



**The Red
Book 2013
Children
under
pressure**

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Dame Clare Tickell Chief Executive Action for Children

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01 Foreword

‘It used to be trips to the zoo
but now we do trips to the food bank’



Dame Clare Tickell
Chief Executive
Action for Children

In the twenty-first century, the state, communities and civil society need to work together. For the people Action for Children work with, life is turbulent. Over 91,000 children are in care across the UK¹ and studies suggest as many as one in ten children are neglected. Children are faced with devastating adult issues such as family illness and separation. Added to this, they are continuing to deal with the impact of the recession and long standing inequalities.

There remains layer upon layer of challenges for people living without the basics that others take for granted. The cost of living for the poorest continues to outstrip income. The fluctuations in the national economy mean little or nothing to those who are just surviving.

For the first time since the 1940s, Action for Children is providing food, clothing and other items to families on a regular basis.

We are seeing a hardening of public attitudes towards welfare claimants, not only direct recipients but also the children of recipients.

In 2013, with the context of less money, a permanently reduced state and problems of vulnerable children and families worsening, the need for early support is stronger than ever. It must be local and it must be from a base that people can call their own. That means new kinds of relationships between services, professionals, citizens and local services to build capacity and resilience in communities. The voices of children and young people must be at the centre of this.

The voluntary sector can help to achieve this. The sector has great strengths: flexibility, our ability to innovate, independence and capacity to bring added value through volunteers; all that is underpinned by an adherence to values which keep us in the right place. We have a collective knowledge about what works, gleaned from investments in preventative approaches when finances allowed.

Although we all have a part to play, governments should lead the way. This *Red Book* sets out what they need to do.

In 2009 we published *Backing the Future*², a report that set out the economic case for early intervention. It showed how business as usual had a £4 trillion price tag over 20 years because we simply did not invest enough in prevention.

A year later as the Chancellor laid out his plans, many economists and political analysts feared that the spending cuts to be delivered over the four-year spending review period would disproportionately affect those in receipt of public services and welfare support. This despite the Chancellor's assurance that 'those with the broadest shoulders should bear the greatest burden'³.

At Action for Children we feared the cuts would unravel the shift towards early help. To test this, we began a three-year programme of research that looked beyond the political rhetoric to examine the actual impact that the spending review was having on the lives of the children and families we work with. The scale of our services operating across the UK enabled us to look at the cumulative impact that decisions made in Whitehall are having on individuals, services and local areas across the UK.

In 2011, when we published the first *Red Book* only six months into the 2011–2015 spending review, we warned that the problems our service users were facing were deepening and that budget cuts meant services were reaching a tipping point. In 2012, we demonstrated how the continued reduction in resources when combined with changes to benefit entitlements and the rising cost of living had resulted in the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families escalating still further.

Red Book 2013 goes beyond emerging trends and indicative findings to show that not only are children facing far greater pressures, but the service infrastructure they depend on is fragmenting. Vital early help is at risk of disappearing. Collectively, the *Red Books*⁴ set out recommendations on how we can respond better to the needs of vulnerable children. They all call for a shift in resources to enable us to tackle problems as soon as they emerge.

From the outset the Coalition Government made a commitment to protect vulnerable children and families and to champion the concept of early intervention by reviewing policy on safeguarding, early years, early intervention, poverty and social mobility⁵. A number of discrete policy initiatives have been developed, including more funding for disadvantaged two-year-olds to access childcare⁶, action to increase the number of children placed for adoption⁷ and help for children and families dealing with multiple problems⁸. More recently, they established the Early Intervention Foundation and have extended the Troubled Families programme to reach a further 400,000 families from 2015⁹.

While these initiatives are welcome, the wider reforms needed to shift to a preventative approach to enhance the life chances of vulnerable children are yet to happen.

The commitment to the principle of localism in England has not translated into greater freedoms for local areas to choose how best to meet the needs of their populations. Promising initiatives such as the community budgets pilots have not been rolled out and central Government initiatives such as the adoption reforms and changes to the inspection regime are cutting across local priorities. With continuing media interest in child protection, local authorities are placed in an

impossible position of meeting devolved responsibilities with ever diminishing resources. Freedoms to join up budgets or to plan for the long term have not materialised.

All the while, the families we work with are at breaking point. That 62 per cent of our children's centres now regularly refer families to food banks is a poor reflection on our society today.

It would be easy to point the finger at the spending decisions made in the last five years. While they have had a significant impact, so too have longstanding bureaucratic processes that lead to short term policy making and commissioning. Often a children's service has barely enough time to be set up and begin to deliver before its staff have to plan for reconfiguration or even closure. The majority of our services (79 per cent)¹⁰ do not have contracts in place beyond the current spending review period. These conditions have a direct effect on the integrity and efficacy of children and families services, not least because it is precisely the stability of interventions and relationships¹¹ that lead to success in achieving positive outcomes for children.

To date, few councils have felt able to redesign their services to implement a true early help approach by setting a long term vision and realising this by getting local systems to work together and join up approaches. We are aware of the varied and tough budgetary constraints that authorities face, but arguably those that struggle to meet the needs of their populations can no longer afford not to shift to early intervention. Taking steps to collaborate with local agencies using community budgets to share resources is the first step. Sharing both risk and rewards is the real prize to aim for. This final edition of the *Red Book* reinforces why we believe, even in difficult financial times, it is essential that central Government leads a shift to early intervention. We conclude with a series of practical recommendations that we believe are necessary to make this happen.

As we approach the next general election and the next spending review period, we have an opportunity to regain the momentum for early intervention. We must not let this pass.

02 Executive summary and recommendations

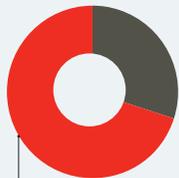
Children under pressure

The stats

Change in needs

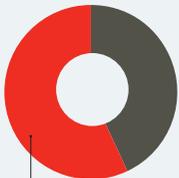
64%

of our managers said that the needs of the children and young people they are working with have increased over the last year



70%

felt young people needed more help to cope with finances



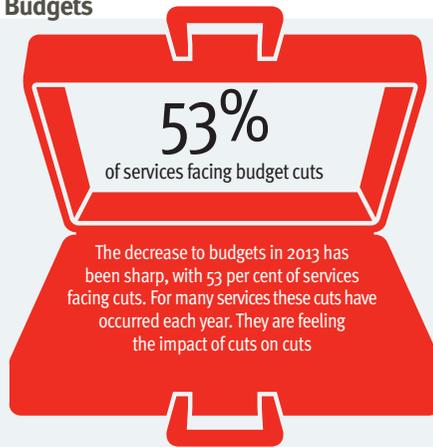
57%

said that children's emotional health needs were escalating

63%

of managers saw children needing more support because of parental depression

Budgets



The decrease to budgets in 2013 has been sharp, with 53 per cent of services facing cuts. For many services these cuts have occurred each year. They are feeling the impact of cuts on cuts

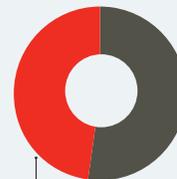
Demand for support

'More families are getting into a crisis situation more quickly than they would have. We have a waiting list and people are presenting with far more complex issues than they were'

47%

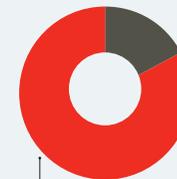
of our services have seen an increase in referrals compared to six months ago. The demand for our support is high

What services are seeing



48%

of services supporting young people have seen more suspected cases of child neglect in the last year

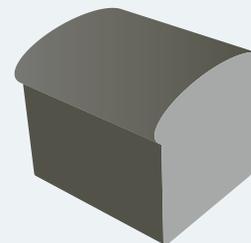


83%

of short break services for disabled children report the needs of children and young people increasing in the last year

50%

of intensive family support managers believe demand has risen for their help because of cuts in other services



of children's centres are signposting their families to food banks

62%

Action for Children works directly with more than 250,000 children, young people, parents and carers each year, through just over 650 services across the UK. In 2010 we began a three-year programme of research to examine the impact that Government spending decisions were having on the lives of the children and families we work with. Looking beyond the political rhetoric we sought systematically to examine the impact that the spending review was having on the ground to see if early help was still being provided to vulnerable children.

Early intervention means different things to different people. For our purposes we mean intervening as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families. Effective early intervention may occur at any point in a child or young person's life.

79%

of services do not have contracts in place beyond the current spending review period

Early intervention approaches can be delivered through both universal and targeted services. This can mean providing services to all children and families, or targeting support to those more likely to suffer poor outcomes at any stage of childhood or adolescence.

The research involved a quarter of our 650 frontline service managers in over 400 hours of in-depth interviews. A further 52 hours of interviews were undertaken with young people and parents who use our services. The results have been recorded annually in our *Red Books*¹².

The Red Book 2013 goes beyond identifying emerging trends to show that not only are children facing greater pressures now, but the service infrastructure they depend on is fragmenting. Vital early help is at risk of disappearing. We found thousands of children across the UK who are struggling to cope as they face serious problems that no child should have to deal with. Adult issues such as poverty, family illness and separation are having a devastating and potentially lasting impact on children's lives.

Our services are seeing more children than ever facing serious

problems. Of the managers we spoke to, 64 per cent said that the needs of the children and young people they are working with have increased over the last year. For example, over half of our services are seeing children needing more help to cope with difficult, frightening or stressful situations in their lives.

Last year, 63 per cent of managers saw children needing more support because of parental depression, 57 per cent said that children's emotional health needs were escalating and 70 per cent felt young people needed more help to cope with finances.

Services are stretched with 47 per cent of managers reporting an increase in referrals. This pressure has been made worse because of cuts to partner agencies. Many of our managers now state that for every child or family they help there is another waiting at the door. This is compounded by the squeeze on budgets that has taken place over the past three years, with 53 per cent of services facing further cuts this year and 79 per cent of contracts ceasing before, or at the end of, the spending review period. This churn means that a children's project barely has time to be set up and begin to deliver help before its staff have

to plan for reconfiguration or even closure.

That said, the encouraging news is that the majority of services have been able to maintain their level of face-to-face support with 86 per cent of managers being able to protect their contact time. This is important as the relationship between the practitioner and a child or family is the key to the success of any service¹³.

Chapter three includes a breakdown of the impact of Government spending decisions in individual service areas.

Early intervention: what works and what are the enablers and barriers to implementation in 2013?

Despite widespread political agreement, making early intervention a practical reality remains fraught with problems. Our current political and funding cycles are working against the collective desire to provide consistency and stability in the way we respond to vulnerable children. While the barriers to realising early intervention are not new, the on-going economic instability, spending restraints and the impact this has on the severity of the problems vulnerable children

and families are facing present additional hurdles.

Against this context, chapter four spells out the core strands of effective service delivery that must be protected in the drive to reform the delivery of children's services. We must hold on to what works:

▶ Services and systems need to be joined up on the ground so that localities can work across the spectrum of need from universal to targeted provision.

▶ Services must be delivered in a way that gives families greater control over their lives.

▶ We must resist drawing the net too tightly, investing in outreach to identify where people are, reach out and offer accessible and non-stigmatising support.

▶ The earlier problems are identified, the quicker and more effectively they can be addressed.

▶ We need to avoid reinventing the wheel and use the available evidence to deliver tried and tested programmes that have been shown to improve children's development.

▶ A focus on how service models are delivered, by whom, and to what degree of fidelity is as important as determining which programme to adopt.

Emotional needs



57%

of managers said that the emotional needs of children had increased in the last year

'These lower levels of spending are the 'new normal' for children's social care'

► A higher quality workforce is inextricably linked to better outcomes for children, requiring investment in well qualified and well supported practitioners as well as in strong leadership.

► We must invest in human relationships: these are the core to the delivery of effective services.

