

Independent review of children's social care newsletter: September 2021

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Introduction from Josh MacAlister - chair of the review

We are seven months into the review and while the first three months produced the Case for Change and gave me a good sense of the problems we need to delve into, this past quarter has allowed us more time to explore the root-causes of these problems.

This update gives a flavour of our work this month which includes: analysing 300 responses to the questions asked in the Case for Change; listening to people with lived or professional experience of children's social care (through stand alone events and our Bridge the Gap deliberative discussions); visiting local areas to do deep dive work and understanding the experience of families using ethnographic research methods.

With the world opening up I was delighted to get out and about across the country, including visits to Walsall to learn about their approach to supporting kinship carers, Blackpool to speak the Young Adder team who help young people out of drug addiction, Camden to see a programme of intensive family help and Warrington to meet social work teams and the families they were supporting. Combined with our ongoing engagement events we have met hundreds of people this month and we are learning a lot from the really rich conversations.

The responses to the questions asked in the Case for Change have offered the review a lot to consider, including some diverging and contradictory responses - which is to be expected given the wide-ranging perspectives and backgrounds of those who responded. We'll be sharing a summary of the feedback and our response on our website soon.

Some of the contradictions we are hearing prompted me to share a post outlining the three 'big dilemmas' at the heart of the review, in the hope that this will give people an insight into our thinking. You can read more here: <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/thinking-out-loud-three-dilemmas/>

Looking ahead to the autumn we will be organising a number of events to explore these dilemmas so that everyone can join the conversation.

Josh



Local area deep dives

The review team has begun work on a series of 'deep dive' visits to ten local authority areas.

The visits will give us important insight into how the system works on the ground and allow us to hear directly from practitioners about ideas for solutions to the problems in children's social care.

The visits involve the team speaking to people and organisations who are involved in children's social care including local authority staff, police, health, schools, judiciary and other partners. Our meetings cover a huge range of topics including: multi-agency working; supporting children in care and care leavers; keeping children safe; and helping teenagers vulnerable to exploitation.

Areas have been chosen to reflect the huge variety of communities across England and the different challenges they may face. Visits to Wolverhampton and Nottinghamshire have been completed so far and we're grateful to all the professionals who have generously given up their time and spoken so honestly about what works and what doesn't in their local area.

We'll be sharing more about the different areas we're visiting soon.

Bridge the Gap

Our 'Bridge the Gap' series of events is now well underway, bringing together people with a mix of backgrounds in the same room to think about potential solutions to the problems in children's social care

The launch event, 'Connect', took place at the end of August and involved around 160 people. Since then we've held themed 'explore' sessions which bring the same people back in smaller groups relevant to their experience. The groups meeting during September have included: kinship, foster carers and adoptive parents; young people and adults with lived experience of care; birth parents and workforce members.

These events are run using an open spaces approach - a powerful way to help groups discuss hugely complex issues in an organised way and inspire creative solutions. The 'explore' sessions have allowed people to take charge of the process, share their own stories and have resulted in some really stimulating conversations.

The series will conclude with a final 'Create' event in early October which will bring all participants back together to consolidate these sessions and offer ideas on how we build a better system for everyone.

Kinship Care Week

On Friday 8th October, during Kinship Care week we will be hosting a debate with the charity Kinship asking: why is kinship care not recognised as the national resource that it is?

The conversation will be chaired by Josh MacAlister and the panel will include, among others: Expert by Experience Janet Kay, former President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales Sir James Munby, Director of Children's Social Care for Leeds City Council Saleem Tariq and Lucy Peake CEO of the charity Kinship.

Please sign up to join the virtual event here: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/care-review-focus-on-kinship-care-tickets-177266227057>



We have more events planned across the autumn including a conversation on stigma with care experienced people and discussions about the three dilemmas raised by Josh earlier this month.

Engaging and listening

We have continued to hear directly from people with over 150 events since the review began, hearing from over 1,000 people with lived experience of children's social care, and over 1,000 professionals including social workers, early help practitioners, residential care staff, teachers, health professionals, police officers and volunteers.

To ensure we are hearing from people with lived experience of children social care, this month we have:

...met with young people through Match Foster Care; held a focus group with birth mothers on the Pause Programme; heard from the Kinship and Parents Panel of the Family Rights Group; took part in a Young Voices & Speak Out Loud session with Tact Care; sat in on a workshop with LGBT+ care leavers organised by Three Circles Fostering; and visited Swanwick Lodge Secure Unit and Wetherby and Deerbolt Young Offenders Institutions to speak to 'seldom heard' care-experienced young people.

Our conversations this month with those who work in children's social care include:

...meeting fostering staff through the St Christophers' charity; a number of Black Table Talk sessions to discuss ethnic and racial disparities; conversations on access to HE and FE with the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers; hearing from members of Reg44 about their experience as independent visitors; speaking to regional leads for SEND across the country; speaking to the London SEND strategic managers and parent carer network; roundtables with Directors of Children's services in the East Midlands and in the South-West; a session with volunteers and staff from the charity HomeStart; and conversations with the Principal Child and Family Social Workers Network.

We've heard a fantastic and diverse range of views through all the conversations we've had since the start of the review - but we know there's more to do to hear from those who are often marginalised in conversations about care. We are particularly keen to speak with children and families from the Gypsy Roma Traveller community, or care experienced adults that have experienced homelessness, and if you can help us reach out to those families please email us through the inbox at: review.childrensocialcare@education.gov.uk


Our conversations will of course continue for the remainder of the review but we will share reflections at the end of next month on what we have learned from almost 8 months of speaking to and hearing from thousands of people.

We appreciate the review is moving at pace, if you think we've missed something important then you can let us know by emailing the review team on review.childrensocialcare@education.gov.uk

In case you missed it...

September's issue of Foster Care Magazine featured a Q&A with Josh where he gives his views on the big issues facing fostering. <https://twitter.com/reviewCSC/status/1436294296265703428>

Experts by Experience board member Angela Frazer-Wicks on BBC radio 4's Four Thought talking about her experiences of children's social care as a birth mother: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000zdtf>



Reflections from Leap Confronting Conflict podcast group member Evie following her meeting with the care review: <https://leapconfrontingconflict.org.uk/influencing-care-review>

We have appointed @AlmaEconomics to work on a project to estimate the wider cost to individuals and society of not getting children's social care right. A twitter thread on this work is here: <https://twitter.com/reviewCSC/status/1433739903838400559>

We really liked this explainer of Lifelong Links from the Family Rights Group: <https://twitter.com/FamilyRightsGp/status/1437317655338360832>

