

# Impact


## Action for Children Impact Report 2013

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# Contents



1 ▶	<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
2 ▶	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
3 ▶	<b>Keeping children and young people safe</b> .....	<b>14</b>
4 ▶	<b>Keeping children and young people healthy</b> .....	<b>20</b>
5 ▶	<b>Improving relationships for better outcomes for children and young people</b> .....	<b>24</b>
6 ▶	<b>Improving children and young people's achievements</b> .....	<b>30</b>
7 ▶	<b>Volunteering</b> .....	<b>38</b>
8 ▶	<b>Early intervention and help</b> .....	<b>42</b>
9 ▶	<b>Intensive family support</b> .....	<b>48</b>
10 ▶	<b>Innovation</b> .....	<b>54</b>
11 ▶	<b>Evidence-based programmes</b> .....	<b>60</b>
12 ▶	<b>Social investment</b> .....	<b>66</b>
13 ▶	<b>Cost-effectiveness</b> .....	<b>70</b>
14 ▶	<b>Conclusion and next steps</b> .....	<b>76</b>
15 ▶	<b>References</b> .....	<b>77</b>



# Executive summary

- 1.1** Action for Children runs more than 650 services across the UK working directly with more than 250,000 children, young people, parents and carers. Our services include early years, intensive family support and services for disabled children and young people. We work with families who have multiple, complex problems to improve outcomes for children and young people. We aim to help every child to fulfil their potential. Our Impact Report demonstrates how we achieve this.
- 1.2** We are very proud of our achievements in 2012/13. All of our services make a significant difference to the lives of vulnerable children and young people across the UK. Particular highlights for this year are:
- ▶ 86% of our children's centres inspected by Ofsted during 2012/13 were rated 'outstanding' or 'good' in outcomes relating to safeguarding children
  - ▶ our Intensive Family Support (IFS) services are cost-effective and can enable commissioners to achieve real cash savings. We have demonstrated achievements in reducing anti-social behaviour, non-attendance at school and safeguarding concerns
  - ▶ we expanded our delivery of evidence-based programmes, including Functional Family Therapy, Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) and Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)
  - ▶ we have developed forms of social investment funding for new MST services in Essex and MTFC service in Manchester



- 1.3** Children face problems at different stages of their lives for all sorts of reasons. We believe that early intervention means meeting people's needs as soon as they are known. It is key to improving outcomes for children.
- 1.4** A broad range of evidence has been used in this review. Internally, Action for Children has developed a specialist outcomes framework and our electronic database (e-Aspire) enables us to report at local, regional and national levels against key outcome indicators. Appropriate indicators are selected by practitioners to match each child's individual case.
- 1.5** We are developing a reporting system that will allow us to collect data at aggregate level to link the outcomes achieved for children with the inputs or forms of help provided. Our service report cards provide local evidence of our value, and we are also able to aggregate key achievements across services.
- 1.6** Action for Children commissions external, independent evaluations and research to demonstrate further the impact that our services have on outcomes for children. Findings from this work add to the evidence base for this Report.
- 1.7** This Impact Report focusses on four key areas that improve children's lives: safety, health, relationships and achievement. These areas are in line with respective national outcomes frameworks across the UK. It goes on to consider the impact that our volunteers have on outcomes for children and young people. The Report sets out our early intervention service approach and the impact of our IFS services. It demonstrates our innovation and delivery of evidence-based programmes. Finally, our Impact Report highlights our work around new forms of social investment, as well as our cost-effectiveness.

## Keeping children and young people safe

- 1.8** Keeping children and young people safe is paramount to everything we do, and we know we make a difference.
- 1.9** Action for Children commissioned the University of Salford to carry out a four-year (2008-2012) evaluation of the nature and impact of interventions offered to assist children who are being neglected or are at risk of neglect. The research found that the Action for Children services included in the research successfully intervened in most cases of neglect, even when neglect was a most serious concern (to the level of child protection intervention). In cases where parents refused or were unable to respond positively, children benefited from an expedited move into care. Our services achieved the following:
- ▶ in 79% of cases, the prevention of neglect or improvement in the level of concern about neglect was shown
  - ▶ in 59% of cases, concern about neglect was removed completely
  - ▶ in 9% of cases, intervention to prevent the expected development of neglect was successful
- 1.10** Taking into account cases where concerns about neglect were both reduced and removed, improvement had been made to a child's life experience in a total of 68 per cent of cases. In the remaining 32 per cent, concern about neglect remained on closure of the case. Most of these resulted in children being taken into care, although even among these a small proportion showed some improvement.
- 1.11** The evaluation found that the Action for Children Assessment Tool enabled practitioners to work with parents to establish a joint understanding of problematic aspects of parenting and to plan for staged improvements. It also provided valuable evidence of objective assessment and review.

#### 1.12 Further evidence of our impact includes:

- ▶ 324 cases were assessed as part of our Safeguarding Review 2013. We continue to deliver services to some of the most vulnerable children in the UK; almost half of the cases reviewed highlighted safeguarding concerns. Through interventions such as one-to-one support and parenting programmes, our services kept children safe and improved their outcomes
- ▶ in 2013, we launched the Action on Neglect Resource Pack in partnership with the University of Stirling to help practitioners provide the best possible response to children who are experiencing neglect
- ▶ our evidence indicates that Action for Children services frequently and regularly report concerns about children's safety to local authorities and other professional agencies. Furthermore, there is evidence of effective inter-agency working and high levels of identification, referral and resolution of safeguarding children issues
- ▶ 86% of Action for Children children's centres inspected by Ofsted in 2012/13 rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' in the outcomes related to safeguarding. e-Aspire data for 2012/13 shows that our children's centres successfully reduced early or later indicators of neglect and concern about a child in 93% of cases
- ▶ joint research by Action for Children and the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) at Loughborough University to review the effectiveness of our IFS services, found that where measured in 87% of cases the early or later indicators of neglect were addressed
- ▶ Action for Children Family Partners service involves staff working intensively with families where there are concerns around possible neglect, intervening in a timely way as soon as concerns have been expressed, and before there has been an escalation to a formal child protection referral

### Keeping children and young people healthy

1.13 Our services support children and young people to be both emotionally and physically healthy. Evidence of our impact includes:

- ▶ our e-Aspire data shows that in the last year, 74% of the children and young people we worked with showed an improvement in their emotional or mental wellbeing where this was seen to be an issue. We also know that this is the outcome most commonly achieved by our services
- ▶ in our children's centres, 74% of cases showed an improvement in the child's physical health and/or individual development milestones where identified as an issue
- ▶ evaluation by the CCFR at Loughborough University found that our short break services for disabled children improved children's emotional wellbeing (94%)
- ▶ our research with the CCFR found that in 84% of cases within our IFS services, the child's emotional or mental wellbeing either improved or showed no deterioration where it was selected as an outcome

## Improving children and young people's relationships

- 1.14** We know that relationships matter in improving outcomes for children and young people. This could be one of many different types of relationships including: between children and peers, children and professionals, children and their parents/carers, or parents/carers' relationships with professionals. Evidence of our impact includes:
- ▶ 72% of the children and young people that we work with improved their ability to maintain or form a supportive relationship with significant other/s
  - ▶ 69% of children and young people improved their relationships with their parents/carers so that there was a reduced risk of family breakdown
  - ▶ stability is central to achieving positive outcomes for children in care. Three months' analysis of placements shows an overall disruption rate of 3.9% for our fostering services, and we only have an 8% disruption rate for our adoption services
  - ▶ during 2012/13, all of Action for Children's fostering services in Scotland gained a rating of 'very good' or above, with our Glasgow service achieving an 'excellent' score from the Scottish Care Commission. A report by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales highlighted that our fostering services provided a consistently 'very good' level of support to carers and children
  - ▶ the University of Ulster evaluated our short break and intensive family support services for families and young people with developmental disabilities and whose behaviour is severely challenging. The research found that children showed improvements in their communication and personal care
  - ▶ social and economic research consultancy organisation Ekosgen evaluated our Youthbuild and other employment services for young people. The research found that our staff, personal and social development programmes are having a positive impact on young people. Data shows that enhancing family life and forming/maintaining supportive relationships are key core outcomes for 86% of participants

## Improving children and young people's achievements

- 1.15** We aim to help children and young people live fulfilled lives. This involves enabling them to learn new skills and gain achievements. Evidence of our impact includes:
- ▶ Action for Children prepares children for school primarily through supporting children's communication, and emotional and physical development. Data shows that within our children's centres, 78% of children improved their outcomes in relation to school readiness and 77% of children improved their communication skills
  - ▶ overall last year, e-Aspire data shows that 73% of children and young people using our services improved their achievements in a learning environment or achieved readiness for school where this was seen to be an issue. 95% were in education, employment or training after 16
  - ▶ Action for Children's joint evaluation with the CCFR of our IFS services found that, in 89% of cases, children and young people achieved at school and 55% of young people improved their engagement with education, training or employment
  - ▶ in 2012/13, e-Aspire data showed an improvement in 65% of cases measuring the child or young person's financial or life skills
  - ▶ CCFR evaluation of our short break services found that we enable children to participate in activities that they may not have done previously or may not get the opportunity to engage in without the necessary specialist support. This outcome had improved for 65% of the children measured
  - ▶ Ekosgen's evaluation of our Youthbuild and other employment services for young people found that two thirds of the young people supported by the projects have progressed into positive employment, education or training destinations
  - ▶ in 2011, young people who use our services were involved in our successful campaign – 'On our own two feet'. This secured a Government commitment of £16.7 million to ensure that every child across the UK, who has been in care for a year or more, will have a Junior ISA opened for them. Over 30,000 accounts were opened between October 2012 and March 2013



## Volunteers

- 1.16** Across a range of our services, 99 per cent of outcomes achieved solely by volunteers had a positive effect. Volunteers helped vulnerable children and young people to live safely in the family or family network (67%), as well as supporting them to develop supportive relationships (63%).
- 1.17** The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Office of Public Management (OPM) evaluation of the volunteer impact in our children's centres found that volunteers bring extra capacity and act as role models within the local community. They contribute unique skills and experience, and encourage engagement with the centre.
- 1.18** The research concluded that children's centres would run fewer and less effective services without volunteers, and reach a smaller proportion of the communities in which they are based.

## Early intervention and help

- 1.19** Throughout our services, we provide help early to children and young people when they need it. The impact of our early intervention services includes:
- ▶ none of our children's centres inspected by Ofsted in 2012/13 were rated as inadequate. 86% were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in outcomes relating to safeguarding and 59% were rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' overall.
  - ▶ our children's centres made a positive impact in terms of reducing the risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse of a child and concern about a child in 94% of cases where this was an issue
  - ▶ in 94% of these cases, there was a positive impact regarding domestic abuse and concern about a child was reduced. This is significant as the most likely trajectory without intervention would be for the situation to get worse
  - ▶ an evaluation by King's College London of our children's centres concluded that: "Action for Children children's centres have the potential to act as a gateway, and in some cases one-stop shop, for the early intervention which we know can improve outcomes, especially health outcomes, for children"

## Intensive Family Support

- 1.20** IFS services, often known as Family Intervention Projects or FIPs, provide both intensive support and challenge to families experiencing difficulties, and where a service is delivered through a key worker who forms a strong professional relationship with the family. This approach was originally developed in Dundee by Action for Children
- 1.21** Evidence of the impact of our IFS services includes:
- ▶ our research with the CCFR to examine the effectiveness of our IFS services found that, where it was identified as an issue, 89% of cases showed an improvement or no deterioration in the mental health of parents or carers resulting in reduced or unchanged risk in relation to concern about neglect or abuse of the child and 87% addressed the early or later indicators of neglect
  - ▶ the research found that 89% of young people reduced their offending or anti-social behaviour and 85% developed supportive relationships with others
  - ▶ 84% of children experienced an improvement or no deterioration to their emotional or mental wellbeing
  - ▶ our evaluated IFS services have been shown to raise the self-esteem of vulnerable parents and reduce the proportion of families with education and employment problems
  - ▶ IFS supports young people to engage in education, reducing truancy and exclusions
  - ▶ the intensive support provided to families reduced the risk of eviction and hence the need for children to enter the care system

## Innovation

**1.22** Action for Children is innovating in many ways, developing services in response to local, unmet needs. Our innovative approach runs alongside the delivery of existing evidence-based programmes. Evidence of our impact in this area includes:

- ▶ the Action for Children Family Partners service involves staff who work where there are early concerns around neglect, intervening in an intensive and timely way as soon as concerns have been expressed and before there has been an escalation to a formal child protection referral. Outcomes included 72% of children experiencing an improvement in their emotional wellbeing. In 68% of cases, the indicators of neglect were addressed and concerns about the child reduced
- ▶ we have completed the first phase of our service model development work with the support of the Dartington Social Research Unit. This is the first time that an innovation designed to tackle child neglect has been developed through such a clear model pathway

## Evidence-based programmes

**1.23** Action for Children recognises the value of evidence-based programmes and the need to avoid reinventing the wheel when proven programmes already exist. Evidence of our impact includes:

- ▶ we are now delivering Functional Family Therapy, Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC), 'Roots of Empathy', 'Incredible Years' and 'Triple P'
- ▶ during 2012/13, 71% of young people who completed an MTFC placement through our Wessex and London services reduced their offending and anti-social behaviour
- ▶ our delivery of 'Roots of Empathy' aims to mitigate risk to children and young people, and promote greater levels of emotional and social wellbeing. An independent evaluation by the North Lanarkshire Psychological Service (2013) found that 'Roots of Empathy' raises levels of empathy amongst pupils, resulting in more respectful relationships and a reduction in problem behaviour in the classroom

- ▶ over the course of 2011/12, 1,302 parents benefited from our delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes, including the 'Incredible Years' and 'Triple P' programmes

## Social investment

**1.24** In the last year, Action for Children has successfully won contracts to deliver evidence-based services financed through innovative new social funding mechanisms:

- ▶ we have won contracts to deliver MST services in the first two major children's social investment projects in Essex. These services will reduce the number of young people on the edge of entry to local authority care from doing so, and instead provide positive alternatives by way of improved relationships within birth families and improved educational attendance and achievement
- ▶ we will begin to deliver MTFC services in Manchester, providing specialist foster placements for teenagers currently living in residential care, and bridge these young people to long-term family placements whether in foster homes or in birth families

## Cost-effectiveness

**1.25** This report sets out how we offer the best value for money possible. This allows us to maintain our focus on some of the most disadvantaged children and young people in priority areas such as early intervention and child neglect. Evidence of our cost-effectiveness includes:

- ▶ Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of our Caerphilly Family Intervention Team/5+ project found that every £1 invested annually generates £7.60 in social value. The total social value accrued for one year's investment is £3.3 million
- ▶ SROI analysis found that, for every £1 invested annually in our East Dunbartonshire Family Support service (which is designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from reoccurring), society benefits by £9.20. Approximately 93% of the benefits to the State come through a reduction in foster care costs

- ▶ SROI analysis of an Action for Children children's centre estimated that for every £1 invested in the centre, between £7 and £8.50 of social value was generated
- ▶ the NCVO and OPM evaluation of the impact of volunteers in our children's centres calculated an illustrative figure of the total overall value per year to Action for Children of volunteer involvement. This was set at over £400,000 per year
- ▶ the CCFR at Loughborough University compared the costs of our short break services with those provided by local authorities. The study suggests that Action for Children short breaks services offer good value for money, most notably in relation to staff and overhead costs
- ▶ Action for Children's Multi Disciplinary Intervention Service (MIST) in Torfaen, South Wales supports young people aged 11-21 who are in care and who present with such significant challenging and risk-taking behaviour that their placement stability is considerably threatened. SROI analysis found that for every £1 invested in the service, the likely social value generated was £5.10

## Conclusion

**1.26** We are working in fast-changing times. Within a much-reduced total pool of funding, decision-making continues to be devolved to local government to a far greater degree than before. Policy and political developments are in the early stages of preparing for manifestos and the next general election. New service models and funding mechanisms still emerge and there has been a divergence of resourcing across each of the four UK nations.

**1.27** Within this context, Action for Children has undergone a period of organisational change. We have restructured to create a more efficient, flexible organisation. We have implemented, and continue to develop, the Lead Practitioner role within our services. These are front-line supervisory staff who drive high-quality delivery by practising and modelling reflective supervision for practitioners, thereby achieving and demonstrating improved outcomes for vulnerable children. We have also made changes in shared services functions to support the work we do on the front line.

**1.28** We continue to work with local partners to deliver services that are tailored to meet local need. This report demonstrates the impact that these services have on the lives of vulnerable and neglected children and young people.

**1.29** However, we know that there is more to be done and want to take our understanding of evidence and impact to another level. Our priorities for the next year are to innovate other initiatives and replicate existing services, such as Family Partners. We want to:

- ▶ continue to develop and support growth of evidence-based programmes
- ▶ continue to develop our achievements in innovative social investment funding
- ▶ capitalise on the work undertaken in innovation (Family Partners, evidence-based programmes) and demonstrate our ability to replicate selected services in future
- ▶ improve the outcomes reporting systems available within Action for Children. Within this, make the best use of the CHARMs programme to improve our ability to report on outcomes for children in care

- ▶ develop the evidence base for the effectiveness of our participation work and our volunteers

**1.30** We will continue to demonstrate our impact and empower children to overcome the obstacles in their lives that hold them back. We will do whatever is needed for as long as it takes to improve the lives of vulnerable and neglected children and young people.









# Introduction

- 2.1** Action for Children's annual Impact Report sets out how we improve vulnerable children and young people's lives. We help to keep children safe and improve their physical and emotional health. We ensure they are supported to enjoy stable and successful relationships. We also increase their skills and help them achieve. These outcomes are linked to frameworks across Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England.
- 2.2** This report explains how we provide support at the earliest possible stage, coupled with targeted and intensive interventions. We demonstrate the value of our volunteers and detail our innovative approach that compliments the use of evidence-based programmes. Finally, the Impact Report highlights our work around new forms of social investment, and how we deliver best value by providing cost-effective services that improve children and young people's lives.
- 2.3** A range of evidence informs this review. Action for Children has developed a specialist internal outcomes framework and electronic database (e-Aspire), this enables us to report at local, regional and national levels against key outcome indicators. Appropriate indicators are selected to match the unique circumstances of individual children. We are aiming to develop a reporting system that will allow us to collect aggregated data. Our service report cards provide local evidence of our value.
- 2.4** Action for Children commissions external, independent evaluation and research to demonstrate the impact that our services have on outcomes for children and young people. These external reviews add to the evidence base for this report. We also take into consideration the knowledge behind evidence-based programmes.
- 2.5** Policy and service provision continue to evolve rapidly. Political parties are starting to prepare for the next general election and funding systems are changing and budgets reducing, for example the abolition of the Early Intervention Grant in England. The focus on devolving decision-making to local areas remains. Initiatives, models and funding mechanisms have developed across the UK in response to the changing environment.
- 2.6** Within this context, Action for Children has undergone a period of organisational change. We have restructured to create a more efficient, flexible organisation. We have implemented the Lead Practitioner role within our services across the UK. These are front-line supervisory staff who drive high-quality delivery by practising and modelling reflective supervision for practitioners, thereby achieving and demonstrating improved outcomes for vulnerable children. We are supporting our Lead Practitioners' development through a series of 15 action-learning sets facilitated by our accredited Improvement and Consultancy Managers. We have also made changes in shared services functions to support our work on the front line.
- 2.7** We continue to lead local partnerships and assist local authorities to adapt to the changing environment, ensuring that the focus remains on outcomes for children and young people.
- 2.8** This is an on-going journey for us and our service users. We recognise the need to understand and evidence what impact our services are having and remain committed to enabling all children to achieve their potential.



# Keeping children and young people **safe**

- 3.1** Action for Children works with some of the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people across the UK. Keeping children and young people safe from harm is key to our services. This section sets out what we have achieved in this area.



## Annual safeguarding review

- 3.2** For the past five years, Action for Children has conducted an annual safeguarding review. This involves audits of case files, staff focus groups and activity to implement our annual improvement plan
- 3.3** In 2013, a total of 324 case file audits was undertaken - the largest sample of any annual safeguarding review. The safeguarding case file audit tool used in the review was revised in 2012 and introduced for all case file audits from 1 January 2013. The new tool was developed to provide more detailed information on need, service type provided and outcomes achieved, in addition to safeguarding and child protection questions.
- 3.4** There has been an increase in the percentage of case files indicating a safeguarding or child protection concern, from 44 per cent in 2012 to 48 per cent in 2013.
- 3.5** The case file audit asked about the nature of need and interventions provided. The intervention most commonly delivered was overwhelmingly one-to-one support to a vulnerable parent or child. This reflects research evidence that suggested this form of relationship support is responsible for many of the most significant improvements in children's lives (University of Salford, 2012<sup>1</sup>).
- 3.6** The next most commonly offered intervention was practical support, which could be assistance in setting and keeping to routines, improving cleanliness of the household, or assisting families with benefits payments and debt issues. Parenting programmes, such as Triple P and Incredible Years, were the third most frequently offered intervention.
- 3.7** The safeguarding review found that Action for Children services talked to other agencies and shared information well. There were no cases where this was a significant issue, and this reflected strength in previous years.

- 3.8** Our extensive programme of audits indicates a continuing improvement in the way in which we enable practitioners to work effectively through regular reflective supervision. We have prioritised the on-going development of this over the next year.

## Reducing early signs of neglect

- 3.9** In 2013, we published our second annual review of child neglect – 'The state of child neglect in the UK' – in partnership with the University of Stirling.<sup>2</sup> The review found that children are still not getting the help they need early enough and that everyone – professionals and the general public – can do something to help improve the lives of neglected children and keep them safe.
- 3.10** In March 2013, we launched the Action on Neglect Resource Pack<sup>3</sup>, produced in partnership with the University of Stirling and sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council. The Pack contains materials to help practitioners – such as teachers, nurses and social workers – to provide the best possible response to children who are experiencing neglect. Through consultation with the practitioner groups and also with parents and young people who have experienced neglect, it outlines ways in which barriers to providing a timely response and help to children might be overcome. This free resource is available on our website:  
  
**[actionforchildren.org.uk/our-services/for-professionals/campaigns](http://actionforchildren.org.uk/our-services/for-professionals/campaigns)**
- 3.11** Action for Children commissioned the University of Salford to work with a number of our services to review the nature and impact of interventions offered to assist children who were being neglected or who are at risk of neglect. The research aimed to identify which interventions correlated with successful outcomes for children under the age of eight.



- 3.12** The research team evaluated the outcomes in 86 cases over a four-year period (2008-2012), and found that our services demonstrated their ability to intervene successfully in most cases of neglect, even when neglect was a most serious concern (to the level of child protection intervention). In cases where parents refused or were unable to respond positively, children benefited from an expedited move into care. Our services achieved the following:
- ▶ in 79% of cases, prevention of neglect or improvement in the level of concern about neglect was shown
  - ▶ in 59% of cases, concern about neglect was removed completely
  - ▶ in 9% of cases, intervention to prevent the expected development of neglect was successful
- 3.13** Taking into account cases where concerns about neglect were both reduced and extinguished, improvement had been made to a child's life experience in a total of 68 per cent of cases. In the remaining 32 per cent, concern about neglect remained on closure of the case. Most of these resulted in children being taken into care, though even among these a small proportion showed some improvement. The remaining cases in which concern remained were returned to the referring agency for continued work on the Action for Children action plan. In cases where parents refused or were unable to respond positively, children benefited from an expedited move into care.
- 3.14** A combination of parenting programmes and home-visiting was the mainstay of intervention. The researchers noted the significance of Action for Children being able to form relationships with parents hostile to other interventions and in particular hostile to local authority social work interventions.
- 3.15** Each of the services used the Action for Children Neglect Assessment Tool (an adaptation of the Graded Care Profile<sup>4</sup>) to assist in the analysing the severity of concerns against a number of domains in a child's life. The Tool requires a scoring of concerns with zero representing no concern and five being a score to indicate highest levels of concern. The Tool is completed in partnership with parents and enables them to understand the nature of neglect concerns.
- 3.16** The research identified that this element of the Tool, alongside skilled relationship work by practitioners, was the single largest factor in cases where neglect concerns were reduced. It enabled practitioners to work with parents to establish a joint understanding of problematic aspects of parenting and to plan for staged improvements. The Tool also provided a valuable source of evidence of objective assessment and review.
- 3.17** Evaluation of our innovative Action for Children Family Partners (details in Chapter 10 Innovation) provides strong evidence that the service successfully identifies families early, and is able to intervene intensively to prevent neglect and associated poor outcomes for children.
- 3.18** In a sample of 25 children whose families received intensive support during the pilot period, improvement was recorded against 86 per cent of the outcomes that were goals for those particular children. This included specific outcomes aimed at overcoming neglect:
- ▶ 72% of children experienced an improvement in their emotional wellbeing
  - ▶ 68% of cases addressed the indicators of neglect, and concerns about the child had been reduced
  - ▶ 56% of children were assessed as feeling safer within their family network
- 3.19** For those children where outcomes did not improve, many were from families that lacked the capacity to change.

## Children's centres

- 3.20** In 2012/13, 86 per cent of our children's centres inspected by Ofsted were rated as 'outstanding' or 'good' in the outcomes related to the safeguarding of children.
- 3.21** In 2011, inspectors described the safeguarding arrangements within our children's centres as 'exceptional' and stated that staff have an excellent understanding of their responsibilities. Our services contributed to the protection of children in their homes and elsewhere with the inspectors concluding that, through our work, parents had learned useful skills to assess risks and protect themselves and their children from abuse.
- 3.22** e-Aspire data for 2012/13 shows that through interventions such as outreach work, one-to-one support and our Family Partners service, Action for Children children's centres successfully reduced early or later indicators of neglect and concern about a child in 93 per cent of cases where it was selected as an outcome.
- 3.23** Our outcomes reports also show that for 2012/13 our children's centres achieved the following:
- ▶ a positive impact in reducing the risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse of a child reducing concerns about a child in 94% of cases where this was an issue
  - ▶ in 94% of cases, there was a positive impact regarding domestic abuse and concern about a child was reduced. This is significant as the most likely trajectory without intervention would be for the situation to get worse.