Over the past three years the Coalition Government has progressed a number of strategies to promote early intervention, social mobility and to enhance support for vulnerable children. Strategic reviews have been complemented by an extension of the free childcare offer, commitments to roll out the 'Troubled Families' programme to reach out to more families earlier and to make free school meals available to a further 1.4 million children. The community budgets initiative could also form the ideal platform to enhance local freedoms and flexibility to deliver a place-based, early intervention approaches.

Yet there are still significant barriers to realising early intervention. Progress has been undermined by the squeeze on preventative spending combined with flawed historic funding

systems and governance. Preventative spending by English councils, such as early help for children, has reduced from 32.4 per cent of their spending in 2010/11 to 30.6 per cent in 2011/12. This means that (proportionally) spending on prevention has reduced by 5.5 per cent. This translates to a 9.2 per cent drop in cash terms¹⁴. The 'localism project' for councils in England remains unfinished as they continue to be hampered by short term settlements, conflicting national policy initiatives and ever tighter public finances. Added to this is the inherent problem in the social care system whereby those who pay for services do not realise the financial benefit of doing so.

Beyond 2013

This final edition of *The Red Book* reinforces why we believe, even in difficult financial times, it is essential that central government helps us to make the shift to early intervention.

In 2009, Action for Children published *Backing the Future*¹⁵ with the new economics foundation. This report argued that Governments were failing to make the best use of public resources to improve key aspects of children's lives. By shifting to an early

intervention approach an estimated saving of £486 billion would be made over 20 years, compared with the £4 trillion price tag of continuing with business as usual. Four years on and the gap between the ambition of transforming our children's services to respond in a timely way to all those who need them, and the ability to deliver on this is clear to see.

The Red Book research confirms that we are seeing a shift away from early intervention. There are children we cannot reach, children who are no longer eligible for our help due to changing admission criteria and those who are hidden because we can no longer deliver crucial outreach and drop in services.

The consensus that an investment in early intervention will ultimately save money has faded from our collective consciousness. We fear this could lead to a crisis in children's social care.

As services close, thresholds for support rise and demand for help increases. We are seeing a regressive move towards dealing only with children and families when they have reached crisis. As one parent we work with put it, 'When you ask for help

you've passed the point of needing early help.'

We need a holistic response. Our communities, civil society and the people who hold power and influence across all institutions need to work together.

Our ambitions for the future

The voluntary and community sector has a role to play. We must hold our nerve so that our work stays true to our values. The quality of what we do must be at our core. Critically though, we must also give a voice to people who would not otherwise be heard.

Councils have a pivotal role. They should be ambitious about what their communities can achieve now and in the future. As commissioners of services councils need to show leadership and be brave, accepting that risk taking is necessary for early intervention because it requires things to be done a different way.

To date, few councils have felt able to redesign their services to implement a truly early help approach. The budgetary constraints that they face are tough and can be seen as insurmountable. Taking steps to collaborate with local agencies using the community budget

£486bn

Could be saved over 20 years by shifting to an early intervention approach, compared with the £4 trillion price tag of continuing with business as usual

‘Councils struggling the most to meet the needs of their populations have more to loose by not shifting to early intervention’

principles is the first step. Councils need to avoid quick, short term, in-year savings that can be achieved by the closure of a service or change in eligibility criteria. This simply pushes the problem on to the following year’s balance sheet creating an environment of instability, which filters down to service users. Instead they need to factor in the costs of the constant churn of commissioning and think about who ultimately benefits and consider how the money could be better spent.

▶ Councils need to seize the opportunities brought by ‘localism’ to embed early intervention.

▶ Consideration must be given to putting in place strategic and cross-party plans for children’s services that span a 5–10 year period.

▶ Long-term contracts and commissioning arrangements for children’s services and interventions are needed, this could be done as a part of a community budget.

Nationally, the short term bias in the funding and commissioning system needs to be removed for us to realise the ambition of delivering early help locally. To do this, we would like to

see five-year spending plans that coincide with the length of a parliament, setting out the funding available for children’s services. This should be produced in line with the Coalition Government’s long term vision of realising early intervention. Ideally this would be undertaken on a cross party basis to prevent a reversal of policies at each election.

The community budget initiative in England needs to be embedded in a new relationship between funding and service delivery. We would like to see an acceleration of the initiative, with central Government putting in place stable funding arrangements that will allow devolution to the lowest level, a default to enable the easy sharing of data between local partners and the further development of social investment models.

To incentivise joint working arrangements, local areas must reap the rewards of their activities, for example in getting a parent back into work. All agencies benefitting from the community budget approach should share in the upfront investment needed to deliver it in each locality. Any savings accrued by early intervention should then be re-invested.

Joint planning mechanisms, in place across the UK should be used to support the development of early intervention approaches. Within local services themselves the problem of data sharing needs to be overcome as it is crucial to the identification of children

and families that need help. Changes need to be made to ensure that children’s centres, for example, have regular access to live birth data so that they can identify and reach out to vulnerable children and families, delivering help early to all those that need it.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

As we approach the next general election and spending review period, we have an opportunity to regain the momentum for early intervention. To achieve this Action for Children is calling for:

1 The introduction of five-year spending plans that set out the funding to be made available for children’s services in line with the fixed term parliament.

2 Government to roll out the whole place community budget programme in England with all agencies benefitting from the approach sharing in the upfront investment needed to deliver it in each locality. Re-investment of any savings accrued by early intervention.

3 Early intervention spending to be clearly identified in Government accounts.



03 The reality for children and families in 2013

Our research

Helen's story

'I think a lot of people are struggling'

Helen's husband Adam is working, but life is still financially precarious for the couple and their two young children.

My husband's hours at work got cut recently, and when we informed the tax credits office, they put the money down as well. So now we're about £50 a week worse off than we were – that's food shopping for all of us.

'Adam does shift work as a forklift truck driver, so it's days one week, nights the week after. It's making it difficult for me to find a job, because of the cost of childcare, and I can't rely on when he'd be there to mind them.'

'We've never been frivolous with money so we were already on a tight budget. This just made it tighter. When you do the same shopping every week you notice what's going up. The basic baby wipes were 18p last year and now they're 60p – over three

times the amount. We do have three meals a day, not always five fruit and veg for us but it is for the kids.

'You feel bad when you can't give the kids what you want to. Food-wise, it's just the bare essentials. And we'd do free activities, like going to the park, but the local park has been gated up for about six months now. I think it was because of vandalism. The council's never done anything about it.'

'We did take the kids swimming, but not recently, not since they're old enough that we have to pay for them. It's a lot of money, nearly £5 for one adult. There are fewer free things than there used to be. There was a local play centre that was really cheap, about £1.20 a child, and that's shut.'

'We do loads at the children's centre. It's been good for meeting new friends, not just for the kids but for me as well. I've done courses, parent and toddler groups and volunteering. I've had advice from people there, about things



'WE'VE NOT GOT ENOUGH SAVED TO COVER THE MORTGAGE FOR ONE MONTH'

like potty training or if the kids have a rash. I'm probably there about 10 hours a week at the moment. If there wasn't support like that I don't know what would happen. I probably would be just stuck in the house with the kids. I'd love to move back near to my family, but it's difficult with jobs at the minute.

'We bought the house when we were both working full time, before the kids. The mortgage is nearly £500 a month and when Adam's on £240 a week, it's a lot. We've not missed any payments but sometimes we go without paying other things that need to be paid. I've borrowed a couple of times off family, to pay the mortgage.'

'We cope, but we don't have anything left over. If anything ever happened with Adam's work, we've not even got the amount saved to cover the mortgage for the next month, so it's a worry. I think a lot of people are struggling.'

The children's centre Helen goes to is one of over 200 run by Action for Children

Action for Children works directly with more than 250,000 children, young people, parents and carers each year, through just over 650 services across the UK. Our services include early years and parenting support, services that provide intensive support and challenge to families experiencing multiple difficulties, services for vulnerable young people, for disabled children and for children who have been fostered or adopted. This work is representative of the support provided to vulnerable children and their families across the UK, putting us in a good position to comment on the impact of Government spending decisions across the range of provision.

In total the research for the three Red Books has involved a quarter of our frontline managers in over 400 hours of interviews. This year 160 Action for Children practitioners took part. These managers support over 49,000

400+

Hours of interviews with frontline managers

52+

Hours of interviews with young people and parents

160

Action for Children practitioners took part for this issue

49k

Children and young people are supported by the managers we interviewed

13.5k

Families are supported by the managers we interviewed

children and young people and 13,493 families.

In the interviews we delved beneath the top-line statistics on budget cuts, to find out what affect these changes are having on the individuals who rely on our support. The research identifies year-on-year changes to demonstrate the cumulative impact of Government spending decisions. Where possible, we spoke to the same service managers each year.

The interviews covered the following areas:

🔴 **need:** to understand if the problems children and families face are getting worse

🔴 **demand for support:** to see where the pressure points in the system are

🔴 **budget and contracts:** the financial and contractual conditions that services are operating within

🔴 **service response:** to see if services are altering their ways of working

We also followed the experiences of 24 young people and parents in over 52 hours of interviews. These interviews focus on changes in their lives, finances and

communities, as well as looking at their hopes and dreams. At the outset of this research we sought to follow young people and families, lives over a two-year period, however the often chaotic and pressured circumstances that our interviewees face has in some instances made this impossible.

Children and families with greater needs

Some children and young people may need additional help to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development. Their needs can relate to a specific problem, for example a parental bereavement or an on-going problem with substance misuse which can impact on their education and wellbeing. Some children have problems that affect multiple areas of their development. What we do know is that the impact can be detrimental and lasting if these needs aren't addressed early.

In 2013, 64 per cent of our managers said that the needs of the children and young people they are working with have increased over the last year. Children now need more support with problems including deteriorating mental health, substance misuse, poor physical health

Figure 1: Increased need: children and young people

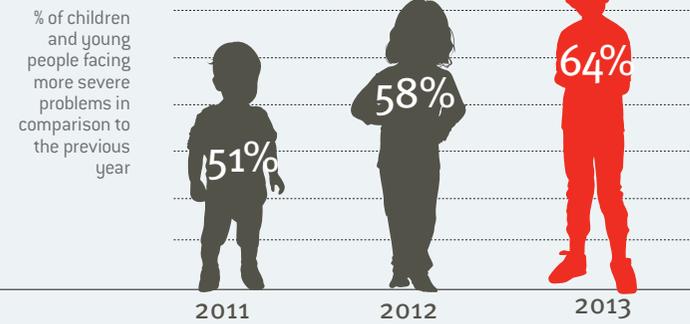
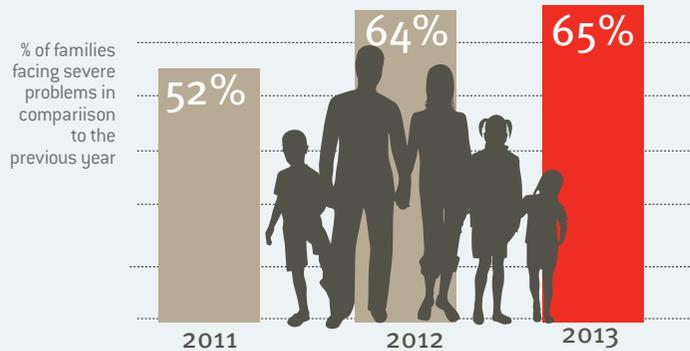


Figure 2: Increased need: families



and educational attainment. Figure 1 shows that over the last three years this figure has risen by 13 per cent, with a 6 per cent increase in the last year alone.

Similar findings are true of the families we are working with, with needs growing year on year. Parental problems include unemployment, domestic abuse and depression. Figure 2 shows this figure rose 13 per cent in the last two years.

