

Independent Review of Children's Social Care Newsletter – March 2022

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Introduction from Josh MacAlister, review chair

It's officially Spring and as a review we are definitely on the home straight. March marks a year since the review launched and as we work to develop our final report and recommendations we are building on the many months of evidence, analysis and conversations that have happened over the past year.

I don't have the usual list of meetings to tell you about because we've been fully focused on the mammoth task of writing. By far my most energising day this month has been an in-person meeting of the Expert by Experience board as we talked through an early iteration of the report. It was the first time some of the board have met in person. While virtual meetings have been the mainstay of this year and I do welcome the fact they have allowed so many from across the country to engage - there really is no beating the conversations you can have in, and on the sidelines of, a real life catch up.

Like many others this month I read about the shocking and unacceptable treatment of child Q - a young Black girl in Hackney who was taken out of class and strip searched by the police. The finding from the review (<https://chscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Child-Q-PUBLISHED-14-March-22.pdf>) that "racism (whether deliberate or not) was likely to have been an influencing factor" in child Q's experience underscores the importance of considering race and racial disparities in how we make future changes to children's social care. The experiences and outcomes of Black children is something this review has been considering throughout and we will make a contribution to this important issue in our final recommendations.



This month also saw a court judgement on unregulated care which will be disappointing for many of you across the children's social care and children's rights sector who have campaigned for change. Ensuring we can provide safe, stable and loving homes for children in care is essential and people quite rightly have strong feelings about this. The review team has spent many hours talking to young people living in all sorts of settings and our recommendations will reflect what we've heard, as well as being bold enough to bring about a reset in how we care for teenagers who can no longer live with their families.

Finally, I'd like to wish you all a happy Easter for when it arrives next month. I hope you all enjoy the bank holiday break and can spend some well-deserved time with loved ones.

A wake up call on the dysfunctional 'market' for children's homes and foster placements

In March, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published the results of their market study of children's social care. The report found significant problems in how the market for children's homes and foster placements is functioning, leading its Chief Executive to comment that "The UK has sleepwalked into a dysfunctional children's social care market".

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report>

In a blog, Josh MacAlister talks about the CMA's 'wake up call', the consequences for children and the need for urgent change so we can provide local, loving homes for children in care. The blog also references a report published by the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care looking at how local authority plan for and ensure that there are enough homes and foster placements for children in their area:

<https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/the-cma-has-issued-the-latest-wake-up-call-we-need-to-be-ready-to-act/>

Adult and workforce engagement summaries

In October we published a summary of our engagement work with children and young people. This month we have brought together the conversations we've had with adults with experience of children's social care and separately we've compiled a summary of our engagement with the children's social care workforce.

The adult engagement summary includes conversations with parents, birth parents and care experienced parents as well as adopters, kinship and foster carers.



https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/IRCSC_Adult_Engagement_Summary_V_29.03.22.pdf

The workforce engagement summary brings together the issues raised with us by social workers, early help practitioners, education professionals, volunteers, professionals who work with children and families and organisations that represent the children's social care workforce.

https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/IRCSC_Workforce_Engagement_Summary_V_29.03.22_2.pdf

Webinar - Improving reunification outcomes

What Works for Children's Social Care are running two webinars to share the findings of research commissioned by the review, both led by Professor Rick Hood from Kingston University.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter the first event is tomorrow (31 March at 12-1pm) and will focus on reunification – considering how children are supported to return home after a period of care and how families are supported to make sure this is successful. You can sign up here:

https://teams.microsoft.com/registration/0ectMGec2USmo_FdYDiulA,5boBEMbZIEiJ9ui0VjtxCw,HMlmb7KEZ02Q0iYuEe8FfA,mmWgJEZL6U6LUvnDk7FYIw,T8CKVIZH20q9HyYQaMscUg,ieMTgaA-x0mbOjs5HD19tA?mode=read&tenantId=302de7d1-9c67-44d9-a6a3-f15d6038ae94

Webinar - Making better decisions in children's social care

The second webinar on 11 April, 12-1pm will look at the subject of improving the quality of decision-making and risk assessment in children's social care.

Decisions in children's social care can have long-reaching implications, but are frequently made against a backdrop of uncertainty and a complex mix of factors. How can evidence help social workers and senior leaders to make better decisions?

In this webinar, What Work for Children's Social Care will be joined by Professor Rick Hood from Kingston University, who will share the findings of his recent research on improving the quality of decision-making and risk assessment in children's social care. This research reviewed the existing evidence to understand the factors that affect the quality and effectiveness of decision-making.

Sign up here:

https://teams.microsoft.com/registration/0ectMGec2USmo_FdYDiulA,5boBEMbZIEiJ9ui0VjtxCw,HMImb7KEZ02Q0iY_uEe8FfA,-zBt79_wdEqlobUQRL93iw,hLiDm9FhuE-dENaXE-Dyig,bnewmx8k80qzXRnNRkXJRA?mode=read&tenantId=302de7d1-9c67-44d9-a6a3-f15d6038ae94

Shared with the Review Team this month

- The charity Kinship has published a report 'Out of the Shadows' which sets out Kinship's vision for a radically reformed kinship care system in England and calls for better support for kinship carers
<https://kinship.org.uk/out-of-the-shadows/>
- The County Councils Network produced a report 'The Future of Children's Social Care' which sets out their vision for the future of children social care, including a reshaped, family-focused way of delivering support which aims to reduce the number of children being placed in care:
<https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/report-sets-out-new-blueprint-for-councils-to-deliver-a-reshaped-childrens-services/>
- Anne Longfield's Commission for Young Lives published their second report 'Supporting families to keep teenagers safe from gangs, exploitation and abuse' warning that thousands of teenagers are ending up in care and at risk from exploitation because their families aren't getting the support they need:
<https://thecommissiononyounglives.co.uk/the-commission-on-young-lives-publishes-new-report-a-new-partnership-with-families-supporting-families-to-keep-teenagers-safe-from-gangs-exploitation-and-abuse/>
- The University of Bristol published a report looking at the mental health of children and young people in care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report highlights the importance of promoting positive relationships in young people's lives for good mental health:
https://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2022/march/mental-health-of-children-in-care.html?utm_content=18c77455369347bc8c2ec5d3d4ef387f-24723695&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=

In case you missed it

- Blog from our Experts by Experience board member Mags Mulowska on the importance of relationships and why it's so important that the system put these first: <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/we-need-to-place-relationships-front-and-centre-of-children-social-care/>
- The Government has published a Green Paper setting out plans for better support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) which are now open for a 13-week public consultation:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-reform-for-children-and-young-people-with-send>

- World Social Work day took place in March, celebrating social work worldwide. We shared some quotes from our engagement work from and about social workers:

<https://twitter.com/reviewCSC/status/1503770667552063489>

- Blog from experts by experience member Chris Wild on how County Lines drugs gangs prey of children in care:

<https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/children-in-care-are-being-pulled-in-to-do-the-dirty-work-on-county-lines/>

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