## Intensive family support

- 3.24** Action for Children worked with the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) at Loughborough University to examine the effectiveness of Action for Children's Intensive Family Support (IFS) services. As part of this research<sup>5</sup>, analysis of data from four of our IFS services across the UK found that, where measured:
- ▶ in 89% of cases, there was an improvement or no deterioration in the mental health of parents or carers resulting in reduced or unchanged risk in relation to concern about neglect or abuse of the child
  - ▶ in 87% of cases, the early or later indicators of neglect were addressed
- 3.25** Research by the Synergy group<sup>6</sup> into Action for Children's targeted family support services stressed that relationships between professionals and vulnerable people were critical in leading to change in parenting. The researchers found that the provision of intensive visiting for a period of time had a significant impact in reducing the level of concern about children's wellbeing. The authors noted that working with families at the early stage of problems had significant impact in terms of avoiding problems becoming entrenched and irreversible.
- 3.26** The evaluation found that service users did not find the services stigmatising, which is an achievement given that the services offered a range of assistance geared towards those in need of targeted assistance with safe parenting. This was clearly linked to the role of Action for Children as a voluntary sector provider of services.
- 3.27** The research also showed that Action for Children services stopped things from getting worse. This point is an important one to consider when working with families where neglect is an issue, as positive change can be a lengthy process. All our services aim to achieve the highest quality of life experience for all neglected children within the context of their individual families.

- 3.28** A study by accredited SROI practitioners (2010<sup>7</sup>) looking at the Northamptonshire Family Intervention Project found that: “As a result of intense whole family intervention, the child can live a safer, happier and more stable life at home and avoid being taken into care. This analysis found plenty of evidence of these outcomes”.

## Child sexual abuse

- 3.29** Action for Children provides therapeutic services to children and young people who have been sexually abused. An evaluation of eight services by Canterbury Christ Church University (2010<sup>8</sup>) found that the results reinforced the benefits for children and young people from receiving structured and long-term skilled interventions. These benefits related to improvements in self-esteem and mood, and control over life choices.
- 3.30** The report highlighted that there were significantly lower numbers of children/young people who displayed violent or aggressive behaviour, experienced sleep problems or had nightmares following contact with the services.
- 3.31** The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is an evidence-based behavioural screening questionnaire for three to 16 year olds. SDQ research data from our child sexual abuse services indicated fewer emotional problems following intervention. It found significant decreases in the total difficulties experienced by the children and young people, and a reduced negative impact of these difficulties on daily routines. At follow-up, the majority of children/young people scored within the normal bands of the SDQ. The most resoundingly positive outcome children reported after attending therapy is that all felt optimistic about their future.

## Action for Children safeguarding conferences

- 3.32** During 2012/13 safeguarding conferences were delivered to our staff across the UK as part of Action for Children’s safeguarding learning and development strategy. In 2013/14, we will run 15 conferences on child neglect, effective interventions, children and young people with disabilities, teenagers and Internet safety. We will develop new topics as required. We are working with Bath Spa University to accredit the events so that they contribute to our staff’s continued professional development and qualifications as social care practitioners.





# Keeping children and young people healthy

- 4.1** We believe that children should be supported to be emotionally and physically healthy. This section sets out what we have achieved in this area.



## Emotional wellbeing

**4.2** Action for Children works to improve the emotional wellbeing of children and young people in a range of different ways, using the best evidence available in the research literature to guide our practice. Activities span all age ranges of children and young people, and concentrate broadly on improving confidence and self-esteem through empathy and recognition for undertaking tasks, however large or small.

**4.3** Our e-Aspire data shows that, in the last year, 74 per cent of children and young people who finished using our services showed an improvement in their emotional or mental wellbeing where this was previously seen to be an issue.

**4.4** Our annual safeguarding audit found that the outcome achieved the most across the services sampled was an improvement in a child or young person's emotional wellbeing or mental health; 15 per cent of cases were audited. This is a significant proportion given that we have 20 outcomes in our Outcomes Framework to reflect the broad range of services we deliver to meet the myriad needs and ages of the children and young people we work with.

**4.5** As part of our 'Growing Strong' campaign, Action for Children undertook studies to highlight how our services improve children and young people's wellbeing. Services were able to demonstrate good use of relationships with the most vulnerable and neglected children and parents. This effected change and the development of self-esteem through a range of activities including those which provided reward and acknowledgement for achievement for children, young people and parents who received little such acknowledgement for the most part of their lives.

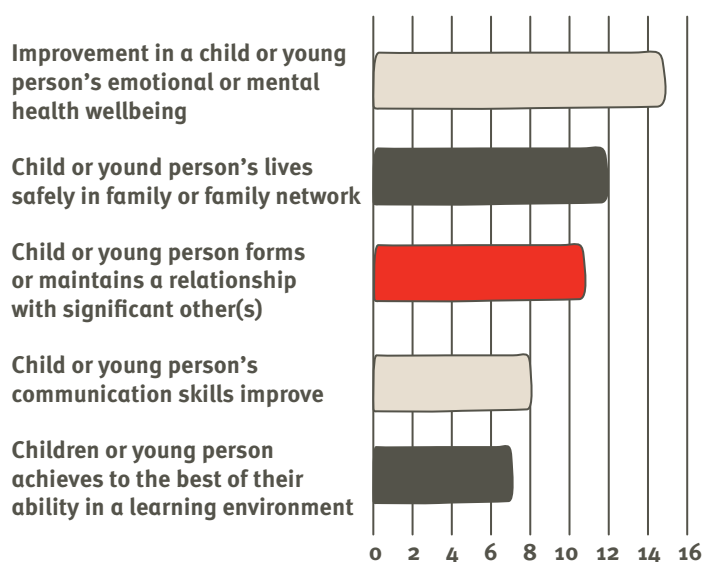
**4.6** Action for Children commissioned the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) at Loughborough University to evaluate the impact that Action for Children's short break services have on disabled children and their families.<sup>9</sup> Staff at eight different short break services indicated that children's emotional wellbeing improved (94%) and that levels of anxiety had been reduced (75%) as a result of their short break service.

**4.7** We also worked with the CCFR to evaluate our IFS services. Outcomes data for four of our IFS services showed that, in 84 per cent of cases where it was selected as an outcome, the child's emotional or mental wellbeing either improved or showed no deterioration.

**4.8** A survey of parents who use our children's centres found that 84 per cent of parents with a child who has special needs felt their child is now more confident and gets on better with people around them<sup>10</sup>. Eighty-five per cent felt their child is happier since using information, advice and services at our centres.<sup>11</sup>

**4.9** Looked-after children are significantly more likely to experience mental health difficulties than their peers. Research demonstrates that these needs often go unmet. Action for Children supports the effective delivery of specialist, therapeutic, and intensive placements to meet young people's needs, especially those who are harder to place and have more complex needs. We have developed a range of evidenced-based practice within our services, in particular in relation to therapeutic fostering services.

**Figure 1:**  
Most prevalent outcomes achieved across  
Action for Children's services



## Multi Disciplinary Intervention Service (MIST)

Action for Children's Multi Disciplinary Intervention Service (MIST) in Torfaen, South Wales supports young people aged 10–21 who are in care. All have experienced abuse and repeated placement disruptions, and have such significant challenging and risk-taking behaviour that they require a very intensive and skilled service to maintain them in foster care and education.

MIST interventions are underpinned by comprehensive assessments and psychological formulations in which the young people are understood in light of their life experiences, relationship style, developmental stage, family circumstances and social context.

MIST works with young people and their families to improve skills such as emotional literacy and participation in intimate relationships. It aims to maximise young people's safety whilst also working psychologically with risky behaviours to build skills and increase resilience.

MIST always attempts to engage foster children's birth family members in their lives in whichever ways are safe, appropriate and wanted by the child.

As a result of contact with MIST, a number of significant outcomes are often achieved:

- improvements to emotional and physical wellbeing
- reduced involvement in behaviours and relationships that are harmful to themselves and others
- becoming more engaged in education and settling in stable foster-care placements

## Physical health

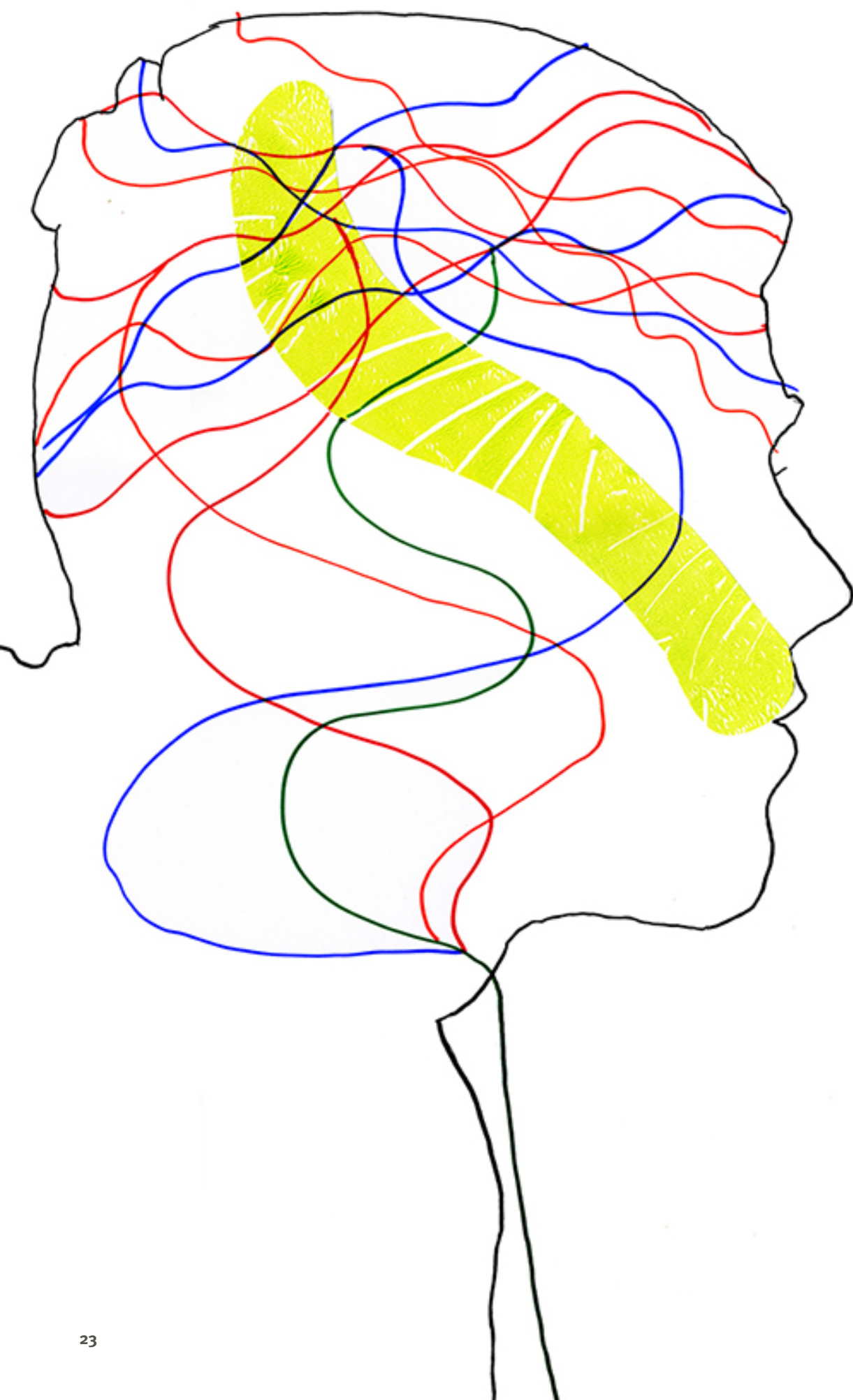
**4.10** In the last year, our e-Aspire data shows that, where it was an issue, over half of the young people reduced their use of harmful substances. Ninety-nine per cent of children and young people experienced a positive change in their physical health and/or met individual development milestones where this was identified as a need.

**4.11** In our children's centres, where identified as an issue, 74 per cent of cases showed an improvement in the child's physical health and/or individual development milestones. This could be achieved through activity such as joint work with health visitors, healthy eating and nutrition groups.

**4.12** e-Aspire data found that in our children's centres, 74 per cent of children improved their physical health and/or met individual development milestones where these were identified as issues for them.

**4.13** A survey of parents across our children's centres found that 71 per cent of parents using health services at our children's centres said that they use health services more often than before they came to the children's centre. Ninety-three per cent of parents who responded feel more confident that they are doing what is best for their children's health and wellbeing as a result of using health or healthy lifestyle services at our centres.<sup>12</sup>

**4.14** Eighty-three per cent of parents surveyed who use our children's centres feel their child is now happier and healthier as a result of our outreach services.<sup>13</sup> Outreach is where we use workers based in our children's centres to reach out to families in need who are not using services and engage them in local provision.



# Improving relationships for better **outcomes** for children and young people

**5.1** Action for Children helps children and young people to maintain supportive relationships with significant individuals in their lives. We know the importance of parents' relationships with each other and professionals, and the impact this can have on children and young people. This section sets out what we have achieved in this area.

