toolbox".

The charity is conducting research into how the technology could reduce mild anxiety in young people, when facing challenges such as in school or in care.

Naudé believes that by offering an almost real world experience, VR can "help practitioners to engage well with young people and build positive relationships".

"VR can be emotive, immersive, fun and as such offer an alternative engagement tool for discussing and helping to deal with difficult topics," she says.

The charity knew from practitioners at its Birmingham mental health drop-in service Pause, that communicating about anxiety is a big challenge for young people, and this can delay them receiving the right support.

The team discovered that VR, via exposure therapy, had been helping adults with post-traumatic stress disorder, and took this as a starting point for their young people's model.

Writing for a blog on the project, Ellen Fruijtier, a design researcher with the charity, explains that it aimed to use VR to help young people from Pause practice coping techniques for "real life scenarios" many struggle with, "from the safety of the drop-in environment and with a Pause practitioner present to guide them".

Designers worked with practitioners to identify the



Exposure therapy can help young people to practice coping strategies for stressful school scenarios such as taking exams

challenges young people face and the coping techniques used.

More than 100 young service users were polled, suggesting that school environments were the most anxiety-inducing for them.

Co-design sessions with young people dug deeper to find key examples, such as being asked to read out loud in class, taking an exam under time pressure, and passing intimidating peers in corridors.

This led to a collaboration with VR specialists The Fred Company, which included filming the scenarios in 360° at a school.

Practitioners were trained to use the VR headsets and a three-month pilot followed in 2018, to

test effectiveness with the staff and young people.

Two further pilots were then developed, that are running until May this year, which take on board the learning from the first.

One of them, again based at Pause, focuses on making VR accessible for young people with learning difficulties.

Fruijtier says: "We are starting to explore how VR can be used for mood regulation – helping young people with signs of ADHD stay calm using a meditative app, or helping young people that feel low feel more positive by doing something fun and active."

The charity has also been working with Salford City Council and the area's clinical commissioning group, to understand how the technology might help children in care.

The project has been "exploring how VR can be used for them to get a 'peek' into life" there, to make young people less anxious when they move there", she adds.

Staff and young people at Salford semi-independent living centre Foundations House were at the heart of the 360 degree filming, and are featured introducing would-be users to the facilities.

IMPACT

Salford's pilot has so far produced some positive anecdotes, with potential in future for using VR for quite detailed familiarisation.

"Staff at the children's home always do their best to provide a good-quality service to young people, however the young person did not understand some basic things, like where you do your laundry," explains Fruijtier.

"Small things like this can feel confusing and make an already stressful transition a little harder.

"We realised that in addition to seeing the house beforehand, it would be nice to make sure all young people access the basic information they need to make the most of their time there to prepare for the transition to independence."

Fruijtier also highlights the scope for using existing VR content in other settings, as an alternative to creating original material.

"A young person who previously wasn't able to sit still and talk to us for more than two minutes because of his ADHD was able to talk to us for 30 minutes after doing some fun activities in VR," she says.

It helped him to channel his excitement and then relax using a mindfulness app.

By Joanne Parkes

"VR can be emotive, immersive and fun, offering an alternative engagement tool for discussing difficult topics"

Kirsten Naudé, director of new ventures, The Children's Society



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Behaviour in the classroom

The government has unveiled plans to tackle unruly behaviour in schools. Ofsted's Daniel Muijs explains to *Jo Stephenson* that a consistent approach and good-quality training are key to a good inspection outcome

Behaviour in schools continues to be a key concern for teachers and is an issue the government has pledged to tackle.

Earlier this year, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced a new programme to improve discipline which will see schools that are doing well work alongside those struggling to tackle poor behaviour (see box).

"Pupils learn best in an environment where there are no excuses for bad behaviour and high expectations are set for all pupils," said Williamson. "Poor discipline disrupts lessons, holds children back and has a profound effect on teachers."

However, concerns have been raised by some in the children's sector who fear a tougher stance on discipline will inevitably lead to more exclusions of vulnerable children.

Through its routine inspection of schools and inspection of initial teacher training, Ofsted is at the forefront of the debate on behaviour management and recently published new research.

Low-level disruption

This looked at progress made since its 2014 *Below the Radar* report on low-level disruption in schools and included analysis of school behaviour policies, interviews with head teachers and pastoral leads and visits to schools, including four primaries, 14 secondaries, two pupil referral units and two special schools.

One key message from the new research was the importance of a consistent approach to managing behaviour for both children and teachers, explains Daniel Muijs, Ofsted's deputy director for research and evaluation.

"What's really important is that it is supported by leadership so when teachers apply the school's behaviour policies the leaders support them in doing that," he says.

"Those kind of consistent approaches need to be underpinned by a shared ethos and values so it is not just about policies and doing things but also about what 'we' – as a school – believe in, the values we promote and the way we feel we should interact with children and young people."

Another key message was the need to explicitly teach children what good behaviour looks like.

"You can't just assume pupils coming into a school know what good behaviour is and that if you just tell them what the rules are then that is going to work," says Muijs.

Need for consistency

There had been some positive developments since the 2014 research including greater understanding of the need for consistency and "whole-school" approaches to behaviour management, he explains.

"What we didn't find is there was one particular strategy or form of behaviour management that is definitively more effective than others," he adds.

One thing that is clear is the role of head teachers and school leaders is central in shaping and driving a school's approach and ensuring school staff have the right training and professional development because "staff training really matters", says Muijs.

It is important that initial training prepares teachers for the day-to-day challenges of working in schools. Behaviour management is a key part of that, says Muijs, and something inspectors will look at when visiting training providers and assessing them against a new Initial Teacher Education Framework, out for consultation until 3 April.

Ofsted's recent research on the initial

teacher training curriculum found trainees were generally "pretty positive" about the training on behaviour management they received but that "does not mean the job is done, by any means".

This is why continuing professional development tailored to the context of individual schools is vital.

Ofsted's new inspection framework for schools – launched in September last year – introduced a separate judgment for behaviour and attitudes – an acknowledgement of the importance of behaviour management for both pupils' learning and staff wellbeing.

"In the framework we have made a number of statements about what we're looking for," says Muijs. "Things like making sure that pupils' attitudes to education are positive, that they have high attendance and are punctual, that the school creates a positive environment and bullying and discrimination are dealt with."

"We are looking at this in a slightly different way from previously in the sense that we have asked inspectors to focus very much on what the school is actually doing and how this is being implemented."

When it comes to children with complex needs, Ofsted's research found schools were making reasonable adjustments.

"It is important that schools make the necessary adjustments to be able to include a broad range of pupils and also those with

DfE UNVEILS 'BEHAVIOUR HUBS' PLANS

The government's new £10m "behaviour hubs" programme was among key pledges on education in the Conservative election manifesto.

More details were announced at the end of February this year including the creation of a team of experts to oversee the programme, led by Department for Education behaviour adviser Tom Bennett.

The idea is that schools and multi-academy trusts (MATs) with an excellent track record on behaviour will support those that are struggling.

The programme aims to recruit up to 20 lead schools and two to three MATs in the first round with plans to support at least 500 schools over the three-year programme.

The first wave of lead schools will be matched up with partner schools and begin work in September.

Support through the programme is open to schools judged "requires improvement" by Ofsted and may include training, mentoring, advice and support to develop and implement an action plan.



MONKEY BUSINESS / ADOBE STOCK

Ofsted expects school behaviour policies to have due consideration for the needs of pupils with complex needs

complex needs who may find traditional behaviour management approaches difficult,” says Muijs.

“In the research we found schools did make those adjustments as appropriate and there was flexibility where required.”

He says Ofsted is acutely aware of concerns about the greater exclusion of SEND pupils.

“We do not hold the view that exclusions should never be part of a school’s repertoire but they should be a last resort and very carefully considered and we would expect due consideration to be made for the needs of individual pupils,” he says.

Off-rolling

The inspectorate has made it clear that the practice of “off-rolling” – where schools attempt to move challenging pupils in a bid to improve their league table position – is “unacceptable”.

Where pre-inspection data flags up “abnormal amounts of pupil movement” then inspectors will want to discuss that to “find out what lies beneath”, he explains. “We have a number of occasions now where inspection judgments have been significantly affected

by what we did or did not find around those kind of off-rolling behaviours,” Muijs adds.

The regulator’s work with schools ties in with other work including joint area inspections of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services.

“We have found that at times it can be challenging for local authorities, schools, clinical commissioning groups and other providers to work together in the most effective way and that is another area we’re looking into as we review the findings from our local area SEND inspections and further research we’re doing in that area,” says Muijs.

In a bid to identify what really works when it comes to managing behaviour in schools Ofsted is embarking on a second phase of research that will take place this academic year with a report due this autumn.

This will include looking at schools that have successfully turned around behaviour problems. “We want to do that in a range of different contexts because we can’t just assume what works in Sunderland, for example, will work equally well in Winchester,” says Muijs. “We also want to use what we find to inform our inspection methodology.”

INSPECTIONS SHORTS



SCHOOLS Schools have been given an extra year by Ofsted to work on plans for their curriculum. The move follows the introduction of a new education inspection framework in September with a new focus on the quality of the curriculum. Ofsted said it had decided to extend a transition period from one to two academic years up to July 2021 after listening to concerns from school leaders and head teachers who said they needed more time to hone their plans.



SOCIAL CARE Providing visible leadership and having high ambitions for children were among key factors identified by children’s home managers as part of research on what makes successful residential care. Ofsted interviewed eight managers and responsible individuals at children’s homes consistently judged “good” or “outstanding”. Other keys to success flagged up by interviewees included a strong sense of ownership of the home’s “statement of purpose” by the manager and staff, thorough admissions processes involving the manager, and good support, supervision and training for staff.



