



FULLY COMMITTED?

How a Government could reverse family breakdown

July 2014



Contents

About the Centre for Social Justice	3
Director's preface	4
Members of the CSJ Working Group	6
Special thanks	9
Chairman's foreword	10
Breakthrough Britain 2015	12
Executive summary	14
Introduction	23
Key principles	25
A Cabinet-level Minister for Families	34
Summary of recommendations	36
Part one: Laying foundations for safe, stable and nurturing relationships	
1 Relationship education in schools	39
Introduction	39
Rising to the challenge of teenage relationship abuse	40
Going beyond sex education	41
Role of non-school providers and parents	43
Summary of recommendations	45
Part two: Forming and maintaining healthy relationships	
2 Family Hubs	47
Introduction	47
A new vision for Sure Start – Family Hubs	48
The 'go to' place for both parents to access services or information about all family-related matters	49
Maximise impact and reduce costs of statutory services	52
Link local activities provided by volunteers through VCS, faith and parent groups	57
Summary of recommendations	57
3 Fathers and Family Hubs	59
Introduction	59
Improving father involvement in perinatal services	61
Payment and inspection to drive father involvement	63
Birth registration	64
Summary of recommendations	66

4	Supporting couple relationships	67
	Introduction	67
	Relationship breakdown is not inevitable	69
	Financial support for couples	76
	Addressing couple penalties	77
	Summary of recommendations	78
5	Father involvement from birth and after separation	81
	Introduction	81
	Joint registration of births	81
	Risks and safeguards	83
	Father involvement post-separation	84
	Child maintenance	85
	The need for fundamental reform	93
	Summary of recommendations	95
	Part three: Supporting families in difficulty	
6	The Troubled Families agenda	97
	Introduction	97
	Working across the family means thinking about couple relationships	98
	Ensuring families with the greatest needs are identified and do not 'fall between' the criteria	99
	Preserving effective residential programmes	101
	Sustaining and building on progress	103
	Achieving system change	104
	Summary of recommendations	105
7	Supporting families whose children are on the edge of care	107
	Introduction	107
	Tackling parental drug and alcohol addiction	108
	'System change' in social work	114
	Summary of recommendations	119
8	Kinship care: investing in extended families to prevent further breakdown	121
	Introduction	121
	Profiling kinship care	122
	Outcomes from kinship care	123
	A Kinship Care Passport	125
	Peer support	127
	Benefits following the child	128
	Summary of recommendations	129

About the Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) aims to put social justice at the heart of British politics. Our policy development is rooted in the wisdom of those working to tackle Britain's deepest social problems and the experience of those whose lives have been affected by poverty. Our Working Groups are non-partisan, comprising prominent academics, practitioners and policy makers who have expertise in the relevant fields. We consult nationally and internationally, especially with charities and social enterprises, who are the champions of the welfare society.

In addition to policy development, the CSJ has built an alliance of poverty fighting organisations that reverse social breakdown and transform communities. We believe that the surest way the Government can reverse social breakdown and poverty is to enable such individuals, communities and voluntary groups to help themselves.

The CSJ was founded by Iain Duncan Smith in 2004, as the fulfilment of a promise made to Janice Dobbie, whose son had recently died from a drug overdose just after he was released from prison.

Director: Christian Guy

Fully Committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown

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Director's preface

This report has been written because we believe the instability threatening many families in our country is not inevitable and cannot be overlooked. It has been published because fewer children and adults should bear the scars of broken homes. It is presented to all political parties in the hope they might take the action necessary to stem the tide.

The inconvenient truth, as the Centre for Social Justice and others have demonstrated, is that Britain is now a world-leader when it comes to family breakdown. Only around two-thirds of all our children are in intact families compared with countries such as Finland where over 95 per cent of children under 15 live with both of their parents (the OECD average is 84 per cent).

Furthermore there is compelling evidence that this breakdown and instability is especially acute in the most deprived communities. Poorer parents are 50 per cent less likely to be married (the most stable family form for children) and over four times as likely to be single parents than those from wealthier backgrounds.

So while almost 40 per cent of 12–16 year olds in better-off households no longer live with both their mother and father, this proportion rises to two-thirds for poorer children. And almost half of the poorest children begin school living in broken homes – this is seven times the number of those in the richest households.

Increasingly, therefore, we can see how stability at home is a preserve of the better off and how family breakdown causes, as well as is caused by, poverty. This matters because many people in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods lack the resilience, networks and capital which help many people in the better-off areas to withstand and recover from family breakdown. That is why this is a social justice issue.

In response some people dismiss the claim that family breakdown damages society, often arguing that it tends not to hold people back or create lasting damage. Others claim that although family breakdown hits hard, there is nothing we can do to reduce it and even if there was, Government has no right to intervene. Some even argue that family breakdown does not cause poverty – instead they claim it is only the pressure of low income which causes family breakdown.

However well-intended or sincerely-held these views may be, they are misguided and must be challenged. That is what we have attempted to achieve in this family policy review – through its interim paper *Fractured Families* and this one – as well as through a decade of wider research and policy recommendations. In partnership with numerous families, charities, academics and professionals we have established a body of evidence which, for anyone willing to consider it rationally, establishes family instability firmly as an urgent social justice concern for public policy makers.

Some very important progress has been secured under the Coalition Government as we recognise in this report, but those responsible for the success stories would be the first to argue that we are still at the beginning of what is necessary.

What we present in this report and our wider work amounts to a comprehensive, exciting and realistic programme to prevent and reverse family breakdown in Britain. Contained here are ideas to support couples, to strengthen society's support for marriage, to re-cast Sure Start, to reform child maintenance and to improve the way complex families are assisted.

This has been made possible by the work of a dedicated team of volunteer experts and a team at the CSJ. In particular my thanks go to Avril McIntyre MBE who has led her working group with tremendous enthusiasm and integrity, and to the members of the group who have offered invaluable input throughout. They have been supported superbly by David Marjoribanks and Dr Samantha Callan, as well as Alex Burghart.

In essence this work amounts to a call on whichever group of politicians enters office next year to commit to being the first Government in history to reverse the traumatic rise of family instability. It is possible and it is essential. It will require political boldness and fearless leadership in the face of some disappointing apathy about these issues in Westminster. But our country would benefit immeasurably and the CSJ stands ready to support those who will make these vital decisions.

Christian Guy

Director, The Centre for Social Justice

Members of the CSJ Working Group



**Avril McIntyre MBE (Chairman) Director,
Community Resources**

Avril is a dynamic community leader with a proven track record of significant achievement. During her 13 year role as Chief Executive of LifeLine Community Projects, it grew from grassroots to a charity with an annual turnover of £5million equipping people for life and work through a range of services including employability programmes, family support and mentoring.

Avril has since established Community Resources, a charity which mobilises people to find solutions to the problems faced in their community. Initiatives developed by volunteers seek to tackle the issues primarily caused by poverty and isolation.



Dr Elly Farmer

Elly is a Clinical Psychologist who specializes in the treatment and understanding of difficulties around child maltreatment, domestic abuse and trauma. Her work involves a mix of consultation, training, policy development, research and therapeutic practice. She co-authored a report for the CSJ on domestic abuse, 'Beyond Violence', and has also previously contributed to CSJ policy work on the early years and youth criminal justice.

Her current work includes a part-time role at the National Crime Agency and training, consultation and research commissioned by the NSPCC, all with a focus on sexual abuse and exploitation. She has previously worked in an NHS substance misuse service helping adults overcome the difficulties at the root of their drugs and alcohol problems, an NSPCC service focussed on the assessment and treatment of young people displaying sexually abusive behaviour, and a residential children's care company.



Nick Woodall, Family Separation Clinic

Nick is a partner at the Family Separation Clinic LLP, an organisation that offers specialist services to families experiencing divorce or separation. He currently practices therapeutic mediation and has particular expertise in working with high conflict families and in cases where children have rejected one of their parents. Previously, he worked on policy and development at the Centre for Separated Families, a national charity that uses whole family interventions to support parents in bringing about better outcomes for their children after divorce or separation. He has recently provided policy responses to the Family Justice Review and the reform of child maintenance. He has given oral evidence to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee on both child maintenance reform and the Welfare Reform Reform Bill.

As well as working directly with families, he designs and delivers training to other professionals working with family separation. He is an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Mediator, accredited by the School of Psychotherapy & Counselling Psychology, and sits on the International Committee of the Academy for Professional Family Mediators. Nick is also a BBC Online parenting expert and the co-author of *The Guide for Separated Parents* (Piatkus 2007), and *Divorce for Dads* (Two Dogs 2010) written with former Manchester United and England goalkeeper, Gary Bailey.



Dr Samantha Callan, Associate Director for Families and Mental Health, Centre for Social Justice (Report Editor)

Samantha is recognised as a research and policy expert in the fields of family relationships, family law, early years, mental health and domestic abuse. She is an honorary research fellow at Edinburgh University's Centre for Research in Families and Relationships and a published academic. Before joining the staff of the CSJ, she worked in the Conservative Policy Unit as Special Adviser on Family and Society. Prior to this she was a research and policy consultant to national and international voluntary sector organisations and industry.



David Marjoribanks, Research and Policy, Relate

David was the Researcher for Family Breakdown at the CSJ until June 2014. Prior to joining the CSJ he worked as an Associate Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent in Canterbury, where he also completed a PhD in Philosophy, and as an Access to Higher Education Lecturer in Sociology at a Further Education College. Before that, he completed a BA with First Class Honours in Politics and an MA with Distinction in Political Philosophy, both at the University of York.



Professor Janet Walker OBE AcSS FRSA

Janet is Emeritus Professor of Family Policy in the Institute of Health and Society (IHS) at Newcastle University. Janet has practised as a probation officer, family therapist and family mediator. Between 1985 and 2005 she was the director of a multidisciplinary research team at Newcastle University, leading over 50 studies in the fields of marriage and divorce, parenting, policing, criminal justice and services for children and has published widely on these topics. Janet has been an expert consultant on family mediation to the Council of Europe and provided advice on divorce reform to governments in several countries.

She has held a number of public appointments, including as a member of the local parole board at HMP Durham, as non-executive Director and Vice-Chair of Newcastle City NHS Trust, and as a member and Deputy Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee until June 2013. She has been a trustee of several charities, including the Family and Parenting Institute and the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners. Currently, she is a trustee of Relate and of Safe Families for Children, a member of the Mediation Task Force for the Ministry of Justice, and a Board member of the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family in Calgary.



Rachel Dyer

Rachel Dyer is the Programme Coordinator and founder of Yeovil4Family, a family support programme which is part of the work of Yeovil Community Church. Yeovil4family has been commissioned by its local council to deliver Troubled Families work in South Somerset. Rachel was formerly a Family Law Solicitor in Manchester and was also one of the first people nationally to gain Early Years Professional Status.

Special thanks

We would like to acknowledge the following people who were not on the Working Group but made a distinct contribution to the policy review:

Stuart Adam, Senior Research Economist, Institute of Fiscal Studies

Harry Benson, Research Director, Marriage Foundation

Dr Christine Davies, Visiting Senior Lecturer, Department of Mathematics, Royal Holloway University of London

Adam Dyer, Yeovil4Family

Professor Brigid Featherstone, Professor of Social Care, Open University

Professor Donald Forrester, Professor of Social Work Research and Director of the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care, University of Bedfordshire

Simon Hart, Independent Chair of Essex Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Adult Boards

Professor Steve McKay, Distinguished Professor in Social Research in Faculty of Health and Social Sciences

Lisa Penney, Head of Stakeholder Relations, Bounty Parenting Club (for their generous help with polling)

Dr Alex Burghart, Director of Policy, Centre for Social Justice, whose insights and questions were essential in refining the remit and recommendations of this policy review.

Mark Winterburn, Research Assistant, Centre for Social Justice, who worked tirelessly and with tremendous attention to detail to ensure this report was completed within deadline.

We are also very grateful to the Oglesby Charitable Trust for their very generous support for this research.



Chairman's foreword

Over the last 18 months, I have had the privilege of chairing the Family Breakdown Working Group. We have had many challenging discussions as we have listened to the expertise of academics, practitioners and policy makers, as well as seeing good practice in action as we have travelled across the country. I would like to thank the Working Group for their commitment over the last 18 months, not only in time, but also their desire to really get to grips with the issues and produce solutions that are achievable.

A family, however it is made up, will shape a myriad of health, social and financial outcomes for its members. This report explores how we can ensure our children are equipped to develop strong, healthy relationships, a resilience that enables them to succeed and fail and the ability to replicate this in their children.