The problems that children and young people are facing have increased consistently over the last three years. To understand what this looks like, we asked our managers to identify which needs had increased, stayed the same or decreased across a number of domains. The response from our managers shows that they are seeing children more in need of help across all of the domains we identified, in comparison to the previous year.

‘More families are getting into a crisis situation more quickly than they have in the past’

Figure 3

Parental problems impacting on children

Compared to last year, our managers have seen children's needs increase in the following areas:

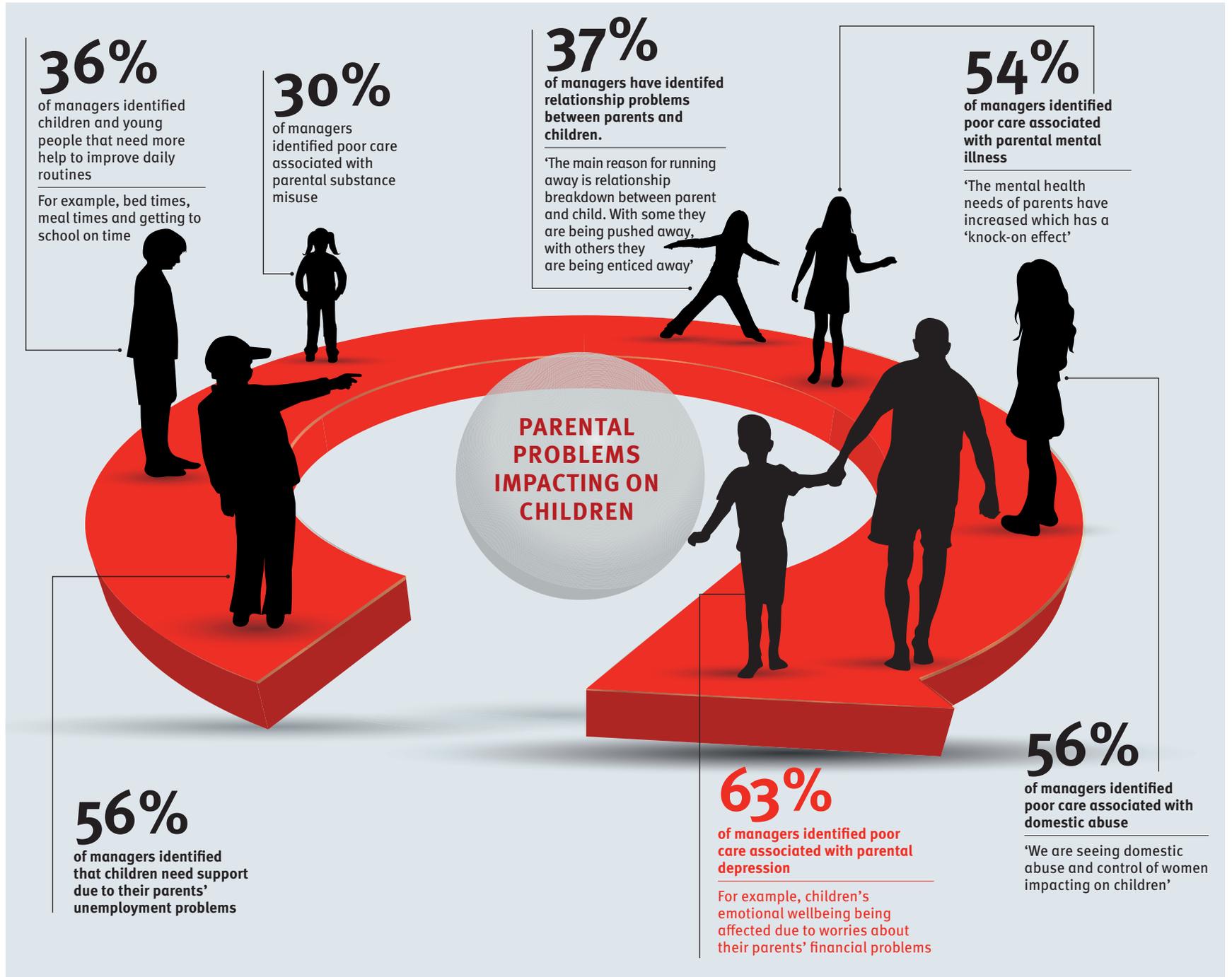


Figure 4

Child health problems

Compared to last year, our managers have seen children's health problems increase in the following areas:

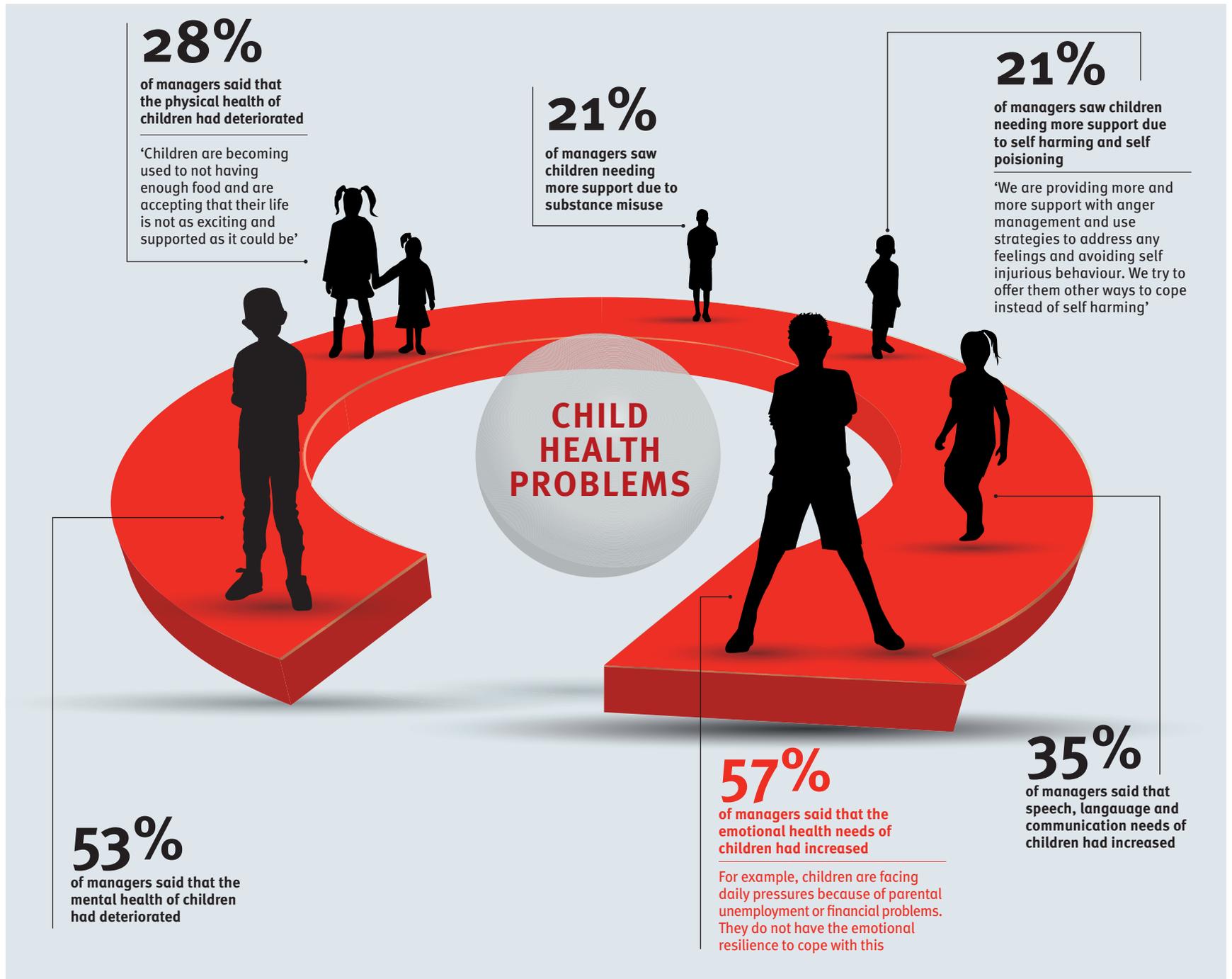


Figure 5

Anti-social and offending behaviour

Compared to last year, our managers have seen young people needing more help to prevent anti-social and offending behaviour.



Figure 6

Problems with education

Compared to last year, our managers have seen children and young people's needs increase in the following areas:

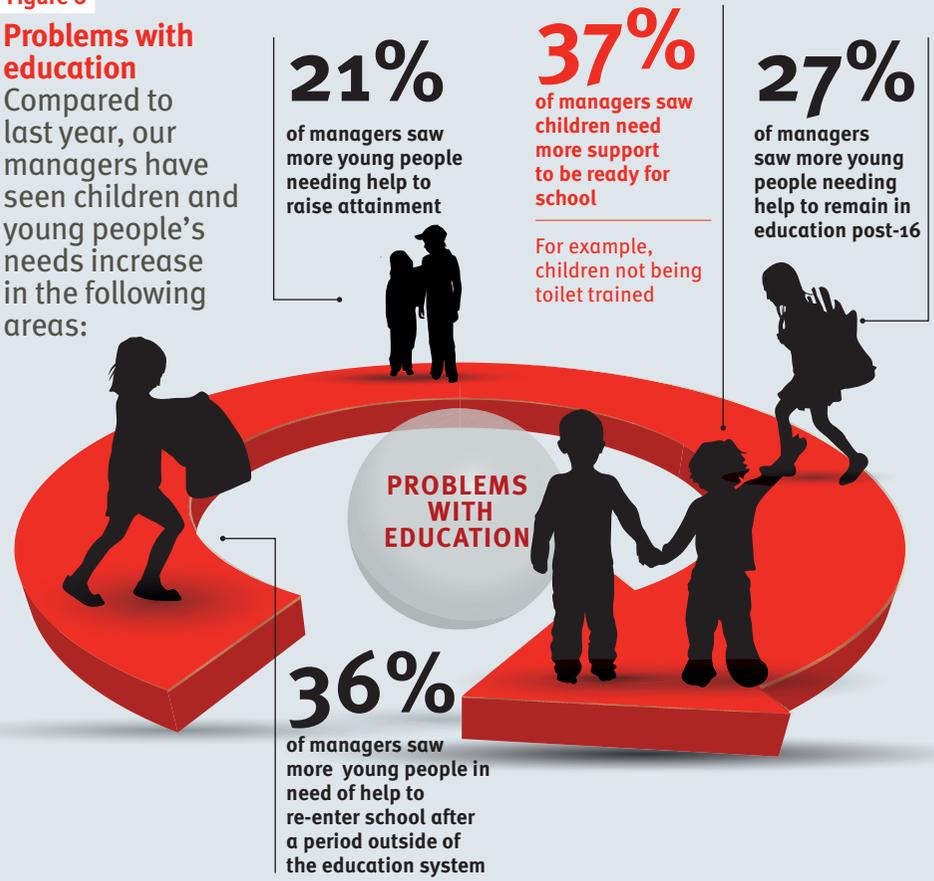
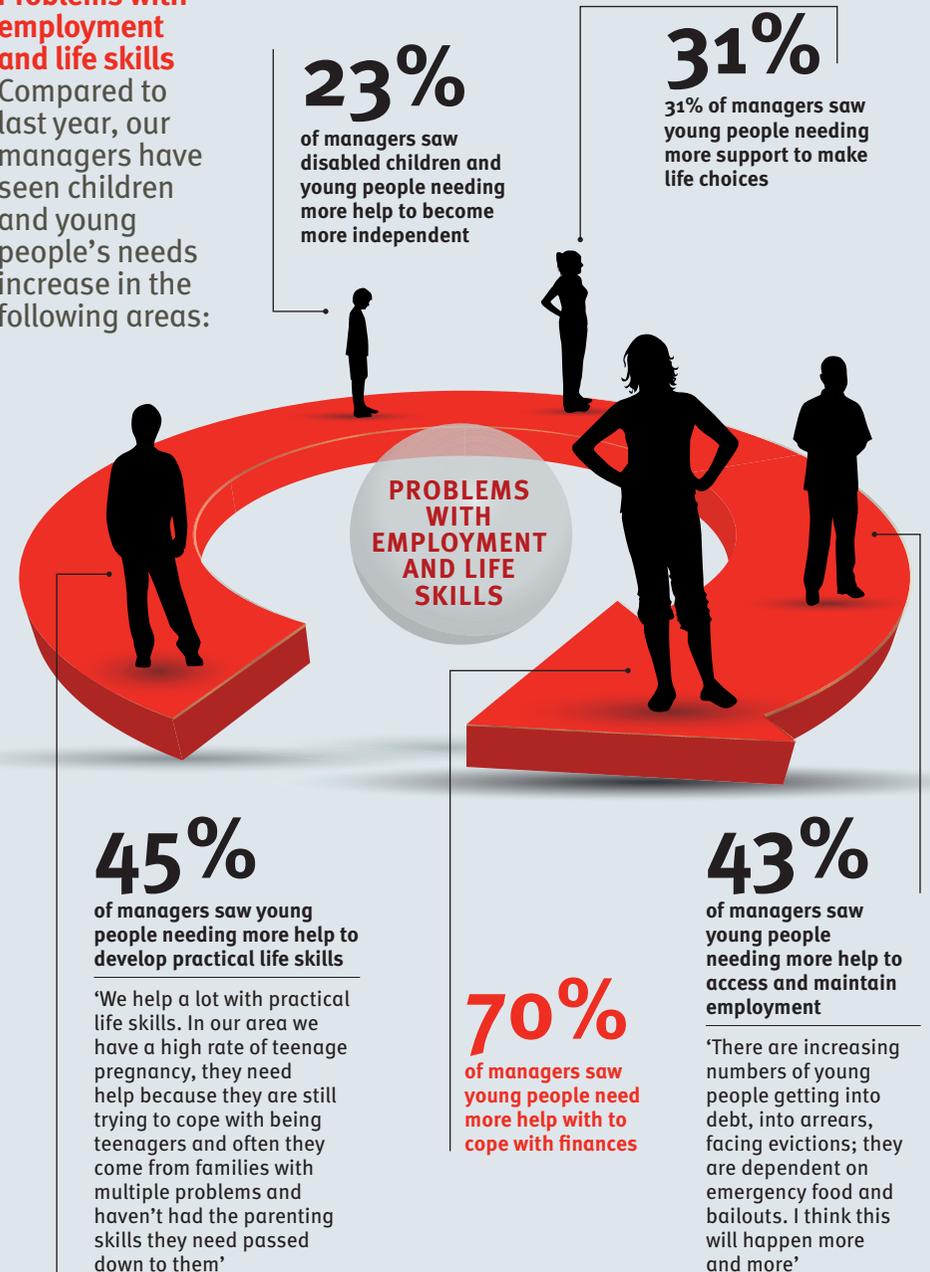