EARLY YEARS Ofsted has published new guidance for early years and childcare settings on what happens to those judged “inadequate” or found not to be meeting registration requirements. It makes it clear settings could face enforcement action if they do not address concerns raised by inspectors. The guidance also emphasises the need to keep parents informed at all stages and provide copies of inspection reports.



YOUTH JUSTICE A troubled young offender institution is to receive intensive support as part of a new government prison improvement programme for “challenging” secure settings. Feltham A, which houses 15- to 18-year-olds, will join five adult prisons on the Prison Performance Support Programme, which replaces special measures status. Prisons minister Lucy Frazer said the programme would offer a “significant package” of tailored support including additional staff and training.



SCHOOLS Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) are “particularly negatively affected” by ongoing financial pressures in schools, a report by Ofsted has found. Research by the inspectorate found 80 per cent of primary school head teachers and 72 per cent of secondary school head teachers who responded to a survey said changes to SEND provision had been made due to financial pressure. Of these, 41 per cent of primary heads and 27 per cent of secondary heads said changes were “major”.

LEGAL UPDATE

Separation under interim care orders

Case highlights need to balance welfare considerations, says *Rosalyn Akar Grams*, head of legal practice at Coram Children's Legal Centre

In a significant decision, dismissing an appeal against the return of a baby to her mother, the Court of Appeal emphasises that separation under an interim care order will only be justified where it is both necessary and proportionate and gives considerable deference to the “most anxious” decision making of the lower courts.

The case concerns a baby, Rosie's* placement with her mother in a residential unit following an interim care order. Liverpool City Council began planning for Rosie's care before her birth because of her mother's “longstanding drug addiction, her chaotic lifestyle and a potentially abusive relationship” with Rosie's father. Her two older children were no longer in her care. Rosie experienced drug withdrawal symptoms for the first four weeks of her life as a result of her mother's use of hard drugs.

At one week, mother and baby were placed in a residential unit offering high levels of support and supervision. While there, Rosie's mother remained abstinent from drugs, showed good capability in most practical tasks and a very warm relationship was observed with Rosie.

However, a resistance to advice and an inconsistent approach to safety resulted in Rosie's mother receiving a formal warning. On 13 January 2020, in the presence of the family support worker, Rosie's mother fell out of her wheelchair while holding Rosie, almost landing on Rosie. Neither Rosie nor her mother were injured but the incident heightened concerns. As a result of an urgent application from the local authority, Rosie was placed in foster care.

Rosie's mother applied for her return and following a two-day hearing, HHJ Sharpe found on 31 January 2020: “The test is whether the child's safety is at risk and, if so, any removal should be proportionate to the actual risks faced and in the knowledge of alternative arrangements which would not require separation.”

The judge concluded the fall was “a pure accident” and guidance around using a sling while moving around had been inconsistent and usage would not have removed all risk. Moreover, the support worker was present and had not intervened and the risks did not

outweigh the benefit of the burgeoning positive attachment. Rosie and her mother were placed in an alternative residential unit.

The local authority, supported by the guardian, pursued an appeal to the Court of Appeal on the grounds that (i) the judge's conclusion that there was not a likely or imminent risk of serious harm was “perverse” as this was not an isolated incident and in the view of the guardian demonstrated the mother had not learned from her mistakes and (ii) the alternative residential unit did not provide adequate safeguards. Taking a familiar approach, the Court of Appeal was cautious to interfere with the decision of the lower courts, which had heard all the evidence and carefully balanced relevant factors in the child's welfare. It noted “decisions about the removal of a baby from parents are among the most anxious decisions taken by the family court, indeed any court”.

This judgment underlines the delicate balancing exercise that local authorities face when considering interim separation and stands as a reminder of the legal test as set out in *Re C (A Child)* [2019] EWCA Civ 1998 which noted:

- An interim order is inevitably made at a stage when evidence is incomplete and should only be made to regulate matters that cannot wait until the final hearing;
- Removal of a child from a parent is an interference with their right to family life under Article 8 of the ECHR which is compounded where a baby is involved because of the impact on the development of the parent-child bond;
- Separation therefore must be necessary and proportionate and the lower (“reasonable grounds”) threshold in such cases is not an invitation to make an order that does not satisfy these exacting criteria;
- Immediate separation should only be sanctioned where the child's physical safety or psychological or emotional welfare demands;
- The local authority must inform the court of all available resources (and alternatives) that might remove the need for separation.

*Name changed

Legal news in brief

UNCRC to be incorporated into Scots Law

The Scottish government has confirmed that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will be fully incorporated into Scots law by next year. A Bill will be laid before Parliament next year and will allow for incorporation of the provisions of the Convention currently beyond the powers of the Scottish Parliament, should these powers change in the future. Scotland's children's commissioner, Bruce Adamson, said the move would open up the opportunity for children to legally challenge the authorities directly if their rights are not met.

Enhanced Domestic Abuse Bill

The new bill, due to go before parliament, includes fresh measures such as requiring tier one local authorities (county councils and unitary authorities) in England to provide support and ensure safe accommodation for victims and their children. The government has appointed Nicole Jacobs to be the designate domestic abuse commissioner to consider what support the government can provide for children who have been affected by domestic abuse. Campaigners welcomed the improved access to refuges but expressed concern that the legislation did not go far enough to protect children who remain in the family home.

Cafcass data opened to researchers

Cafcass, a national support service representing children in family court cases, has transferred its case file data to the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank and the fully anonymised data is now available for researchers to access. The initiative, hailed by former family division president Sir James Munby as an “astonishing achievement”, will help gain a greater understanding of family justice issues and the diverse needs of children and families in family court proceedings.

School Admissions for Children Adopted from Overseas Bill

A private member's bill to make provision for children adopted from overseas to receive the same priority for admission to maintained schools as children looked after or previously looked after by a local authority in England has had its first reading in the House of Lords. The bill, sponsored by Lord Triesman, refers to children who have been legally adopted by UK citizens and are currently residing in the United Kingdom. A second reading in the House of Lords is due to be announced.

School admissions framework

The current primary school admissions process continues to lead to poorer outcomes for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, says *Richard Oldershaw* of the Child Law Advice Service

Parents and carers are due to find out if their child has been offered a place at their first preference primary school on 16 April 2020 (“national offer day” for primary school places in England). While parents and carers do have the right to express a preference for a particular school in the application process, there is no guarantee of a place being offered at their preferred school or schools.

The Department for Education figures show that in 2019 at primary level, 90.6 per cent of applicants received an offer of their first choice school and 97.5 per cent received an offer of one of their top three preferences. All children have the right to an education that is suitable for their age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that they may have. However, there are concerns that the current school admissions framework does not support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in society. While the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has narrowed by at least 9.5 per cent since 2011, the current admissions process continues to lead to poorer outcomes for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Oversubscription criteria

If a school is oversubscribed, the school will apply their oversubscription criteria to prioritise applications and determine the order in which places are allocated. Schools do have a certain amount of discretion in deciding how their oversubscription criteria is formulated. For example, faith schools can use faith-based oversubscription criteria to determine their allocation of places whereas designated grammar schools can give priority to students with high academic ability. However, with the exception of designated grammar schools and independent schools, highest priority must be given to looked-after children and previously looked-after children in accordance with paragraph 1.7 of the school admissions code.

Looked-after children and previously looked-after children are regarded as two of the most vulnerable groups of children in society. As such, it is critical that a school place is available that can meet the individual child’s needs. The Children Act 1989 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review guidance published by the DfE highlights the importance of education to these groups: “Education, like health, is closely linked to quality of life in adulthood. There is a large



GILBERT GULBEN/ADOBE STOCK

Places must meet the needs of looked-after children

body of evidence about the relationship between education and life chances which has informed the current strong policy focus on the education of looked-after children.

“Children looked after by a local authority suffer from a number of interlocking educational disadvantages. Some are ‘external’ such as the experience of frequently disrupted schooling and the lack of opportunities to acquire basic skills. Others are pathological, such as low self-esteem.”

POINTS FOR PRACTICE

- Schools must set out in their arrangements the criteria against which places will be allocated at the school when there are more applications than places.
- Highest priority must be given, unless otherwise provided in this code, to looked-after children and all previously looked-after children.
- Schools must ensure that their admission arrangements do not disadvantage unfairly, either directly or indirectly, a child from a particular social or racial group, or a child with a disability or special educational needs.
- Parents of “summer born” children can apply to defer their child’s entry to school until the September following their fifth birthday and request that they are admitted outside of their normal age group – to reception rather than year 1.

There is statutory guidance published by the DfE that focuses specifically on the duties that local authorities have to these children in the context of education, titled Promoting the Education of Looked-after Children and Previously Looked-after Children.

The school admissions code does provide the Secretary of State with the power to direct a school to admit a looked-after child, even when a school is full. However, this is used sparingly to the detriment of looked-after children.

A recent private member’s bill, sponsored by Lord Triesman, aims to give children adopted from overseas the same priority as looked-after children and previously looked-after children for admission into maintained schools.

Framework gap

There is also a notable gap in the admissions framework for those children who are not looked-after or previously looked-after, but where there is some form of children’s services involvement – children who are on a child in need plan or a child protection plan, for example. Research conducted by the DfE in 2019 found that children who had been in contact with a social worker at any time since year 5 achieved on average 20 grades lower at GCSE than their peers, meaning they get two grades lower in each of 10 GCSEs.

Another group of vulnerable children are those with exceptional medical or social needs. Most, but not all, schools include this as part of their oversubscription criteria. Schools that use this criterion must set out in their arrangements how they will define this need and give clear details about what supporting evidence will be required (e.g. a letter from a doctor or social worker) and then make consistent decisions based on the evidence provided. Schools tend to apply this particular rule stringently and the school admissions code is fairly vague in outlining how this rule should be applied.

In June 2019, the then Education Secretary Damian Hinds announced that the school admissions code would be changed in order to support the most disadvantaged children. However, no concrete changes to the school admissions framework have been made since this announcement. It is clear that a review does need to be conducted, even more so in light of recent concerns that there are a lack of school places and school places not being commissioned in the areas which need them most.

