

Independent Review of Children's Social Care - December newsletter

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Introduction from Josh MacAlister, review chair

Welcome to this month's update on the work of the independent review of children's social care. As we are approaching the end of the year, this update also includes a brief round-up of our work over the past year.

We started December with the heartbreaking news around the cruelty and abuse Arthur Labinjo-Hughes suffered at the hands of people who should have loved and cared for him. Sadly just less than two weeks on and the case of Star Hobson, a 16 month old murdered by her mother's partner, means we are asking again what more can be done to protect children from such shocking abuse. Our final recommendations will take into consideration the findings of these safeguarding reviews.

We closed the Call for Ideas earlier this month and with it, brought to a close an extremely busy year of engagement and consultation. Almost 600 people or organisations made a submission to the Call for Ideas and the team are already factoring the almost 1000 ideas into their thinking around recommendations. Thank you to everyone who shared their ideas.

Before Omicron limited in-person meetings I was lucky to have the opportunity to travel to Edinburgh at the start of the month to meet with Fiona Duncan and the team at The Promise. Fiona led the Scottish review of children's social care and has been a source of advice and wise counsel since I took up post. It was great to meet with her and the team in person in chilly, but beautiful as ever, Edinburgh.

We've all grown a little tired of online meetings but I do find myself reflecting at the end of a year mostly sitting in front of a screen that they really have offered me the opportunity to speak to a huge number of people in a way that may not have happened in 'normal' times. Not only can I virtually move from one end of England to the other, but I can also invite hundreds of you to join virtual conversations on the big issues we are grappling with. Thank you to everyone who has 'zoomed' in for one of these meetings, I hope they proved interesting.

Finally a huge thank you for your continued interest in this review. The review team is now in the home stretch as we work towards finishing in spring 2022 and I will necessarily be in fewer meetings as I work with the team on recommendations. We'll have a busy start to the year, but I look forward to 2022 being the year we set out recommendations to transform children's social care.

JOSH



Learning from tragedy to improve help and protection

The awful news of two cases of children - Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes - who died at the hands of their carers has been at the front of our minds and our thoughts are with all those who knew and loved them.

Recommendations from the Review Panel into Arthur's death will be made available to Josh and the review and we will take on board these recommendations before we report in spring 2022. We also want to learn from the Joint Targeted Area Inspection into Arthur's death as well as the review into Star Hobson's murder – both are expected early in the new year.

There has been much public conversation about the children's care system in the wake of these cases and we are yet to fully understand what went wrong for these children.

Learning from these dreadful cases is absolutely crucial, as Josh wrote in a blog last week "This review will be unflinching in learning from the evidence about what happened, bold in considering the options for change that may be needed and open to the inherent complexity of children's social care"

You can read the full piece here:

<https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/learning-from-tragedy-to-improve-help-and-protection/>

'Focus on' events

Our 'focus on' series of debates has spanned October to December and provided a chance to discuss some of the issues at the forefront of this review: stigma, kinship, freedom & responsibility and local, regional, national.

The format - bringing experts with a rich mix of professional and lived experience together to discuss and debate in front of a virtual audience - has allowed us to get under the skin of these big topics, stimulate people's thinking and approach issues from a fresh perspective.

We're grateful to everyone - panel members and audience - who have given up their time to take part and make these such helpful sessions.

We are also grateful to the many organisations that have convened events on issues of interest to the review and decided to make them open to anyone with an interest. Family Rights Group hosted a seminar entitled - 'How can partnership with families run through family support and child protection systems and practice?'. We feel this added a lot to our thinking around the help/protection dilemma which Josh shared in his 'three dilemmas' blog earlier in the year. We've included a link to this at the end of the newsletter.

For those of you who couldn't make our event on freedom and responsibility on 9 December, you can find a link on our Youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBB24ddN7Hg>



Call for Ideas

We opened the Call for Ideas back in November as we wanted to give everyone - from care experienced young people to big charities - the chance to share ideas about how to improve children's social care.

The Call for Ideas closed on 15 December and there was a fantastic response, with almost 600 people or organisations submitting just under 1000 ideas.

Over half of the submissions came from people with lived experience of children's social care, carers or the children's social care workforce and we're delighted so many who understand children's social care at a personal level have contributed.

The Call for Ideas adds to the huge amount of evidence we have amassed over the course of the review including through workshops, focus groups, local area deep dives and conversations with groups big and small.

Our task is to now take all this work and bring it together into coherent recommendations that will help us transform children's social care and improve outcomes for children and families.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to make a submission - we'll publish these alongside our final report at the end of the review.

2021 round up

So much has been achieved since the start of the review, it's hard to summarise in one short round up but we're giving it a go!

We think of the review as having four distinct phases and throughout all these ran the golden thread of engagement, listening and consultation.

Our engagement team have run hundreds of events, workshops and focus groups and worked with organisations who support those with lived experience and professionals to run their own sessions. Our groups (the Experts by Experience board and our design and evidence groups) have brought in the voice of lived and professional experience at every stage. Josh has also been out and about meeting countless amazing people who have generously shared their insights and experiences.

As we approach the end of the year, we wanted to give you a whistle stop tour our work so far and the review's phases.

We began with a **"Diagnosis" phase when we worked on defining the issues the review needed to address as a priority**. We ran calls for advice and evidence - prioritised engagement with people with lived experience and members of the workforce - examined a wealth of evidence, including from previous reviews - and published our Case for Change in June 2021 with an open invite for feedback.

Next came the **"Discovery" phase when we dug into root causes and built understanding**. We read more than 300 formal responses to the Case for Change and spent time in 10 local areas conducting 'deep dives' which involved speaking to families and professionals such as social workers, teachers and senior staff at local authorities that work



in the local area. We also continued our engagement work including through our 'Bridge the Gap' programme of events, which brought together people with different types of lived and professional experience in one virtual room to generate new ideas.

So that leads us on to the present stage **“Development”, where we are identifying tangible solutions and moving towards developing recommendations.** At the centre of this has been our 'Call for Ideas' where we invited everyone to share their ideas for change with us. We also published 'Paying the Price' to estimate the financial and social cost of children's social care, and ran five 'focus on' public debates which explored different perspectives on some of the most challenging issues we're exploring through the review.

Next year will come **“Delivery” where we hand over recommendations to Government,** detailing what we think needs to change and how. The review is due to report in spring 2022.

In Case You Missed It

- The Family Rights Group seminar on family support and child protection, hosted by Angela Frazer-Wicks is here: https://youtu.be/DA_RvD9zWa8
- Have a read of the Fostering Network's state of the nation report here: <https://thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/sotn21>
- Also from the Fostering Network - we've referred to the Mockingbird programme a few times in review, this little animation tells you about it from the point of view of young people. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCbUKWgeZyl&t=1s>
- It's not too late to donate to The Christmas Dinners - an annual project founded by the poet Lemn Sissay OBE to provide an amazing Christmas Day for care leavers aged between 18 and 25. You can find a list of dinners via this link (click through to a facebook page to donate or find out more): <http://thechristmasdinners.org.uk/christmas-present/>

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