## Children and young people's relationships

- 5.2** Many services measured the impact they had on helping children and young people to develop supportive relationships with significant others. This included helping children or young people to develop their family relationships by improving their communication skills, as well supporting children or young people to improve their ability to make friends.
- 5.3** Where it was seen to be an issue, 72 per cent of children and young people improved their ability to maintain or form a supportive relationship with significant other/s. Sixty-nine per cent of cases evidenced a positive change in the relationships between children and young people and their parents/carers so that there was a reduced risk of family breakdown. This included evidence of reduced behavioural challenge by the child or young person.
- 5.4** Furthermore, 76 per cent of children and young people improved their communication skills, which is vital for building relationships.
- 5.5** These figures demonstrate our long-standing success in helping vulnerable children and young people improve their relationships.

## Relationships between parents and professionals

- 5.6** Research highlights the importance of vulnerable children, young people and families having someone to whom they can talk and trust. The use of effective professional relationships can have a significant impact. Vulnerable parents and carers are able to use the comfort and security of such a relationship to develop their skills and self-esteem, and improve parenting.
- 5.7** Building on the existing evidence base, Action for Children commissioned York Consulting to undertake research to help us articulate how we develop effective relationships with vulnerable parents that make a difference for children and young people.<sup>14</sup>

- 5.8** As part of this research, we produced:
- a skills framework identifying the qualities, experience, skills and knowledge that are essential to developing effective professional relationships with vulnerable parents in order to improve outcomes for children
  - an organisational framework that identifies organisational qualities that support the development of effective relationships. It also provides examples of how Action for Children services are delivering these organisational qualities
  - a final study report that provides examples of how our services are delivering effective relationships
- 5.9** Based on five case study areas, the research identified approaches used in Action for Children's services that worked well with parents. Approaches included providing flexible, needs-led delivery. This was an important driver in Action for Children's ability to meet needs and improve outcomes of children, young people and families.
- 5.10** The main positive outcomes we achieved for children and young people were improvements in children and young people's attendance at school, safety, emotional wellbeing and development.
- 5.11** Action for Children has commissioned York Consulting to build on this research and consider what a good professional relationship with young people that builds their resilience would look like. The research will be carried out during 2013.



## Barnstaple Children's Centres

Action for Children Barnstaple Children's Centres cover one of the 30% most deprived areas of the country, as well as some pockets of deprivation where families are either dependent on workless benefits or are on low incomes.

The centres work to improve relationships between infants and parents through 'Little Bump, Big Bump, Birth and Beyond'; a targeted ante-natal service that Action for Children designed for parents-to-be who have recognised vulnerabilities, and who traditionally may not be interested in attending an ante-natal class. The group runs for eight ante-natal sessions and two post-natal sessions, that run fortnightly and therefore start when they are approximately 20 weeks pregnant.

The centres work closely with both the Health Visiting and Midwife teams to engage families and co-deliver some of the sessions.

The service improves relationships between parents and their growing bump by telling them about the developing baby, which in turn enhances the promotion of attachment and bonding. Engaging families early has resulted in many being open to further improve their relationships and understanding of their baby by attending groups such as 'Baby Massage' and 'Here's Looking at You Baby'.

## Relationships for children in care

**5.12** During 2012/13, all of Action for Children's fostering services in Scotland gained a rating of 'very good' or above, with our Glasgow service achieving an 'excellent' score, from the Scottish Care Commission. The report stated: "There was a clear commitment to continue to develop the service and improve outcomes for the young people".

**5.13** A report by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales highlighted that our fostering services provided a consistently very good level of support to carers and children.

**5.14** Placement stability results in better outcomes for looked-after children. Our success is reflected in our low disruption rates i.e. avoiding circumstances where the placement of a child with a foster carer or adoptive parent breaks down in an unplanned way.

**5.15** Three months' analysis of placements shows an overall disruption rate of 3.9 per cent for our fostering services, and we only have an eight per cent disruption rate for our adoption services.<sup>15</sup> Ofsted statistics for England (2011<sup>16</sup>) quote a rate of five per cent.

**5.16** An evaluation of our fostering services highlights how Action for Children provides placements for some of the most vulnerable children and young people. Many children and young people who live with our foster carers do so as a result of having experienced multiple placement breakdowns before local authorities commissioned our supported placement services.

**5.17** The evaluation found our work to build strong relationships (e.g. between the young person and carer) contributed to placement stability. Our foster carers identified the concept of giving back power and control to the child as an important factor in building a relationship with a young person. Carers felt that it was important to identify aspects of the child's life that are within their control, and offer them the opportunity to make choices and decisions where possible.

- 5.18** In England, Action for Children fostering services are successful in finding placements for older children, with 82 per cent of children over 10 years old compared to the English average of 58 per cent. Eighty-five per cent of Scottish children fostered with Action for Children are over 12 years old, compared with only 42 per cent nationally. In Wales, 79 per cent of our fostered children are over 10 years old, compared to 54 per cent nationally.
- 5.19** At only eight per cent, the disruption rate for our adoptive placements demonstrates that we provide stability to some of society's most troubled children and young people. These include those from a black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, sibling groups and older children.
- 5.20** Our specialist black adoption service, Mosaic, is an example of how we achieve stable placements for BAME children and young people. It successfully recruits black adopters and supports lasting placements of children with those adopters.
- 5.21** Action for Children commissioned the University of Central Lancashire (2010<sup>17</sup>) to evaluate the effectiveness of this service in developing, supporting and encouraging adoptive parents (and families) from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds to provide permanent homes for children and young people waiting for adoption.
- 5.22** The report concluded: "With an all-BAME staff group and central focus on ethnically-matched placements, Action for Children Adoption Black Families had developed specialist expertise and insight into the myriad ethnicities, cultures and religions of both adoptive parents and children".

## Supporting disabled children's relationships

- 5.23** Evaluation by the University of Ulster considered three Action for Children services – in Cardiff, Glasgow and Edinburgh – that provide specialist short breaks and intensive support services to families and young people with developmental disabilities and whose behaviour is severely challenging.<sup>18</sup>
- 5.24** Over a six-month period, children were reported to have shown improvements in their communication and personal care. There was improvement in around half of cases where behavioural problems and aggression to other people was reported as an issue. Children who had received short breaks tended to have improved behaviour, especially if they received a greater number of nights within the short breaks service per annum. This was linked with improved ratings on parental wellbeing. However, for small proportions of children the risk of moving out of the family home had increased rather than decreased.
- 5.25** Overall more than 40 per cent of the children were deemed to have improved in one or more areas. The improvements were greatest in relation to communication and personal care. Compared to children who had intensive support only, higher proportions of children who attended short breaks were rated as showing improvements in their self-feeding and personal care.
- 5.26** Similar ratings were made for the challenging behaviour that the children were recorded as displaying. More children were rated as improved in terms of the harm they may cause others and in repetitive routines. However, fewer had changed in terms of screaming, self-injury and depressive mood.
- 5.27** For our family-based short break services for disabled children and young people, 71 per cent have seen communication skills improve and 80 per cent were able to exercise a choice and express their ambitions for the future.
- 5.28** Parents and carers also benefit from our short break services; 100 per cent of relationships between children and young people and parents/carers have improved so there is reduced risk of family breakdown.

## Supported employment programmes

- 5.29** Action for Children commissioned economic and research consultancy organisation Ekosgen to carry out a three-year evaluation of our Youthbuild Supported Employment Programmes operating across central Scotland. Ekosgen<sup>19</sup> found that projects made the greatest progress towards ‘relationships’, as well as ‘employability’ outcomes. Between April 2011 and March 2012, relationships outcomes improved in 83 per cent of cases where this was measured.
- 5.30** Ekosgen’s evaluation<sup>20</sup> found that there is evidence from referral partners, project workers and young people that the support of staff and aspects of Youthbuild’s personal and social development programme is having a positive impact. Data shows that enhancing family life and forming/maintaining supportive relationships are core outcomes for 86 per cent of participants (145 young people).
- 5.31** Through provision of holistic and tailored support, Youthbuild can help young people to manage changes in their lives. Ability to manage change is linked to having a strong and supportive social network. Although managing change is only a relevant outcome for 30 per cent of participants, just under two thirds of these reported a positive impact as a result of Youthbuild.
- 5.32** Data showed that Youthbuild has a positive impact on family relations for around two fifths of respondents. They noted that Youthbuild had contributed to improved relationships by “getting them out of the house” and providing them with a regular source of income and realistic prospects for the future. There are several cases where respondents commented that, since enrolling on the training, family members were proud of them or have more respect for them.

## Mother and Baby Units

- 5.33** Action for Children became the first organisation to provide wider health, care and education services on Mother and Baby Unit (MBUs) in prison. We work in partnership to provide high-quality services that meet the needs of babies and their mothers, while respecting the prison’s requirements.
- 5.34** An independent evaluation found that the team in HMP Prison Service Styal MBU has a wealth of skills, a solid knowledge base and a range of complex understandings around the care and education of babies and their mothers in a prison context. In 2010, the service received an ‘outstanding’ Ofsted report and an honour was awarded to them by the Butler Trust.



# Improving children and young people's achievements

- 6.1** Action for Children services improve children's development in the early years and young people's access to education, employment and training, as well as helping them to find and maintain suitable accommodation. We also support young people to engage in positive activities and reduce their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. This section highlights our work in this area.



## Education, training and employment

### Early years

- 6.2** Action for Children prepares children for school primarily through supporting children's communication, emotional and physical development. Data shows that within our children's centres:
- ▶ 78% of children improved their outcomes in relation to school readiness
  - ▶ 77% of children improved their communication skills
- 6.3** We are part of a consortium to deliver the early learning and development programme in all of our children's centres and also have speech therapists based in our centres, as well as running play sessions and a range of health intervention programmes.
- 6.4** Research shows how vital parental engagement is to improving children's educational attainment. We provide a range of targeted parenting support within our children's centres. During 2011/12, 1,302 parents received evidence-based parenting programmes from Action for Children. In addition, we promote home learning, working with parents to support their child's education and creating a positive home-school relationship. We also provide adult learning support and skills development, such as literacy and numeracy classes, IT-training and volunteering programmes.

## Beacon Heath and Whipton Children's Centre 2gether pilot

Action for Children's Beacon Heath and Whipton children's centres are participating in a pilot run by Devon County Council aimed at improving outcomes and narrowing the education attainment gap between disadvantaged and other children in Devon, as well as supporting parents to take up training or to go into work.

The children's centres are delivering the two-year-old early education offer and provide sessions directly for disadvantaged two year-olds, as well as providing complimentary parenting support. A child care team liaises closely with the family support team to ensure there is a good understanding of individual children's needs and how to achieve the best outcomes.

Data shows that the pilot successfully targeted those with greatest need; for example lone parents, families where there is domestic abuse, BAME communities, families where English is a second language, grandparents as main carer and parents with a physical disability.

All the children who attended the pilot moved to a nursery when they reached three. The outcomes for children in the first cohort were extremely good, as measured against their health and development. An interim report into the effectiveness of the pilot concluded that, for children living in families with very high levels of need, the pilot offered compensatory experiences that they otherwise would not have had.

One of the key emerging issues was that it was much easier to develop good relationships between family workers and parents when the children were attending child care at the children's centres.

**6.5** Action for Children runs the Early Years Arts Initiative in partnership with Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books. The Initiative aims to support children and families to explore and develop relationships and routines with books, as well as using them as a starting point for discussion and creative activity. Staff from 35 of our services were trained in story-telling techniques. Over 450 children and 300 parents attended workshops across the UK designed to increase confidence in reading among children and their parents.

**6.6** When evaluating the impact of this Initiative:

- ▶ 94% of service staff strongly agreed or agreed that the families they support are now more able to use books with their children
- ▶ 94% of service staff strongly agreed or agreed that there has been a positive impact on how the children view books

## Education, training and employment

**6.7** Overall last year, e-Aspire data shows that 73 per cent of children and young people working with our services improved their achievements in a learning environment or achieved readiness for school where this was identified as an issue for the child or young person concerned. In addition, where relevant, 95 per cent of children and young people were helped with their education, employment or training post-16.

**6.8** Specifically, out of the care leavers who have finished their contact with our services, 98 per cent had improved or maintained their engagement in education, employment or training after 16.

**6.9** Ninety-three per cent of young carers who have finished their contact with our services achieved in a learning environment to the best of their ability or improved their readiness for school.

**6.10** Ekosgen's (2012) evaluation of our Youthbuild and other employment services for young people found that two thirds of the young people supported by the projects have progressed into positive employment, education or training destinations. Of these, the majority have gone onto training courses at further education colleges or training providers (71%) and the remainder have gone into paid (27%) or voluntary (2%) work.

**6.11** Evaluation of our IFS services found that, in 89 per cent of cases, children and young people achieved at school. Fifty-five per cent of young people improved their engagement with education, training or employment. This is a significant achievement given the current economic climate and labour market.

**6.12** Action for Children's Headlands School is an independent residential school in Wales for children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. It has seen a substantial increase in examination entries over the past four years, rising from 45 in 2009 to 160 in 2012. Learners have also achieved other external accreditations such as Duke of Edinburgh Awards and BTEC Level 2 in construction.