RESEARCH

Report: Impact Study on Early Education Use and Child Outcomes Up to Age Five Years

Authors Edward Melhuish and Julian Gardiner

Published by Department for Education, February 2020

SUMMARY

The Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) is conducted by a consortium including the National Centre for Social Research, the University of Oxford, Action for Children and Frontier Economics. This report looks at links between children's development in the first two years of school and the age they started early education and types of provision used.

The researchers used data on 3,186 children and their families, collected when children were aged two, three, four and five years old. Of these children, 3,149 had attended formal group early education and childcare, such as nursery, 419 had been looked after by a childminder and 1,686 had experienced informal childcare, such as being looked after by a relative or nanny.

The results showed children who spent more time in formal group childcare, such as nurseries, were more likely to experience a number of poor outcomes during year 1 at school. They displayed more "externalising behaviour" such as aggression, more "internalising behaviour" like anxiety, and less "prosocial behaviour" – positive behaviour that benefits others. They also showed less behavioural self-regulation and less emotional self-regulation. Children who spent more hours in informal childcare were more likely to show small benefits in verbal ability in year 1.

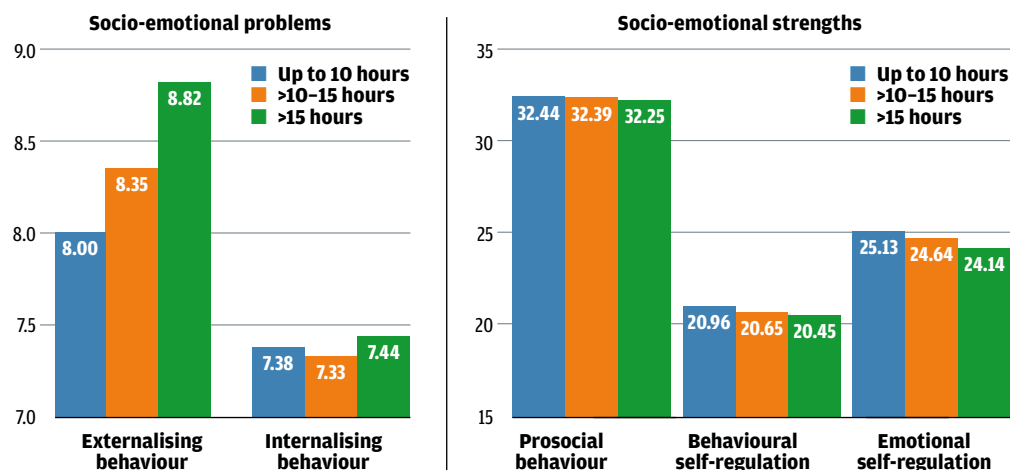
For children from the most disadvantaged families, spending more hours per week with a childminder was associated with poorer Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) scores in reception. However, for children from moderately disadvantaged families, spending more hours with a childminder was associated with better scores. The researchers suggest the most disadvantaged families may be more likely to use poorer quality childminder care.

For children from the least disadvantaged families, the greatest benefits were associated with an early start in formal childcare combined with low to medium use. These children had better numeracy, better sociability and better prosocial behaviour. Children who started childcare between 25 and 36 months and attended for more than 20 hours a week had poorer outcomes for externalising behaviour.

For children from the most disadvantaged

IMPACT OF NURSERY CARE ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Average scores according to how many hours per week of group childcare children receive



Source: Department for Education

families, an early start in formal childcare aged two or younger and high use at more than 20 hours per week had benefits for EYFS outcomes and small benefits for verbal ability. However, a pattern of early start and high use was also associated with poorer outcomes for externalising behaviour and emotional self-regulation. Children who started childcare between 25 and 36 months and attended for more than 20 hours a week showed small benefits in verbal ability, but negative effects on externalising behaviour and emotional self-regulation.

Children who spent on average 15 hours a week in formal group childcare and spent some time with a childminder tended to have better verbal ability in year 1. Children who spent more than 15 hours a week at nursery and did not use a childminder had higher non-verbal ability in year 1 but poorer socio-emotional outcomes and a poorer total EYFS score. Children who spent more than 15 hours a week in nursery and also spent some time with a childminder showed higher verbal ability during year 1 and poorer outcomes for externalising behaviour and emotional self-regulation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The study authors say their results indicate possible benefits of an early start in formal

childhood education and care, especially for more disadvantaged children. However, there are also potential disadvantages for high use of formal early education and care. They say the addition of some individual care from childminders, friends and relatives might be able to mitigate some of the negative socio-emotional outcomes that children may otherwise experience from high use of formal group care. The authors suggest a greater level of one-to-one interaction may be helpful in building children's emotional resilience, which could be significant for early years policy going forward if backed by further research.

FURTHER READING

Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project, Kathy Sylva and others, Department for Education, March 2012

Study of Early Education and Development (SEED), Edward Melhuish and Julian Gardiner, Department for Education, September 2018

Early Childcare Type Predicts Children's Emotional and Behavioural Trajectories into Middle Childhood, Ramchandrar Gomajee and others, *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, October 2018

FUNDING FOCUS

Foyle Foundation

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Foyle Foundation. Last year, the foundation, registered as a charity in July 2000 to implement the terms of the will of the late Christina Foyle, distributed around £9m in grants. Beneficiaries include schools, youth groups and children's charities.

Foyle was the daughter of William Foyle who co-founded the family owned bookshop Foyles in London's Charing Cross Road, which she continued to manage after her father's death.

There are three grant programmes, with a maximum funding of £500,000 available for projects that support young people through arts and learning, with a particular emphasis on expanding access to this.

What are the grants and how much is available?

The main grants scheme is for UK-based organisations with an annual turnover of £150,000 or more and whose main purpose is for arts and learning.

Main grant scheme applicants can apply for between £10,000 and £500,000, although the majority of grants range from £10,000 to £50,000, unless for large capital applications.

Small grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 are available for charities working at grass-roots and community level. They do not need to be focused on arts and learning and can apply for support for a wide range of activities.

A third grant scheme supports school libraries specifically. Grants should be used within two years.

What projects are funded through main grants?

THE ARTS

The foundation seeks bids that "make a strong artistic case" for support in either the performing or



visual arts. This includes projects aimed at helping to make the arts more accessible by developing new audiences, supporting tours, festivals and arts educational projects; encouraging new work and supporting young and emerging artists; and building projects that improve or re-equip existing arts venues. In 2018, it made 121 arts grants totalling £3.8m.

LEARNING

It is keen to support projects that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and learning and which have a long-term strategic impact. Key areas for support are libraries, museums and archives; special educational needs; and projects and activities that increase access and diversity. Citizenship, esteem-building, training, skills acquisition to aid employment, independent living, early learning projects or playgroups are not generally considered. In 2018, it made 69 learning-related grants totalling £3.9m.

SCHOOLS

Dedicated schools and colleges catering for those with special educational needs can bid for funding for educational projects. State-funded mainstream schools can occasionally receive main grants for other projects with direct educational/arts benefits – but they must demonstrate why their project cannot be funded from statutory or other funding. There were 196 schools grants worth £837,800 made in 2018.

What is funded through small grants?

The foundation says that competition for small grant funding is intense – last year it received 581 applications and made 219 grants totalling £877,690.

The one-year grants can cover core costs, equipment, capital or project funding for charities that can show that such a grant will make a significant difference to their work. "If you cannot demonstrate this, your application will be declined," the guidance states. "Demonstrating ongoing sustainability is also important, particularly if you have recently lost local authority or other regular funding," it adds.

When can grants be applied for?

Applications are accepted all year round, there are no deadlines for submission. Except for large capital projects, it may take up to four months, occasionally longer, to receive a decision from the trustees, so apply well in advance.

For capital projects seeking more than £75,000 the foundation will only consider these twice a year in the spring and autumn.

It could be six months or more before decisions on bids are made.

If an application is declined, applicants are eligible to reapply 12 months after the previous request.

Where a grant of £50,000 or less has been awarded, the charity is eligible to reapply to the foundation 12 months after the approval date.

Where a grant of over £50,000 per annum has been awarded, the foundation will not normally accept further applications from the same charity within three years.

More from: www.foylefoundation.org.uk/how-to-apply/

Funding roundup

Six organisations are to share funding from the **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport** and the **National Lottery Community Fund** to champion the importance of good safeguarding and locally available sources of advice and support. The Social Care Institute for Excellence, Voluntary Action Leeds and the Federation of London Youth Clubs are three of the organisations to receive funding.

Grants totalling £1.16m are to be allocated to 168 youth and community groups in England through the **UK Youth Fund**. Grants ranging from £360 up to £20,000 will fund sports clubs, counselling services, creative writing workshops, crime prevention sessions and equipment for children with disabilities.

A six-year partnership with **Rank** has seen £2.5m raised for Carers Trust. Employees from Rank's Mecca and Grosvenor venues and support offices have raised money to help 11,670 unpaid carers, who have been supported by Carers Trust and its Network Partners. This includes respite care, education courses and crisis support.

A programme at HMP Winchester that works to improve the lives of children and families affected by imprisonment has received a major funding boost. **Invisible Walls**, run by Spurgeons Children's Charity, supports fathers to improve their parenting skills and build and maintain healthy relationships with their children and families while in prison and post-release. The programme has been awarded £450,000 by the **National Lottery Community Fund** to continue its work over the next three years.

COMMISSIONING

National contracts (part II)

Work to refresh national care contracts is gathering pace but it is not too late to shape the future, says **Toni Badnall**



Earlier this year, I participated in a Local Government Association (LGA) workshop around developing a new set of documents for the national contracts for independent fostering and residential children's home placements.