We have examined the latest robust research into the impact of family breakdown in UK society and the evidence is very sobering, going beyond the individual family, impacting on the whole community and how it functions. We have grown used to the reality of family breakdown – even experienced it ourselves – and it can be hard for us to face up to the impact it has for the children and adults involved. This impact includes cost to the public purse through added pressure on the welfare benefits system, housing stock, social care and health services.

Yet, the most significant thing we have heard again and again over the last 18 months, is that family breakdown is not inevitable and when families do break down, much can be done to support them in that. This ensures more positive outcomes, particularly for children. Consequently, we believe that family policy must be a key focus for any UK Government and that the recommendations in this report should be implemented.

We are calling for a Cabinet-level Family Minister, who will provide leadership and challenge across all government departments to develop policy rooted in the recognition of the significance of strong, stable families on our communities. This must start with relationship education, be integral to birth registration, universal maternity and child health care services, and be high on the agenda in health and social care departments, welfare benefits and tax legislation.

It feels naive that we somehow expect parents to find a way through all of the challenges they will face in their relationship together and with their children. It is decades since the traditional extended family was the primary support structure and, as people become more socially excluded, there is limited support available to families until crisis hits.

Family Hubs are a key recommendation of this report and an example of how we can increase support for families without increasing government spend. Building on the work of Sure Start Children's Centres, we describe a new vision for Sure Start. There is a staggering range of support available for families in most communities, especially through the voluntary sector; and Family Hubs will be the 'nerve centre' ensuring families can access what they need, when they need it.

Whilst the realities of child protection loomed large over the Working Group discussions, we heard from practitioners across the different sectors that professionals may have become too risk averse. We have highlighted some good practice examples across the country which are working effectively with some of the most vulnerable families using multi-disciplinary approaches, embracing the voluntary sector as an equal partner and recognising the value of the extended family. We expect these models to provide challenge and support for Local Authority leaders as they shape services for families.

Finally, we conclude that children thrive when they experience stable, secure, loving relationships from two parents. If we are brave enough to acknowledge this, we will ensure that parents in the UK get the best chance possible to make this a reality for their children. Our future depends on it.

Avril McIntyre MBE

Chairman

Breakthrough Britain 2015

The Centre for Social Justice shone a light on the shocking levels of deprivation that blight communities across the UK in 2007 in our report *Breakthrough Britain*. The project transformed the British political landscape, reinvigorated a tired debate on how to tackle poverty and was hailed as a definitive research paper on social problems in modern Britain.

This unprecedented diagnosis of deprivation led us to identify five interlinked 'pathways to poverty'. These were:

- Family breakdown;
- Economic dependency and worklessness;
- Educational failure;
- Drug and alcohol addiction; and
- Serious personal debt.

Alongside this, we made recommendations about unlocking the potential of the voluntary sector to reverse social breakdown.

These reports revealed how, despite the longest period of continuous economic growth in modern history – more than 60 quarters – and unparalleled levels of government spending, a large proportion of British society remained cut off from the mainstream. We argued that what was trapping people was not necessarily the economy but their exposure to long-term worklessness, family breakdown, poor education, addiction and serious debt, and that too often government intervention was focussed on trying to alleviate the symptoms of poverty, rather than these causes.

Seven years on, the UK is in a radically different political and economic position – but the need to give a voice to the most disadvantaged people could not be greater. For this reason we have spent the past two years researching *Breakthrough Britain 2015* – a fresh assessment of how the five pathways are continuing to hold people, families and communities back.

Following on from our six 'state of the nation' reports last year, over the coming months we will publish recommendations to all political parties, again showing how people can be

helped back to work, families kept together, educational achievement improved, addiction and personal debt relieved. The work will amount to an exciting and radical programme for any Government in 2015.

These six policy reports are the culmination of an extraordinary process. Our team has travelled tens of thousands of miles around the country, visiting our most deprived communities – from Rhyl to Ramsgate, from Margate to parts of Manchester, from Great Yarmouth to Glasgow – to discover first-hand what is fuelling poverty. We have carried out extensive public polling, conducted several thousand meetings with charities, frontline workers and policy experts, and heard from huge numbers of people struggling to get their lives back on track. For further inspiration we have looked abroad, taking evidence from successful projects around the world including those in Australia, the Netherlands, various parts of the USA, Ireland, and Singapore.

As well as our own committed staff, the CSJ has recruited well-known specialists in each of the six areas to be on working groups who have met regularly to take evidence from those who understand the problems best. These dedicated individuals have used their extensive knowledge and contacts to ensure our research is relevant, focussed and influential.

Throughout this process we have constantly been given heart by the remarkable work people are doing to help rebuild the lives of those who have become trapped in poverty. The practical solutions presented in these reports are grounded in their experiences and they are a call to politicians to ensure that the next government continues the fight against poverty by tackling it at its roots.

Executive summary

I. Introduction

Ten years of research – particularly hearing firsthand the experience of poverty-fighting charities in the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) Alliance – have persuaded us that family breakdown is the backdrop to so many broken lives. Yet it is still difficult for many politicians, policy makers, academics and commentators to acknowledge that the relentless rise in fractured families is perhaps the biggest social problem of our age. The reticence surrounding this issue is understandable because so many have experienced it themselves or close at hand among family and friends and want above all else to avoid sounding moralistic or judgemental.

There is still a fear that being clear about the benefits of marriage and committed relationships, and the merits of supporting and encouraging them, betray a ‘nanny state’ approach. However, our high levels of family breakdown threaten to undermine hard-won gains in other areas such as education, welfare and economic productivity and it is becoming increasingly important for a *canny* state to tackle this issue.

Strong and stable relationships and families are indispensable to a strong and stable society. Secure, nurturing, loving and reliable family environments are crucial for the health and wellbeing of children, adults, and wider communities, and where these factors are absent this can have a profoundly damaging effect on the fabric of society. Yet for almost half a century there has been an escalation in family breakdown across Britain – divorce and separation, dysfunction and dadlessness.

89 per cent of people agree (52 per cent strongly agree) that ‘if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we’ve got to start’.¹

In June 2013 the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) published a major report on family breakdown in Britain, *Fractured Families: Why stability matters*, which shone a light onto the alarming scale and negative effects of family breakdown. We presented overwhelming evidence of how this trend

¹ CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

has hit our poorest communities the hardest. Social justice demands that politicians and policy-makers from across the political spectrum recognise that while financial and other pressures arising from worklessness, debt and poor mental and physical health can put significant stress on relationships and increase conflict, family breakdown *itself* can lead to and entrench poverty.

- Without concerted and sustained government action, by the end of the next Parliament nearly half of all children taking their GCSEs (48 per cent) will come from broken homes;²
- It is already more likely that a teenager sitting their GCSEs will own a smartphone than live with their father (only 57 per cent of 15 year olds are still living with their fathers while 62 per cent own a smartphone);³
- Almost half of all children aged zero to five years old in low-income households are not living with both their parents – seven times the number of those in the richest households;⁴
- While almost 40 per cent of 12–16 year olds in better-off households no longer live with both their mother and father, for those in the poorest 20 per cent income bracket this proportion rises to two-thirds;⁵
- While nationally almost one quarter of families with dependent children are lone-parent families,⁶ this figure rises significantly in our poorest neighbourhoods, and can be as high as 75 per cent.⁷

This final contribution from the Family Breakdown Working Group to Breakthrough Britain 2015 presents policy recommendations rooted in evidence, including the experience of frontline poverty-fighting and family-strengthening organisations. Together these aim to help effect the massive cultural change that is needed to reverse the tide of family breakdown and, where this is not possible in individual cases, to mitigate its worst effects.

We call on the next Government to set itself the goal of becoming a world leader in achieving a sustained and significant reduction in levels of family breakdown. They will need to be armed not only with the array of solutions we present here but also with the resolve to take seriously the evidence that marriage and commitment make an enormous contribution to stability.

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- 2 This figure is compiled from the analysis of two datasets: ONS, *2001 Census*, ONS, 2001 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/census-2001/index.html> (3/7/14)] and *Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study* [accessed via: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk> (3/7/14)]. It compares parental status at birth with parental status at the age of 15. All future projections build on the assumptions in the Appendices to Benson H, *The myth of 'long term stable relationships' outside marriage*, Cambridge: Marriage Foundation, 2013
 - 3 Ibid, Ofcom, *Children and Parents: Media User and Attitudes Report*, 2013
 - 4 Understanding Society Policy Unit: Income and household size are negatively correlated, so households with lower income tend to have more children. This is especially the case when income is equalised to factor in the differences in household sizes so their income levels can be more accurately compared. Each extra child reduces the equalised income. Absolute numbers reflect the fact that when children and not households are compared, there are proportionally more children from larger (and by association lower income) households in the data than there are large (low income) households in the population of households. No direct causation is implied between low income and family breakdown through this data. There is a potential for causation in both directions. For example, having only one parent may be associated with low income both because low income leads to marriage/partnership breakdown, and because one person leaving a household reduces the available income and economies of scale.
 - 5 Department of Work and Pensions, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, London: The Stationery Office, 2012, p6
 - 6 Office of National Statistics, *General Lifestyle Survey Overview: A Report on the General Lifestyle Survey 2011, Chapter 3 – Households, families and people*, 7 March 2013 [accessed via: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_302210.pdf (2/7/14)]
 - 7 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: Why stability matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p32

Britain can do better; our high breakdown rates are by no means inevitable. Other developed countries have far more children growing up with both parents than here in Britain where just over two-thirds of all our children are in intact families. In Finland over 95 per cent of children under 15 live with both of their parents; the OECD average is 84 per cent.⁸

We require a change in culture so that the following become the norm throughout all strata of society:

- people choosing to have children within committed relationships;
- an expectation that people will prepare for relationships;
- parents deciding to mend rather than end relationships when they hit difficulties because of their awareness of the effect of breakdown on their children;
- easily accessible relationship support that has mainstream appeal;
- policies that incentivise and reward couple parenting.

By 2020 it has been projected that almost 50 per cent of all 15 year olds will have seen their parents split up. Yet internationally respected prevention scientists have advised us that this proportion could be reduced to approximately 30 per cent (and the overall divorce rate reduced by as much as 50 per cent) if the necessary magnitude of cultural change can be achieved.⁹

Public support for stability

- 81 per cent of people think that it is important for children to grow up living with both parents;¹⁰
- Nine out of 10 mothers consider it important that a child grows up living with both parents, six in 10 thought it was very important;
- Over half of lone mothers thought it was important that a child grows up living with both parents – one in five lone parents thought it was very important;
- Almost two-thirds of step-parents thought it was important that a child grows up living with both parents and a quarter of them thought it was very important.

Parents from across the social spectrum and parents who are not still together want the Government to take a strong lead:

- Over 80 per cent of parents from social grade DE (where there are the highest levels of family breakdown) agree that the Government is right to say that stability matters for children;
- Three-quarters of lone parents and almost nine in 10 step-parents also agree that this is an appropriate and necessary message for the Government to send.¹¹

8 OECD, *OECD Family Database*, Paris: OECD, 2014 Table SF1.3.A: Distribution of children aged 0–14 by living arrangements

9 Personal correspondence with Scott Stanley, research professor and codirector of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver and Alan Hawkins, Professor of Family Life, Brigham Young University.

10 CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

11 CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling of 1828 mothers (either expectant or with children under 2), July 2012 – see Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families? The vanishing agenda*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012, p7

2. The consequences of family breakdown

It is not only the adult partners in a relationship who suffer when their relationship breaks down; divorce and separation also carry high costs for children, adults in the extended family (particularly grandparents) and wider communities.

- Children who experience family breakdown are more likely to experience behavioural problems; perform less well in school; need more medical treatment; leave school and home earlier; become sexually active, pregnant or a parent at an early age; and report more depressive symptoms and higher levels of smoking, drinking and other drug use during adolescence;¹²
- Many of these problems continue into adulthood – one study showed that 60-year olds still suffer the long-term effects of childhood stress linked to the psychological trauma of family breakdown;¹³
- One million children lose touch with their grandparents as a result of separation or divorce.¹⁴

3. Why family breakdown should matter to government

Although family dysfunction has long been considered a legitimate concern of social services and other statutory agencies, the fragility of couple relationships has historically been considered a personal matter between adults, and governments have taken a hands-off approach. Yet significant financial costs are incurred to the public purse in terms of income support for many parents and their children, the administrative costs of running the child maintenance system, and the greater proportion of the costs of caring for the elderly than would be necessary if a greater number of families remained intact.