**6.13** There has been consistent improvement in learners' use of skills throughout the curriculum, for example all learners in post-16 education continue to improve their reading age, and there has been an increase in the number of learners achieving higher National Curriculum level mathematics.

**6.14** Where reported, the improved outcomes for children and young people in our foster and adoption care include 75 per cent achieve satisfactory attendance at school, further education, training or in employment.<sup>21</sup>

## Developing children and young people's skills

- 6.15** In 2012/13, data showed an improvement in 65 per cent of cases measuring the child or young person's financial or practical life skills. This includes being able to manage their finances and reduce debt, or open a bank account and remain in credit. Skills may include being able to prepare a nutritious meal safely or being able to make and keep appointments.
- 6.16** In 2011, young people that use our services were involved in our successful campaign – 'On our own two feet'.<sup>22</sup> This secured Government investment of £16.7 million up to 2015 and on-going funding - to ensure that every child across the UK who has been in care for a year or more will have a Junior ISA opened for them. Accounts will have an initial deposit of £200 and fundraising activity will take place for additional top-ups. The scheme came into effect in autumn 2012. Between October 2012 and March 2013, over 30,000 Junior ISAs for looked-after children were opened. Over 93 per cent of the local authorities and Health Trusts across the UK confirmed participation in the scheme, and over 75 per cent submitted their first tranche of data to The Share Foundation, enabling Junior ISAs to be opened. This represents a Government investment of over £6 million.
- 6.17** Action for Children provides a range of financial skills services with the assistance of funding and staff time from Barclays. This provides money management and debt advice workshops for vulnerable young parents, and for young people preparing for independence after care.
- 6.18** An independent assessment of the programme for 2011/12 found that the programme is improving young people's financial capability, as well as changing their attitudes towards topics such as budgeting, debt and saving for the future. Young people have experienced increased self-confidence. In some cases, this has enabled them to access formal training courses or seek employment; two young people have gone on to become Barclays apprentices.
- 6.19** In 2013, we are looking to embed Barclays Money Skills as part of the core service offer in our children's centres.
- 6.20** Action for Children's Inspire IT Programme, supported by Dell, continues to grow and innovate. Twenty active Inspire IT projects - based in services including children's centres, young carers and youth employability - allow vulnerable young people access to online services and learning resources. Inspire IT keeps young people connected to their communities, providing stability in their lives and supporting positive development. An evaluation of the programme found young people's skills and confidence increased, as well as their employability and access to training and education.<sup>23</sup> The creation of a Service User network will enable Inspire IT to work with a wider range of services, providing valuable online connectivity to families and communities that need it.
- 6.21** Action for Children's range of participation and co-production opportunities includes young people being 'trained as trainers' and Right Choice facilitators (children and young people involved in our staff recruitment). Young people have co-delivered Right Choice training to staff in six locations across the UK. These experiences have had a positive impact on their skills and confidence.
- 6.22** Throughout our services, children and young people have developed their skills and confidence through participation in forums, group sessions, youth cabinets and Children in Care Councils. For example:
- ▶ North Lanarkshire Young Carers' young people-led youth forum meets fortnightly and takes part in regular reviews on service design and delivery
  - ▶ young carers groups in Northern Ireland meet quarterly focusing on design and feedback of our services
  - ▶ Disability Lincolnshire hosts a regular group of young people who are part of the 'Active citizenship team' influencing Lincolnshire County Council service provision. Young people are also regularly involved in staff recruitment and consultation
  - ▶ Llanelli Children's Rights runs three children and young people's groups that have contributed to consultations on services, their 'ideal foster carer' and looked-after children reviews

## Building disabled children and young people's skills

- 6.23** The evidence of the impact of Action for Children services for disabled children shows an excellent record in helping young people to undertake successful transition to adulthood.
- 6.24** The Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University evaluated the impact of Action for Children short break services on outcomes for children. It found that our services enable children to participate in activities that they may not have had the opportunity to previously, certainly not without the necessary specialist support. This outcome had improved for 65 per cent of the children in the sample for whom it had been identified.
- 6.25** The research found that 'the outcome to develop practical life skills was identified for 68 children in the sample and was recorded as improved for 43 per cent of those children over a six-month period. All services were found to help children develop new skills, especially the overnight stays and the various day trips the staff take the children on. Overnight short breaks present a unique opportunity to assist the child in developing skills such as dressing, washing, eating and shopping'.
- 6.26** The outcome indicator 'views are sought, heard and contribute to decision-making' was identified for 80 children in the sample and was recorded as improved for 62 per cent of those children. This is particularly pertinent as many of the children attending Action for Children short breaks are non-verbal and use specialist techniques for communication, such as picture exchange communication system (PECS) or Makaton.
- 6.27** The research explained that given the high levels of need identified for the children in the sample, any improvements in outcomes are positive however small. Action for Children services work to integrate these children into a community so that they are able to continue to attend the short breaks together with other children who have a gastrostomy feeding tube, or disrupted sleep patterns, or who are non-verbal.
- 6.28** Perceptions of the services by children's families, other service providers and commissioners and staff were also positive. Families reported improvements in their child's:
- ▶ confidence (63%)
  - ▶ emotional wellbeing (50%)
  - ▶ behaviour (30%)
  - ▶ personal care (48%)
  - ▶ practical skills (37%)
- 6.29** Families and delivery partners were positive about the quality of the service provided with regards to:
- ▶ the staff's knowledge of their child's specific condition and associated needs
  - ▶ the quality of the equipment at the homes
  - ▶ our ability to take the child's views into consideration
  - ▶ communication between different agencies working with individual children
- 6.30** Overall, families were very positive about how the three homes shared information with other professionals. Around two-thirds of families reported that the targets set for their children were linked to work being undertaken at their child's school or with other agencies working with their child. Nearly three-quarters of the staff members who submitted surveys agreed that partnerships with other agencies help to achieve the best outcomes for children.
- 6.31** Researchers at the Norah Fry Research Centre at the University of Bristol evaluated our Kingfishers project in Gloucestershire, which provides supported housing to young people with learning difficulties entering transition to adulthood. This found that disabled young people were helped towards independence very effectively and that Kingfishers adopted a holistic approach to progression, taking an interest in the tenants' employment, future accommodation and social lives as well as developing practical skills.

## Helping young people to find suitable accommodation

- 6.32** Evaluation of our supported employment programmes found that access to suitable accommodation was identified as a key outcome through e-Aspire for 84 per cent of Youthbuild participants (142 young people). Over the duration of their involvement with Youthbuild, 54 per cent of these young people were supported to improve their accommodation.
- 6.33** We offer vital support to children when they leave the care system. This is essential to ensuring a safe route to independence and avoiding the risk of negative experiences such as homelessness. These opportunities are assisted through our corporate partnerships – for example Balfour Beatty has supported our care leavers into independent living by funding start-up costs and equipment for young people to set up a new home. This is particularly vital for those young people with no support network around them.





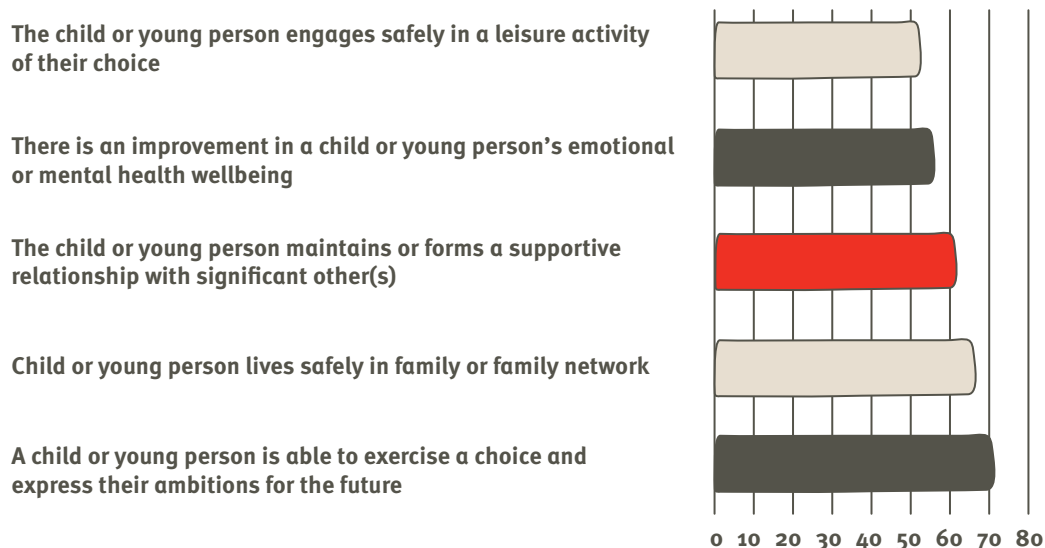


# Volunteering

- 7.1** Volunteers support vulnerable children and young people in a variety of our services, such as those who work with children in care and children's centres.
- 7.2** Across a range of our services, including children's centres and Independent Visiting services, 99 per cent of outcomes achieved solely by volunteers had a positive effect. Figure 2 sets out the outcomes to which volunteers make the greatest contribution.

**Figure 2:**

Outcomes to which volunteers make the greatest contribution



**7.3** Action for Children commissioned the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Office of Public Management (OPM) to evaluate the impact of volunteers in our children's centres. The research (2012<sup>24</sup>) found that volunteers in children's centres:

- ▶ bring extra capacity and provide an informal reassuring presence for families using children's centres
- ▶ act as role models to the local community, and contribute unique skills and experience as well as bringing practical support and providing a pastoral role to families
- ▶ enhance the children's centre environment and help it to reflect the local community
- ▶ increase use and reach of children's centres; break down any stigma of using the children's centre, widen participation and become a community resource by creating new relationships between people
- ▶ experience a range of benefits including an increase in confidence and feeling of self-worth, a route to employment, education or training, a sense of personal satisfaction and a chance to socialise and have fun

**7.4** The research stated that a 'staff, parents and volunteers alike describe a volunteer-free centre as a quieter, less vibrant place'.

**7.5** The research calculated an illustrative figure of the total overall value (the value less the cost of volunteering) per year to Action for Children of volunteer involvement in children's centres to be over £400,000.

**7.6** The research concluded that children's centres would run fewer and less effective services without volunteers and reach a smaller proportion of the communities in which they are based.

**7.7** We are committed to developing our work with volunteers and ensuring that we direct volunteers to making the greatest positive difference possible to the lives of children and young people. We will provide further evidence of the impact of our volunteers in the next year.







# Early intervention and help

- 8.1** Providing help early, as soon as needs emerge, is key to improving children's outcomes. In 2012-13, Action for Children worked with the Social Care Institute for Excellence to consider how early intervention approaches can be realised at local level.<sup>25</sup> Early intervention requires a flexible and adaptive approach to service provision. This chapter sets out what we have achieved in this area.

## Children's centres

**8.2** Children's centres provide effective, accessible, local responses that reach out to vulnerable families and improve children's life chances through both direct work with children and support to parents who have the biggest impact on children's life chances. They offer an essential combination of support for a child's early development, working directly with children, supporting parents and early education providers.

**8.3** Our outcomes reports show that for 2012/13, our children's centres achieved the following:

- ▶ a positive impact in reducing the risk of physical, sexual or emotional abuse of a child, reducing concerns about a child in 94% of cases where this was an issue
- ▶ in 94% of cases, there was a positive impact regarding domestic abuse and concern about a child was reduced. This is significant as the most likely trajectory without intervention would be for the situation to get worse
- ▶ 77% of children improved their communication skills where this was an issue for them

**8.4** Action for Children commissioned King's College London (2011<sup>26</sup>) to evaluate the impact that our children's centres in England have on outcomes for the most vulnerable children. Outcomes data was collected on 202 closed cases. At the time of closing a case, children (where appropriate) and their carers were asked to identify areas of improvement, no change and deterioration. These indications related broadly to being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making positive contributions and achieving economic wellbeing. Each individual could select more than one area. The data showed:

- ▶ 156 areas of improvement
- ▶ 85 areas where children had maintained their initial level

**8.5** The areas of greatest improvement related to: parents/carers' capacity to support their child's health, parents/carers' ability to cope with difficulties, and improvement to the child's ability to contribute to the learning environment.

**8.6** In addition, the report highlights that our children's centres are successful at:

- ▶ reaching people who do not normally access services
- ▶ identifying and meeting the needs of vulnerable children
- ▶ working in partnership, especially with health services
- ▶ reducing the stigma that may be attached to accessing services

**8.7** King's College London concluded that "Action for Children children's centres have the potential to act as a gateway, and in some cases one-stop-shop, for the early intervention which we know can improve outcomes, especially health outcomes, for children". Findings suggest that the Action for Children's "service style constitutes a very timely and effective way of delivering services in a period of particular resource challenge."

**8.8** Following a refresh in 2011, the latest revised Ofsted inspection framework for children's centres in England came into effect from April 2013. The new framework reflects the move to clustering services and has a greater focus on demonstrating outcomes for children and families, in particular the most vulnerable. Revision of the inspection framework has resulted in some children's centres' ratings shifting due to the new criteria as opposed to changes in service provision.

**8.9** Against this background, none of our children's centres inspected by Ofsted in 2012/13 were rated as inadequate. Eighty-six per cent were rated 'good' or 'outstanding' in outcomes relating to safeguarding and 59% were rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' overall.