Hertfordshire County Council is leading this workstream, sponsored by the LGA and supported by the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers and the Independent Children's Homes Association.

This was the second national contracts workshop following a previous event held late last year that I attended along with representatives from 40 local authorities (National framework contracts, *CYP Now*, November 2019). Here, we questioned the fitness for purpose of the existing contracts, which were designed to support the kind of framework purchasing that has given way to more dynamic and diverse commissioning arrangements. We agreed that while these documents contained some useful elements, they need a refresh to ensure they remained current and relevant. We have since been mapping good practice through the LGA's children's commissioning and procurement

group, and sharing local contracts to develop key lines of enquiry.

One key question is around the benefits of this approach, and how to secure wider buy-in. The national contracts were originally developed to remove unnecessary duplication in commissioning and to improve the quality of contracting, but their subsequent devolution and dilution to meet local or consortia needs has only increased duplication for commissioners as well as the administrative burden on providers.

However, these principles remain the unique selling point for the initiative – most commissioners welcome opportunities for collaboration and practice sharing around a service area fraught with pressures. A move towards greater standardisation of contract terms and conditions might see more generic elements, many of which are covered by legislation and the regulatory frameworks for fostering and residential care, removed from service specifications – which could then be targeted towards local sufficiency needs. Alignment of contracts may also, in time, pave the way for alignment of consortia and purchasing blocs, giving commissioners greater leverage in procurement.

Questions remain over how much of the contract would be unalterable – covering “core” terms and conditions – and how much could be adjusted locally. Providers' insurance levels, arrangements for sharing information and

intellectual property protection are all potential sticking points for individual local authorities' procurement and legal departments. These could form some of the bespoke elements of the contract, but it could also be useful to develop an industry standard around these issues that could offer guidance to providers. Moreover, standardisation of practice around notice periods, retainer fees and inflationary uplifts would assist commissioners and providers in financial and placement planning.

Contract schedules

To complement a model set of terms and conditions, the group agreed that our next steps would be to develop an example set of contract schedules. It is essential that this work be conducted in collaboration with stakeholders – not just commissioners and national membership organisations, but also with directors of children's services, the wider provider market and care-experienced children and young people to ensure that these contracts deliver good outcomes for looked-after children and are fit for today's commissioning landscape.

Hertfordshire Council and the LGA have already secured funding for a subject expert to draw up such a suite of documents for 16+ semi-independent accommodation, together with a set of voluntary national standards (which may be superseded by those proposed by the Department for Education in its consultation on unregulated provision which closes on 8 April). A similar resource is being sought to develop revised independent fostering agency and residential care contracts which, while perhaps less urgent than semi-independent, are long overdue an update. Currently, we are focusing on raising awareness and support of this workstream, including a panel at June's National Commissioning and Contracting Training Conference for children as well as ongoing LGA events.

● Toni Badnall is senior commissioning officer at Bedford Borough Council

● Thanks to Clair Jones and Grace Abel

HOW CAN COMMISSIONERS SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE?

- There are three strands to this workstream: reviewing the national contracts for independent fostering agency placements and residential children's homes, developing a set of standards and piloting a new national contract for unregulated semi-independent accommodation, and an independent schools contract being redeveloped by local authorities and the National Association of Special Schools, via the LGA's special educational needs and disabilities special interest group. If commissioners would like to get involved or share good practice, or have any questions, you can get in touch with workstream co-ordinator Clair Jones clair.jones@hertfordshire.gov.uk
- A key barrier to the adoption of a national contracting practice is the varied end dates of

current framework and Dynamic Purchasing System contracts. Work is under way to map placement commissioning arrangements nationally with a view to sharing this information and facilitating greater alignment of contracts and consortia. Even if this objective is not desirable, it is worth being part of the conversation through KHub, the LGA's knowledge-sharing platform.

- For some local authorities, national mechanisms for securing and contracting placements are not advantageous, particularly those with large numbers of looked-after children or “niche” needs. Ongoing, proactive dialogue with the “market” is necessary to ensure providers operating nationwide are fully engaged with commissioning arrangements, in order to add to local sufficiency.

FURTHER READING

Knowledge Hub (KHub): Children's Services Commissioning and Procurement Group, www.khub.net/group/national-consortia-network

LEADERSHIP

Partnership working has far-reaching benefits for children's services, ensuring resources go further and best practice is shared. Knowing what makes a successful partnership is key to strong leadership

Successful partnership working



Toby Lindsay
Principal consultant for
leadership, management and
organisation development, Skills
for Justice and Skills for Health

Partnership working in children's services is vital – particularly when all public services are expected to do “more with less”. The benefits include greater access to a range of resources and knowledge, sharing of workload and costs, and more flexible service provision. However, partnerships can fail, experience ups and downs, and require continual work to get the very best from them.

Work has been done to understand why partnerships are more likely to succeed or fail but this knowledge only makes a difference when it is incorporated into leadership practice.

1 Partnerships are a social process. Before partnerships can deliver their anticipated outcomes, connection needs to be built. Partners need to get to know each other and as they do, trust emerges. This process takes time and involves all sorts of emotions and, at times, stresses. Through connection learning begins with partners gaining access to the knowledge and experience of others. Action can then be taken, and the partnership can really start to achieve its goals

and deliver the kinds of joined-up service provision that improves the lives of children, young people and families.

The importance of ongoing connection and learning cannot be underestimated especially when new partners come on board.

2 Partnerships are about power and identity. Government-commissioned research on collaboration between the emergency services published in 2015 found maintaining the distinct identities of partners was a key element of successful partnership work. Partnerships that have “extraordinary members” seem to work better than those that don't, and this suggests partnerships function best when we attend to the difference and uniqueness in them. This requires leadership that understands and makes time for this, which can be difficult when there is pressure on the partnership to deliver and differing levels of motivation and engagement among partners.

Other research suggests power imbalances in partnerships are always present and need to be acknowledged for them to function well. It is the way power is used in a partnership that most impacts on its success and longevity. Coercive and manipulative uses of power lead to those with less power disengaging. A recent example I came across was a partnership where smaller organisations complained meetings always took place at a larger partner's premises “when it suited them”. This led to the failure of that group.

When taking up leadership in partnership we should ask: Who has the power here and how is it being used? What am I doing to be open and collaborative in using my power to engage rather than alienate and dominate?

3 Set up is key. A good-quality set up is important in establishing a partnership. This can include sharing information about the different partners, exploring the partnership's vision and criteria for success, discussing how you will work together and what different wants and needs are present. All of this creates a pattern where the “how” of working is explored and not assumed.

Beginnings also need to focus on endings. We know that partnerships where there is a clear

process for exiting do better than where there is not. Partnerships that feel like endless obligation lead to people finding other ways to disengage.

4 Review and governance are vital. A partnership that agrees to a regular review of working practice is one that has a greater chance of success than one that doesn't. However, this can be difficult for us to do on our own. It's much easier to do with an external governing body or process. Where there is good governance for a partnership, it achieves more.

This is another area where power needs to be considered. A partner with significant resources may be in a position to host a partnership within those resources. However, this places governance in the hands of the most powerful partner. It is important to discuss upfront how best to review and govern the partnership rather than simply doing what seems easiest.

5 The need for collaborative leadership. Partnerships require robust leadership from the outset. This must recognise that partnership is a process, which needs regular reflection and development. This is not easy for leaders of individual organisations and in a partnership arrangement is even harder. Who is the leader? If we naturally allow this to be the most powerful then this can create resentment and disengagement even when working with the best of intentions.

Partnership leadership needs to be collaborative and distributed, where we all act to lead, rather than wait and do nothing. Inaction in a partnership will lead to the partnership failing. However, speaking up, acting, expressing views and inquiring into the dynamics of groups are all risky activities. This takes us back to the importance of connection and a willingness to learn together in partnership, understanding this will take time and effort to achieve. All partners must take responsibility for leadership knowing we will not get it right all of the time. This is what makes great partnerships great.

● *Skills for Justice has recently launched a series of public sector leadership development programmes*
www.sfjuk.com

HOW I GOT HERE

Sharon Lovell

Inspiring view of myself

I remember staring at a poster in biology class while at school. The image was of two people at the top of a mountain overlooking a beautiful scene. The statement at the bottom read: "Where you have been to, is not nearly as important as where you are going." My fascination with it hadn't gone unnoticed; the teacher saw me looking at it, took down the poster and said, "have it, Sharon. And know whatever you do, you will succeed, as you have the personality to take you anywhere". I was in complete awe of Ms Mitchell and thought, wow – what a statement! Especially as a typing teacher a few days previous had told me that the only place good enough for me when I left school was the dole queue. I was 15 and about to leave school with no idea what I wanted to do.

Discovering youth work impact

I started going to a youth club aged 14 and can honestly say this access to an alternative education gave me the confidence and direction of travel I have been on ever since. I became an active volunteer for a peer-led youth organisation looking at issues such as drugs prevention and HIV/AIDS. I had amazing opportunities including travelling around Wales, Europe and the other parts of the world looking at different forms of drug prevention methods. At the age of 21, still with no idea what I wanted to do other than youth work, someone suggested I apply to attend college to get a youth and community qualification. I really didn't think I could. I came from a working class family and no one else had been to college or university. Receiving the letter of acceptance is still one of the best feelings I have ever had.

National executive director (Wales), National Youth Advocacy Service



"It was not a statutory duty for councils at that time and influencing systems to promote the voices of young people was a real challenge"

Working with vulnerable young people

I knew I wanted to be a director of a children's rights charity one day and work towards helping the most vulnerable young people in society. My first job was working with homeless young people, and I could see the connection between those who had been in the care system and those who ended up homeless. At the hostel, I would often talk with young people into the early hours while they would share their stories. I was always amazed by their resilience. My next job was working for The Children's Society, setting up advocacy services for young people in care. It was not a statutory duty for councils at that time and influencing systems to promote the voices of young people was a real challenge. My next job was managing youth service provision across Cardiff – I remain a youth worker at heart!