Yet the costs do not end there. Broader social problems result from family breakdown, straining public resources. For example, more than half of the prison population come from broken homes, and a quarter spent time in care as a child.¹⁵

We argue that, in common with many other Western societies, including the United States, Australia and Sweden, this country can no longer afford the eye-wateringly high costs of family instability (£46bn per year in the UK).¹⁶ Strengthening, supporting and stabilising families and relationships, where possible, has to become a much higher priority of this and future governments. Well-functioning families are not only important for the wellbeing of children and adults but they also benefit and support society and are essential for any nation's economic competitiveness.

12 Pryor J and Rodgers B, *Children in Changing Families*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, cited in Mooney A, Oliver C and Smith M, *Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being: Evidence Review*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009, p7

13 Bartley M, *Life Gets Under Your Skin*, UCL Research Department of Epidemiology and Public Health on behalf of the ESRC International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health, 2012, pp16–17

14 Grandparents Plus, *Policy briefing Paper 01*, Grandparents Plus, 2011

15 Ministry of Justice, *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds: Results from surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2012, p8

16 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: Why stability matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013, Section 2.1

4. Turning the tide will take time

This Government has begun to take some limited action to address our high levels of family breakdown:

- £30 million for relationship support for couples (2011–2015);¹⁷
- £5 million for CANparent – vouchers for free parenting classes to all parents of children aged eight to six in three trial areas (2012–2014);¹⁸
- Commitment to double the number of Family Nurse Partnerships to 13,000 and recruit an additional 4,200 health visitors by 2015;¹⁹
- Troubled Families programme: £448 million over 2012–15; a further £200 million for 2015–16;²⁰
- An ‘expected investment of an extra £10 million for an additional 10,000 family mediations’ over 2013–14;²¹
- £20 million over three years until 2015 to support separated and separating families as part of changes to the Child Maintenance system;²²
- Transferrable Tax Allowance for married couples worth a maximum of £1,050 per family (10 per cent of the personal allowance) costing £515 million from 2015–16.²³

However this agenda needs to be radically stepped up. Although this Government has spent more on addressing family breakdown than any previous administration, compared with the price tag associated with family breakdown this is a very small amount. £15 million will, for example, pay the costs associated with 450 prisoners for a year.²⁴ Moreover there is no Cabinet-level champion for families despite its clear importance to the nation’s flourishing. Central and local government urgently need to provide clear leadership and facilitate opportunities for the private and voluntary sectors to play their part. Without concerted action across government and beyond to address our epidemic levels of family breakdown there is a danger that the agenda will be lost.

5. Principles underlying our work

The recommendations proposed in this report are guided by principles consistent with our previous work.

- Children tend to do best if they grow up with two parents committed to them and to each other;

17 See Department for Education, *Relationship support*, Department for Education, 2012 [accessed via: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140220082709/http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/relationship/a00212592/relationship-support-> (24/6/14)]

18 These are Middlesbrough, Camden and High Peak in Derbyshire. DWP, *250,000 more children living with both birth parents*, DWP, 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/250000-more-children-living-with-both-birth-parents> (30/6/14)]

19 DWP, *Social Justice: Transforming Lives – One year on*, London: The Stationery Office, 2013

20 DCLG, Press Release, *Prime Minister welcomes troubled families progress*, 1 May 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-welcomes-troubled-families-progress> (30/6/14)]; DCLG, *Troubled Families programme receives extra £200 million boost*, 24 June 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/troubled-families-programme-receives-extra-200-million-boost> (30/6/14)]

21 HM Government, *Progress on commitments in Social Justice: transforming lives*, HM Government, 2013

22 Ibid

23 House of Commons Library, *Married couple’s allowance*, London: House of Commons Library, 2014; Hansard, Oral Answers to Questions, 9 April 2014 [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140409/debtext/140409-0001.htm> (17/14)]

24 Ministry of Justice, *Costs per place and costs per prisoner*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2013

- Family breakdown is not inevitable, prevention is possible;
- The importance of taking a 'whole family' approach and not focusing solely on children if we are serious about improving their life chances;
- Fathers matter for children's wellbeing but their importance is often downplayed.

95 per cent believe that fathers are important to a child's wellbeing but 49 per cent believe that this and the previous Governments' policies treat fathers as unimportant.²⁵

- There is an important role for the voluntary sector to play in strengthening families and preventing breakdown;
- Marriage is important and has become a social justice issue – aspirations to marry are high throughout society but low-income communities face massive financial and cultural barriers to realising these.

60 per cent believe marriage has become less important and this is a bad thing.²⁶

6. Recommendations

National and local leadership are indispensable:

- The appointment of a Cabinet-level minister who will champion the family agenda at the highest levels of government: a Secretary of State with clear accountability for families who is resourced at a departmental level to drive through a programme to strengthen families, boost stability and uphold fatherhood and its importance.
- Local authorities to rebadge and redesign Children's Services as Family Services (signalling a desire for culture change by appointing a Director of Family Services) and develop a strategy for strengthening and supporting relationships to prevent family breakdown as part of their local Child Poverty Strategy.

The rest of this report is structured around the continuum of support for relationships and father involvement that is required across the lifecourse and in a range of different circumstances, but with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged where family breakdown is most prevalent.

We need to:

- Lay good foundations before young people become partners and parents;
- Make it easier for people to get help to keep their relationships on track through challenges and transitions – including separation, where this is not preventable; and

²⁵ CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

²⁶ Ibid

- Ensure that interventions to support complex families focus on family stability.

Laying foundations for stable families and good quality relationships

Relationship education in schools

1. Schools have an important role to play in addressing the culture of relationship breakdown through a compulsory relationship education module teaching children and adolescents the importance of commitment, the benefits of stability and the advantages of two parents being involved in family life.
2. Local public health and other commissioners to co-fund third sector providers who have professional expertise in relationship education to deliver this in schools and train teachers.

Forming and maintaining stable family relationships

Family Hubs

3. Children's Centres to become Sure Start Family Hubs: local 'nerve centres' coordinating all family-related support, including universal services and specialist help, to help meet both parents' most pressing needs.
4. Given the very high levels of family breakdown in this country Sure Start Family Hubs will include couples' relationship support/education as part of their core offer to families.
5. Family Hubs will extend their core purpose to incorporate the vital work of Family Relationship Centres, so all separating parents have access to support.
6. Local health and public health commissioners to ensure all ante- and post-natal services are co-located within or co-ordinated from Family Hubs.
7. Father engagement to be part of Family Hubs' reformed core purpose and included in inspections of their early years and maternity services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission and local authorities' payment by results frameworks.
8. All birth registration to take place within Family Hubs, not civic registry offices.

Relationship support for couples

9. The registry office fee (£70 per couple) to be waived for couples intending to marry who take part in an accredited Marriage Preparation course.
10. As recommended in 2007, every couple to have a personal budget for relationship and parenting education with all individuals, couples and families entitled to draw down money to access pre-marriage, antenatal relationship support and parenting (of nought to fives, fives to 11s and teens) services.²⁷

27 Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

11. The NHS and Public Health England to fund an awareness campaign through Family Hubs and GP surgeries so GPs (and those who self-refer into the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme (IAPT)) know couple support is available on the NHS through IAPT funding.²⁸
12. The gains from the transferable personal tax allowance for married couples are disregarded for those on Universal Credit.
13. The Government to commit to working towards a fully transferrable tax allowance for all married couples and, as a first step, to double the amount that couples with children under three can transfer to £2000, saving them an additional £200 per year and costing £480m.²⁹
14. The Government to invest in the universal credit earnings disregard for couples and the couple family benefit cap through annual uprating.

Father involvement from birth and after separation

15. The Government to implement the 2009 Welfare Reform Act Schedule 6 on joint birth registration enabling fathers to register themselves on birth certificates, without requiring mothers' approval (with appropriate exemptions).
16. The Government to raise the current thresholds at which fathers are expected to pay the reduced and basic rates of child maintenance to enable paying parents to support themselves as well as their children as a matter of urgency. This must be the first stage of a radical overhaul of child maintenance and financial support for families after separation to better enable both parents to play a meaningful role in their children's lives.

Supporting relationships in complex families

Troubled Families

17. The Troubled Families programme should be a long-term commitment, for the full term of the next Parliament – and beyond.
18. Given the high level of family instability in troubled families, the Department for Communities and Local Government must ensure all local authority programmes provide support for couple relationships and draw in fathers who can often be helped to become a resource to the family.
19. The centrally-set attachment criteria allowing local authorities to include families on the programme to be extended to include key public health priorities such as domestic abuse, substance misuse and poor mental health.

²⁸ Where relationship distress is contributing to partners' poor mental health.

²⁹ CSJ calculation based on HMRC Tax Data, IFS calculations and assuming the 2014–15 basic tax rate/tax threshold of 20 per cent/£10,000. See: Centre for Social Justice, *Supporting Families, Strengthening Marriage, A plan for a meaningful transferable tax allowance for married couples*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

20. Where there is a clear local need for residential support ('family fostering') and an effective provider able to deliver it, this higher level of support should be included as part of the Troubled Families menu of options.
21. Results-based payments to be made available for success in tackling drivers of family breakdown such as debt and substance misuse.
22. The Government (and political parties) to commit to resourcing public service transformation at a level that will enable local authorities to effect system change.
23. Local authorities should make volunteer befrienders/peer support a core part of Troubled Families provision, alongside and following professional intervention to sustain family learning and change and avoid a cliff-edge of support withdrawal.

Edge of Care

24. Royal Commission to be established in the next Parliament (and report by the end of 2017) to radically re-think and advise on the wholesale re-design of social care and statutory mental health services for vulnerable children and young people.³⁰
25. The Department for Education's funding for further roll-out of the Family Drug and Alcohol Court must be ongoing after 2015 to enable much wider roll-out across the country: there needs to be a FDAC in every local family court.
26. Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a promising programme needed in every local authority area. Subject to its evaluation, local authority Children's Services must partner with the charity by paying overheads as it rolls out gradually across the UK.
27. The Department for Education to work with the independent College of Social Work to enable at least one local authority in every region to become a 'Training Local Authority' operating like a University Hospital.

Kinship Care

28. With the aim of preventing placement breakdown, the Department for Education to develop a Kinship Carers Passport, with up-front financial assistance to local authorities in the form of a Kinship Carers Reform Grant.
29. Councils to partner with local voluntary sector agencies and former kinship carers to develop peer support networks based in or connected to Family Hubs.
30. Existing state support (child benefit and child-related tax credits) to follow the child, rather than staying with the parent, as soon as there is a change in residence initiated by, or brought to the attention of, social services.

³⁰ Centre for Social Justice, *Enough is Enough: A report on child protection and mental health services for children and young people*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2014

Introduction

Thriving families and stable childhoods should be the foundations on which we build a better Britain. Strong families are the seedbed in which other reforms can take root. Yet there has, over the last 40 years, been an escalation in family breakdown (divorce and separation, father absence and dysfunctional relationships). As a result, the proportion of families with dependent children headed by lone parents has increased from 8 per cent in 1971 to 22 per cent.³¹

'We are in the middle of a perfect storm; with increased family dysfunction and family breakdown at the same time as the biggest squeeze on public spending of our generation. More children than ever are exposed to the long term impact of domestic abuse, lack of attachment, poor diet and substance-misusing parents. It severely erodes the quality of their childhood, their ability to function in society and ultimately the kind of parents they make.'

Family breakdown is also leading children to seek "family" groups elsewhere and the lowering of the age of gang membership has increased the number of girls we see suffering sexual exploitation. The danger of them repeating the cycle of dysfunction is very high.

We must do more about this but in recession early intervention and prevention are not seen as a priority. We need a government who will bite the bullet and spend now on the prevention of dysfunction to save families and money that will otherwise continue to financially burden future generations.'

Gracia McGrath, CEO Chance UK

In June 2013, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) published a major report on family breakdown in Britain, *Fractured Families: Why stability matters*. This shone a light onto the alarming scale of family instability, its negative effects on children, adults and wider society and how the evidence continues to build up that it is our poorest communities – and children – that have been most affected.