Figure 7

Problems with employment and life skills

Compared to last year, our managers have seen children and young people's needs increase in the following areas:



'They come to us because they don't know where else to go'

Child neglect

There has been a three per cent reduction in staff identifying more cases of suspected neglect in comparison to last year (2012) (Figure 8). This relative reduction comes from a very high base of 48 per cent, so the figure in 2013 remains 11 per cent higher than in 2011.

Over the past three years the profile of child neglect has risen among both policy makers and practitioners. This is very positive, meaning that more neglected children are being identified at an earlier stage. A proportion of the increase we have seen is likely to be due to better recognition, but this is very unlikely to account for the total amount.

Demand for support

The demand for frontline services remains high with 47 per cent of managers reporting an increase in referrals since October 2012 (Figure 9). The increases in demand are cumulative over the three years and are consistent with the rise in the severity of the problems that children and families are facing. These problems are driving a greater demand for our services.

'More families are getting into a crisis situation more quickly

than they would have. People are presenting with far more complex issues than they were. We don't go in there and just do parenting support, we are also helping with debt, housing, mental health issues. We are seeing heavier cases and as a consequence we have a waiting list.'

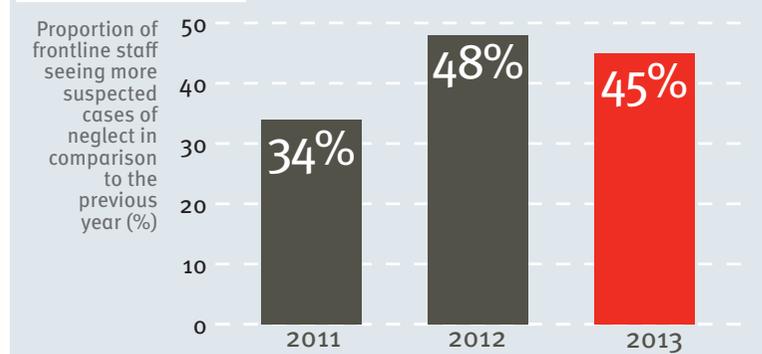
Figure 10 shows 36 per cent of managers believe the demand for their service has increased because of reduced funding for partner agencies.

Part of the pressure that our services are under is due to the impact of wider cuts on our partner agencies. If less help is available across a community, the ripple effect is felt in those services that are still operating. Add to this the far greater problems that children and families who use our services are facing and you can see why many of our managers describe that for every child or family we help, there is another one waiting at our door.

Budgets

Over the past three years we have seen a decrease in budgets across all the types of services we provide. This includes children's centres, family support services, care leaving and young carer and short break services for disabled children.

Figure 8: Change in the number of suspected cases of child neglect 2011-13



'There were lots of services that now cease to exist that used to exist a few years ago'

Figure 9: Increased referrals over a six-month period 2011-13

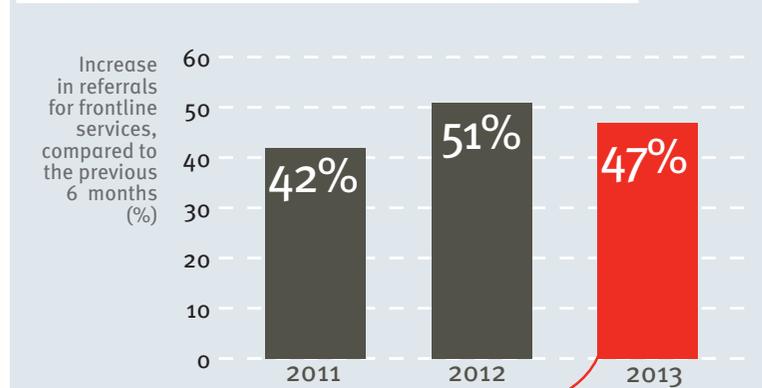


Figure 10: Reason for the increase in demand for services in 2013

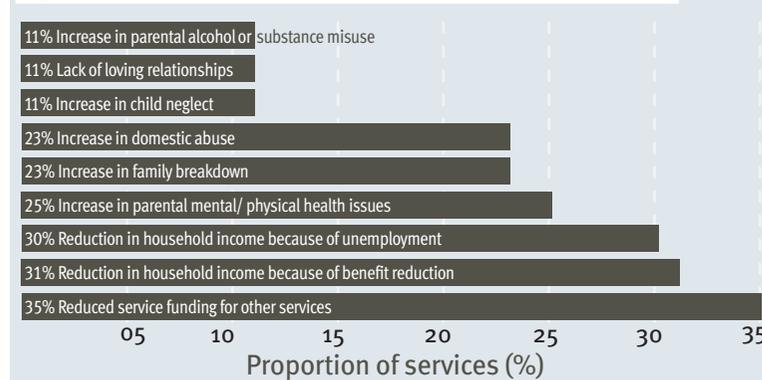


Figure 11: Increase and decrease in service budgets 2010/11 to 2012/13*

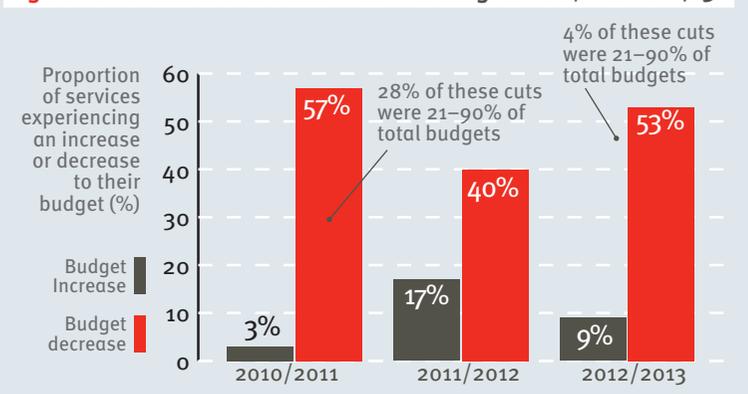
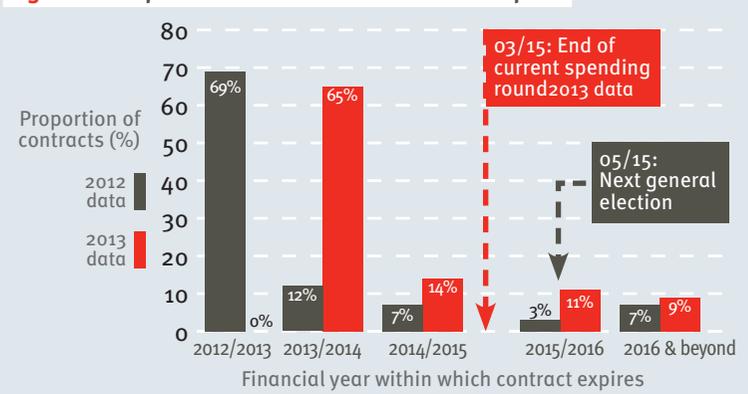
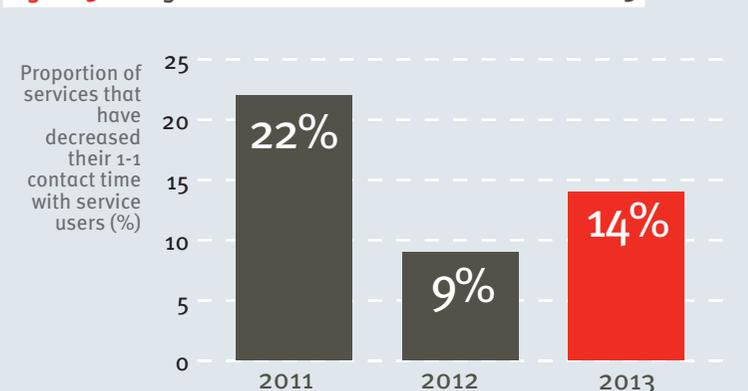


Figure 12: Proportion of service contracts due to expire*



*Figures 11 and 12 relate only to our existing services and do not include new services we began operating in this period.

Figure 13: Change in contact time with service users 2011-2013



The decrease to budgets in 2013 has been sharp, with 53 per cent of services facing cuts.

For many services these cuts have happened each year. They are therefore feeling the impact of cuts on cuts.

However, when we interrogate these figures further we can see that there has been some stabilisation over the past year. In 2013, only three (4%) of services received a cut of more than 20 per cent, whereas in 2011, 28 per cent of services had a cut of over 20 per cent.