**8.10** The Nationwide Children's Research Centre (2011<sup>27</sup>) carried out action research over three years in relation to our children's centres in Cumbria. The evaluation concluded: "Partnerships between the children's centres and other agencies, particularly children's services, health and schools have improved overall, creating opportunities for better outcomes for children. Team Around the Child meetings and the Common Assessment Framework contributed to improved outcomes".

**8.11** The researchers found that we provide a mix of universal services, including family learning and parenting programmes, as well as more intensive, personalised, targeted family support. We achieve a high level of reach (targeting) with just under half (48%) of the 62 cases included in Year Three of the research already known to children's services. The Year Three report found that 41 out of 62 cases were assessed by staff as 'improved' or 'much improved'. Eight cases stayed the same and eight deteriorated.

**8.12** The independent research team RMRA and the Centre for Research on the Child and Family, University of East Anglia (2009<sup>28</sup>) evaluated the effectiveness of the eight Action for Children children's centres in Norfolk. Findings highlighted:

- ▶ all children's centres had partnering arrangements with health services in the community. They also had links, shared resources or worked together across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors
- ▶ children's centres worked effectively with social services. All centres had well established links to children's services and child protection teams to support the more complex cases and families at risk of social exclusion
- ▶ health service links were very important. Our ability to share resources indicated close and effective working between a range of health professionals and children's centre managers
- ▶ there was good professional expertise and integration of health, social and education services to support families in need

**8.13** Action for Children's work with fathers is also noteworthy. Of father/male carer respondents to a children's centre survey<sup>29</sup>:

- ▶ 96% feel supported to help their child get the best start in life because of services they have used at the centre
- ▶ 90% felt more confident that they could be a good father because of their experience at the centre
- ▶ 88% feel they can be a better role model to their child because of the services they used at the children's centre

**8.14** Action for Children works in partnership with E.ON to help families we work with to address fuel poverty. Last year, our Energy Counts programme worked with over 650 parents and their children from ten of our children's centres. Families were given Energy Counts information and advised about practical measures to help them save on fuel bills and reduce energy consumption. A further 120 families who engage with our children's centres in Birmingham were given intensive support: a home visit from an Action for Children Support Worker who completed an initial energy audit. In partnership with Age UK, 100 of these families were visited by an Age UK handy van and given installations to make their homes more energy efficient and safe. Over 250 children experienced a significant improvement in safety and comfort within their homes. One hundred per cent of families gave positive feedback regarding reduction in fuel bills and consumption.

**8.15** Action for Children runs Flying Start services in Wales. A Welsh Government evaluation of Flying Start found that 'it seems likely that the Flying Start programme has succeeded in increasing access to health visiting services and resulted in a more positive user experience.' Evidence suggests "there has been success in providing parents with a more holistic service with health visitors playing a crucial role in signposting to other types of support designed to improve parent and child outcomes."<sup>30</sup>

## Early intervention programme in Northern Ireland

**8.16** In Northern Ireland, the Northern Area Early Intervention Project was established to support children between the ages of eight and 13 years and their families, who are vulnerable to offending and anti-social behaviour. Service provision includes individual work, outreach support, youth justice preventative work, support around parenting skills and educational improvement.

**8.17** An evaluation by Independent Research Solutions showed an almost complete reversal from the level of difficulties experienced on admission to the level of difficulties on discharge. Results indicated the positive outcomes for the children and their families following the intervention. Scoring was agreed between the staff, the referrers, the children themselves and their parents with a validation exercise to confirm that comments reflected the outcome indicator scores accurately. The average cost of a service included in the programme indicated a substantial saving when compared to later interventions, such as care or custody interventions that can be 30 (or more) times the service cost.<sup>31</sup>

**8.18** These services were able to demonstrate significant outcomes improvements. Use of the Outcomes Star tool<sup>32</sup> (a tool for supporting and measuring change when working with vulnerable people) was correlated with an 82 per cent increase in emotional wellbeing of children and young people and 80 per cent increase of understanding risk and ensuring that protective factors are in place.









# intensive family support

- 9.1** Intensive Family Support (IFS) services, often known as Family Intervention Projects or FIPs, provide both intensive support and challenge to families experiencing difficulties, and where a service is delivered through a key worker who forms a strong professional relationship with the family. This chapter sets out what we have achieved in this area of work.
- 9.2** Action for Children delivers 45 IFS services across the UK. The model of IFS service has evolved but has retained fidelity to the original model developed in Dundee. IFS services have demonstrated their effectiveness in dealing with anti-social and offending behaviours, as well as improving educational outcomes through increased attendance. IFS services have kept young people safe where there were safeguarding concerns at home and also dealt with youth crime and the safe entry to care for teenagers. This has been achieved in Action for Children through a proliferation of family intervention services as well as through delivery of intensive help through family and children's centres.

## Dundee Families Project

Action for Children's Dundee Families Project was formally established in 1996. It was the first UK family intervention programme aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour.

In December 2012, 37 families and 71 children received support. Referring agencies include the Council's social work, anti-social behaviour and housing teams. Most families have multiple presenting issues including children's behaviour, parenting and mental health issues.

The service has diversified the families it works with. An additional angle means the service engages some families before their problems get worse i.e. to the stage of tenancies being under threat.

The service has developed a parenting initiative, delivering the evidence-based programme 'Incredible Years' targeted at parents with children aged 5-12 years old. An adaptation of the Parenting Daily Hassles tool<sup>33</sup> is used to evaluate impact.

Evaluation found the multi-disciplinary nature of the project team to be a key strength. Families had a high degree of existing agency involvement with referral agencies, often with three or more different agencies involved. Co-ordinating this involvement for the best interests of the families is a key function of the service.<sup>34</sup>

In cases where the following outcomes were recorded (2012/13):

- ▶ 100% experienced a reduction in offending or anti-social behaviour
- ▶ 81% experienced an improvement in relationships so that there was a reduced risk of family breakdown
- ▶ 75% experienced an improvement in the child or young person's achievement in a learning environment
- ▶ 71% saw the child living safely in the family network
- ▶ 65% saw an improvement in parental mental health and reduction in concerns about neglect or abuse

## Keeping children and young people safe and out of care

**9.3** Action for Children worked with the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR) at Loughborough University to examine the impact and cost effectiveness of our IFS services. As part of this research, data from four of our IFS services across the UK was analysed. Where it was identified as an issue:

- ▶ 89% showed an improvement or no deterioration in the mental health of parents or carers resulting in reduced or unchanged risk in relation to concern about neglect or abuse of the child
- ▶ 87% addressed the early or later indicators of neglect. The situation deteriorated in only 13% of cases and for some families, this will have resulted in Action for Children escalating concerns within the local authority to ensure safeguarding of those children
- ▶ 77% of children and young people were living safely within the family or family network
- ▶ 85% developed their supportive relationships with others
- ▶ 81% developed their relationships with their family

**9.4** The Scottish Government published an evaluation of intensive family intervention projects in Scotland.<sup>35</sup> This research was undertaken mainly to evaluate the 'Breaking the Cycle' pilot projects funded by the Scottish Government. The evaluation focused on three pilot projects – Action for Children Scotland's Perth Families project, and pilot projects in Falkirk and in South Lanarkshire – as well as on Action for Children Scotland's Dundee and Aberdeen Families projects. The evaluation endorsed the Dundee Families Project upon which the pilot projects were modelled, with the evaluation report stating: "It would appear that there is a good prospect of positive outcomes from schemes set up on this model".

- 9.5** An independent review by Synergy Research and Consulting Ltd<sup>36</sup> demonstrated that intensive family support services achieve optimal impact when the following conditions are applied:
- ▶ continuity of support when the ‘intensive support’ period has ended
  - ▶ the significance of the professional relationship as a vehicle for change when working with service users who had experienced exclusion and disadvantage
  - ▶ targeted support was not seen as stigmatising by parents or young people. Intensive support worked when provided from a universal base
  - ▶ robust outreach, whereby service staff make contact with families in the community, is essential
- 9.6** The research concluded that a genuinely preventative approach seeks, at every point, to prevent ‘something worse’ from happening. Making things ‘not worse’ might be an outcome that is not always well captured for some children.
- 9.7** Furthermore, it found that there was not a concern among service users in terms of feeling stigmatised by contact with the services even though the services offered a range of assistance geared towards those in need of targeted assistance with safe parenting. This is likely to link to the role of Action for Children as a voluntary sector provider of services.
- 9.8** The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen, 2011<sup>37</sup>) statistics on family intervention projects, that includes our services, show that on average there was a 47 per cent reduction in the proportion of families experiencing risks associated with poor family functioning including poor parenting, family breakdown, domestic violence or child protection issues.
- 9.9** Synergy Research and Consulting Ltd. looked at the outcomes achieved by four Action for Children services through audit of files and through capturing the views of service users, partners and Action for Children staff. The projects were drawn from two in England (Exeter and Bayswater), one in South Wales (Pontllytyn) and one in the north of Scotland (Moray).
- 9.10** The researchers noted that there was a positive impact in terms of reducing early signs of child neglect. It was in these cases where the use of professional relationship was noted by the researchers to have a significant impact. Vulnerable parents and carers were able to use the comfort and security of such a relationship in order to develop self-esteem and improve parenting.
- 9.11** A study by accredited SROI practitioners (2010<sup>38</sup>) looking at the Northamptonshire Family Intervention Project found that: “As a result of intense whole family intervention, the child can live a safer, happier and more stable life at home and avoid being taken into care. This analysis found plenty of evidence of these outcomes”.
- 9.12** Research found that in 80 per cent of cases, families’ tenancies had been successfully stabilised. Furthermore, 85 per cent of complaints about anti-social behaviour had either ceased or reduced to a level where the tenancy was no longer deemed to be at risk at the point when the family exited the project.<sup>39</sup> NatCen research found that following contact with IFS services, families facing one or more housing enforcement actions declined from 50 per cent to 14 per cent (72% reduction).<sup>40</sup>
- 9.13** Our evaluated intensive family support services have been shown to raise the self-esteem of vulnerable parents and help overcome neglect by tackling issues in the early stages of a problem.

## Reducing anti-social behaviours and keeping children out of custody

- 9.14** As part of our research with the CCFR at Loughborough University, evaluation found that, where identified as an issue, 89 per cent of young people reduced their offending or anti-social behaviour.
- 9.15** NatCen research highlighted that on average there was a:
- ▶ 50% reduction in the proportion of families involved in crime and anti-social behaviour
  - ▶ 53% reduction in the number of families with reported issues of truancy, exclusion or bad behaviour at school
- 9.16** The economic and social return evaluation of Action for Children's family intervention project Northamptonshire (2010<sup>41</sup>) included the following outcomes for children and young people:
- ▶ child separated from father and as a result, feels more safe and secure and is less at risk of domestic violence
  - ▶ child felt calmer/less anxious/less angry/happier/safer, and family life and relationships had improved
  - ▶ child avoided contact with the criminal justice system
- 9.17** Research<sup>42</sup> into the longer-term outcomes of families who had worked with intensive family support projects showed that:
- ▶ the intensive support provided to families who were at risk of eviction because of anti-social behaviour had the potential to reduce the need of children entering the care system
  - ▶ of the 28 families who had significant needs, the researchers judged that for 20 families the project was a success
  - ▶ the other eight families were considered to have continuing difficulties. The researchers highlighted the fact that the families who were referred to these services often had deep-rooted problems, suffered from multiple deprivations and were likely to continue to be vulnerable

## Achievement

- 9.18** Our joint research with the CCFR at Loughborough University found that in 89 per cent of cases, children and young people achieved at school. Fifty-five per cent of young people improved their engagement with education, training or employment. This is a significant achievement given the current economic climate and labour market.
- 9.19** NatCen research highlights that on average there was a 34 per cent reduction in the proportion of families with education and employment problems. Sheffield Hallam University found that as a result of engagement with IFS services, young people truanting, being excluded or behaving badly at school declined from 57 per cent to 24 per cent (58% reduction).
- 9.20** Closely linked to this, evidence shows that where selected as an issue, 84 per cent of children experienced an improvement or no deterioration to their emotional or mental wellbeing. Although a physical outcome indicator was not consistently tracked in the services visited, it is a reasonable conclusion to draw that children's physical health will see improvement as a result of safer, less neglectful parenting.







# Innovation

- 10.1** Action for Children is innovating in many ways, developing and adapting services in response to local needs. This section sets out our innovative approach to services that run alongside our delivery of evidence-based programmes in response to different levels of need (see Chapter 11 Evidence-based programmes).
- 10.2** Our research shows that neglected children do not get the help they need early enough and that the development of a trusting relationship with vulnerable parents while retaining a focus on outcomes for children, is by far the most significant factor behind reducing levels of concern around neglect.
- 10.3** In response, we have developed our innovative Family Partners service. Specialist staff work with families where there are concerns around possible neglect, intervening in a timely way as soon as concerns have been expressed and before there has been an escalation to a formal child protection referral. Family Partners also provide the trusting relationship with parents while maintaining an element of challenge to the family.
- 10.4** We now have services in Bristol, Derby and London funded by Action for Children's donated voluntary income. We also have a service in Sandwell that is funded by a combination of our voluntary income and money from the local authority relating to the children's centres we run in the area.