Reaching the top of the mountain

I missed the advocacy world, so I applied for a job at children's rights charity National Youth Advocacy Service as a project co-ordinator. Fast forward 15 years, and I am now its national executive director (Wales) – my dream really has come true. I am incredibly proud of the work that has been achieved during this time. Recently, I have been part of a campaign movement that has resulted in all young people entering care to receive an "active offer" to see an advocate. I have always been passionate about human rights and took up the position of vice-chair for Amnesty International UK last year, another achievement I am very proud of. I was also blown away to be informed that I had been awarded a Member of the British Empire in the Queen's New Year's Honours list. I accepted on the grounds of promoting youth work, advocacy and human rights work.

TOP THREE CAREER TIPS

1

It can be lonely as a director so find a support network. This can be as simple as having coffee with like-minded people. I have had some of the most inspiring thoughts during these catch ups.

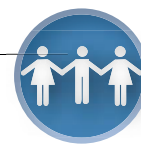


2

Change your thinking from, "why should it be me?" to "why not me?". Be brave and remember why you are doing what you do. I often think of all the young people I am representing to avoid any self-doubt.

3

As a director, you often feel expected to know all the answers. Your team are the most important people around you and often know much more – believe in them, support them, and empower them.



PARTICIPATION IN ACTION

Leap turns to young people with lived experience to shape future priorities

Provider Leap Confronting Conflict

Name Embedding co-production

Summary Leap Confronting Conflict (Leap) co-ordinated three separate focus groups between young people and Leap's key stakeholders, including staff, community partners, funders and trustees in creating its Transforming Conflict Together strategy.

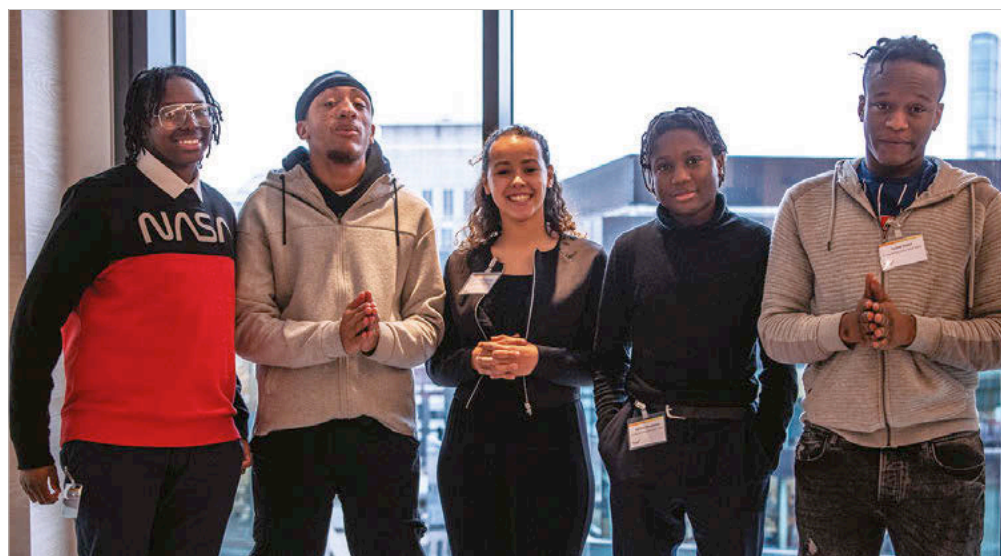
For more than 30 years, Leap has designed and delivered programmes that transform the way conflict is managed by young people and the adults who support them. By developing creative and adaptable approaches, Leap supports young people to deal with immediate issues, while also addressing some of the longer term, systemic patterns of behaviour that lead to violent and destructive expressions of conflict.

Leap has a strong history of integrating young people's opinions and voices into programme delivery and organisation strategy. Prior to my appointment as co-production officer in 2018, graduates have been recruited to the board, sat on interview panels and been involved in the design of programme curriculum. My role is about creating consistency in the organisation around our approaches to co-production. We believe that by involving young people with lived experience, our work will be relevant to the needs of young people; increasing both engagement and impact.

In creating our strategy, we listened to young people to understand the challenges they are facing. When we talked to young people key themes emerged. They told us they wanted Leap to support them around: staying safe, social media, race, masculinity and identity. But how did we arrive at this position?

For the first meeting in May 2019, myself along with colleagues organised a workshop between Leap's senior managers, frontline staff and graduates from the Improving Prospects programme, which is designed to give young people aged 15 to 21 an insight into the causes and consequences of conflict.

“In creating our strategy, we listened to young people to understand the challenges they are facing”



Leap's young ambassadors helped to co-design a programme that supports young people's school transition

We used games like Pattern Ball to build rapport and also to introduce the concept of strategy, its purpose and how it can achieve specific goals.

Our chief executive, Ben Kernighan presented a summary of the environmental analysis and strategy development process to inform conversation about what has changed since 2016 and what are the needs, challenges and opportunities for young people. We made the analysis visual and engaging and we described the process so that the young people would understand where and how their input fed into the process. These process aspects are key in co-production and something that is often ignored.

This process gave young people an opportunity to learn new skills, such as strategic planning, public speaking and leadership skills. Four young people volunteered to share on camera their reflections on the emerging themes (see box) and several young ambassadors had the opportunity to network with an audience of 80 stakeholders: community partners, philanthropists, trusts, corporations and representatives from government departments at the strategy launch in January.

We are committed to building up a culture and practice of co-production across the organisation. Since the strategy launch, we have worked with graduates and ambassadors to co-design a programme that supports young

My View

Tori Allison-Powell, aged 16

Tori is a Leap graduate who attended the young people consultation day and was one of four to be filmed sharing their thoughts on young people and violent crime for the video.

“I am a black Caribbean girl and I would say that I am very independent for someone my age. I feel safe in my community. It is not perfect; there are good and bad things within the community. However, I do feel like for boys it is more difficult for them. I feel they are targeted, whether that is gang recruitment. They are more targeted to getting stabbed. To me they get stopped and searched much more than girls. So, I feel like within the community they are not safe themselves.”

people to make the transition from primary to secondary school. For the next six months, my priorities are to educate all levels of the organisation on power sharing and what this looks like in their area of work by implementing training, policies and processes that can support consistency in co-production across Leap.
By Abdul Jaleel, co-production officer, Leap Confronting Conflict

Play helps children learn to be

Early years healthy living programme promotes children's self-esteem and wellbeing, helping to develop

PROJECT

Healthy Movers

PURPOSE

To use play and physical activity to develop pre-school children's communication skills and school-readiness

FUNDING

The scheme is funded by different organisations in each area. In West Somerset it was funded with £170,000 from the West Somerset Opportunity Fund. The scheme in Cornwall is funded by Active Cornwall and Public Health Cornwall

BACKGROUND

The Healthy Movers programme developed out of a pilot scheme created by the Youth Sport Trust and Active Cumbria in 2016 with the aiming of boosting young children's "physical literacy" – the skills and confidence needed for life-long engagement in being active.

The pilot project was called Smart Start and featured activity sessions in early years settings aimed at developing a range of thinking, social, health, physical and creative abilities.

Schools and settings across the country can now buy into aspects of the Healthy Movers programme, such as resource packs and training. It is being delivered in full in some parts of the country such as Cornwall and West Somerset as part of wider programmes to boost social mobility and improve outcomes for children and families and on a smaller scale in Bedfordshire and Southwark.

ACTION

Healthy Movers focuses on two- to five-year-olds, and centres on fun activities such as chasing bubbles,



Chasing bubbles is one way Healthy Movers sessions help children to learn about the importance of being physically active

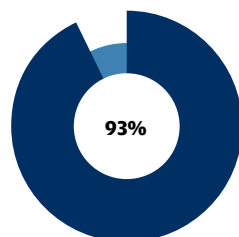
balancing bean bags while moving, acting out stories in books, and moving from one task to the next by hopping, jumping or skipping. "The earlier children understand why it is important to be physically active, and how that also supports

so many other elements of their life, the better," says Chris Caws, national development manager at the Youth Sport Trust. The programme aims to promote children's self-esteem and wellbeing, and develop agility,

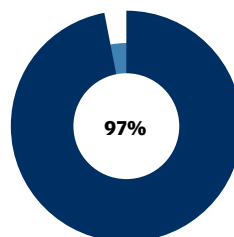
balance and co-ordination, while also linking with other areas of the early years curriculum such as communication and language, literacy and numeracy. Some activities, for example, focus on controlling and moving objects as a

EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS REPORT IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILDREN'S SKILLS

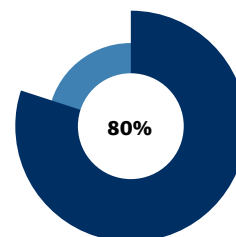
Results from practitioners taking part in Healthy Movers in Cumbria in 2018 to 2019



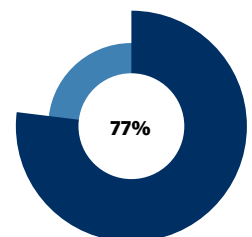
said motivation to improve children's physical activity had increased



felt more equipped to promote physical activity



said children's enjoyment of physical activities and play had increased



said children's skills and attitudes had improved

Source: Active Cumbria

Healthy Movers

agility, balance and co-ordination through fun activities

precursor to controlling and holding a pencil. “Rolling a ball around your stomach can help with doing up shoelaces, holding a pen and so on,” says Caws.

Early years professionals receive training on how to deliver the activities and how these promote learning. The practitioners who attend the training are designated “Healthy Movers Champions”. They receive mentoring from Youth Sport Trust Learning Academy tutors, who come into settings on a monthly basis to model delivery of the activities and provide support. There are opportunities to gain a recognised Level 3 Award in Supporting Physical Development and Physical Activity. Healthy Movers Champions also provide training for other staff in their setting.