³¹ Figures for 1971 and 2011. ONS, *General Lifestyle Survey Overview: A Report on the General Lifestyle Survey 2011, Chapter 3 – Households, families and people*, ONS, 2013

- Without concerted and sustained government action, by the end of the next Parliament nearly half of all children taking their GCSEs (48 per cent) will come from broken homes;³²
- Almost half of all children aged zero to five years old in low-income households are not living with both their parents – seven times the number of those in the richest households;³³
- While almost 40 per cent of 12–16 year old young people in better-off households no longer live with both their mother and father; for those in the poorest 20 per cent income bracket this proportion rises to two-thirds;³⁴
- Nationally one quarter of families with children are headed by lone parents but this figure rises significantly in our poorest neighbourhoods and can be as high as 75 per cent.^{35, 36}

Children who experience the breakdown of their own parents' relationships are particularly likely to experience divorce and separation in their own future relationships.³⁷ As they are then subject to the same disadvantages this can greatly undermine this and future government's efforts to improve social mobility.

Family breakdown hits the poorest the hardest because it interacts with and exacerbates the other drivers of poverty which we identify: educational failure, worklessness and welfare dependency, serious personal debt, drug and alcohol addiction and poor mental health. These forms of disadvantage also, in turn, put a significant strain on families and can fatally undermine relationships which were already insecurely founded or not underpinned by the kinds of attitudes, behaviours and soft skills which make them resilient to pressures.

So it is too simplistic to reduce family breakdown to a simple lack of money and other material resources. Yet recently published research highlights how parents with fewer resources are less well equipped to buffer the effects of divorce and separation on their children, while those in more affluent settings are able to mitigate some of the harms.³⁸ Policymakers and politicians who have seen or experienced firsthand the breakdown of close personal relationships, frequently fall into the latter category and might, as a result, be more likely to underestimate how devastating family breakdown can be. Yet our work with many CSJ Alliance organisations in communities across the country has exposed the harsh daily realities of life without strong, supportive family ties.

32 This figure is compiled from the analysis of two datasets: *2001 Census*, ONS and *Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study*. It compares parental status at birth with parental status at the age of 15. All future projections build on the assumptions in the Appendices to Benson H, *The myth of 'long term stable relationships' outside marriage*, Cambridge: Marriage Foundation, 2013

33 Understanding Society Policy Unit: Income and household size are negatively correlated, so households with lower income tend to have more children. This is especially the case when income is equalised to factor in the differences in household sizes so their income levels can be more accurately compared. Each extra child reduces the equalised income. Absolute numbers reflect the fact that when children and not households are compared, there are proportionally more children from larger (and by association lower income) households in the data than there are large (low income) households in the population of households. No direct causation is implied between low income and family breakdown through this data. There is a potential for causation in both directions. For example, having only one parent may be associated with low income both because low income leads to marriage/partnership breakdown, and because one person leaving a household reduces the available income and economies of scale.

34 Department of Work and Pensions, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, London: The Stationery Office, 2012, p6

35 ONS, *Families and Households 2013*, ONS, 2013, table 3

36 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: Why stability matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p32

37 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families*, London: CSJ, December 2006, p122

38 Amato P and Anthony C, 'Estimating the effect of parental divorce and death with fixed effect models', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76, 2014, pp370–386

In *Fractured Families* we called upon politicians and policy-makers from all political parties to recognise the gravity of the scale of family breakdown and instability and to take concerted, comprehensive action both to prevent it and to mitigate its worst effects.

The exorbitant price tag attached to family breakdown of £46 billion, even when expressed solely in economic terms, is unsustainably high.³⁹ When lost human potential, poor wellbeing and adverse mental health are factored in it becomes clear that this social problem is undermining our best efforts to rebuild the nation's competitiveness. It also puts a massive brake on all attempts to close gaps in educational attainment, enhance people's ability to maintain and progress in work, reduce severe personal indebtedness and overcome addictions.

The Government that tackles family breakdown in a sustained and sufficiently resourced way is not a *nanny* state so much as a *canny* state. This final report from the Family Breakdown Working Group presents policy recommendations which, when taken together, aim to help effect the massive cultural change needed to reverse the tide of family breakdown and, where this is not possible in individual cases, to mitigate its worst effects.

We call on the next Government to set itself the goal of becoming a world leader in achieving a sustained and significant reduction in levels of family breakdown. They will need to be armed not only with the array of solutions we present here but also with the resolve to take seriously the evidence that marriage and commitment make an enormous contribution to stability. We require a change in the culture so that the following become the norm throughout all strata of society:

- people choosing to have children within marriage and committed relationships;
- an expectation that people will prepare for relationships;
- parents deciding to mend rather than end relationships when they hit difficulties because of their awareness of the effect of breakdown on their children;
- easily accessible relationship support that has mainstream appeal;
- policies that incentivise and reward couple parenting.

As stated earlier, if nothing is done by 2020 almost 50 per cent of all 15 year olds will have seen their parents split up. Yet internationally respected prevention scientists have advised us that this proportion could be reduced to approximately 30 per cent (and the overall divorce rate reduced by as much as 50 per cent) if the necessary magnitude of cultural change can be achieved.⁴⁰

Key principles

The recommendations proposed in this report are guided by principles consistent with our previous work.

³⁹ Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: why stability matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013, section 2.1

⁴⁰ Personal correspondence with Scott Stanley, research professor and codirector of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver and Alan Hawkins, Professor of Family Life, Brigham Young University.

Children tend to do best if they grow up with two parents committed to them and to each other

Few would disagree that children need a high level of parental attention, nurture and expressed love in order to thrive, but the evidence also shows clear links between couple relationship quality, parenting and child wellbeing.⁴¹ Children benefit in a range of ways from growing up in a context where there are two parents available to them, sharing the load and resolving difficulties together on a daily basis.

Our polling clearly shows that the public understand the importance of children growing up with both their parents:

- 81 per cent of people think that it is important for children to grow up living with both parents;⁴²
- Nine out of 10 mothers consider it important that a child grows up living with both parents, six in ten thought it was very important;⁴³
- Over half of lone mothers thought it was important that a child grows up living with both parents – one in five lone parents thought it was very important;
- Almost two-thirds of step-parents thought it was important that a child grows up living with both parents and a quarter of them thought it was very important.

Compared with other children, those who grow up in stable, two-parent families have a higher standard of living, receive more effective parenting, experience more cooperative co-parenting, are emotionally closer to both parents, and are subjected to fewer stressful events and circumstances.⁴⁴

Moreover, studies show children's emotional and mental development is significantly influenced by the parents' relationship *quality*, with exposure to parental conflict resulting in increased anxiety, depression, aggression, hostility and anti-social behaviour and criminality.⁴⁵

It is especially important when the family is facing economic hardship that parents are able to rely on each other. As part of a wider poverty-fighting strategy, helping people to build resilient relationships is therefore particularly important in our poorest communities, where relationship breakdown is most concentrated.

Family instability exacerbates financial disadvantage and compounds its effects. Not only does it tend to lead to a reduction in material resources, but in households with only one parent it is also more likely that children will grow up experiencing emotional deficits.⁴⁶

41 Cowan, C and Cowan, P, 'Interventions as tests of family systems theories: Marital and family relationships in children's development and psychology', *Development and Psychology*, 14, 2000, pp731–759

42 CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

43 CSJ/ Bounty – the Parenting Club polling of 1828 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), July 2012. See in Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families? The vanishing agenda*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012

44 Amato P, 'The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation', *Marriage and Child Wellbeing*, 15, 2005, p75

45 Harold G and Leve L, 'Parents and Partners: How the Parental Relationship affects Children's Psychological Development', in Balfour A, Morgan M and Vincent C (Eds.), *How Couple Relationships Shape Our World: Clinical Practice, Research and Policy Perspectives*, London: Karnac, 2012

46 See CSJ, *Fractured Families: Why stability matters*, London: CSJ, June 2013, p68

As a result, a child of separated parents is more likely to:

- Grow up in poorer housing;
- Experience behavioural problems;
- Perform less well in school and gain fewer educational qualifications;
- Need more medical treatment;
- Leave school and home when young;
- Become sexually active, pregnant or a parent at an early age; and
- Report more depressive symptoms and higher levels of smoking, drinking and other drug use during adolescence and adulthood.⁴⁷

Fathers matter

Given the importance of both parents to a child, it is therefore essential to challenge the assumption we frequently encountered in our research that fathers are optional extras in family life. While a dependent child losing touch with his or her mother is rightly considered to be a tragedy, the same yardstick is not routinely applied when fathers disappear from their children's lives. Yet studies show that:

- Fathers' involvement boosts children's self-esteem and confidence and children with good relationships with their fathers are less likely to experience depression or exhibit disruptive behaviour;⁴⁸
- When fathers are actively involved in children's care, children are more likely to feel good about themselves, do well at school, and avoid trouble.⁴⁹

It is therefore highly concerning that over a million children have no meaningful contact with their fathers⁵⁰ and by the end of their childhood a young person is considerably more likely to have a Smart Phone than a resident father (only 57 per cent of 15 year olds are still living with their fathers while 62 per cent own a smartphone).⁵¹

The default attitude of many professionals, including those delivering statutory services, can be that fathers are, at worst, somewhat risky to their children's safety, and, at best, irrelevant to their wellbeing. Without 'essential-ising' fathers, and saying they are always indispensable no matter how they act, we argue instead that they should be seen as potential resources

47 Mooney A, Oliver C and Smith M, *Impact of Family Breakdown on Children's Well-Being: Evidence Review*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, June 2009, p7

48 Mosley J and Thompson E, 'Fathering behaviour and child outcomes: The role of race and poverty' In Marsiglio W (Ed.), *Fatherhood: Contemporary theory, research, and social policy*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995, pp148–165

49 Flouri E, *Fathering and child outcomes*, Chichester: Wiley, 2005; Saradki A, Kristiansson R, Oberklaid F, and Bremberg S, 'Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: A systematic review of longitudinal studies', *Acta Paediatrica*, 97, 2008, pp153–158; Williams R, 'If we want fathers to change their ways, we need to first change ours', pp68–70 in *Where next for parenting?*, Family and Parenting Institute, October 2011

50 CSJ Calculation – for an explanation, see Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: why stability matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

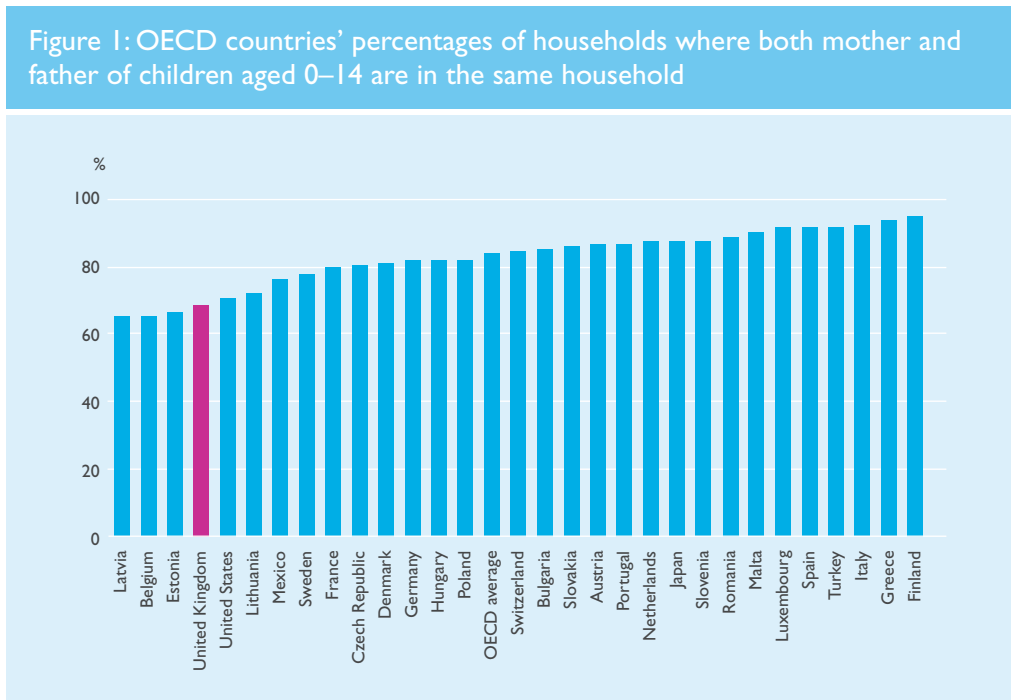
51 This figure is compiled from the analysis of two datasets: ONS, 2001 Census, ONS, 2001 [accessed via: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/census-2001/index.html> (3/7/14)] and *Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study* [accessed via: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk> (3/7/14)]. It compares parental status at birth with parental status at the age of 15. All future projections build on the assumptions in the Appendices to Benson H, *The myth of 'long term stable relationships' outside marriage*, Cambridge: Marriage Foundation, 2013

to mitigate the many risks children are exposed to, especially in impoverished and dangerous neighbourhoods.