## Innovation

- 10.5** There is strong evidence that the Action for Children Family Partners service has been successful in identifying families early and intervenes intensively to prevent neglect and associated poor outcomes for children.
- 10.6** In a sample of 25 children whose families received intensive support during the pilot period, improvement was recorded against 86 per cent of the outcomes that were goals for work with those particular children. This included specific outcomes aimed at overcoming neglect:
- ▶ 72% experienced an improvement in their emotional wellbeing
  - ▶ 68% saw indicators of neglect addressed and concerns about the child reduced
  - ▶ 56% of children were assessed as feeling safer within their family network
- 10.7** Many of those not achieving these outcomes were children for whom the family network lacked sufficient safety to contain and nurture the child in question. In these cases, children's outcomes improved as a result of expedited entry to alternative care arrangements.
- 10.8** The cost-effectiveness of the Action for Children Family Partners Service is highlighted in Chapter 13 Cost- effectiveness.

## Family Partners

During 2012/13, an Action for Children's Family Partners service was delivered through a children and family centre. It provided intensive family support packages targeted at families with children under eight years old who are identified as being at risk of neglect.

Referring agencies included health, education and social care. Family Partners engaged families early before behaviours became entrenched and concern for children escalated.

The programme used child-focussed planning with parent-led intervention. Family Partners provided long-term intensive support with the allocated worker spending up to six hours per week in the family home; particularly at identified trigger times such as bedtime, mealtimes and morning routines. Family Partners built a positive working relationship with parents and families.

The Family Partner was the lead professional for the Common Assessment Framework and chaired 'Team around the Child' meetings to ensure multi-agency working.

Data shows the positive impact of Family Partners:

- ▶ in 67% of cases, early or later indicators of neglect were addressed and concern about a child reduced
- ▶ in 69% of cases, there was an improvement in the mental health of parents or carers and concerns about neglect or abuse of a child reduced
- ▶ in 67% of cases, domestic abuse is addressed and concern about a child reduced
- ▶ in 83% of cases, the child successfully improved their relationships with significant other/s
- ▶ in 68% of cases, there was an improvement in a child's emotional or mental wellbeing



- 10.9** We have completed the first phase of our service model development work with the support of the Dartington Social Research Unit. This has resulted in a detailed manual and a clear theory of change being set out for all Family Partners to follow. This is the first time that an innovation designed to tackle child neglect has been developed through such a clear model pathway.
- 10.10** We now face exciting challenges in the year ahead. We will open further Family Partners services in Sandwell and East London in spring 2013 and the second phase of our service model development work will begin. In this phase, Family Partners will work with close fidelity to the model of intervention developed. Both fidelity and outcomes achieved for children and families will be evaluated by the Dartington Social Research Unit.
- 10.11** Our intention is to complete a further development stage in future years - a randomised control trial or similar evaluation whereby we are able to compare the benefits of Family Partners with other approaches provided for similar families. In these ways, we will achieve our mission of developing an evidence-based intervention capable of dealing effectively and reliably with early intervention needs. This will reduce the flow of children needing higher-level interventions such as local authority care, criminal justice sanctions and child mental health services.
- 10.12** In response to the identification of unmet needs of parents and children, Action for Children has developed a range of bespoke parenting programmes. We have found that running these programmes helps parents to engage with and complete evidence-based programmes. They offer a local wrap-around response that has been agreed with commissioners and partners. These courses include:
- ▶ ‘Living with Confidence’ works on building self confidence, social skills and explores parenting models
  - ▶ ‘Skills for School’ looks at closing the attainment gap and preparing children and parents for the basics needed when children attend school
  - ▶ ‘Protecting your Child from Grooming and Sexual Exploitation’ helps parents protect their child both in the real world and on the Internet
  - ▶ ‘Parents 4 Change’ is a programme based on attachment theory delivered to parents with low levels of literacy and self esteem
- 10.13** Initially developed in one of our residential homes, ‘Holding the Space’ is a therapeutic programme designed to work with children in care who have high levels of need. The programme has evolved into a structured course accredited by the Northern Council for Further Education.
- 10.14** Monitoring and evaluation of the programme has shown the potential of ‘Holding the Space’ to improve the quality of life for children and young people who have experienced abuse. An evaluation by the Scottish Institute for Residential Childcare found that the relationships between the staff and children improved on delivery of the programme, as well as relationships between the children themselves. We have expanded ‘Holding the Space’ to further projects in Scotland and into our fostering and schools work.

## Two of a Kind

Action for Children's Two of a Kind service matches care-experienced Independent Visitors (IVs) with young people in the care system across London. Funded by the Go Play Foundation, the main aims are:

- ▶ to enhance the life chances of children/young people in care e.g. facilitating access to education and recreational activities, reducing isolation and providing long-term stability while there may be many changes in social workers or foster carers
- ▶ to train, equip and support people with experience of care to be IVs building their own confidence, self esteem and skills
- ▶ to break down negative stereotypes about people in, or with experience of, care
- ▶ to promote the positive aspects and benefits of a peer-mentoring scheme

IVs are trained through a structured schedule. Their own experience of care enables them to provide empathetic, tailored support. At the end of March 2013, there were 16 matches, with 15 more young people waiting for an IV. The service has successfully appealed to harder to reach young people, e.g. those involved in criminal activity or not in education, training or employment.

Evaluation by IVs, young people, social workers and foster carers has been extremely positive. Young people have stated how they find it easier to talk to their IV, knowing that they have been through care. Many of the young people would not have considered an IV unless they had been in care. Of young people surveyed:

- ▶ 100% felt that their IV were someone to talk to, had helped them feel positive about their future and had provided them with opportunities to try new hobbies and learn new skills
- ▶ 75% said that their IV had helped them with school or college work







# Evidence-based programmes

**11.1** Evidence-based programmes have remained a focus for local authorities and commissioners of services in the UK. A study for the Department for Education in England (2012<sup>43</sup>) found that “carefully planned and well-resourced implementation is critical to achieving better outcomes and programme success”.

**11.2** In England, Graham Allen MP’s review of early intervention placed a spotlight on evidence-based programmes.<sup>44</sup> In 2013, the Government commissioned the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to advise, support and develop evidence-based interventions that achieve the greatest impact.<sup>45</sup>

**11.3** Action for Children is leading the way in the delivery of evidence-based programmes. We run the following services:

- ▶ Functional Family Therapy
- ▶ Multi-Systemic Therapy
- ▶ Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care
- ▶ ‘Roots of Empathy’
- ▶ ‘Incredible Years’
- ▶ ‘Triple P’

**11.4** Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is an evidence-based programme with a random control trial base in Seattle, US. Its main aim is to stop young people from entering care and custody. We started delivering FFT in November 2012. We run the programme in Renfrewshire and the Northern Trust area of Northern Ireland. Research<sup>46</sup> has found that outcomes of FFT include:

- ▶ significant and long-term reductions in youth re-offending and violent behaviour
- ▶ significant effectiveness in reducing sibling entry into high-risk behaviours
- ▶ low drop-out and high completion rates
- ▶ positive impacts on family conflict, family communication, parenting and youth problem behaviour

**11.5** We will begin to deliver Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) at two sites in Essex from spring 2013 as part of the first major children’s social investment projects. These services will reduce the number of young people on the edge of entry to local authority care from doing so, and instead provide positive alternatives by way of improved relationships within birth families and improved educational attendance and achievement (see Chapter 12 Social investment).

**11.6** We provide Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) services in Wessex and London for young people mainly referred through youth justice systems. In October 2011, Action for Children was re-certified as an MTFC provider having successfully met the required standards.

**11.7** MTFC provides an alternative to custody for young offenders, who instead received a community-based sentence working with a specially-trained foster carer. The pilots in the UK are based on the Oregon model. The Youth Justice Board commissioned the University of York to evaluate the intensive fostering pilot services across the country and the evaluation report was published in July 2010.<sup>47</sup> The evaluation, which included our services, highlights the positive outcomes for young people. Key findings from the York research included increased engagement in education or training, successful return to the home environment and reduced re-conviction rates. The report recommended the continuation of the intensive fostering programme.

**11.8** During 2012/13, where recorded for young people who had completed an MTFC placement through our Wessex and London services, 71 per cent reduced their offending and anti-social behaviour, and half achieved to the best of their ability in a learning environment.

**11.9** MTFC also helps young people with challenging behaviours move from residential to family placements and improve their outcomes. We will begin to deliver two MTFC services of this nature in Manchester (see Chapter 12 Social investment).

**11.10** In 2010, Action for Children launched the first Scottish pilot of the ‘Roots of Empathy’ (ROE) programme run in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council and with funding from the Scottish Government. The programme is now delivered in 19 local authorities and will be introduced to all 32 Scottish local authority areas as of September 2013 – reaching 400 primary schools and over 10,800 new pupils over the course of two years.

**11.11** ROE is an evidence-based classroom programme that has shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression among schoolchildren while raising social and emotional competence and increasing empathy.<sup>48</sup> The children participating in the ROE programme are among the most economically- and socially-deprived children in Scotland.

**11.12** An independent evaluation by the North Lanarkshire Psychological Service (2013<sup>49</sup>) found that ROE raises levels of empathy amongst pupils, resulting in more respectful relationships and a reduction in problem behaviour in the classroom. The research showed a significant difference between pupils participating in the ROE programme and the control group in the following areas:

- ▶ 59% of ROE pupils showed an increase in their cognitive empathy
- ▶ 51% of ROE pupils showed an increase in their emotional empathy
- ▶ 56% of ROE pupils increased their pro-social behaviour
- ▶ ROE pupils showed an improvement of 32% more than the control group in relation to total difficulties (emotional conduct, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationships and pro-social behaviour)

**11.13** Action for Children delivers a range of evidence-based parenting programmes, including 'Incredible Years', 'Triple P' and 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities'.

**11.14** During 2011/12, we looked at the provision of our most frequently delivered programmes (including 'Incredible Years' and 'Triple P') across 55 of our services.<sup>50</sup> Collectively these services delivered 172 parenting groups that were attended by 1,302 parents.


**11.15** 'Incredible Years' is a manualised parenting programme comprising a series of steps that parents follow guided by facilitators. The course is focussed on relationships, strengthening parenting competences and fostering parents' involvement in children's school experiences across age groups. Its evidence-base is mainly from the US where it has been subjected to six randomised control group evaluations by the University of Washington as well as five independent replications by other researchers.<sup>51</sup> Evidence of impact includes:

- ▶ increase in positive family communication and problem-solving
- ▶ reduction in conduct problems in children's interactions with parents and an increase in their positive effect and compliance to parental commands
- ▶ increase in positive parenting such as use of praise and a reduction in the use of criticism and negative commands
- ▶ improvements in parents' behaviour, for example replacing spanking and harsh discipline with non-violent discipline techniques and increased monitoring of children
- ▶ increase in children's co-operation with teachers, positive interactions with peers and engagement in school activities

**11.16** Twenty six of our services provided 59 'Incredible Years' courses, attended by 540 parents, including an adapted course for parents with a learning disability and an adapted course for fathers. In Poole, the delivery of the programme to vulnerable families with children aged eight to 13 at risk of anti-social behaviour was found to be working and highlighted as promising practice by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO).<sup>52</sup>

**11.17** 'Triple P' is a 'positive parenting programme' based on a framework that aims to tailor information, advice and professional support to the needs of individual families. Interventions range across levels of need and include brief targeted interventions for specific behaviour problems. 'Triple P' has a strong evidence base, including RCTs, that has shown<sup>53</sup>:

- ▶ reductions in child disruptive behaviour
- ▶ improvements in dysfunctional parenting strategies
- ▶ reductions in parenting conflict
- ▶ improvements in relationships and communication

- 
- 11.18** Last year, seventeen of our services provided 88 ‘Triple P’ courses. Several services ran one-to-one courses for vulnerable parents.
- 11.19** ‘Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities’ (SFSC) is an inclusive evidence-based parenting programme adapted from the US parenting programme, ‘Strengthening multi-ethnic families: A violence prevention programme’. SFSC is designed to promote protective factors that are associated with good parenting and better outcomes for children. Research evidence<sup>54</sup> shows the impact of SFSC includes a statistically-significant improvement in parents’ self esteem and confidence, family relationships and relationships with children.
- 11.20** Four of our services ran 13 SFSC courses attended by 119 parents.
- 11.21** Our innovation Family Partners service (see Chapter 10 Innovation) has successfully identified families early and intervenes intensively to prevent neglect and associated poor outcomes for children. We are working with the Dartington Social Research Unit to develop our service model and our intention is to complete a further development stage in future years: a randomised control trial or similar evaluation whereby we are able to compare the benefits of Family Partners with other approaches provided for similar families.
- 11.22** In 2013/14 we will continue to support our growing portfolio of evidence-based programmes whether funded through social investment or otherwise.