Settings receive resource packs to help them deliver Healthy Movers, including a practitioner handbook with tips to get the most out of the programme, 16 activity cards, reward stickers, and a CD of music to accompany activities. Children in the setting receive branded backpacks that include copies of the cards, so activities can continue at home, some basic equipment like beanbags, balls, and a sticker pack.

Some settings share a Healthy Movers card of the week on a notice board or online so parents can see what activities their children have been doing. Parents are also encouraged to get involved through stay and play sessions held at settings. At Timberscombe Preschool in West Somerset, for example, parents and children enjoyed a story together called *The Runaway Train*. The story led to an activity session with children and parents exploring moving at different speeds, turning, and

weaving in and out of each other and obstacles. “This kind of activity enhances children’s learning of basic physical literacy skills like dynamic balance and co-ordination, as well as giving them an opportunity to hear a range of descriptive words,” says Caws. “It has been great to see the engagement from parents.”

OUTCOME

In Cumbria, 731 Reception children took part in Healthy Movers sessions. The programme trained 55 early years practitioners and supported 37 schools to deliver Healthy Movers sessions. When surveyed directly after the training, 93 per cent of practitioners said their motivation and inspiration to improve children’s physical activity and play had increased while 97 per cent said they felt more equipped to promote physical activity. Before the training, 27 per cent of practitioners said they worked with parents to promote physical activity but a later survey found 80 per cent said they were now working with parents. When delivering the programme 80 per cent of practitioners said children’s enjoyment of physical activities and play had increased and 77 per cent said children’s skills and attitudes had improved.

So far, 431 children, 135 parents and 46 practitioners in 15 settings have taken part in Healthy Movers in West Somerset. An interim evaluation of the programme found 55 per cent of children taking part showed improvements in managing relationships and 57 per cent showed improvements in listening and attention. In all, 95 per cent of parents said they had been given ideas to help their child to be active and 90 per cent felt

EXPERIENCE SESSIONS MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE TO PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT



TIMBERSCOMBE PRESCHOOL

The diverse range of activities in Healthy Movers sessions engage children

Clare Jones* – now aged four – took part in Healthy Movers sessions last year when she attended Teddy Bears Nursery in Old Cleeve, West Somerset.

Before taking part in the sessions, Clare struggled with physical development, explains nursery teacher Alison Welch. “Clare had global developmental delay. She couldn’t even sit still on a mat – it was impossible for her,” says Welch.

Healthy Movers sessions are delivered for around 20 minutes, two or three times a week. “It depends how busy we are, sometimes we do it five days a week,” says Welch, who attended the Healthy Movers training for practitioners. The children are enthusiastic, and often ask if activities will be happening. Welch believes the diversity of the activities and the equipment has supported their engagement, and staff have observed the children using the Healthy Movers activities in their own play.

Healthy Movers sessions gave Clare the opportunity to take part in

activities with different equipment and learn how to hold items and move with them. Before Healthy Movers, for example, she would not have been able to grip a scarf, but now she has a much more solid grip, says Welch. Nursery teachers noticed a difference, as Clare was much more engaged, able to sit down and listen to instructions, and was not fidgeting as much. “She was always eager to try out the next piece of equipment and the next Healthy Movers activity,” says Welch.

Teddy Bears Nursery is attached to Old Cleeve Church of England First School and Clare is now one of the youngest pupils in the school’s reception class.

The benefits of Healthy Movers have stayed with Clare in her new school. “I spoke to her mum and she says there is a real difference,” says Welch. “In reception she is asked to sit and listen for longer periods, and she is able to do so. Her core strength has also improved.”

*Name changed

more confident in helping their child to be active at home.

WHAT’S NEXT?

The programme aims to encourage settings to continue using Healthy Movers after support has ended with Healthy Movers Champions training new staff and engaging new cohorts of children. For example, at Teddy Bears Nursery in West Somerset, staff are encouraging children that have

already taken part in Healthy Movers this year to show new children some of the activities. The Youth Sports Trust hopes to continue to work with local authorities to roll out Healthy Movers. There are currently plans to roll the programme out in Wiltshire.

If you think your project is worthy of inclusion, email supporting data to derren.hayes@markallengroup.com

INTERNATIONAL FOCUS

Disaster-based trauma support, Australia

The rugged, remote and inhospitable nature of much of the Australian landscape means that when natural disasters strike the effects can be all the more severe. Cyclones, droughts and forest fires have been a consistent part of the Australian environment for centuries, but the escalation in climate change is making such events more regular and their severity increasingly pronounced. This was most recently seen in the bushfires that raged across large swathes of eastern and southern Australia from September 2019 to January 2020, which claimed the lives of dozens of people and an estimated half a billion animals. Some people lost homes and livelihoods, while whole communities were consumed by the flames that raged across 11 million hectares of Australian land.

The human, animal and environmental toll has been well documented, however, the long-term impact of the bushfires on the mental wellbeing of children and young people is yet to be fully understood and could last for years, experts say.

This is not the first time that Australia has been affected by such a natural disaster and consequently, experts and academics in the country have studied the effect that disaster events can have on children leading to a better understanding of the impact of trauma.

SCALE AND IMPACT

Experience from previous Australian natural disasters suggests that 12 per cent of children and teenagers develop a clinically significant mental health problem as a result.

However, the huge scale of the recent bushfires means that more children are likely to be traumatised according to one expert. This could extend to young



DARIA NI/ADOBE STOCK

Most people traumatised by disasters can make a good recovery with the right help

people who have experienced smoke pollution or seen media reports of death and destruction.

“With this particular disaster or series of disasters, I would actually expect the percentage to be higher,” Vanessa Cobham, principal research fellow at Brisbane’s Mater Research Institute and a senior clinical psychologist in the child and youth mental health service in Queensland, told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

“That’s partly because there has been significant loss of life but also the almost unbelievable extent of this disaster and the huge number of animals that have died.”

Dr Cobham said the right time to intervene was between three and six months after the disaster.

“Within the first month, we would expect that everybody who’s been impacted by this kind of event is going to be distressed – that’s normal, we don’t want to pathologise that,” she said. “Most

people are going to make a good natural recovery, with the support of their family and community.”

Aid agency Save the Children Australia, which delivered support for families during the height of the bushfires, has also warned of the traumatising affect they have on children’s emotional wellbeing. Its chief executive Paul Ronalds, says the frightening events can have a “psychological toll [that] can last a very long time if not properly addressed”.

“That’s why supporting children’s mental health needs will be a really important part of the longer-term recovery process,” Ronalds explains.

Save the Children ran three child-friendly spaces in evacuation centres, providing children with a safe place to socialise, play and relax. It has also pledged to support children’s long-term mental health needs. “This is likely to include running a range of

activities for children to help them process and express their emotions, deal with the issues they are facing and develop coping mechanisms for the future,” explains Ronalds.

Georgie Harman, chief executive of mental health charity Beyond Blue, says: “It’s very normal to struggle with difficult thoughts and feelings during and after a disaster like this, and these feelings can be intense and confusing.

“These feelings can be at their most severe in the first week after a traumatic event but, in most cases, fade over a month.”

If symptoms persist for longer it may indicate that someone needs professional support, Harman explains.

EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

The Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network, a government-funded group of medical organisations, in its advice on post-disaster support, explains that in families that have suffered loss as a result of bushfires, children may conceal their emotions or not have their support needs met by other family members also grieving.

“Understanding where a bereaved child’s best supports are and helping them link to these, both in family and school settings, can be helpful,” it states.

Continuity of family life is important even if the family is displaced from its original home, or living in temporary accommodation, because it can “help those affected have some sense of security about everyday living and reassure children and adolescents that the whole world has not collapsed and that there are possibilities for their future”, explains the network.

The advice also highlights the types of concerning behaviour that children affected by bushfires may display. In pre-school children this



can include: withdrawal and/or regression, self-soothing, crying, repetitive questions, anger and acting out behaviours, separation-anxiety and attention seeking.

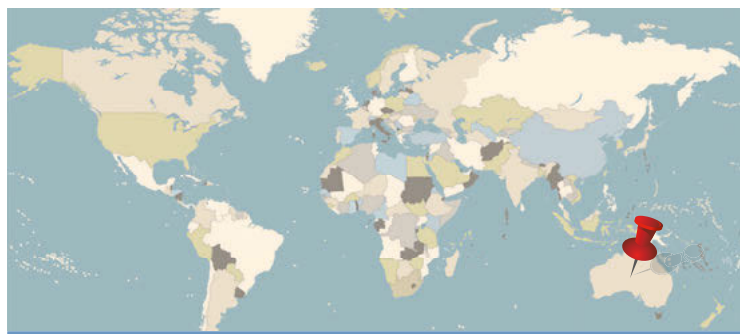
These reactions indicate the child's need for comforting. Holding, talking gently, recognising a child's distress, and giving space for them to play are some of the support strategies. Re-establishing family rituals and routines, normal sleep, and comforting for separation distress/anxiety can be helpful to young children, according to the advice.

Primary school children are increasingly familiar with death, but may assume it is to do with killing and badness. It is helpful for children if they can ask questions and receive simple, clear and honest answers. They may feel that it is somehow their fault and need reassurance that it was not.

Withdrawal and internalising behaviours may mean primary age children are seen as not affected and not needing help or support. Acting out behaviours, aggression or conduct difficulties may be seen as "problems" and that the child is uncaring and not affected. It is helpful for children if they are provided with support and the reassurance that they are cared for both physically and emotionally. Children's play may also reflect their grief and any associated trauma experiences.

For adolescents, thinking processes become much more like those of adults with the capacity to not only understand the nature of death, but that they also could die. Family bonds are still important but peer relationships take on added significance for adolescents.