95 per cent of people believe that fathers are important to a child's wellbeing but 50 per cent believe that this and the previous Government's policies treat fathers as unimportant.⁵²

Family breakdown is not inevitable, prevention is possible

We stand out in Europe as having high rates of single parenthood, high divorce and separation rates and large numbers of children entering the local authority care system; Britain can do better.⁵³ Other developed countries have far more children growing up with both parents than here in Britain where just over two-thirds of all our children are in intact families. In Finland over 95 per cent of children under 15 live with both of their parents; the OECD average is 84 per cent.⁵⁴



Moreover there are many international examples of good practice when it comes to tackling high rates of family breakdown. Australia and Norway both consider non-conflictual family relationships to be so vital for children's wellbeing that they fund centres specifically aimed at

52 CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012
 53 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, p21; World Bank, *Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15–19)*; OECD, *OECD Family Database – SF1.3: Living arrangements of children*, OECD, 2010; Department for Education, *Children looked after in England, including adoption*, Department for Education, 2013; ONS, *Divorces in England and Wales*, 2012, ONS, 2014
 54 OECD, *OECD Family Database, SF1.3: 'Living arrangements of children'*, 1 November 2012 [accessed via: <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/42293565.xls> (03/04/14)]

helping parents address their relationship difficulties before, during and after separation. The United States Federal Government launched a Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative in 2005, which aimed to strengthen couple (including non-marital) relationships, where it was safe to do so, as a key dimension of their wider welfare reform agenda.

States drawing down the highest per capita levels of federal subsidy (and therefore supporting the highest levels of relationship support activity, specifically marriage and relationship education or MRE) saw small but statistically significant changes in family outcomes at a population level:

- More children living with two parents;
- Fewer nonmarital births; and
- Fewer children living in poverty.⁵⁵

For example, researchers found an estimated 3 per cent increase in the proportion of Oklahoma children living with two parents (than would be predicted without the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative), a three per cent decrease in children living with one parent, nearly a 3 per cent decrease in children born to a single mother, and a 1.4 per cent decrease in children living in poverty.

Although the researchers found that the results were somewhat skewed by the presence of a particularly 'well-performing' outlier, the District of Columbia, they also pointed out there were important lessons to be learned from why this smaller geographical region with a high concentration of low-income (and ethnic minority) couples benefited as much as they did, albeit from the particularly high level of funding they received. They concluded that: 'A significant need combined with significant opportunities may be the ingredients needed for these policies to have their intended effect.'⁵⁶

The evidence is therefore promising that sustained and concerted effort could provide the 'significant opportunities' that research suggests are necessary to see any shift in important outcomes such as stability and poverty reduction and reducing family instability in the UK by only one per cent could save almost half a billion pounds.⁵⁷

While this Government has given more funding to couple support than any previous administration (at a time of heightened fiscal constraint) this spending has remained in the very low millions and it has not been backed up with rhetorical support.⁵⁸ We have described elsewhere how 'current government effort [to tackle family breakdown] is dwarfed by the scale and cost of family breakdown in this country and is one of Whitehall's best-kept secrets', stating that the Government needs 'to take a strong and vocal lead in tackling the "culture of relationship breakdown" through every available means, including the law, the tax and benefits systems, and frontline services that are already working with families.'⁵⁹

55 Hawkins A, Amato P and Kinghorn A, 'Are Government-Supported Healthy Marriage Initiatives Affecting Family Demographics? A State-Level Analysis', *Family Relations*, 62 (3), 2013, pp501–513

56 Ibid

57 Given the estimated annual cost of family breakdown (£46 billion), as cited earlier.

58 £30m for relationship support for couples over 2011–2015.

59 Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families? The vanishing agenda*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012, p6

Obviously stability of relationships should not trump all other considerations and relationship quality is also important. However, unhelpfully, these two aspects often seem to be pitted against each other in policy discussions when in fact they are interrelated. If a couple feel there is no hope of improving a relationship they consider to be of low quality then there is very little incentive to persevere. Our recommendations therefore aim to increase access to relationship support so that couples have the means to stay together where this is what they want for themselves.

There will of course be cases where family breakdown is not preventable but separating parents will still need to work together in their children's interests. Again, we outline how support can be forthcoming to help parents ensure their children continue to have a meaningful relationship with them both which is usually, though not always, best for children's wellbeing.

The importance of looking across the whole family for resource

The last Government began to emphasise the importance of taking a 'whole family' approach in 2007.⁶⁰

*'Many services begin with a single person and with a single problem. This tendency to individualise approaches to family difficulties can mean that the significant strengths demonstrated by even the most marginalised families can be overlooked ... a "whole families approach" stresses the importance of looking at the family as a unit and of focusing on positive interdependency and supportive relationships [and] takes the family's resilience and social capital as the foundations for achieving positive outcomes.'*⁶¹

Our research confirms unequivocally that we need to see individuals in the context of their nuclear and extended families yet there is little evidence that this approach has taken root in Children's Centres, social work practice and other public services.

Family Group Conferencing and kinship care solutions are notoriously under-used when families falter and yet continuity of care within families can be instrumental in ensuring children come through these very difficult family crises and transitions well. Government and local authorities should be on the side of those who are willing to take on the care and responsibility of children outside their nuclear family and we make recommendations to ensure this vital resource does not go untapped.

The Troubled Families programme is also a positive development, and we welcome the central government spending commitment which is set to continue into the next Parliament, until at least 2016. This report will highlight where our research indicates improvements can build on progress to date.

60 Social Exclusion Task Force, *Reaching Out: Think Family*, London: Cabinet Office, 2007

61 Ibid, p28

However, looking across the whole family is not only important in such 'high need' situations; whilst relationships within families can be at the root of many problems they can also be resources that must be drawn upon.

We argue that a greater awareness of these considerations needs to be apparent across the whole continuum of universal provision (such as maternity services, Children's Centres, health visitors and schools), not least because family breakdown and the negative outcomes resulting from poorly functioning relationships affect all sectors of society.

Important role for the voluntary sector

The CSJ is unusual as a think tank in that our research is rooted in the wisdom and experience of those working to tackle Britain's deepest social problems. We partner with an Alliance of about 350 grassroots charities and social enterprises and regularly consult them as we carry out our work. Practitioners in the social or voluntary sector often have crucial insights into the complex experience of those most affected by the root causes of poverty we are aiming to address, and these frequently complement and confirm other sources of evidence.

Moreover, their work can often be innovative and transformational, particularly when their ideas have arisen out of a need no statutory or other service has been able to meet. As a result we believe it is vital that policy development is informed by their practice and that it respects the role they are uniquely placed to play.

The voluntary and community sector is perhaps particularly important in tackling family breakdown as many charities are providing the kind of relationally-based support that can begin to lay foundations of trust that have often been missing because of people's adverse childhood and later experiences. Modelling different ways of coping with disagreements and other interpersonal challenges can help people living in communities that have been ravaged by high rates of fractured families to develop better couple and parenting relationships and build their own social networks.

This is why several members of the Family Breakdown Working Group have come from leading-edge organisations working within the social or voluntary sector, and why we cast the net for evidence widely across this sector in seeking solutions (although we are obviously aware that practice is of variable quality within this sector as in any other).

Marriage is a social justice issue

If the Government is to send a clear message about the importance of stability for children's outcomes, it cannot afford to be neutral or non-committal about marriage. The rise in cohabitation is closely related to the increase in lone parenthood and in children ceasing to live with both parents:

- Understanding Society data shows that 93 per cent of all couples who are still together by the time a child is 15 are married;⁶²
- The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) has found that parents who cohabit are approximately three times more likely than parents who are married to have separated by the time the child reaches the age of five;⁶³
- Fewer than one in 10 married parents have split by the time a child is five compared with more than one in three who were not married. Where parents were not living together when a child is born, the break-up rate (five years later) is a staggering 60 per cent;⁶⁴
- Cohabiting couples are around three times more likely to have split up by the time their child is aged five.⁶⁵

The 'selection effects' argument (i.e. that those who marry tend to be better able, from the outset to make relationships work, because they have higher incomes, better education, more social support etc.) is inadequate to explain these significant differences in outcome. Even after controlling for education and income, cohabiting parents are between two and two and a half times more likely to break-up than equivalent married couples.⁶⁶

Analysis of the Census data (see Figure 2 below) does, however, reveal a social gradient in marriage – poorer parents are 50 per cent less likely to be married. This matters because their children are more likely to experience relationship breakdown and undergo the major transition this entails on several occasions; the same dataset shows poorer parents are over four times as likely to be single parents. However, marriage is a social justice issue; aspirations to marry are high across the social classes but further down the ladder it becomes harder to realise those aspirations for economic and cultural reasons.⁶⁷

60 per cent believe marriage has become less important and this is a bad thing.⁶⁸

62 Benson H, *The myth of 'long-term stable relationships' outside marriage*, The Marriage Foundation, May 2013

63 Analysis of Millennium Cohort Study corroborated by Goodman A and Greaves E, *Cohabitation, marriage and relationship stability*, IFS Briefing Note BNI07, London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010

64 Ibid

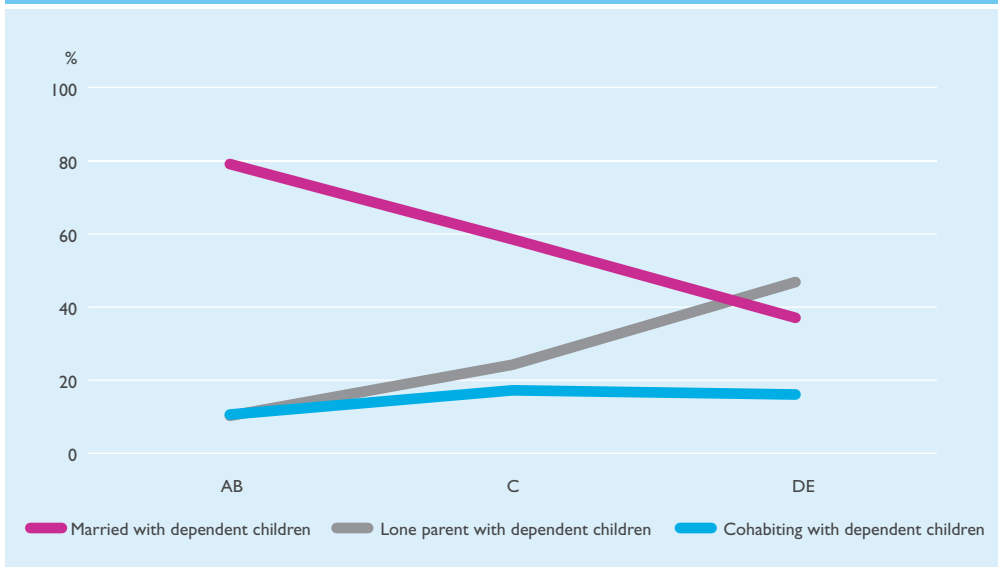
65 Ibid, p4

66 Analysis of Millennium Cohort Study corroborated by Goodman A and Greaves E, *Cohabitation, marriage and relationship stability*, IFS Briefing Note BNI07, London: Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010. The IFS research found that differences in stability between marriage and cohabitation became statistically insignificant after controlling for further unobserved characteristics such as relationship quality and unexpected/early pregnancy. However, we contend that it is more likely than not that these factors or their effects are themselves significantly influenced by marriage. Although we agree that failure to control at all would overstate the effect of marriage we contend that by 'over-controlling' in this way they understated its actual effects. They admitted that this was a potential danger in their statistical model.

67 de Waal A, *Second Thoughts on the Family*, London: Civitas, 2008

68 CSJ/YouGov polling of 1,722 British adults, November 2012

Figure 2: Social Grade of parents by household composition⁶⁹



We therefore challenge any assumption that the social gradient in marriage is driven by personal choice and consider it important to enable people to make commitments that will put their relationships on a surer footing, especially where children are concerned.

However marriage is not a magic bullet; although rituals matter and going through the act of marriage can help to raise awareness of the explicit commitment it entails, it is in the behaviours and attitudes that tend to be more associated with marriage than with more informal relationships where key differences lie.

For example, a deliberate long-term orientation towards the relationship can help to develop a willingness to sacrifice for the other partner; often with the understanding that this will be reciprocated in the future. Research suggests many slide into cohabiting, which can lead to long-term consequences and the pressures they bring (for example, being tied into a rental or mortgage agreement or having a baby together), before a quality decision has been taken by both parties that they want this relationship to have a future.⁷⁰ The difference between 'sliding and deciding' is likely to be an important explanation of the greater instability of non-marital relationships.