# Social investment

- 12.1** In the last year, Action for Children has successfully won contracts to deliver evidence-based services financed through innovative new social funding mechanisms. Social Impact Bonds generate cost savings. They demonstrate Action for Children's commitment to innovation and finding solutions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people even in times of reduced public services and commissioning.
- 12.2** We have won contracts to deliver evidence-based services in the first two major children's social investment projects. In Essex, we will begin to deliver Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) at two sites from spring 2013. These services will reduce the number of young people on the edge of entry to local authority care from doing so, and instead provide positive alternatives by way of improved relationships within birth families and improved educational attendance and achievement.
- 12.3** This builds on our working relationship with the Brandon Centre to develop a service offer around the provision of MST. The Brandon Centre, in partnership with Camden and Haringey Youth Offending Services, ran the first randomised, controlled trial test of MST in the UK.

## Multi-Systemic Therapy and social investment

Action for Children's Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) service in Essex is uniquely funded by social investment from a range of sources with the investment return connected to the outcomes of preventing children aged 11-17 entering care and/or custody.

The service is provided via a three-way partnership involving Essex County Council, Action for Children and Social Finance, and is the first social impact bond involving children's social care.

MST involves one practitioner engaging all of the systems around the young person to restore family efficacy and create long-lasting change.

The service provision extends across the whole of Essex, covered by two teams located in Basildon and Colchester consisting of four therapists and a supervisor in each team. Colchester started taking referrals in May 2013, with Basildon following in early June.

**12.4** In Manchester, we will begin to deliver two Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) services to provide specialist foster placements for teenagers currently living in residential care, and bridge these young people to long-term family placements whether in foster homes or in birth families.

**12.5** These are exciting developments. This kind of social investment funding can be vital in helping us and partner local authorities to move towards transforming the face of provision by reducing higher end needs and investing some savings made in effective early interventions for the future.







# Cost- effectiveness

**13.1** Given the continued challenging economic climate, it is essential that we offer the best value for money possible. The statistics on some of the costs are stark:

- the cost of crimes related to drugs cost the UK £15.4 billion every year<sup>55</sup>
- the total cost of children in care services is estimated at £3 billion<sup>56</sup>
- the annual cost of young offenders was estimated by the National Audit Office at £8.5–11 billion<sup>57</sup>

**13.2** There is an increasing understanding of the costs of non-intervention especially in a time of finite resource. This is supported by overwhelming evidence that a shift towards an early intervention approach works both in terms of financial savings as well as most importantly in improving long-term outcomes for children.

**13.3** By offering the best value for money possible, we can maintain our focus on the most disadvantaged children and young people, and achieve our objectives in priority areas such as early intervention and child neglect.



- 13.4** Action for Children and the new economics foundation (nef, 2009<sup>58</sup>) set out the financial case for early intervention in 'Backing the Future'. Key findings included that the cost to the UK economy of continuing to address current levels of social problems will amount to almost £4 trillion over a 20-year period. Investing in a dual-investment package – including targeted interventions, universal childcare and paid parental leave, could help address as much as £1.5 trillion of the cost of these social problems.
- 13.5** A study sample of families found that a single family intervention could save up to £49,000<sup>59</sup>; another that every £1m invested in family intervention could save £2.5m.<sup>60</sup> This is because high-quality interventions work. The changes they bring are sustained and often improve nine to 14 months after the initial intensive support.<sup>61</sup>
- 13.6** This section looks at our evidence around cost effectiveness and the case for investment in areas of our service provision.
- 13.8** Other cost analysis of family intervention projects has shown that they offer excellent value for money given their potential to reduce considerably short- and long-term costs of many agencies, including those providing services relating to housing, criminal justice, policing, education and health. They also offer many intangible benefits to families – such as keeping families together and improving their quality of life and their prospects – and to society, by making neighbourhoods and communities safer and more pleasant places.<sup>62</sup>
- 13.9** Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis examines the benefits generated to a broader range of stakeholders than just the state. SROI is a rigorous measurement framework that can be used to understand better the social and economic value of services.
- 13.10** A SROI analysis of our Caerphilly Family Intervention Team/5+ project found that every £1 invested annually generates £7.60 in social value. The total social value accrued for one year's investment is £3.3 million.<sup>63</sup>

## Intensive Family Support

- 13.7** Intensive Family Support (IFS) services work to tackle social deprivation, anti-social behaviour and neglect. There is a substantial evidence base for their effectiveness. This approach offers excellent value for money by reducing short- and long-term costs in housing, criminal justice, policing, education and health. Families are supported to stay together and improve their prospects, while additional social benefits can be seen in neighbourhoods and communities.
- 13.11** A SROI analysis of Action for Children's family intervention estimated that, for every £1 invested in Northamptonshire Family Intervention Project activities, the likely social value created is about £4 (in the range of £3 to £6 based on the information currently available).<sup>64</sup> This analysis also suggested that had the service been running for longer than 12 months, it is possible that more confident assertions about savings could have been reached on the basis of the longer-term data.
- 13.12** A SROI analysis was undertaken of Action for Children East Dunbartonshire Family Support (EDFS) that provides short-term, focussed and flexible support for children, young people and families in crisis. It found that, for every £1 invested annually in this service, society benefits by £9.20. Approximately 93 per cent of the benefits to the State come through a reduction in foster-care costs.



**13.13** In 2011, New Philanthropy Capital used our SROI models to calculate the impact of possible cuts to intensive family support services. They assessed that, for example, one family support service run by Action for Children that works with over 40 vulnerable families, reduces the number of children going into care by more than half. This saves the local authority more than £37,000 per year for every child.<sup>65</sup>

**13.14** Furthermore, a study of a sample of families found that a single family intervention could save up to £49,000; another that every £1 million invested in family intervention could save £2.5 million. This is because the changes these interventions bring are sustained and often improve nine to 14 months after the initial intensive support.

**13.15** Action for Children commissioned the CCFR at Loughborough University to examine the cost effectiveness of our IFS services. The research explores the costs incurred by a sample of 43 families accessing IFS. This relates to costs generated through the negative effects of the families' difficulties, such as those associated with offending behaviour, and the provision of support aimed at addressing these difficulties. The final report will be published on 27 June 2013 and will set out realisable, in-year savings. The next stage of this work is to share a new cost-estimation tool developed by CCFR and explore how these 'cashable' savings might be reinvested.

## Intervening early to tackle child neglect

**13.16** The average cost of the delivery of the Action for Children Family Partners service (referenced in Chapter 10 Innovation) equates to £24.34 per week per child where the service was delivered alongside existing provision in children's centres. Analysis has found that the diversionary and preventative nature of the work is likely to result in significant cost savings to society and the state.

**13.17** The overall aim of the service is to prevent neglect, and therefore it is fair to assume that successful work with families will result in fewer safeguarding interventions and care admissions for children in the medium to long term. It is also likely that the project will impact on wider outcomes for families such as health, emotional wellbeing, education, employability and family cohesion.

## Children's centres

**13.18** An independent SROI evaluation by Beacon CIC of one of our children's centres found a total return on of between £7.00 and £8.50 for every £1 invested.<sup>66</sup>

**13.19** 'Backing the Future' included an SROI analysis of an Action for Children children's centre. It estimated that for every £1 invested in the centre, £4.60 of social value was generated.

**13.20** The King's College London (2011) evaluation of Action for Children children's centres found that: "In the data presented... it is possible to identify an overlap/fit between services that meet the needs of children and their families, and services whose identity and mode of delivery can potentially be seen to reflect 'value for money'."

**13.21** The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Office of Public Management (OPM) evaluation of the impact of volunteers in our children's centres calculated an illustrative figure of the total overall value (the value less the cost of volunteering) per year to Action for Children of volunteer involvement in children's centres to be over £400,000. The research concluded that children's centres would run fewer and less effective services without volunteers and reach a smaller proportion of the communities in which they are based.

## Services for children with disabilities

- 13.22** High costs are sometimes evident due to the specialist nature of some services. For example, the evaluation of our short breaks and intensive support services highlighted the need for a high level of qualified and trained staff, individualised planning and integrated service delivery, management support and transport costs as explanatory factors.<sup>67</sup>
- 13.23** Action for Children commissioned the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University to carry out a study to compare the costs of our short break services with those provided by local authorities.<sup>68</sup> The study suggests that Action for Children short breaks services offer good value for money, most notably in relation to staff and overhead costs. On average, Action for Children short break services include a higher proportion of the overall costs on staff salaries. The experience and numbers of staff offered as part of those services are valued by funders and service users.
- 13.24** The research also found that payments to staff and foster carers have also been linked with retention, an important consideration in a service area that supports children with highly complex and unique needs. The study also found that, on average, the costs of Action for Children services include a smaller proportional component for management costs, suggesting that some efficiencies can be made by commissioning a larger organisation utilising economies of scale.
- 13.25** Research (University of Ulster, 2011<sup>69</sup>) highlights that: “the costs have to be seen in the context of the provision of other specialist forms of service delivery. For example, the estimated cost of children in looked after secure accommodation is on average £471 per day, and similarly the costs of maintaining young people with learning disabilities who have severely challenging behaviour is on average £475 per day. The cost of in-patient acute mental health hospital care is around £600 per day”.
- 13.26** Action for Children and the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign commissioned nef consulting to undertake research into the social and economic value of short break services.<sup>70</sup> The research recognises that short breaks can provide families with a mechanism by which to cope with the pressures of caring for a disabled child. It also acknowledges that a significant number of families have in the past been unaware of or not able to access these services.
- 13.27** By exploring the social and economic value created by short breaks, the research concluded that significant savings could be made to the State if short breaks were provided to all the families with disabled children who need them. It went on to state that failure to support these families in the long term would result in substantial additional costs to the state.
- 13.28** Through independent analysis of data, nef consulting calculated that savings to the State, when short breaks are effectively delivered to all those eligible to receive them, would reach a total figure of £173,988,440. These savings were based on the following data:
- ▶ decreased cost of long-term residential care from reductions in the number of disabled children placed outside of the family home: £135,008,061
  - ▶ decreased cost to health service from reduction in parents’, families’ and carers’ stress: £17,610,108
  - ▶ decreased cost to schools of educating siblings with behavioural and emotional difficulties: £21,370,271
- 13.29** These calculations have been based upon the indirect impact on the family environment in terms of less stress for parents, more time for other siblings and a reduction in family breakdown. It should be noted that the cost of the lack of a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services, the social isolation of disabled children and their families, along with stress and potential family breakdown, can be calculated using additional indicators. Therefore the figures given in this research should be interpreted as a minimum figure.

## Supported employment programmes

- 13.30** Ekosgen's independent evaluation of Action for Children's supported employment programmes found that: "By diverting young people away from crime, alcohol and drugs the programme has the potential to lead to fiscal savings for the public purse." <sup>71</sup>
- 13.31** Based on evidence from NPC<sup>72</sup>, the researchers explain: "Each young offender costs society £300,000 over a lifetime. Prolific young offenders cost services and society £80,000 per year. Preventing one in 10 young offenders from ending up in custody could save society over £100m a year. The crimes committed by young adults cost up to £19bn every year. The annual cost in England and Wales was estimated to be £60bn in 2000."

## Children in care

- 13.32** Action for Children's Multi Disciplinary Intervention Service (MIST) in Torfaen South Wales supports young people aged 11– 21 who are in care and who have such significant challenging and risk-taking behaviour that their placement stability is considerably threatened.
- 13.33** A SROI analysis found that for every £1 invested in the service, the likely social value generated was £5.10.<sup>73</sup>
- 13.34** While much of the value directly relates to the use of foster care rather than costly out-of-area residential care, the analysis also captured the value of the service in improving short- and long-term outcomes for young people in respect of their emotional health and wellbeing. This included their ability to make relationships, develop resilience and regulate their emotions and behaviour.
- 13.35** The analysis concluded that MIST improves outcomes in the following areas:
- ▶ enhances young people's capacity to parent their own children and breaks intergenerational cycles of being in care
  - ▶ reduces the need for costly out-of-area residential care that did not meet young people's needs
  - ▶ repairs, stabilises and improves relationships between young people and their birth parents







# Conclusion and next steps

- 14.1** This report clearly demonstrates the positive impact that Action for Children's 650-plus services has on outcomes for children and young people. We help to keep children safe and healthy, as well as support children, young people and families to develop positive relationships with peers and professionals. We work with children and young people to develop their skills and help them engage in education, training and employment. We can also show the value of volunteers and the difference they can make to the lives of children and young people.
- 14.2** Our commitment to early intervention runs alongside a combination of innovative services and the delivery of evidence-based programmes. Furthermore, we have started to deliver new evidence-based services funded by innovative social finance arrangements and can demonstrate our cost-effectiveness in times of reduced resources and increased need.
- 14.3** But, we know that more must be done to understand fully and evidence the impact of our services. Our priorities for the next year are to innovate other new initiatives and replicate existing services, such as Family Partners. We want to:
- continue to develop and support growth of evidence-based programmes
  - continue to develop our achievements in innovative social investment funding
  - capitalise on the work undertaken in innovation (Family Partners, evidence-based programmes) and demonstrate our ability to replicate selected services in future
  - improve the outcomes reporting systems available within Action for Children. Within this, make the best use of the CHARMS programme to improve our ability to report on outcomes for children in care
  - develop the evidence base for the effectiveness of our participation work and our volunteers
- 14.4** We will continue to demonstrate our impact and empower children to overcome the obstacles in their lives that hold them back. We will do whatever is needed for as long as it takes to improve the lives of vulnerable and neglected children and young people.

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## Notes





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