Contract length

Figure 12 shows that 79 per cent of our current contracts will have ceased before, or at the end of, the current spending review period. Only 20 per cent of our services will have contracts in place after the next General Election in 2015. Within these figures, a large proportion of our service contracts are for one and two years only (38 per cent)¹⁶. Those delivering services are feeling increasingly insecure about when the money may run out. This is a historic problem, but one that has been exacerbated by the current financial climate. Research we published in 2008 found that during the lifetime of a 21-year-old there had been over 400 different

major announcements and policy initiatives¹⁷ affecting children, young people and their families. That represents around 20 changes every year, with each new initiative lasting, on average, a little over two years.

Contact time

It is essential that we protect the core elements of effective service delivery. The relationship between a practitioner and a child or family is the key to the success of any service¹⁸. In 2011 the face-to-face time that we could spend with the children and families who use our services, fell significantly. The following year, many of our services successfully adapted in order to protect this most vital element of our work. But in 2013, more of our services have had to reduce the amount of face-to-face contact time they can offer. That said, it is encouraging that the majority of services have been able to maintain their level of face-to-face support with 86 per cent of managers being able to protect their contact time.

400+

Different major announcements and policy initiatives over 21 years affecting children, young people and their families

20

Changes every year, with each new initiative lasting, on average, a little over two years

'It's nerve-racking that I'm on my own until something goes wrong'

Alex, 23, describes how it's difficult to get the support he needs. He has dyspraxia and Global Development Delay.

I'm sort of OK in one sense but struggling a bit in another sense. I can keep myself able to live – food, getting around and all of that – but at the same time, I'm not really moving forward in my life. Which I think is a bit of a shame.

'I want a job, but for me, getting a job is really difficult. I can read a bit, but not read and write so that I can fill in an application form or find an advertisement for a job. Ideally, that's the kind of support I'd like.'

'I volunteer at the children's centre, and there's other volunteer work I do; people with disabilities. That's going really

well. I love doing volunteer work, but it would be nice if they would train you and get a job for you.

'When we're younger, we're at school and we make friends. We might go to college or uni; we make friends. And then we have a job and we make friends. That's pretty much how it goes. I feel like I'm missing out, not having a job, because I'm not having that fellowship of people.'

'At the jobcentre, you're meant to apply for four jobs every week, and I don't. But that's not from me not wanting to. It's generally because I don't know how. I had a chat with one woman – she said they'll look for a job for me. But obviously not enough, because I don't have a job and I've never been on a proper interview.'

'I went to the jobcentre this week and had to fill in the form to say what I'd been doing. I actually thought I'd been taking quite a lot of steps, so I thought it was quite good. But the advisor seemed to want to pick holes in it. They cut my benefits for a week. I was surprised. My understanding is that it'll be six weeks next time. And then longer. It isn't nice - I live on my own, and I've got bills and if I don't pay them, it'll be bad. No one wants to be in that situation.'



'I'M NOT REALLY MOVING FORWARD IN MY LIFE. WHICH I THINK IS A BIT OF A SHAME'

'When I was younger I had a social worker but I don't at the moment because people reckon I'm not entitled to it. My disability hasn't got better or worse and it's not going to get better.'

'I did get support from the housing people, and without it I probably wouldn't have had the tribunal and got the money I was entitled to. Three years ago I wasn't getting my disability money. My understanding of it is, the government was trying to save money so they decided to cut my money right down. I may well have had a letter saying, "if you have an issue with this, write to us", but because I can't write or didn't read the letter or something like that, it never got done. So my money got cut. My biggest complaint is how it was all done by paperwork. I find it really confusing. I find it much easier talking.'

'I'm fine at the moment, had my tribunal money, so I'm OK. But it's sort of nerve-racking to think, I'm on my own until something goes really badly wrong. It's like, you can have the support but only when things are getting bad.'

Alex volunteers at an Action for Children advocacy service. The service supported him for more than three years when he left foster care.

Service responses

This section looks at individual service areas, looking at the impact of government spending decisions on vulnerable children and young people. It also seeks to understand if any changes are enabling us to intervene earlier in the onset of problems. The results are set out in a report card style, green being a good rating, orange an area to look out for and red signaling where we have concerns that changes are having a detrimental effect on vulnerable children and young people. Where possible, we have compared the 2013 findings with previous years.

This section covers the following service areas:

- 🔴 Children's centres
- 🔴 Early help for children and family support services
- 🔴 Intensive family support services
- 🔴 Services for young people with additional needs
- 🔴 Foster care
- 🔴 Short break services for disabled children

56%

OVER HALF OF THE MANAGERS (56%) REPORT AN INCREASE IN THEIR FACE-TO-FACE TIME WITH FAMILIES THEY WORK WITH OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

This increase shows that despite huge pressures on children's centres, seeing greater numbers of children and families with complex problems at the same time as managing budget restraints, they have been able to increase the core element of service delivery that makes the biggest difference.

This increase shows that despite huge pressures on children's centres, seeing greater numbers of children and families with complex problems at the same time as managing budget restraints, they have been able to increase the core element of service delivery that makes the biggest difference.

32%

OF MANAGERS SAY THEY HAVE A CONTRACT IN PLACE THAT WILL SEE OUT THE SPENDING REVIEW PERIOD: THE NEXT TWO OR MORE YEARS. THIS FIGURE HAS ONLY INCREASED BY 1% IN THE LAST YEAR

Given we are less than two years away from the end of the current spending review period, and that the spending round for 2015/2016 has already been announced, we did expect this figure to rise more than 1% in the last year. This means just under a third of our services have the stability they need to embed good practice, achieve positive outcomes for children and sustain relationships with the community and individuals.

83% OF CHILDREN'S CENTRE MANAGERS REPORTED CUTS IN THEIR BUDGETS. THIS COMPARES TO 48% IN 2012 AND 64% IN 2011

The number of managers reporting budget cuts has dramatically increased since last year. This is even more concerning given that we are looking at cuts on cuts for some services over a three-year period. As reductions in budgets continue they become harder to absorb. For some service managers this has meant changing the way they are working, for example by reducing universal provision in favour of more targeted support.

83%

76% OF MANAGERS SAW CHILDREN NEEDING MORE SUPPORT DUE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE

'We are seeing domestic abuse and control of women impacting on the children'

76%

52% OF MANAGERS SAW CHILDREN NEEDING MORE SUPPORT DUE TO PARENTAL MENTAL ILLNESS

'Demand is greater due to increases in unemployment, increase in cost of living, increase in mental health issues, lack of parental social interaction with their children resulting in the child's language and development suffering'

52%

THREE QUARTERS OF MANAGERS (75%) SAY FAMILIES ARE IN NEED OF MORE HELP NOW AS THEY ARE FACING GREATER PROBLEMS THAN THEY WERE LAST YEAR

We are seeing issues such as neglect, deprivation and mental health problems becoming more entrenched. As well as the personal turmoil in these families, as the problems deepen the need for services will continue to rise.

75%

Children's centres

Sixty three of our children's centre managers took part in our research. Our children's centres deliver high quality, evidence-based provision and outreach to engage children and families, especially those that are vulnerable, and provide help early where it is needed. When delivered effectively at a local level, children's centres support children, families and communities to achieve their full potential. The managers who took part in our research support nearly 42,000 children. Fifty of the services we spoke to were also interviewed for last year's Red Book.

'We get lots of clothes given to us and within two - three days all of the items are gone which is a sign that families are really struggling.'

62% OF OUR CHILDREN'S CENTRES ARE SIGNPOSTING THEIR FAMILIES TO FOOD BANKS

That nearly two thirds of our managers are regularly signposting families to food banks is worrying, but in-line with national trends. 'We have set up our own food bank and have received a lot of support from the community in stocking it'

62%

41% OF MANAGERS SAID THAT COMPARED TO LAST YEAR CHILDREN ARE INCREASINGLY NOT READY TO START SCHOOL, AS THEY NEED MORE HELP TO REACH BASIC MILESTONES

'We have also seen a rise in children not being able to start school because of developmental delay, e.g. still in nappies.'

41%



56%

56% OF SERVICES HAVE MAINTAINED THEIR LEVEL OF FACE-TO-FACE TIME WITH SERVICE USERS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

10 SERVICES (31%) INCREASED THEIR ONE -TO-ONE CONTACT TIME.

The ability of most services to maintain their one -to-one support is positive.

But 4 (13%) reported a decrease in the time they could spend with service users, with one service stating that this had decreased by up to 80%.

34%

34% OF THE MANAGERS SAID THEIR BUDGETS HAD NOT REDUCED OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS

63% OF MANAGERS ARE IDENTIFYING CHILDREN NEEDING MORE SUPPORT DUE TO PARENTAL DEPRESSION

63%

47% MANAGERS ARE SEEING AN INCREASE IN SUSPECTED CASES OF NEGLECT IN THE LAST YEAR

Given that these services exist to provide children with early help it is positive that they are picking up on child neglect cases. Nonetheless the figure represents a worrying trend.

47%

44% OF THE SERVICES ARE SIGNPOSTING THEIR FAMILIES TO FOOD BANKS. 16% ARE SIGNPOSTING TO CLOTHES BANKS

44%

DEMAND FOR EARLY HELP SERVICES IS HIGH, WITH 47% OF MANAGERS SEEING THE NUMBER OF NEW REFERRALS RISING, COMPARED TO THE PREVIOUS SIX MONTHS.

47%

59% OF SERVICES REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR

59%

78% OF MANAGERS SAY THEIR SERVICE CONTRACT HAS LESS THAN 12 MONTHS REMAINING

This figure is hugely significant given the concerns last year about the abolition of the Early Intervention Grant.

78%

Early help for children and family support services

In 2013, 32 of our managers delivering early help and family support services took part in our research. This included those providing parenting support and mentoring for children. They support 3,662 children and young people and 3,911 families. Twenty-six of the managers we spoke to were also interviewed for last year's Red Book.



It is unsurprising that demand for these services is rising. The concern is that the situation will get worse and as services fill up other children will go without the support they desperately need. No child can be helped when they are stuck on a waiting list.

64%

64% OF THE SERVICES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN THE LEVEL OF FACE-TO-FACE TIME THEY CAN SPEND WITH SERVICE USERS

21% HAD INCREASED THEIR FACE TO FACE CONTACT TIME. BUT 14% DESCRIBED A DECREASE IN THE AMOUNT OF TIME THEY COULD SPEND WITH SERVICE USERS

At the heart of the intensive family support model is the keyworker role. It takes time to build trust so it is good that this has been maintained.



Intensive family support services

In 2013, 14 of our managers delivering intensive family support services, such as (eight) Family Intervention Projects (FIPs), took part in our research. These services provide both intensive support and challenge to families experiencing difficulties. The service is provided through a key worker who forms a strong professional relationship with the family. The services support 499 children and young people and 497 families. Eight of the managers we spoke to were also interviewed for last year's Red Book.



50% OF MANAGERS REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR

50%

43% OF MANAGERS SAID THEIR BUDGETS HAD REDUCED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

43%

50% OF MANAGERS BELIEVE DEMAND FOR THEIR SERVICES HAS INCREASED DUE TO CUTS IN OTHER PROVISION SUCH AS CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CAMHS) AND ADVICE SERVICES

50%

43% OF MANAGERS REPORTED SEEING MORE SUSPECTED CASES OF NEGLECT IN THE LAST YEAR

43%

43% OF THE SERVICES ARE SIGNPOSTING THEIR FAMILIES TO FOOD BANKS. 21% ARE SIGNPOSTING TO CLOTHES BANKS

43%

71% OF MANAGERS REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR

57% of managers said that the mental health of children had deteriorated over the past 12 months.

71%

93% OF MANAGERS SAY THEIR SERVICE CONTRACT HAS LESS THAN 12 MONTHS REMAINING

This means that almost a year before the end of the current spending round and ahead of the general election in 2015, these services are heading into a period of great uncertainty and instability.