A strategic approach at the local and national level

Our research on the scale of family breakdown drives home the need for a coherent and strategic approach to its prevention and the amelioration of its effects. Although it is a

69 Created using data on 'one family only' households. Social grade is approximated by ONS. ONS, *Census: DC6127EW – Approximated social grade by household composition*, Nomis, 2011

70 Stanley S and Rhoades G, 'Marriages at Risk: Relationship formation and opportunities for relationship education', pp21–44 in Callan S and Benson H (eds), *What Works in Relationship Education?*, Doha, Qatar: Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development, 2009

problem spanning all social strata, its greater prevalence among the poorest and its potential to undermine all other poverty-fighting attempts, means this is where efforts should primarily be focused. We believe fundamental reforms at the local and national level are crucial to success in this policy area and to driving through all the other recommendations we make in this paper.

First, the emphasis on families should be driven from the top in each local authority area, redesigning Children's Services as Family Services (appointing a Director of Family Services) and developing a strategy for strengthening and supporting relationships. As family breakdown is recognised as a key driver of poverty its prevention must be championed as an integral part of every local Child Poverty Strategy. This will require working with local partners such as Relate and other grassroots organisations who have demonstrated their effectiveness and cost-effectiveness in improving relationship quality and reducing family breakdown.⁷¹

Second, we need local, easily accessible support for families and relationships based in or connected to existing but substantially refocused Children's Centres, renamed 'Family Hubs' in recognition that they are to be nerve centres of family strengthening activity. Key statutory activities such as antenatal care and birth registration will need to be based onsite with the aim of ensuring families are connected to other statutory, voluntary and private sector support within the Hub or elsewhere in the community. Our vision for this is outlined in Chapter Two and referred to throughout this report.

Third, we need a national, Cabinet-level champion to ensure the Government maintains its focus regardless of the many other pressures on its attention and resource, and this is outlined in greater detail below:

A Cabinet-level Minister for Families

We recognise that this Government has taken some limited action to address our high levels of family breakdown, spending more on prevention than any previous administration (through its relationship support grant of £30m over four years), recognising it as a key driver of poverty and launching a family stability review.⁷² There has also been a range of other programmes spread over different government departments aimed at strengthening families, reducing pressures on them and supporting them after separation and these are listed in the box below.

71 Developing a quality kite mark which can be visibly displayed outside premises where counselling and relationship education services are available will increase public trust in such services and awareness that they exist.

72 See HM Government, *Social Justice: Transforming Lives*: London: The Stationery Office, 2012

Coalition action/spending to strengthen families and tackle family breakdown (and responsible department)

- £30 million for relationship support for couples (2011–2015) – Department for Education (DfE);⁷³
- £5 million for CANparent – vouchers for free parenting classes to all parents of children aged zero to six in three trial areas (2012–2014);⁷⁴
- New telephone and online help services for parents of teenagers, particularly in disadvantaged and vulnerable families, aiming to improve outcomes when young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviour running from April 2013 to March 2015 – DfE;⁷⁵
- Commitment to double the number of Family Nurse Partnerships to 13,000 and recruit an additional 4,200 health visitors by 2015 – Department of Health (DH);⁷⁶
- Troubled Families programme: £448 million over 2012–15; a further £200 million for 2015–16, extended to a further 400,000 families – Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)/DfE/Home Office (HO)/Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/Ministry of Justice (MoJ)/DH;⁷⁷
- Shared parental leave (parents can split 52 weeks' leave between them coming into force April 2015 – BIS;⁷⁸
- An 'expected investment of an extra £10 million for an additional 10,000 family mediations' over 2013–14 – MoJ;⁷⁹
- £20 million over three years until 2015 to support separated and separating families as part of changes to the Child Maintenance system – DWP;⁸⁰
- Transferrable Tax Allowance for married couples worth a maximum of £1,050 per family (10 per cent of the personal allowance) costing £515 million from 2015–16 – HM Treasury (HMT);⁸¹
- Funding of up to £200k a year for existing services and up to £200k a year for new services (2011–2015) for local authorities setting up evidence-based interventions, including Functional Family Therapy, the Family Drug and Alcohol Court, Multi Systemic Therapy, Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care and Family Group Conferences – DfE.⁸²

73 Department for Education, *Relationship support*, London: Department for Education, 2012

74 These are Middlesbrough, Camden and High Peak in Derbyshire. DWP, *250,000 more children living with both birth parents*, DWP, 2014

75 DWP, Press Release, *Putting children first – £20 million to help separating families*, 25 January 2012 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/putting-children-first-20-million-to-help-separating-families> (2/7/14)]

76 Ibid. As of April 2014 there were 9,959 full-time equivalent health visitors in post in England – 1,867 more health visitors than at the May 2010 baseline of 8,092 (growth of 23%). The Government accept that a further 2,333 new health visitors are required in order to reach the target of 4,200 new health visitors by April 2015 (HC Deb 28 April 2014, c455w).

77 DCLG, Press Release, *Prime Minister welcomes troubled families progress*, 1 May 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-welcomes-troubled-families-progress> (30/6/14)]; DCLG, *Troubled Families programme receives extra £200 million boost*, 24 June 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/troubled-families-programme-receives-extra-200-million-boost> (30/6/14)]

78 HM Government, *The Shared Parental Leave Regulations 2014*

79 HM Government, *Progress on commitments in Social Justice: transforming lives*, HM Government, 2013

80 DWP, Press Release, *Putting children first – £20 million to help separating families*, 25 January 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/putting-children-first-20-million-to-help-separating-families> (2/7/14)]

81 HM Treasury, *Budget 2014*, London: HM Treasury, 2014, Table 2.1 and Table 2.2

82 Department for Education, *Improving the adoption system and services for looked-after children*, 2014; Department for Education, *Prospectus: Delivering intensive interventions for looked after children and those on the edge of care or custody and their families*, London: Department for Education, 2011

To ensure action to strengthen families and address father absence is concerted and sustained, there needs to be a strong lead from national government requiring, at the very least, a named Cabinet-level Minister with the vision and ambition to tackle our epidemic levels of family breakdown. We would argue further that there needs to be recognition in Whitehall that families, the foundation of a strong society, cannot be adequately supported as a sub-issue in the Department for Education.

'Whole family life is spread across disparate government departments. There is no one person waking up and thinking family. Family representation in the Government would make a huge difference.'

Paula Pridham, Director of Service Delivery, Care for the Family

A highly-focused Department for Education is essential to realise the ambitious scale of school reform currently being undertaken and which we endorse, not least because major planks of that reform programme – such as free schools and the Pupil Premium – were key recommendations in our seminal 2007 report, *Breakthrough Britain*. Given the enormity of the challenge of family breakdown (and other major issues facing families) it is unlikely that we will ever see the necessary sea-change by simply tagging 'the family' onto this or another Government department's agenda. Indeed the slimming down and de-prioritisation of the DfE's Relationship Support division shows how easy it is for family issues to slip off the table.

Although there is a commitment to continue funding the Troubled Families programme until 2016 further progress on this and the other initiatives outlined above is by no means guaranteed. There is a very real danger that progress to date could stall or be washed away as other priorities take precedence yet the family strengthening agenda needs to be radically stepped up.

To ensure this happens there needs to be a Ministry (or Department) for Families led by someone with the necessary seniority to provide a strong family-focused lead within Cabinet, coordinate other departmental efforts and drive through the recommendations we make in this report. It might be argued that as families are a cross-cutting issue it would be impractical and unnecessary to base them in one department or ministry but as the box above makes clear, a Cabinet-level Family Minister would command a significant level of public funding. Moreover, basing them within their own department would ensure there was adequate analytical resource for policy development.

Summary of recommendations

- Local authorities to rebadge and redesign Children's Services as Family Services (signalling a desire for culture change by appointing a Director of Family Services) and develop a strategy for strengthening and supporting relationships to prevent family breakdown as part of their local Child Poverty Strategy.
- The appointment of a Cabinet-level minister who will champion the family agenda at the highest levels of government: a Secretary of State with clear accountability for families who is resourced at a departmental level to drive through a programme to strengthen families, boost stability and uphold fatherhood and its importance.

PART ONE

Laying foundations
for safe, stable and
nurturing relationships

chapter one

Relationship education in schools

Introduction

By the time they sit their GCSEs 46 per cent of all children are not living with both their parents and one in four see violence played out in intimate relationships in the home.^{83, 84} Given that so many young people do not experience secure and stable family relationships or know they are even attainable, it is vital they are able to learn about them.

'If young people see only destructive relationships, without being judgmental or stigmatising, it is wrong to say this is OK. When given opportunity to reflect young people are often aware of things they don't want to be repeated in their own relationships. We want young people to see healthy relationships modelled.'

'Our aim at Romance Academy is to break the cycle of damaging relationships in the UK— we do this by giving young people the skills to build and sustain healthy relationships, raising self-esteem (which lowers risk-taking behaviour), developing their own values and taking responsibility for their behaviour.'

Jason Royce, CEO of The Romance Academy in evidence to the CSJ

The epidemic of family breakdown we face in this country demands a response from schools: they have an important part to play in educating the next generation about relationships from the start and laying a foundation of understanding in the next generation about the importance of safe, stable and nurturing relationships for their wellbeing.⁸⁵

83 Department of Work and Pensions, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework April 2013*, London: DWP, 2013

84 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013, p26; Radford L et al, *Child Abuse and neglect in the UK today*, London: NSPCC, 2011, p47

85 See Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preventing Child Maltreatment Through the Promotion of Safe, Stable, and Nurturing Relationships Between Children and Caregivers*, CDC Strategic Direction (undated); Mercy J, and Saul J, 'Creating a Healthier Future Through Early Interventions for Children', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 301 (21), 2009, pp2262–2264

Particularly when modelled by a supportive school culture, schools will also be investing in pupils' educational achievement by helping them build skills in this area; the classroom learning environment benefits greatly from better relationships. Achieving this, especially with vulnerable young people, requires schools to build strong alliances with parents and voluntary sector organisations with the expertise to teach this important issue.

The strongest message to emerge from one major government-backed study on improving relationships was that 'relationship education – learning about and preparing for relationships – needs to begin as early as possible.'⁸⁶ Relationship education appropriate to the age of pupils enables understanding, values and skills to be developed in children and young people and can also help to normalise discussions about relationships, thereby making it more likely they will ask for help in the future if their adult relationships falter.

Rising to the challenge of teenage relationship abuse

Although all children and young people are likely to benefit from learning about such issues, the need to focus attention here is even more acute given the shocking prevalence of abusive teenage relationships:

- One in three girls and one in six boys experience sexual violence from a partner⁸⁷ and this is often seen as normal and inevitable;⁸⁸ and
- Many young people show a limited understanding of 'consent': sex without consent where those involved knew each other was often not seen as rape.⁸⁹



Young person attending Brook Clinic

86 Walker J, Barrett H, Wilson G and Chang Y-S, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p99

87 NSPCC, *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*, London: NSPCC, 2009, p5

88 Coy M, Kelly L, Elvines F, Garner M and Kanyeredzi A, 'Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape': *How young people in England understand sexual consent*, Office of the Children's Commissioner, November 2013

89 Ibid

Going beyond sex education

Schools bound by the National Curriculum are only required to teach the sex education components of the science curriculum: anatomy, puberty, reproduction, HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In academy schools, even this very limited sex education is not compulsory. While the previous Government commissioned a review in 2008, and accepted its recommendation to make PSHE statutory, provision for it in the Children, Schools and Families Bill 2010 was deleted (largely due to lack of parliamentary time).⁹⁰

The Teenage Pregnancy Advisory Group, the Sex Education Forum and others have long called on government to make PSHE, and sex and relationship education (SRE) within PSHE, statutory parts of the National Curriculum. This is not least because evidence from the previous Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy showed that, among other things, giving a high priority to SRE in schools was a key factor in reducing rates of teenage pregnancy.⁹¹ Similarly the 2013 Cross-Party Inquiry into Unplanned Pregnancy recommended SRE be statutory to allow for a consistent and comprehensive programme across the country.⁹²

Evidence suggests that these campaigners are right to call for major improvements in provision:

- Ofsted reported in 2013 that PSHE education required improvement or was inadequate in 40 per cent of schools, and SRE required improvement in over a third of all schools;⁹³
- A quarter of young people do not receive any SRE in school (and of those who do, a quarter say their teacher is not able to teach it well) and one-fifth of young people on average rate their SRE as poor.⁹⁴

However, we are not convinced that making PSHE and SRE compulsory would necessarily achieve the desired effect of improving children and young people's relational health and skills. While there is obviously some overlap between sex and relationships, these are also in many ways very different topics.