"Young people in these age groups have very strong peer bonds, and are likely to experience great distress over the deaths of peers," the network's guidance states. "They will rely a great deal on group support from school and



RESPONDING TO NATURAL DISASTERS

ADVICE ON COPING

- Spend time with people who care
- Know that recovery times will differ for everyone
- Find out about the impact of trauma and what to expect
- Try to keep a routine and return to normal activities as soon as possible
- Talk about your feelings or what happened when you're ready
- Do things that help you relax
- Set realistic goals
- Review and reward your progress, even small steps
- Talk about the ups and downs of recovery

TALKING TO CHILDREN

- Children's reactions to trauma may include withdrawal from family, friends and activities, headaches and stomach aches, trouble concentrating or sleeping
- Tell your child these feelings are normal in the circumstances
- Take their concerns and feelings seriously
- Encourage them to speak about their feelings and listen to what they say
- Try to return to regular routines as soon as possible
- Allow children to play and enjoy recreational activities

Source: Beyond Blue's looking after yourself after a disaster fact sheet, 2019

other peer-based groups, with ritual and expressions through group action, social media, memorial rituals and expression with music.

"Their roller-coaster of emotions may be externalised, may seem demanding and may be perceived as non-supportive by other family members. Alternately, they may be seen as not affected when they appear to be getting on with their lives, which they may struggle with, sometimes experiencing guilt when they do."

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Emerging Minds develops mental health policy, services, interventions, training, programmes and resources in response to the needs of professionals, children and their families. The organisation now leads the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health in

Australia, delivered in partnership with a number of health and research bodies. It has put together a resource pack for educators to help them support children after bushfires.

It explains that teachers, continuing to perform their essential role in student learning and wellbeing, are invaluable supporters of children and young people in recovery.

Being prepared for potential disaster can play a part in helping children recover if and when it occurs, it explains. Teachers in bushfire-affected communities are advised to:

- Focus on establishing and maintaining normal classroom routines
- Develop new and existing relationships to support connection between both students and staff
- Provide structured

opportunities to talk about the bushfires

- Provide students with additional notice and reminders of changes to scheduled events
- Provide spaces and opportunities to focus on emotional expression and regulation skills through mindfulness, circle time or relaxation activities
- Anticipate situations that may trigger distress, such as hot and windy weather, fog or smoke
- Monitor students for symptoms of trauma over time
- Practice self-care and seek support for themselves and their students.

For younger children, talking about the event may be difficult. Some children might respond better to drawing or playing games as a way of communicating. Talking about bushfires:

- Place rules and time limits around "bushfire talk"
- Remain calm and optimistic, and convey a clear message that the threat is over
- Focus on positive coping strategies the student has demonstrated since the traumatic event.

Students who have witnessed the impact of the bushfire crisis on communities, animals and the environment personally or through widespread media coverage are likely to feel distressed. It is important to acknowledge students' concerns about the bushfire crisis and talk about it. If teachers don't know the answer to students' questions, they should use it as an opportunity to explore the answers together. Offer reassurance, avoid distressing media content and explore examples of all the people trying to help and ways that students can make a difference too.

By Derren Hayes

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Hertfordshire County Council

Council with reputation for innovation turns its attention to improving special educational needs and disabilities services

This year marks a decade since Jenny Coles became director of children's services for Hertfordshire. Over that time, Coles has overseen gradual improvement in services, moving from an "adequate" rating for child protection services in 2013 to "good" in 2015's single inspection framework assessment and the same judgment in 2018. In that most recent judgment, Ofsted praised the "outstanding" leadership across children's services in Hertfordshire up to and including the council chief executive and elected member for children and families.

Openness and accountability

The report cites a robust culture of "openness" and accountability among senior leaders as crucial to the success in the department.

"Senior leaders are conscientious in holding each other to account," the report states. "Knowing that, as the chief executive likes to say, 'bad news doesn't get better by not talking about it', managers are encouraged to 'tell it how it is'. There are no secrets and no attempts to shy away from recurrent challenges...in fact, senior leaders' approach is one of openness and transparency. At an operational level, this organisational culture is helping to create an environment in which social work is flourishing."

The "open, honest, appropriately self-critical and essentially accurate" approach to self-evaluation also ensures there are few surprises when it comes to services, it adds.

"Senior leaders have a good understanding of what is happening at the frontline," it states. "With one exception, this inspection told them very little that



CLOUDVISUAL/ADOBE STOCK

More residential care placements are being made available to address the high number of children being placed out of authority

they did not already know about themselves, their staff or their services."

The settled leadership team is also reflected in a stable children's workforce – hard for any authority, let alone one within commuting distance of London boroughs. Turnover, vacancy and agency rates are well below regional and national averages (see graphics). The report highlights how low caseloads mean "social workers have the time and space to build meaningful relationships, and do purposeful work, with children and families", an important factor in reducing turnover.

Services to support families in need of help and protection and those supporting looked-after children and care leavers were both rated "good" in 2018. Partnership working with adult services was highlighted as playing a crucial role in facilitating "creative

solutions to long-standing and/or deeply entrenched problems, including those associated with parental substance misuse, mental ill-health and/or domestic violence".

Out-of-authority placements

Looked-after children levels have remained consistently low over the past five years thanks in part to improving intensive support for families in need, however rising numbers of teenagers in care are putting pressure on residential placements, explains Coles (see box).

Also, too many come into care in an emergency, while the number moving placement and placed out of authority are also too high. "Senior leaders are acutely aware of this and of the potentially damaging and disruptive impact on the lives of children and young people," Ofsted states.

To address some of these challenges, the council is developing more in-house care placements including the number of residential care places available. It is also involved in sector-wide efforts to develop national standards for unregistered settings.

Embracing innovation is also reflected in the council's involvement in the children's social care innovation programme which led to it being able to develop its approach to early help and to radically transform the way in which family safeguarding services are delivered.

It now hopes to apply this innovative approach to special educational needs and disability services – over the last year, the council has reshaped alongside parents its local offer with the aim of offering more support and advice to children with special needs and their families (see box).



SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN HERTFORDSHIRE

■ Hertfordshire ■ Region ■ England

Child population (2015)



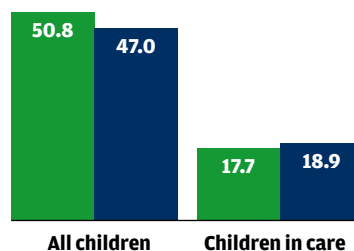
Hertfordshire citizens
is aged 0-19 (289k)

Population projections

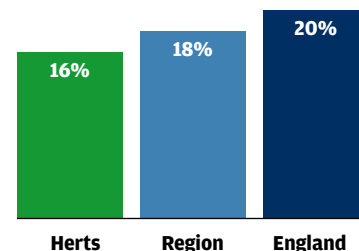


projected rise in 0-19 year olds
by 2025

Average Attainment 8 score

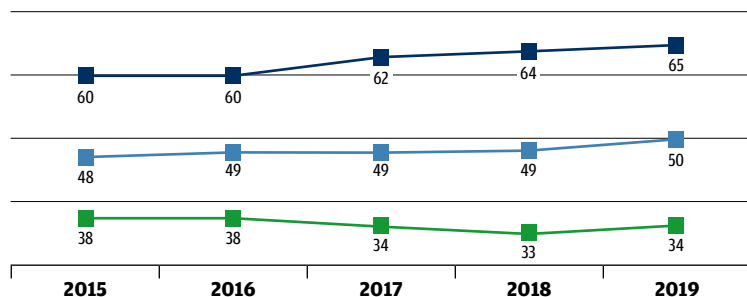


Child obesity (year 6)



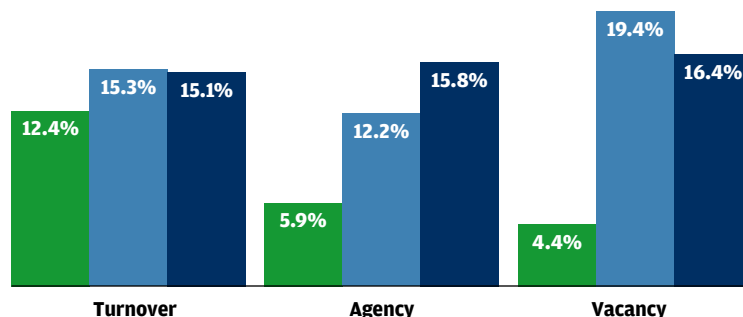
Source: Public Health England profile

Looked-after children (rate per 10k children)



Source: Children in care data at 31 March 2019, DfE, December 2019

Children and family social workers



Source: Workforce data at 30 Sept 2019, DfE, February 2020

EXTENDING RESIDENTIAL CARE CAPACITY



Jenny Coles,
director of
children's
services,
Hertfordshire

What we've seen over the last two years is the rise in demographic pressures. We have a rising population of children and young people and a changing profile - we could see we needed to get ahead of that.

With SEND, we were seeing more children being educated outside the authority boundary, and parents were telling us they weren't happy. We were also seeing less stability in residential and foster care placements and more children going out-of-area. It has been a real challenge, but by improving wraparound care and developing links between children in care and their extended family and friends the situation has improved.

In response to a rise in the number of teenagers in care we have analysed the council estate to identify where we can increase residential capacity. By Easter, we'll have two small residential units open, one run by the council and another by a partner organisation. Also, a children's home that had been mothballed for some years is to be reopened, while a short break centre is to be repurposed. We think that will provide enough extra capacity. The council decided to use our facilities because feedback from independent providers was that property is too expensive to open new provision.

We are also the lead authority in the East of England on a regional quality assurance framework for regulated residential provision. We have been reviewing all of the standards that are used when quality assurance visits are undertaken by councils with a view to updating and improving standards.

ONLINE SOLUTIONS TO RISING SEND DEMAND



David Butcher,
head of SEND
transformation

Hertfordshire is experiencing challenges to supporting children, young people and their families with SEND. We've seen a 72 per cent growth in the number of education, health and care plans since the 2014 reforms, increasing demand for specialist provision and independent placements.