93%

57%

57% OF SERVICES HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR FACE-TO-FACE TIME WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

30% OF SERVICES REPORTED INCREASING THEIR FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT TIME

However, 13% reported a decrease in the time they could spend with service users.

Services for young people with additional needs

We undertook in-depth interviews with 23 managers who provide support for young people with additional needs. This includes support for care leavers, young carers, young people at risk of homelessness and youth offending services. The services support 1,939 children and young people. Twenty of the managers we spoke to were also interviewed for last year's Red Book.



35%

35% OF MANAGERS SAID THEIR BUDGETS HAD NOT REDUCED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS.

48% OF MANAGERS REPORTED AN INCREASE IN DEMAND FOR THEIR SERVICE OVER THE LAST 6 MONTHS

When asked for the reasons for this, 55% of managers believed demand for their services had increased due to reduced services such as CAMHS and advice services. 27% believed demand had increased because of the reduction in household income because of unemployment and or benefit reduction.

48%

48% OF MANAGERS REPORTED SEEING MORE SUSPECTED CASES OF NEGLECT IN THE LAST YEAR

48%

35% OF THE SERVICES ARE SIGNPOSTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO FOOD BANKS. 13% ARE SIGNPOSTING TO CLOTHES BANKS

35%

57% OF OUR MANAGERS REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE FAMILIES THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR AS THE PROBLEMS THEY FACE ARE MORE ENTRENCHED

'We are seeing more of the emergence of young carers who would be living with the impact of hidden harm (parental alcohol and substance abuse). Other things continue to be an issue. Our young carers are living with the impact of mental ill health of their parents and disability issues of their parents. Their needs are more visible to us'

57%

57% OF OUR MANAGERS REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR

48% of managers said that the mental health of children had deteriorated over the past 12 months.

65% of managers saw children needing more support due to parental depression.

57%

65% OF SERVICE CONTRACTS HAVE LESS THAN 12 MONTHS REMAINING

This means that almost a year before the end of the current spending round and ahead of the general election in 2015, these services are heading into a period of great uncertainty and instability.

65%

57% of managers children needing support due to parental mental illness

39% of managers children needing support due to parental substance misuse.

67%

67% OF MANAGERS SAY MORE POTENTIAL FOSTER CARERS ARE COMING FORWARD DUE TO AWARENESS RAISING SUCH AS LOCAL RECRUITMENT DRIVES

The UK is facing a shortage of 9,000 foster carers this year, so while the increase in the number of potential carers coming forward to our services is welcome, it needs to be seen in context.

ALL

SIX SERVICES EXPECT THEIR PLACEMENT NUMBERS TO INCREASE IN THE NEXT YEAR

ALL

MANAGERS REPORTED THAT COMMISSIONERS WERE EXPECTING FAR MORE FROM THE SERVICE IN THE LAST YEAR

Foster care

We undertook in-depth interviews with six managers of our fostering placement services.



83% OF MANAGERS REPORTED SEEING MORE SUSPECTED CASES OF NEGLECT IN THE LAST YEAR

83%

67% OF OUR MANAGERS REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR

67%

67% OF MANAGERS SAID THAT THE EMOTIONAL HEALTH NEEDS OF CHILDREN HAD INCREASED OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

67%

50% OF MANAGERS SAID THAT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN HAD DETERIORATED OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS

50%

There remains a high number of children waiting to be fostered, particularly those who have disabilities, teenagers and children in sibling groups.

We are developing our provision to ensure we meet the needs of children, for example developing therapeutic and remand placements as well as psychology services.

89%

89% OF SERVICES SAID THERE HAS BEEN NO REDUCTION IN THE LEVEL OF FACE-TO-FACE TIME STAFF CAN SPEND WITH CHILDREN OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS.

In four of our services, managers reported that they are now able to work with more children across the age ranges, with differing needs. This was because they had extended their opening hours and increased the number of beds.

58%

58% OF THE MANAGERS SAID THEIR BUDGETS HAD STAYED THE SAME OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS. HOWEVER, 26% HAD SEEN A DECREASE IN THEIR BUDGETS

42%

THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA IN 8 OUT OF THE 19 SERVICES (42%) HAVE CHANGED. IN SOME CASES MORE CHILDREN CAN NOW BE REACHED, WHEREAS IN OTHERS HIGHER THRESHOLDS HAVE MEANT THAT FEWER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ARE ABLE TO ACCESS SUPPORT

32% OF MANAGERS SAID THAT DEMAND FOR SERVICES HAS RISEN IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS WITH THE NUMBER OF NEW REFERRALS INCREASING

32%

61% OF MANAGERS HAVE SEEN AN INCREASE IN THE SEVERITY OF ISSUES FACING FAMILIES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

61%

39% OF MANAGERS BELIEVE THEY ARE WORKING WITH MORE CHILDREN WHO HAVE COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

39%

58% OF MANAGERS SAY THEIR SERVICE CONTRACT HAS LESS THAN 12 MONTHS REMAINING. THREE SERVICES ARE WORKING ON A ROLLING CONTRACT, ONE THAT HAS NO END DATE AND IS ROLLED OVER EACH YEAR

58%

83% OF OUR MANAGERS REPORTED THAT THE NEEDS OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THEY ARE WORKING WITH HAVE INCREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR

53% of managers saw children needing more support due to parental depression.

37% of managers saw children needing more support due to parental mental illness.

83%

Short break services for disabled children

We undertook in-depth interviews with 19 of our managers who deliver short break services to support disabled children and their families. These services work with 1,400 children. Fourteen of the managers we spoke to were also interviewed for last year's Red Book.



For four services, a change in criteria means they can only now work with children with the most complex health and behavioural needs. Children with 'lesser' needs are no longer eligible for support. This was a trend we picked up on last year and we fear that it could lead to some disabled children, who do not reach the threshold for support, not getting the right help when they need it the most.

These short break services are working with some of the most vulnerable children in the country. They have profound health and behavioural needs meaning that they need stable support provided by familiar staff. Services who do not know if, and when, they will have their contracts terminated are anything but stable.

04 Early intervention

What works and what are the enablers and barriers to implementation in 2013?

'Early intervention means different things to different people. For our purposes we mean intervening as soon as possible to tackle problems emerging for children, young people and their families'

Making early intervention a practical reality remains fraught with problems. This is despite politicians agreeing that this approach is the best way of supporting children and families as well as stemming the growing tide of families¹⁹ with acute problems coming through the system²⁰. So why has the UK not made more progress towards embedding early intervention as the standard for children's social care?

The problem arises from our current political and funding cycles which are working against the collective desire to provide consistency and stability in the way we respond to vulnerable children. Even with the renewed focus on 'localism', councils in England, in particular, believe that their autonomy continues to be undermined by the imposition of national political timescales and the short term funding arrangements that

follow²¹. The National Audit Office argued recently that, *'the UK budgetary process does not include the sort of longer-term vision seen in other countries which could help inform strategic decision making. This would be more conducive to the development of spend-to-save initiatives, which require a willingness to accept short-term costs in return for later benefits'*²².

While the barriers to realising early intervention are not new, the ongoing economic instability, spending restraints and the effect that this has had on the severity of problems vulnerable children and families are facing present additional hurdles.

The evidence in chapter 3 shows how over the past three years we are being pushed towards delivering more targeted support to those with the most severe problems, as opposed to providing early help when these problems first emerge and are easier to

tackle. There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating why early intervention not only improves the life chances of individuals²³, but can also lead to significant savings for the state²⁴, as outlined by the National Audit Office²⁵ and the Early Action Task Force²⁶.

The current shift towards delivering later and more targeted interventions also means that we are at risk of losing our collective knowledge about what works, gleaned from the investment in preventative approaches when finances allowed this. Below we have listed the core strands of the early intervention approach that need to be protected in the drive to reform the delivery of children's services.

▶ A system for delivery

Services and systems need to be joined up on the ground so that localities can work across the spectrum of need from universal to targeted provision. In this way problems can be

identified and acted upon early. In addition, once intensive interventions end children and families can be re-routed onto less intensive support.

The children's centre model is an example of where services and systems have been pulled together to deliver multi-agency responses in one place. By consolidating local responses children's centres can offer an essential combination of support for a child's early development, working directly with children, as well as assisting parents and early education providers. They are the system for delivering early intervention in localities. Open access avoids stigmatising service users and ensures that children benefit from mixing with their peers from all social backgrounds.

▶ Community engagement and co-production

We need to deliver services in a way that gives families greater control over their

lives. In an increasingly disjointed societal landscape, service approaches must promote connectivity through reaching out and bringing people together to design and deliver solutions. Service users want the opportunity to give something back.

How services are delivered can create extra connections between families and children, through informal means such as space design, or purposeful ways including creating networks of care between families and engaging users in not only planning and managing projects, but also in

SERVICE EXAMPLE

Mentors and intergenerational projects can create new connections between peer groups and across generations, generating social capital. An example of such as project is Action for Children's Two of a Kind service, which matches care-experienced Independent Visitors (IVs) with young people in the care system across London. Trained through a structured schedule, IVs draw on their own experience of care to provide empathetic and tailored support. We know that many young people would not have considered using an IV unless they had been in care themselves. They find it easier to talk to their IV, knowing that they have been through the care system.

the co-production of services²⁷. Schools and youth groups can connect families and create a new generation of social entrepreneurs to undertake local action in the future.

► Reaching out

As resources get tighter, many services are being asked to focus on the most vulnerable children and families. To do this, services need to know who these people are, reach out to them and offer accessible and non-stigmatising support.

Robust outreach, whereby staff make individual contact with families in the community, often in their own homes in the first instance, is essential to connect with those families who are seen as being the most 'hard to reach'. Investing in effective outreach is not an optional extra, yet in the current climate it has been particularly vulnerable to cuts. We must resist drawing the net too tightly.

► Early identification

The earlier problems are identified, the quicker they can be addressed. This is particularly important in the early years. In her review of the Early Years Foundation Stage Dame Clare Tickell²⁸ notes that 'It is a missed opportunity if children's needs,

including any special educational needs and disabilities are not identified during this period'.

Although there are encouraging signs that practitioners from an increasingly diverse range of professionals are becoming more alert to children who require additional support, these gains need to be embedded. While specific programmes have been developed, such as Every Child a Talker, to help professionals identify areas where children may need further support, the early identification of the range of vulnerabilities children face remains patchy and fragmented. We would like to see faster progress on the delivery of the integrated health and social care check list for two-year olds. This check list needs to be accessible and simple to use, so that additional needs are identified early, communicated across professional boundaries and the child's progress then tracked through to formal education.

► Evidence-based approaches

We need to avoid reinventing the wheel when proven programmes already exist. There are a number of tried and tested programmes that have been shown to improve children's development.

SERVICE EXAMPLE

Another way to facilitate community cohesion is through innovative peer-to-peer and volunteer programmes. For example, at our Cowgate and Blakelaw Children's Centre, the Family Support Volunteer Project recruits and trains local residents as volunteers to support families with children from 0–12 years of age. This can be through home visits, peer support or assisting them to access services. Volunteers support local families to make positive changes and build parenting capacity.

Delivered by skilled and well supported professionals, these evidence-based programmes make a difference. The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) has a key role to play in advising, supporting and embedding evidence-based approaches in the UK context²⁹.

► Maintaining the fidelity of provision

When budgets are stretched, it is easy for questions to be raised about the importance of certain elements of service models, especially those that cost the most. For example, in the roll out of the original Family Intervention Project (FIP) model we saw a dilution of impact because people were not adhering to the full service model.

A study for the Department for Education in England³⁰ found that ‘carefully planned and well-resourced implementation is critical to achieving better outcomes and programme success’ for the delivery of evidence-based programmes. A focus on how models are delivered, by whom, and to what degree of fidelity is just as important as determining which programme to adopt.