Conflating relationship education with sex education has proven to be problematic, mainly because the 'relationships' aspects are inadequately emphasised and can be more or less completely ignored.⁹⁵

90 Hansard, Written Ministerial Statements, 27 April 2009 [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090427/wmstext/90427m0001.htm> (19/6/14)]; PHSE Association, *PSHE provisions removed from Children, Schools and Families Bill*, 7 April 2010; [accessed via: https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news_detail.aspx?ID=1093 (19/6/14)]; The Guardian, *Sex education and primary curriculum reforms abandoned*, 7 April 2010; Department for Education, *Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education*, 2013

91 Department for Education and Skills, *Teenage Pregnancy Next Steps: Guidance for Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts on Effective Delivery of Local Strategies*, Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills, 2006, Chapter 5

92 Rudd A, Osborne S, Burt L, Beer G and James M, *The Morning After: A Cross Party Inquiry into Unplanned Pregnancy*, London: 2020 Health, 2013, p2

93 Ofsted, *Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2013, p6

94 Brook, *UK sex and relationships education fails to prepare young people for modern day life*, Press Release, 12 October 2011 [accessed via: <http://www.brook.org.uk/index.php/what-s-new/latest-news?view=article&id=91> (21/03/14)]; UK Youth Parliament, *SRE: Are You Getting It?*, London: UK Youth Parliament, 2007, p4

95 Rudd A, Osborne S, Burt L, Beer G and James M, *The Morning After: A Cross Party Inquiry into Unplanned Pregnancy*, London: 2020 Health, 2013, p9–10

- Research on young people's experience of sex education aged 14–25, found that 43 per cent had not been taught about what was 'good and bad about a relationship' and one in three did not learn about sexual consent;⁹⁶
- A survey of 22,000 young people by the UK Youth Parliament found 43 per cent had not been taught about personal relationships at school.⁹⁷

Rebadging the subject as 'Relationships and Sex Education' (instead of 'Sex and Relationships education') is frequently argued for but it is unlikely that this in itself will ensure adequate attention is focused on developing relationship skills. For this reason, we reiterate what we have said previously and argue instead for Relationship Education (Rel Ed, as RE already stands for Religious Education).^{98,99} This should be made compulsory in its own right, in the same way and for the same reasons as the biological aspects of sex education. This would mean national standards could be applied and children could not be withdrawn from it.¹⁰⁰

Primary and secondary schools must teach this with age-appropriate content and methods, emphasising the importance of respect, tolerance and commitment. A module must aim to prepare children and young people for life-long relationships with family (including couple relationships and parenting) and friends, as well as with people at work and in the community. It would also include self-respect, recognising and handling bullying and peer pressure, what consent means and its legal implications, signs of an unhealthy, abusive and/or exploitative relationship and conflict management. It could be included, for example, in PSHE, Citizenship or run during tutor group time.

Our proposal avoids confronting any reluctance to make SRE compulsory due to sensitivities around mandating discussions in schools about young people's attitudes towards sex. It focuses attention where it needs to be: on the basic relational knowledge, skills and values that all young people need for adolescent and adult life. These are as essential as literacy and numeracy and are based around the values of equality and respect, which should be uncontroversial in our society and therefore not optional to understand and learn.

While making a subject statutory does not automatically lead to improved quality, it signals that the Government is intervening early to challenge the culture of relationship breakdown.

A relationship education module, focussed on helping children and adolescents to build respectful and non-abusive relationships needs to be made statutory within the curriculum and be backed up by a supportive school culture and learning across other subjects.

96 National Children's Bureau, *New survey finds children and young people aren't being taught about consent in school*, 8 January 2014 [accessed via: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/news/new-survey-finds-children-and-young-people-aren%E2%80%99t-being-taught-about-consent-in-school> (08/01/14)]

97 UK Youth Parliament, *SRE: Are You Getting It?* London: UK Youth Parliament, 2007, pp4, 6

98 For example, Hansard, Grand Committee, 11 November 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/131111-gc0001.htm> (30/6/14)]

99 CSJ, *Beyond Violence: Breaking cycles of domestic abuse*, London: CSJ, 2012, See section 4.3.3.2

100 This measure would send a strong signal about the importance of Rel Ed to academies and free schools not bound by the national curriculum.

Surveys reveal that most teenagers intend to marry – nine out of 10 under 16-year-olds want to ‘tie the knot’ in the future, and nine out of 10 young women dream of a white wedding.¹⁰¹ Research-based differences between marriage and cohabitation (in terms of stability and the way people can find it easier to slide into cohabitation rather than decide to marry) need to be brought to the attention of young people, as should the effects of family breakdown.¹⁰²

Obviously many young people will have experienced their parents splitting up but, rather than stigmatising them by discussing it, helping them and others understand the deep ways they can be affected will help to acknowledge the pain and difficulties they may be experiencing.

Programmes should be delivered that build the motivation to form equal, respectful relationships and the skills with which to do so. In our report *Beyond Violence* we presented two programmes which successfully do this – *Within my Reach* and *Appreciative Enquiry* – and below we present examples of promising practice.¹⁰³ However we acknowledge that there is an ongoing need to build a broader evidence base of effective programmes and approaches.¹⁰⁴

Programmes have to move beyond theory; they need to teach children how to put learning into practice, such as around conflict resolution, and experiential work is vital. Obviously this will require training for teachers but Rel Ed need not all be delivered by the school and we recommend the involvement of other professionals, including those within voluntary sector services.

Role of non-school providers and parents

Given that most teachers are not specifically trained to deliver Rel Ed and may be reluctant to do so, it is important that the valuable expertise (and understanding of young people) found within many national and local voluntary sector organisations is also drawn on.¹⁰⁵ We have found good examples of organisations who have helped schools develop a culture that understands and values relationships.¹⁰⁶

For example, CSJ Alliance member Family Links trains teachers in the Nurturing Programme with the aim of changing the culture around how everyone in the school relates and enabling schools to develop a behaviour policy which is based on positive, healthy relationships.

Following their training with Teach First, 97 per cent of participants were more confident in their ability to deliver nurturing classroom practices and 98 per cent who attended follow-on workshops agreed that the programme helped them support the emotional needs of pupils

101 Survey of 5,000 teenagers in Bliss magazine, March 2004, and survey of 5,000 women reported in the Daily Telegraph, October 2004, cited in *Care, Changing Trends In Family Life*, London: Care, 2006

102 See Stanley S, Rhoades G, and Whitton, S, 'Commitment: Functions, Formation, and the Securing of Romantic Attachment', *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 2, 2010, pp243–257

103 Centre for Social Justice, *Beyond Violence: Breaking cycles of domestic abuse*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012, p87

104 See Relationships Alliance, *Opportunities for Relationship Support: A set of diverse case studies*, Relationships Alliance, 2014, p16

105 Such as Brook (see: <http://www.brook.org.uk/>) and the FPA's Speakeasy (see: <http://www.fpa.org.uk/commission-us/about-speakeasy>)

106 See for example, Family Links (see: <https://www.familylinks.org.uk/schools>) and Place2Be (see: <http://www.place2be.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-schools/>)

and effectively manage challenging behaviour.¹⁰⁷ Children in Family Links-trained schools also develop their own social and emotional literacy through Circle Time, sessions which were rated very highly by pupils themselves (scoring 8.32 on a scale of 0–10).¹⁰⁸

Effective Rel Ed involves a partnership between home and school although many parents lack the confidence, skills and knowledge to talk to their children about relationships.¹⁰⁹ Organisations which work with schools and also help parents to understand and support their children in this area, like CSJ Alliance Award winner Love4Life, are especially effective.¹¹⁰

Good practice example: Love4Life

Love4Life work with girls (11–19) from four of the top five most deprived estates in Leicestershire, each of which is a teenage pregnancy 'hotspot'. Many have no contact with their biological fathers, often have to act as 'parent' to younger siblings due to their mothers' incapacity, have no positive or accessible support networks, and all suffer chronic pressures to do with sex, image and gang 'loyalty'. Their self-esteem and aspirations are minimal and they frequently repeat the cycles of hopelessness they see around them.

Their teenage years are characterised by numerous, short-term sexual relationships, and they frequently reject school and learning, develop substance and self-harm addictions, fall out violently with family and friends, eat poorly or hardly at all, get involved in crime, and end up as young mothers.

Love4Life go into homes, meet with parents, support the whole family in multi-agency meetings and hold group discussions where girls can explore their ideas, thereby living out a model for young people to follow; a new cycle which shows how they can relate effectively with each other.

Results are impressive.

- 86 per cent of girls reported that relationships within the home became less volatile, and that they were now able to communicate feelings more effectively;¹¹¹
- 95 per cent reported that they now knew what a healthy relationship looked like;
- 82 per cent reported marked improvement in 'I can recognize healthy relationships' and 'I feel confident about my sexual health';
- 80 per cent have reported marked improvement in 'I can cope well with new challenges' and 'I am able to handle my emotions'; and
- 100 per cent of girls reconnected with school learning after involvement in Love4Life.

Connecting with schools

Love4Life have developed strong relationships with school nurses who work with the most vulnerable young people and make referrals to Love4Life when their support cannot meet a young person's specific needs. They also sit on the local Teenage Parent Forum, Behaviour Partnership and multi-agency meetings for individual young people alongside someone from the school. Through these settings strong working relationships have been built with schools who can choose from a range of support (such as group work or a one to one intervention).

107 Grant S, *Evaluation of the Nurturing Programme for Parents and Carers: Full Report January 2012*, Oxford: Family Links, 2012

108 Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Practitioner-Led Research project in collaboration with Hampshire Educational Psychology service. (2007–08).

109 Sex Education Forum, *Does sex and relationships education work? A Sex Education Forum evidence briefing*, London: NCB, 2010, p4

110 As part of the umbrella organisation Twenty Twenty (see <http://www.twentytwenty.org.uk/home/>)

111 Evidence submitted to CSJ by TwentyTwenty

Although cash-strapped and busy, schools see huge benefit from bringing in external professionals because the pressures on teachers and pastoral care can be so great they often do not have the time or capacity to follow through with at-risk cases, leaving these students feeling let down and rejected, compounding their problems. Young people also benefit from having a clean slate with Love4Life; a fresh start is hugely important.

Moreover, they are a team of highly skilled professionals (trained counsellors, sex and relationship educators and mentors) whose sole aim is to deliver social and emotional sessions; again taking the pressure off teachers who have their own chosen subjects.

Free funded places also demonstrate up-front the value of their support before schools have to start paying.

The example of Love4Life shows the importance of voluntary sector organisations taking the initiative to prove their worth to schools, but this must be seen in the context of wider agendas. Local authorities need to recognise the clear public health need, and Police and Crime Commissioners are increasingly aware of the wisdom of working 'upstream' to prevent domestic abuse; an integrated approach demands that they jointly commission external providers such as charities with or for schools. For example, we heard how Hull City Council funded provision of voluntary sector services for schools (as part of their Teenage Pregnancy Strategy) and managed to standardise sex and relationships education across the city.

We recommend that local public health and other commissioners co-fund (from their prevention budgets) external organisations, such as charities, with professional expertise in relationship education to deliver this in schools and train teachers where possible and appropriate.

Summary of recommendations

- Schools have an important role to play in addressing the culture of relationship breakdown through a compulsory relationship education module teaching children and adolescents the importance of commitment, the benefits of stability and the advantages of two parents being involved in family life. This should help children build respectful and non-abusive relationships and be modelled by a supportive school culture
- Local public health and other commissioners to co-fund (from their prevention budgets) third sector providers who have professional expertise in relationship education to deliver this in schools and train teachers.

PART TWO

Forming and
maintaining healthy
relationships

chapter two

Family Hubs

Introduction

In England there are over 3,000 Sure Start Children's Centres managed by or on behalf of local authorities: infrastructure with invaluable potential to transform families.¹¹² We outline our vision for maximising this potential here and the next chapter explains how we would ensure greater father involvement.

Most notably we believe Children's Centres have a much more influential role to play in ensuring all families get the support they need, especially for those who need it most, and in helping to prevent relationship breakdown. By the time they are five years old almost half of all children in low-income neighbourhoods are not living with both their parents – three times the number of those in middle- to high-income households.¹¹³

'At the moment, children's centres are ignoring what other groups are doing, taking them for granted, or actually seeing them as a threat. Rather than simply pushing the services they already provide, Sure Start staff need to work with the community and what's going on there. Activities run by people in the community and with a heart to serve are always going to engage more people than the statutory sector: people feel a genuine welcome and don't feel like a statistic.'