Supported by a £3m investment, we've created the capacity to make significant and lasting difference. We're increasing places in existing special schools, developing a new free special school for September 2022 and introducing a new approach from this month to funding children with SEND in our mainstream schools to foster a stronger approach to inclusion.

We're also nurturing more

collaborative local delivery of health, social care and education services through the development of a range of specific strategies, from improved autism diagnosis pathways and early years specialist provision, to improving pathways to employment and independence.

Seeing familiar issues and processes through new eyes - and co-producing solutions with families - is key to our ambition. It's at the heart of our redesigned online Local Offer focusing on finding digital solutions to life's offline challenges for SEND families. Three months of intensive user research with families and regular testing with an online feedback group were crucial to the development of the new website which went live in January.

Over the next year, we'll be applying the same philosophy to getting our education, health and care plan processes fully online, and improving our wider information and advice.

Youth Work in the 2020s: Policy, Practice & Opportunities

Youth Work in the 2020s will provide essential learning and insight for everyone who has an interest in the future of youth work. The conference - organised by Children & Young People Now, alongside our event partner National Youth Agency - brings together key figures and leading practitioners to support you in providing high quality, effective services and support to all young people.

The conference, on Thursday 25th June 2020, will feature a series of CPD-certified keynote talks and practice seminars, providing key insights on:

- The ongoing review of the youth work curriculum and qualifications and what it will mean for the workforce in practice
- How funders, commissioners and employers believe youth work can yield greater influence and win its 'seat at the table'
- Measuring the impact of youth work, and establishing a framework of learning, evaluation and continuous improvement
- Youth participation, and encouraging decision makers to listen to young people
- Funding streams for youth work, and the current facilities and infrastructure needs of the sector
- The National Youth Agency's 2020 Ten Year Vision for Youth Work, and what it would mean for the whole sector
- How contextual safeguarding and detached youth work approaches can address serious youth violence and gang membership
- Effective youth work approaches for schools, and developing links between life in the classroom and life outside the classroom
- How Leeds-based Getaway Girls – winner of the CYP Now Youth Work Award – has transformed the lives of girls and young women
- Trauma-informed youth work in health settings, and building working relationships with health staff
- Practice learnings and outcomes from the National Citizen Service that can be applied more widely to support young people



The Ferret

Sniffing out stories that have gone to ground

ADOGSLIFE/PHOTO/ADOBE STOCK



Williamson moves to whip DfE into shape

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson reportedly keeps a whip in his Westminster office. This may have been gifted to him in his previous role as chief whip but it seems to be no coincidence that it has re-emerged (along with a ceremonial dagger) amid a call for “exemplary schools” to pilot the Department for Education’s new behaviour hubs.

“We are going on a discipline drive in schools,” writes Williamson in a blog, celebrating the launch of the £10m scheme. “Visit some of the country’s best performing schools, and you’ll notice that many of them have one thing in common: discipline,” he adds, lauding high praise on the “dedicated” head teachers “trying all sorts of common-sense solutions to curb unruly behaviour”.

The Education Secretary stops short of suggesting the return of corporal punishment – or displaying the tools of punishment on the classroom wall – but suggests a successful school would have a mobile phone ban, silence in the corridors and “demerit pupils for forgetting their pens and slouching in class”.

Students are expected to display good behaviour “no matter who they are or where they come from”, Williamson says, telling readers that “good manners, courtesy and respect for others is also immensely valuable for pupils”.



LEYF urges nursery children to get on their bikes

London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) is urging both the London mayor and Paul Cowperthwaite, Transport for London’s general manager responsible for Santander Cycles, to help fund a scheme across the capital to give every London child access to a bike while at nursery. LEYF made the call at Bikeworks, a not-for-profit social enterprise in Bethnal Green, which has donated 200 bikes to LEYF. The bikes will be shared across LEYF’s 39 charitable social enterprise nurseries and forms a part of the LEYF-led initiative to get children active and help curb the capital’s childhood obesity epidemic.

Job ad reveals the perks of working for the DfE

Not many businesses or charities – let alone public bodies – would think it acceptable to wait up to 10 weeks to pay employees. Yet, that’s

what is facing the lucky candidate that lands a senior job at the Department for Education.

An early version of a job advert looking for private secretaries for DfE ministers explained that the successful applicants would not be

paid up to two months after they start work. According to political website Guido Fawkes, the payment delay was blamed on a new HR system meaning that “if you are recruited to the department in late March/April please be aware that you will not receive your pay until the end of May”. To add insult to injury, an explanation about the delay was included in the “benefits” section of the job spec!

The line had been removed by the time Ferret had a look, but somewhat disconcertingly the advert states that “no prior knowledge or experience of educational policy, or working in central government is required, although may be helpful”.

Policing guidance stokes stereotypes

Draft guidance on conflict management from the College of Policing recently came in for criticism for its wording on when officers should use force.

The draft guidance states police officers might be more likely to use force in situations where a suspect: is disrespectful and abusive; possesses a weapon; appears intoxicated; and resists arrest. All fairly straightforward. But goes on to add: “The risk of force being used might also be greater in encounters with people who are male, younger, non-white or perceived to have mental ill health.”

The wording was described by commentators on Twitter as reinforcing racial stereotypes.

“Does your guidance on conflict management justify greater use of force on non-white males? YES or NO,” asked Sophie Khan.

In response, the College of Policing denied that was the meaning intended. It apologised for the wording of the guidance and said it would be amended to be made clearer. “It is based on social research and is meant to encourage officers to consider their use of force,” the college stated from its official Twitter account.

FROM THE SOCIALS



Points-based Paddington

The government’s new points-based immigration system has not been well received by some in children’s services. The announcement prompted Tact chief executive Andy Elvin to ponder whether Paddington “the handsome young bear” would qualify for a skills-based visa? I think we all know the answer to that.

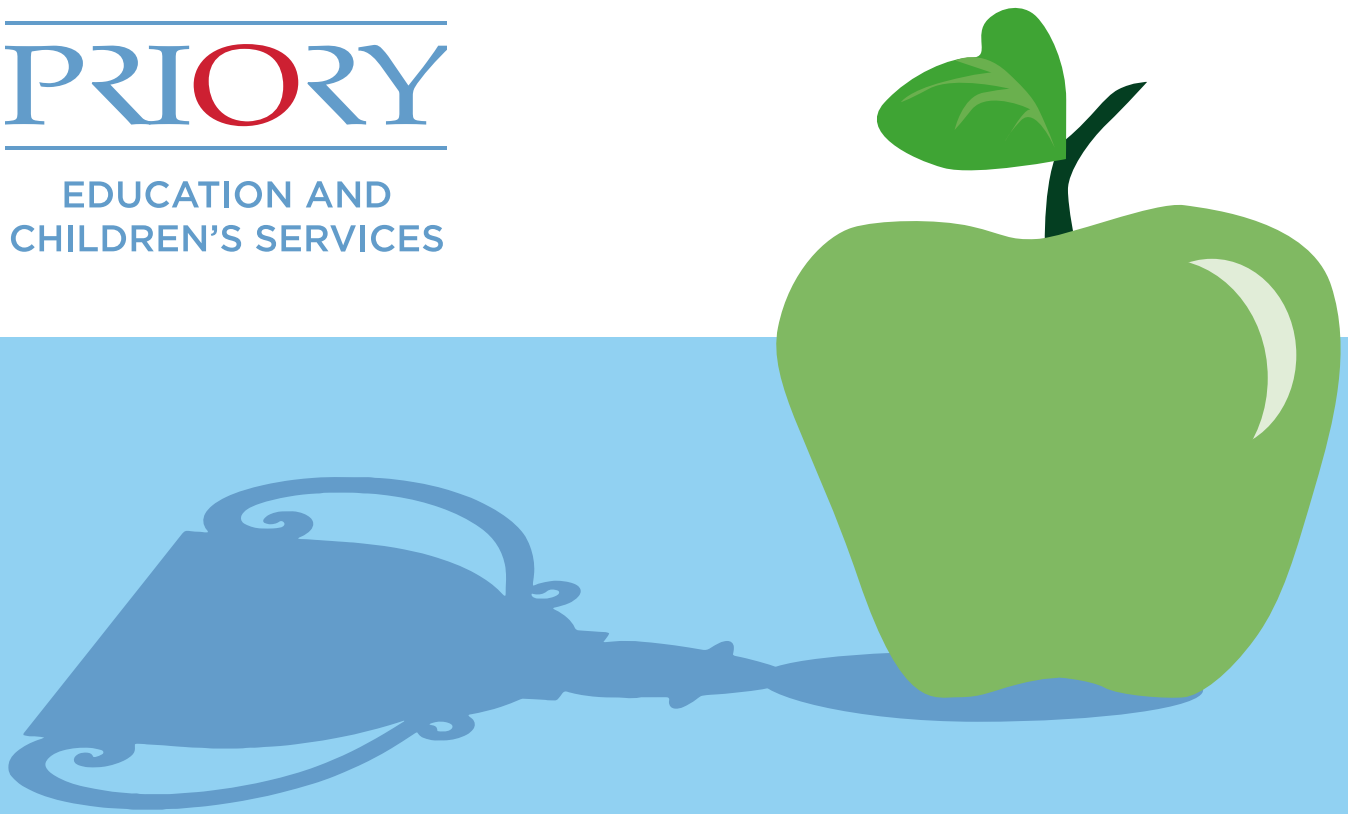
Dez lives the high life

Dez Holmes, chief executive of social care research body Research in Practice, shared with her Twitter followers a photo of her shoe collection recently. The colour-co-ordinated collection certainly generated some admiring comments. It would appear Dez likes a high heel – some so high they struggle to fit on the shelf!



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