► **Leadership and a well qualified and supported work force**

A higher-quality workforce is inextricably linked to better outcomes for children³¹. This requires investment in well qualified and well supported practitioners, as well as in strong leadership. Qualifications, training, resources and support networks are all crucial elements to ensure the quality of provision. The Munro Review advocated for arrangements for practitioners to reflect on their direct work and plans for supervision and training. In response to this, alongside our own practice development, Action for Children has implemented the Lead Practitioner role within our services across the UK. Lead Practitioners are frontline supervisory staff. They drive high-quality delivery by practising and modelling

Martine’s story

‘With seven other people in the house, it was crazy’

Martine is 35 and has five children aged between four and 19. Family life is beginning to change for the better, and her next goal is to find a job.

‘**M**y older daughters aren’t living at home now. My oldest has a permanent flat, so that’s an improvement. My next daughter’s got temporary accommodation, but it’s a nice flat with one bedroom. It’ll do until her boy gets a bit bigger.

‘She was in the bed and breakfast for over a year – I think she just got forgotten about until the housing person came and saw her there. So they were at my house every day. She had to use the washing machine, and my other daughter didn’t have a cooker so she’d come down as well.

‘Both my daughters have kids of their own, so that was me and seven other people in the house. It was really hard; it was crazy. For my three younger children, it was hard because the house was so busy. It was hard to spend time with them, hard for them to do homework. But the chaos is much better now, so I’m focussing more on what I want to do.

‘I’ve got my CV done. I’m applying for jobs, so that’s a big step forward for me. Action for Children got me in touch with a “Working Families Together” project, and it did help me. Doing a training programme and other things has given me skills, so I can add them on my CV. It’s making me more employable, I believe. I mean, I haven’t got GCSEs.

‘I’ve built my confidence up, as well. I did some voluntary work, to become a community champion. You go round the estate and give people advice on health things, like dental hygiene for children. I can’t give medical advice, obviously, but it’s about signposting them because some people don’t know what’s going on in the area.

‘I’M APPLYING FOR JOBS, SO THAT’S A BIG STEP FORWARD FOR ME’

‘We were speaking to people about whether they do any exercise, and a lot of them were saying no, there’s no childcare or it costs so much. So I came up with this idea: have a family fun-day where parents and children can come along, play in the park, and exercise at the same time. The lady who runs community champions, she ran it by the NHS, and they went with it. I’m really pleased with that achievement.

‘Financially it’s still a struggle but we haven’t got debt lenders to pay back so it’s easier than before. I decided I wasn’t going to take a loan out for Christmas, which is a good thing now, but it meant Christmas was a horrible time. My children, as well, they run out of money. Not that I’ve got money to lend, but I try and help where I can.

‘What I want to do now is get a job. When my youngest turns five I’m going to have to sign on if I’m not working. I’m hoping to get a job before that.’

An intensive family support service referred Martine to Action for Children in 2009, to help develop her skills and confidence in moving towards employment.

‘Human relationships are core to the delivery of effective services, no matter how programmes and funding may change’

reflective supervision for practitioners. The role also demonstrates a clear focus on safeguarding across our services.

▶ Investing in relationships

Human relationships are core to the delivery of effective services, no matter how programmes and funding may change³². Developing effective professional relationships makes a real difference to outcomes for children, yet too often this core aspect of service delivery is overlooked and under resourced.

Within Action for Children we have developed a skills framework that identifies the key qualities and experience, skills and knowledge that are essential to developing effective professional relationships with vulnerable parents in order to improve outcomes for children and young people. This works across the three broad stages of relationship development: building rapport with parents, identifying needs and meeting needs. The role of organisations in supporting the development of effective parent-practitioner relationships should not be underestimated.

The enablers to implementing an early intervention approach

Over the past three years the Coalition Government has progressed a number of policies that aim to encourage early intervention, promote social mobility and enhance support for vulnerable children, young people and families.

It is taking forward recommendations from the Munro review of child protection³³, the Tickell Early Years Foundation Stage review³⁴ and Graham Allen’s early intervention review³⁵. Following the Allen review, the Early Intervention Foundation was established to ‘advocate for early, rather than remedial, intervention, rigorously assess what works on the ground and advise those planning and delivering services to ensure children, young people and families get the best support possible’.

The Coalition Government is extending the free childcare offer for vulnerable two year olds from 20 per cent to 40 per cent, rolling this out from September 2014³⁶.

The revised statutory guidance for children’s

centres published in April 2013 represents a refreshed focus and commitment to the children’s centre model. It includes a welcome emphasis on achieving improved outcomes for children within the core purpose, as well as stressing the importance of joined-up working in localities, using the children’s centre as the vehicle to deliver this.

More recently, the announcement that free school meals will be made available to 1.4 million more children is a welcome step. It means that 200,000 more children will benefit from free school meals during reception, year 1 and year 2³⁷.

Vulnerable families were included in June’s Spending Round through an extension of the ‘Troubled Families’ programme in 2015 and beyond. The Government committed £200m in the first financial year 2015/2016 so that the programme can reach a further 400,000 families. This means there will be a greater emphasis on working earlier with families to prevent them from reaching the threshold of becoming a so-called ‘troubled family’.

In April 2011, 16 first-phase Community Budgets for

COUNCIL EXAMPLE

In addition to the national initiatives that have been put in place to facilitate early intervention, councils are also putting in place strategies to enable the shift to deliver early help to children and families. For example, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council are establishing a single Early Help and Prevention (EHP) service and Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) have re-thought the way commissioning decisions are made in respect of children’s services to develop a new operating model.

SCIE (2013) Early intervention: decision making in local authorities children services

families with multiple problems were announced. Community Budgets allow providers of public services to share budgets, improving outcomes for local people and reducing duplication and waste. They provide an ideal mechanism for enhancing local freedoms and flexibilities to deliver a place-based, early intervention approach.

The barriers to implementing an early intervention approach

Squeeze on early intervention spending

Local authority spending on prevention has reduced in the last three financial years, amounting to £18.7 billion

9.2%

fall in preventative spending in cash terms over the last three financial years

in 2009/10, £18.8 billion in 2010/11, and then £17.1 billion in 2011/12. This represents a fall in preventative spending, in cash terms, of some 9.2 per cent. Allowing for CPI inflation of 3.5 per cent over the year 2011/12, the effects are steeper still³⁸.

The Early Intervention Grant (EIG) was absorbed into wider local government funding from April 2013. Prior to that, money was reallocated from what was the EIG to fund the free early education entitlement (costing around £760 million³⁹) and the Adoption Reform Grant (£150 million⁴⁰). Because of this, the Local Government Association suggested an additional £49 million would be removed from early intervention services in 2013/14 and 2014/15⁴¹ for children's centres, this means there has been a 20 per cent diversion of funding between 2010 and 2012/13⁴², moving money away from existing provision.

Added to this, the spending round announced in June this year resulted in a 10 per cent cut to council funding in 2015–16. This comes on top of the 33 per cent reduction since 2010⁴³.

These lower levels of spending are the 'new normal' for children's social care.

Flawed funding systems and governance

Councils across England now have greater autonomy to shape their own response to children and families. But the 'localism project' remains unfinished as they continue to be hampered by short term funding. Conflicting national policy initiatives are preventing them from implementing their own long term plans.

Instability is created by the inherent short-termism built into the system. This is passed down the chain from Westminster to devolved Governments and councils onto service providers. The current three- or four-year spending review cycles, translate into shorter contract periods for local services, which simply are not long enough to embed change.

Often a children's service has barely enough time to be set up and begin to deliver its service before its staff have to plan for reconfiguration or even closure. For example, 79 per cent of our services do not have a contract in place beyond the current spending review period. The short term nature of the system also feeds an often relentless cycle of commissioning, the cost of which we would prefer to see

rerouted to funding front line services. Figure 14 (page 54) shows what the system looks like when it goes wrong.

The Transfer of Undertakings practices (TUPE) can also have a negative effect on delivery, particularly at a time where a greater number of services are being transferred out of local authority delivery. As the economic challenges facing councils increase, commissioners are looking at ways of reducing costs and this places adherence to the TUPE regulations at risk. We have examples of commissioners dividing existing services into different 'lots' under Framework Agreements with the intention of creating challenges for existing providers to demonstrate eligibility for their staff to transfer. This increases the risks to those providers and leaves staff uncertain and insecure in their employment status. This increasing commercialisation of services is a particularly English phenomenon, much can be learned from the alternative approaches in other parts of the UK.

Inevitably this impacts on the children and families who then experience changes in both the services they receive and the staff who

provide their support. This does not mean that services should go unchallenged if they are failing to perform. There is already scope to de-commission services where they are failing to deliver. This and other safeguards would remain in place even with longer contracts.

The system must be greater than the sum of its parts, with wider and deeper collaboration between agencies from Whitehall departments to those delivering locally across the UK. There is an inherent problem in the social care system whereby those who pay for services do not see the financial benefit of doing so: *'the fruit of our labour doesn't fall in our garden'*⁴⁴. If, for example, a local authority supports an individual back into work, then the Department for Work and Pensions reaps the financial rewards. This inherent disincentive in the system casts a long shadow; it prevents agencies from being compelled to act together and means they cannot always see the mutual interest of joint activity.

Increasing needs

Over the past three years we have seen an escalation in the problems that the children and families we work with are facing.

'It would be easy to point the finger at the spending decisions made in the last five years as the cause of the problems the families we work with face. While they have had a significant impact, so too have longstanding bureaucratic processes that lead to short term policy making and commissioning'

FIGURE 14: WHAT THE SYSTEM LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT GOES WRONG

HM TREASURY

HM Treasury
One to four year Spending Reviews
National spending decided by central government

Central Government Departments

Distribute spending review allocation: proportion of funding retained for centralised policies, remainder devolved to local areas

- ▶ Little time for strategic planning
- ▶ Funding for local areas reduces
- ▶ Policy priorities vie for funding
- ▶ Departments respond to and create policy churn

Local Authority

Receive spending review allocation: annual settlements for certain funding streams

- ▶ Priorities vie for funding across Local Authority departments
- ▶ Funding silos persist in departments and work streams
- ▶ Funding for current priorities not guaranteed at the next Spending Review so services not commissioned beyond spending review period

Local Service

Contracted by Local Authority: often 1-3 years, rarely exceeds full Spending Review period

- ▶ Limited time to make embed service
- ▶ Insufficient time to demonstrate impact
- ▶ Limited opportunities for long term planning

Front Line Professional

Works within contracts to provide services to children and families

- ▶ Service restricted to contract period
- ▶ Time with families limited given competing demands
- ▶ Personal job insecurity
- ▶ Limited development opportunities

Family

Receives support from front line professional

- ▶ Do not receive timely and appropriate support
- ▶ Instability in professional relationships

Our practitioners talk about the basics feeling increasingly fragile for some families who are struggling to make ends meet. Parents are facing an impossible choice between putting food on the table or paying the rent. This in turn is feeding the increase in long standing mental and physical health difficulties. Children are bearing the brunt. *‘Poor kids are apologetic in nature.’* It is difficult to see how these issues are likely to improve in the long term.

The number of vulnerable children and families is predicted to rise significantly between now and 2015. Using the Government’s own measures of vulnerability⁴⁵, we estimate that the number of children living in families with five or more vulnerabilities is set to rise by 54,000 to 365,000. This is an increase of around 17 per cent⁴⁶.

Problems are being stored up for the future.

Councils know this and have told us they would not be surprised if the number of children in care continues to rise over the next five years. Due to their inability to invest in preventative approaches, at the same time as the inevitable periodic peaks following high profile serious case reviews.



'It was education or money. I went for the money option and looking after the family'

Samantha, now nearly 18, describes some of her worries as a young carer.

