

# Independent review of children's social care newsletter: August 2021

- Chair's introduction
- Bridge the Gap
- Listening to people with lived experience
- Hearing from the children's social care workforce
- Spending Review
- In case you missed it

## Chair's introduction

Welcome to the August edition of our monthly newsletter offering you a brief update on the work of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

I joined the review in Spring this year and was clear that I wanted to be really transparent early on in our thinking as a review team. Rather than produce recommendations at the end of the 15 months we have to run this review I wanted to set out the problems as I saw them early doors so that everyone had the chance to tell us if we were on the right track. By 'thinking out loud' I hope we have allowed people an insight into this review in a way that isn't usually the case.

Our first three months meant a lot of listening and a lot of intensive work to get down on paper our early analysis of the problems. Since publishing the Case for Change in mid-June we moved from analysing the problem to getting into deeper conversations about the issues - moving from the open-ended questions and discussions we had at the start to much more granular conversations as we debate the details.

This second phase has run across the summer and will conclude in early autumn. Over the summer we have received over 300 responses to the Case for Change and hosted or attended 59 engagement events with people with lived experience and those who work in children's social care. Over the coming weeks we will:

- Share our reflections on the feedback you have given us on the Case for Change
- Continue our Bridge the Gap events which bring together around 160 people with a huge variety of experiences of children's social care to hold deliberative discussions (see below for more)
- Spend 30 working days taking an in-depth look at the issues through local deep dives in around ten local authorities, as well as spending time with families in some of those areas to understand how they experience children's services.
- Continue our engagement activity with those with lived experience as well as the children's social care workforce

Thank you to all of you who have responded to the Case for Change or contributed to this conversation through events or workshops. I know that people will have taken up valuable work hours and even personal time to put together their responses. Your input is invaluable and has helped us move closer to developing a vision for children's social care which will make a difference to young people's lives.

Josh MacAlister



## Bridge the Gap

Last week we launched 'Bridge the Gap', a series of events which focus on bringing people with a rich mix of experiences together in the same room to discuss their collective experience of children's social care.

Unlike our previous workshops these events are designed to prompt deliberative discussions and allow people who come from different viewpoints to come together to help us think about potential solutions to the problems in children's social care

The launch event, 'Connect', took place on 26 August and involved around 160 people. Over half the people in the (virtual) room were care experienced young people aged 16-25, many more were individuals who applied through the expression of interest earlier in the review (including a lot of social workers) and some were nominated by organisations and charities who work with people with lived experience of children's social care or are part of the workforce.


There was a really rich mix of people from different backgrounds at the Connect event, and a real willingness from participants to share their thoughts and ideas. We recognised at the start of the session that our 'bridge the gap' events are going to have a different look and feel to a traditional workshop and that in order to propose truly democratic and co-created solutions it requires everyone to be brave and self-organise. We are grateful to everyone who contributed so far which included sharing your views, coming with us and entering into the spirit of this different way of working.

Everyone was keen to have more space to continue their conversations. Over the next few weeks participants will come back together in themed groups for a series of 'explore' sessions which will provide a space for people to share their own story. The series will conclude with a final 'Create' event in October. By this time, we hope participants will have shared some very diverse, perhaps conflicting, opinions but that they will have also found some common ground and be in a place to talk with clarity about ideas on how to design a future care system.

## Listening to people with lived experience

Our programme of listening, which started well before the case for change, is continuing but taking on a slightly different focus. We always intended our engagement to be a conversation and we are now beginning to come back to groups we've already met to start discussing potential solutions.

A flavour of those we have met with over the past month include:

- An online focus group with young care leavers, hosted by Become, to talk about children's rights and entitlements.
  - A group of birth parents, hosted by the Parent, Family and Allies Network, to talk about their experiences of being involved with children's services.
  - Pure Insight to learn more about the volunteers who support care leavers
  - Young People's Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.
  - A face-to-face meeting with Coram Voice's 'A National Voice Ambassadors' group to hear reflections from young people from Children in Care Councils across the country.
  - Drive Forward to hear from care-experienced young people about a range of issues including criminalisation and housing.
  - Devon Children in Care Council and young people in care from Southampton.
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## Hearing from the children's social care workforce

Events involving the children's social care workforce and carers have been a huge focus over the summer for the review team. We have now spoken to over 1000 professionals and volunteers who work with children and families to gather views and feedback on the Case for Change, working with local authorities, charities, and other groups.

This month our engagement has covered a wide variety of roles from social workers, early help practitioners and health professionals, to children's home and semi-independent home staff.

A flavour of those we have met with include:

- Sessions with ten local authorities to hear from children's social care workforces, including social workers, early help practitioners and IROs
- Online focus groups with mental health professionals working in secure children's homes and youth offending institutions
- Black Table Talk where we met with social workers, supervising social workers and independent reviewing officers to discuss racial and ethnic disparities
- The Practice Leaders network which brings together senior leaders in social work from across the UK. Josh and the team attended two sessions where members shared their insight including thoughts on the Case for Change
- Session co-facilitated with Kinship to hear from their professional network
- London Infant Family Team (LIFT) to learn more about their approach of intensive support through assessment for infants and their parents in care proceedings.


## Spending Review

At the start of the month Josh MacAlister wrote to the Government ahead of their expected Spending Review later this year.

Government's undertake spending reviews every few years and the potential timing of this one means some big decisions around government priorities might happen before we conclude. While we don't want to pre-empt the conclusions of a review that is not yet complete, we also don't want to miss the opportunity to contribute and have the case for funding children's social care made at a key moment for government.

In his letter to the Secretary of State for Education Josh MacAlister took the opportunity to share early findings and set out at a high-level areas he thinks should be considered based on what we have heard so far and what is in the Case for Change. You can read the letter: <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/letter-to-government-on-spending-review/>

The letter focuses on three areas - more family help, homes for children in care and mental health support for children in care. These are by no means the only areas the review is considering and we will deliver costed recommendations when we complete in Spring 2022.



## In case you missed it...

- Josh reflecting on this month's exam results and educational outcomes and Expert by Experience board member Angela Frazer-Wicks on the importance of family support: <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/news/>
- This really interesting podcast from the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2021/aug/18/how-the-pandemic-exposed-the-crisis-in-childrens-social-care-podcast>
- Findings from the first What works for Children's Social Care social workers polls <https://twitter.com/whatworksCSC/status/1424754687472029698>

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