Looking back now, it was hard for me socially when I was younger. I hardly had friends because other kids thought I was so different. But to me it was natural, the whole caring experience. I didn't know anything else.

'My mum has hydrocephalus and spina bifida. She's in a wheelchair and sometimes has stress fits. She's still independent; she does shopping and cooking. But things like reaching up in cupboards, or cleaning the floor – that's where

we help. Me and my brother are always on hand. My brother's 16 and he has epilepsy.

'Senior school was probably the worst time of my life. The other girls didn't understand and I couldn't speak to anyone about my experience. I got bullied, there was name calling, a few knocks and stuff. I got to a point where I couldn't take it. I ended up not going to school very much in year 10.

'Young Carers helped me move to a new school and they understood better. They went with a timetable based around me, and got me taxis to school so I could help my mum. So I got all my GCSEs and made new friends.

'Financially we take life day-to-day. Mum only gets her disability living allowance once a month, so we do a shop then and get gas and electric. Some months we are OK; some months we struggle a lot. There have been times where we couldn't afford food, not even bread or milk. Young Carers gave us vouchers so we could eat for a week, or they went shopping for us, or they gave us food from food banks. And they've helped with grants to help my mum get a stair lift and stuff like that.

'YOU DO HAVE WORRIES IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOU'RE LIVING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE'

'I wish I could do more. If I did have a job I could put money towards the rent, or electric and gas. I do that with the carer's allowance but it never feels like enough.

'I claimed carer's allowance at the age of 16. At the time it was education or money, because you can only do 16 hours education a week if you're claiming and I couldn't find a 16-hour course at college. I went for the money option and looking after the family. But now we're all steady I want to get into education or some sort of work.

'My main worries for the future are the whole caring thing. I'll keep in contact with Young Carers when I turn 18 but I know they won't be able to give me so much support. They've done so much; I feel like I can't thank them enough. But you do have worries in your life when you're living with disabled people. Like will my brother have a fit, will my mum be OK. I tend not to think about it and hope for the best.'

Sam has had support from an Action for Children Young Carers service since she was nine years old.

05 Beyond 2013

Conclusions and recommendations

‘Early action can provide positive social and economic outcomes and reduce overall public spending by preventing problems from becoming embedded. A shift from reactive to preventative spending could improve value for money from public spending’

Action for Children published a report in 2009 setting out why investing in early intervention is good for us all. *Backing the Future*⁴⁷ by the new economics foundation made the economic and social case for transforming the way we invest in the future, through children. We highlighted failures by governments to make the best use of public resources. We catalogued failure to improve key aspects of children’s lives: poverty, inequality and inadequate family support. We demonstrated how savings can and should be made. We calculated an estimated £486 billion saving over 20 years if family breakdown, mental health problems and

offending behaviours are tackled early on. Comparison to the £4 trillion price tag of business as usual is stark and should be an incentiviser.

The report was widely accepted by government and decision makers. It stood as evidence that local service responses must be redirected, with the emphasis placed on providing early help and support.

Four years on, the gap between the ambition of a shift towards early help and the reality of its delivery is clear. *The Red Book* research confirms that the direction of travel is away from early intervention. There are children we cannot reach. There are children who are no longer eligible for our help due to changing admission criteria. There are children that are hidden from view, because we can no longer deliver crucial outreach and drop-in services. These children are missing out on early help but they don’t just

disappear. Their needs will escalate and services will see them further down the line when their problems are more severe and more expensive to resolve, both financially and in human terms.

Evidence from our services reflects national spending trends. Preventative spending such as early help for children, by councils in England, has reduced by 5.5 per cent over the last two financial years. This translates to a 9.2 per cent drop in cash terms⁴⁸.

The consensus that investment in early intervention will ultimately save money has faded from our collective consciousness. We fear this could lead to a crisis in children’s social care.

As services close, thresholds for support rise and demand for help increases. We are seeing a regressive move towards dealing only with children and families when they have reached crisis point.

As one of the parents we work with put it, ‘when you ask for help you’ve passed the point of needing early help.’

We need a holistic response. When the children and families who use our services describe society as an ‘exclusive club’ that they do not belong to, we have some rebuilding to do. When the UK has children with little or no aspirations for their futures, little connection with their communities or even pride in where they live, we have serious questions to ask of ourselves.

Our communities, civil society and the people who hold power and influence across all institutions need to work together.

Vulnerable children and families are paying a high price for the economic down turn.

The majority of people in receipt of both benefits and services have seen the value

‘Families are struggling in the current financial climate; some services are setting up their own food banks and providing emergency help with clothes and other essentials like beds’

Child poverty



1 in 4

children are living in poverty in the UK

of both decrease⁴⁹. There are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK. That's 27 per cent of children, more than one in four⁵⁰.

Food banks are celebrated as a mainstream response. We are seeing a sticking plaster answer to deeply embedded problems. Families and children are reaching breaking point.

Our ambitions for the future

Wherever power and influence lies there is a duty to protect the most vulnerable in our society. Too often the families and young people that have least in our communities are stigmatised and caught in a race for easy headlines. Given that virtually every child in the UK rightly receives support from the state, be it in the form of health visitors, vaccinations, extra support at school and child benefit, this is reductive and disingenuous and is not good enough.

We support the campaign *Who Benefits*⁵¹? It has created a platform to show that everybody needs help, at one time or another.

In the voluntary and community sector we have our role to play. Our work must stay true to our values and we must hold our nerve.

We provide support, we deliver services and we must continue doing this with integrity. Critically though, we must also give a voice to people who would not otherwise be heard.

We should be proud of our worth, our history, our reach and our impact. It's important now, more than ever. The quality of what we do must be at our core.

The current environment brings challenges to this. We are having to compete against each other and outsourcing private sector organisations for our survival. We are being pressed to reduce costs year-on-year so it is difficult to keep sight of the overall impact of this on our fundamental purpose. It takes courage to challenge this erosion of funding but it is also very important to keep sight of our overall aims and be realistic about what we can do with limited resources.

An approach that gives help early must be at the centre of our response and our funders and commissioners need to give us support. Councils have a pivotal role. They should be ambitious about what their communities can achieve now and in the future. As commissioners of services, councils need

to show leadership and be brave, accepting that risk taking is necessary for early intervention because it requires things to be done a different way.

Sadly to date, few councils have felt able to redesign their services to implement a truly early help approach. We are aware of the tough budgetary constraints that authorities face. Arguably, however, those struggling the most to meet the needs of their populations have more to lose by not shifting towards early intervention.

Taking steps to collaborate with local agencies using community budget principles is the first step. Sharing both risk and rewards is the real prize to aim for.

Councils need to avoid quick, short term, in-year savings that can be achieved by the closure of a service or change in eligibility criteria. This simply pushes the problem on to the following year's balance sheet creating an environment of instability, which filters down to people using services. Instead they need to factor in the costs of the constant churn of commissioning and think about who ultimately benefits and consider how the money could be better spent.

▶ Councils need to seize the opportunities brought by localism to embed early intervention.

▶ Consideration must be given to putting in place strategic and cross-party plans for children's services that span a 5–10 year period.

▶ Long-term contracts and commissioning arrangements for children's services and interventions are needed, this could be done as a part of a community budget.

For Government, our concerns about a funding system that is inherently short term in nature are long rehearsed. The short term bias in the funding and commissioning system needs to be removed for us to realise the ambition of delivering early help locally.

To do this, we would like to see five-year spending plans that coincide with the length of a parliament, setting out the funding available for children's services. This should be produced in line with the Coalition Government's long term vision of realising early intervention. Ideally this would be undertaken on a cross-party basis to prevent a reversal of policies at each election. This is not about calling for more money. It is about

enabling councils to plan services over the longer term to meet local needs. This will give localities the confidence to reconfigure their services to deliver early intervention. Importantly, it would also enable councils greater freedom to work with their local partners, share the initial financial burden but also reap the benefits that early intervention brings. Strengthening public accountability for performance in this area will help. One way to do this would be to produce an annual report for Parliament working with the National Audit Office and Select Committees.

We have seen real progress made through the community budget initiative. Now that needs to be embedded in a new relationship between funding and service delivery. There are measures that the UK Government can take to help local areas across the UK to embed sustainable solutions and make the shift towards preventative approaches. The whole place community budget pilots in England have begun to deliver more fully integrated place-based public services. We would like to see an acceleration of this initiative, with central Government putting in place stable funding arrangements

that will allow devolution to the lowest level, a default to enable the easy sharing of data between local partners and the further development of social investment models.

To incentivise joint working arrangements, local areas must reap the rewards of their activities, for example in getting a parent back into work. The financial benefits of integrated local working currently fall to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the NHS, the police, justice agencies, as well as councils themselves. A new way of budgeting for public services across a place needs to be developed to embed the community budget approach. All agencies benefitting from the approach should share in the upfront investment needed to deliver it in each locality. Any savings accrued by early intervention should then be re-invested. A virtuous cycle is enabled to continue.

Joint planning mechanisms in place across the UK, should be used to support the development of early intervention approaches. Within local services themselves, data sharing continues to be problematic, but is crucial to the identification of children and families that need help.

Changes need to be made to ensure that children's centres, for example, have regular access to live birth data so that

they can identify and reach out to vulnerable children and families, delivering help early to all those that need it.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

In the run up to the next General Election, Action for Children will be specifically calling for:

- 1** The introduction of five-year spending plans that set out the funding to be made available for children's services in line with the fixed term parliament.
- 2** Government to roll out the whole place community budget programme with all agencies benefitting from the approach sharing in the upfront investment needed to deliver it in each locality. Re-investment of any savings accrued by early intervention.
- 3** Early intervention spending to be clearly identified in government accounts.



'I feel I've left that lowest stage in life and I'm fine'

Stacey, 23, has two sons aged five and two. She's proud of how her family is doing now, but it hasn't been easy.

Last year was a bad year. I felt bad emotionally and I was drinking and I just wanted to run away from everything. I didn't want to deal with anything. And my family wasn't getting on. They kept coming over arguing and fighting, and I got thrown out of the property, because of my brother's behaviour. The neighbours didn't want me to live there, so they had to move me.

'I'm a lot happier here. I get my full tenancy soon and I haven't had one report since I've lived here, since I've met my new fella. I've got a proper full contract, they can't just throw me out. I've worked for it. There haven't been any complaints

because there's been nothing to complain about.

'I had my first son really young. At the time I thought I was old enough, but I look at 17-year-olds today and I think, wow. When his dad left me, my life fell apart; I was easily led. It's taken me five years of being a mum to realise what being a mum is all about.

'My Action for Children worker helped me realise everything my kids are going to be is going to come from me. If I'm at my worst, they're going to be at their worst.

'Because he works with the families, actually does stuff with them, he gets to know what it's really like. He would take me down to the beach with the kids. Like he wanted to be a friend as well. He used to come pick us up and take us to fun days, things like that. Not only that, he wanted to step back. With social services you felt they wanted to keep hold of you and never let you go and tell you exactly what to do.

'Now I'm doing things myself. There's nobody there making you feel as though you need to do everything this way; everything the right way. You know, we're going to school and

**'IT'S
TAKEN ME
FIVE YEARS
OF BEING
A MUM TO
REALISE
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A MUM
IS ALL
ABOUT'**

coming home. We take the kids out places, little mini holidays, weekends away. It's just everything I've always wanted.

'People have been in for Sunday dinner. I've learned to cook a chicken and everything. The first couple of times I was like, how normal do you want to be? Like turning into your grandma!

'These last few months I've felt just a normal mum, an everyday person. I feel that I've left that lowest stage in life and I'm fine. Everything's fine.'

Stacey had support from Action for Children for over two years. Now her children are off the 'at risk' register and doing well.



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