Joanna Gordon, Director, Daniel's Den

The original aim of Sure Start Children's Centres was to give children the best possible start in life through health and family support, emphasising outreach and community development with a particular focus on parents who might struggle most.¹¹⁴ The evaluation of Children's

¹¹² As of 30 November 2013, there were 3,055 statutory children's centres – a reduction from 3,615 in 2010. There have only been 65 outright closures since 2010, with the remainder of the change resulting from reorganisations and mergers (HC Deb 18 December 2013, c679w) [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131218/text/131218w0002.htm> (23/6/14)]

¹¹³ Department of Work and Pensions, *Social Justice: transforming lives – one year on*, London: The Stationery Office, 2013, p13

¹¹⁴ Centre for Social Justice, *The Next Generation*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2008, p112

Centres in 2013 showed that the original model of Sure Start centres as standalone units has already begun to change towards a wider model of service delivery and we want to consolidate and build upon this trend.¹¹⁵

A new vision for Sure Start – Family Hubs

After almost 15 years, we believe a new vision for Sure Start Children's Centres is urgently required.¹¹⁶ They must be seen as hubs in the community, co-locating or coordinating vital frontline agencies (and involving schools) and tackling the root causes of poverty and low social mobility from one generation to the next, particularly focussing on family breakdown. Such help is particularly needed in many disadvantaged communities where, as we showed in *Fractured Families*, family breakdown is now the norm.¹¹⁷

We recommend that Children's Centres become Sure Start *Family Hubs*: local 'nerve centres' which enable parents to access all family-related support including universal services and specialist help to meet their most pressing needs.

Family Hubs will use a 'hub and spokes' model with the primary purpose of providing accessible, friendly and comprehensive support to strengthen local families.

Operating according to a new and extended core purpose (see box below) they will:

- Be the 'go to' place for any parent (including fathers) to access services or information about all family-related matters including: birth registration, antenatal and postnatal services, information on childcare, employment and debt advice, substance misuse services, relationship and parenting support, local activities for families, and support for families separating;
- Maximise impact and reduce costs of statutory services through co-location and co-ordination, including services for children over five years; and
- Link with activities provided by volunteers through local voluntary and community sector (VCS), faith and parent groups who can reach families in communities that do not tend to come through the doors of mainstream Children's Centres.

Currently the core purpose of children's centres is 'to improve outcomes for young children and their families and reduce inequalities between families in greatest need and their peers in:

- child development and school readiness;
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and
- child and family health and life chances.¹¹⁸

115 Goff J et al, *Evaluation of Children's Centres in England, Strand 3: Delivery of Family Services by Children's Centres*, Oxford: Department for Education and University of Oxford, 2013, p88

116 Sure Start started in 2002, but built on Sure Start Local Programmes which started in 1999

117 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

118 Department for Education, *Sure Start Children's Centres statutory guidance*, London: Department for Education, 2013, p7

The Education Select Committee concluded, however, that this is 'too vague and broadly worded and should be reviewed to focus on achievable outcomes for children and families and to recognise the difference between centres. This should include reaching clarity on who centres are for – children or parents – and what their priority should be.'¹¹⁹

We concur with this judgment and our proposed reform to the core purpose of Children's Centres takes their criticisms into account:

Proposed Family Hub core purpose

The core purpose of Sure Start Family Hubs is to co-locate and coordinate all family services available within a community and provide a visible and welcoming access point for any parent (mothers and fathers) to appropriate support, services or information about family-related matters. Hubs should also coordinate statutory, voluntary and other sectors' efforts to address the root causes of family breakdown and poor child outcomes, and focus on:

- the stability and quality of family relationships – including couple and parent-child relationship – to prevent breakdown or minimise the impact of instability, where it occurs, on children's welfare (support for separating and separated parents would therefore be important);
- child development and school readiness;
- parenting aspirations and parenting skills; and
- child and family health and life chances.

The 2006 Childcare Act will require amending to specify that Family Hubs would connect families to:

- early years provision (early education and childcare), ensuring a strong offer for all children from a range of providers;
- social service functions of the local authority relating to young children, parents and prospective parents, enabling families to connect with additional support services available locally for prevention of crisis escalation or step down from crisis;
- health services relating to young children, parents and prospective parents including perinatal services, to raise awareness of all services available and ensure vulnerable families are picked up by other relevant provision;
- training and employment services to assist parents or prospective parents, through qualified Information, Advice & Guidance professionals who can support parents to access appropriate opportunities locally.

The 'go to' place for *both* parents to access services or information about all family-related matters

Children's Centres currently provide a range of programmes and activities for families. Whilst there is no doubt that many of these have provided essential links into more vulnerable families, we believe there would be more gain if these centres became the recognised access point to all local provision. 'Family Information Teams' (typically now in council offices) would be based at the Hub, for example. The aim is to link parents up with locally approved provision ('spokes') (including VCS and faith group-led activities) and information about parenting and

¹¹⁹ House of Commons Education Committee, *Foundation Years: Sure Start Children's Centres*, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, Volume I, p3

relationship support, finding a job or getting out of debt, and specialist health services such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Speech and Language Therapy and drug and alcohol dependency.

Ensuring families have access to information and support on relationships and parenting

The Family Hub team will proactively develop a comprehensive menu of support for relationships and parenting to either signpost people towards or deliver within their own premises. This will include help in the early years and beyond, building on much excellent parenting support and drawing on proven interventions, including those outlined elsewhere in this report. Anyone accessing the Hub will be given information about this so it is easy for them to connect as appropriate. (Chapter Four describes what is needed to support couple relationships and the role for Family Hubs if we are to prevent divorce and separation where possible.)

Examples of where couple support has been made available in Children's Centres

Greenwich MIND in partnership with the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships and local providers of parenting support programmes ran post-natal support groups and parenting workshops for parents with or at risk of depression in a local Children's Centre. These specifically included a focus on the co-parenting relationship, not least in terms of how it is affected by adjusting to parenthood – evaluations showed that relationship quality and mental health improved as a result.

They also provided courses of couple counselling; evaluation showed that many of the couples who took up this service had serious mental health problems, had low relationship satisfaction and found it very hard to communicate with each other about issues that caused most personal distress in ways that led to them feeling better understood and supported. As a result of the course, depression reduced and relationship satisfaction increased, more couples were living together at the end of the counselling than at the beginning, and the couples rated the service they received very highly.¹²⁰

Providing support for separating families

We have in the past urged the development of 'extended Sure Start'¹²¹ which would, as the name suggests, extend what is currently available in Children's Centres and make reliable help, advice and support widely available, ideally out-of-hours (evenings and weekend) for separating and separated parents and couples at risk of separation. The new core purpose for Family Hubs should include this extended offer because helping separating and separated families to develop effective parenting plans and other arrangements through a range of quasi-legal, mediation and other relationships services, makes it less likely they will go through adversarial and damaging court processes.¹²²

¹²⁰ Clulow, C., Donaghy, M., 'Developing the couple perspective in parenting support: evaluation of a service initiative for vulnerable families' *Journal of Family Therapy*, 32, 2010, pp142–168

¹²¹ For example, Centre for Social Justice, *Response: Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

¹²² Parkinson, P., 'The idea of family relationship centres in Australia', *Family Court Review*, Vol. 51 No. 2, April 2013, pp195–213

Some existing Children's Centres already run such programmes and occasionally provide supervised contact facilities (see box below).¹²³ However, provision is very patchy: the 4Children 2013 *Children's Centre Census* found three-quarters of Children's Centres did not expect to be involved in relationship support programmes in the year ahead.¹²⁴

We have previously described in some detail¹²⁵ how we could follow the lead of other countries such as Australia and Norway which have government-funded Family Relationship Centres in response to their high rates of relationship breakdown. In this country we are beginning to see community-based facilities emerge very slowly (without any public funding or government assistance). However, government involvement and leadership is vital to a high-profile, national roll-out of a range of quasi-legal and other relationship services in existing community infrastructure. Those existing pioneering centres provide important learning opportunities for policy-makers.

Good practice example: Separated Families

Separated Families is a not-for-profit organisation which works with everyone affected by family separation to achieve better outcomes for children. They run a Family Separation Clinic to help parents build and maintain strong cooperative parenting agreements through:

- therapeutic mediation, parent coaching and counselling;
- training for professionals on working with separated/separating families; and
- parenting assessments for courts.

Separated Families also hosts an online Family Separation Hub,¹²⁶ through which they channel all of their expertise in working with families during and beyond family separation, and this forms a network for sharing learning and information across locally-based centres for separated families.

Island Separated Families¹²⁷ on the Isle of Wight, for example, is a community-based, non-profit social enterprise with a team of committed and highly experienced local professionals (with experience in mental health and family counselling, mediation, family law and psychotherapy) and parents with recognised qualifications and many years experience of fostering and working with families.

This centre works with many agencies including solicitors, social services, health visitors, schools and family centres, to offer support around issues such as relationship breakdown, supporting children through separation and enabling them to have a relationship with both parents (for example by helping parents with handovers and supervised 'contact'), domestic violence and child protection concerns, housing, debt (and other financial hardship) and isolation.

Similarly, Jersey Centre for Separated Families¹²⁸ (also linked into the Family Separation Network Hub) was launched in February – the first of four centres which will be launched in 2014, the others being in the Midlands and in North West England. It is built upon the model developed on the Isle of Wight and is another community-based support service drawing on local expertise and knowledge, without the need for government funding.

¹²³ For example, Carousel Children's Centre in Braintree, Essex, run by 4Children.

¹²⁴ 4Children, *Children's Centres Census 2013*, London: 4Children, 2013, p34

¹²⁵ Centre for Social Justice, *Every Family Matters: An in-depth review of family law in Britain*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2010, Section 3.3

¹²⁶ See Family Separation Hub, [accessed via: <http://www.familyseparationhub.net/> (25/6/14)]

¹²⁷ See Island Separated Families [accessed via: <http://www.islandseparatedfamilies.org.uk/about-us/> (25/6/14)]

¹²⁸ See The Jersey Centre for Separated Families [accessed via: <http://jerseyseparatedfamilies.org.je/> (25/6/14)]

The Centre is run entirely by volunteers in a local school that provides free premises. At its heart is a child contact centre where children can spend time with parents they do not live with and where parents can get help, if appropriate, to try and resolve problems surrounding contact. The Centre also offers a monthly Separated Parents Support Group.

The overall aim is to keep parents away from the court system and to provide them with the support and information that they need to ensure that their children continue to have close relationships with both parents.

70 per cent agree that support for separated parents should be available outside of normal hours.¹²⁹

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

Given the very high levels of family breakdown in this country we recommend that Family Hubs extend their core purpose to incorporate the vital work of Family Relationship Centres,¹³⁰ so all separating parents have access to support.

Maximise impact and reduce costs of statutory services

Co-location of services can maximise their impact in a time of ongoing (and potentially even more severe) public spending restraint. By setting ante- and post-natal services and birth registration in Family Hubs (see next chapter), Directors of Public Health and Health and Wellbeing Boards could help to ensure those expectant parents who are typically hardest to reach, access these and other public and community-based services and social networks early on. It should also ensure Hubs get the birth data they need to plan services. Where co-location in one building is not possible or is not the best solution, by acting as a local 'nerve-centre' the Hub would allow the coordination, integration and joining-up of services.

*'We recognise the important part played by universal services in making targeted services effective... Co-location with other services is less important than integration of services and shared objectives.'*¹³¹

61 per cent of mothers state they would welcome a 'cold call' from a local Children's Centre after having a new baby to inform them about the support and services available for new parents.¹³²

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

¹²⁹ CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

¹³⁰ See Centre for Social Justice, *Every Family Matters: An in-depth review of family law in Britain*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2010, Section 3.3

¹³¹ House of Commons Education Committee, *Foundation Years: Sure Start children's centres*, Fifth Report of Session 2013–14, Volume 1, p3

¹³² CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014



Perinatal services

We recommend that all perinatal services¹³³ are co-located or coordinated from within Family Hubs, including:

- Ante-natal appointments;
- Ante-natal and postnatal education classes;
- Health visiting;
- Post-natal support; and
- Maternal and infant mental health.

Good practice example: Oxford Parent Infant Project (OxPIP)

OxPIP have pioneered parent-infant psychotherapy, working with babies up to the age of two and their parents (normally but not exclusively the mother). Parents can refer themselves, or are referred by health and other early years professionals.

Their work focuses on the parent-baby relationship; therapists help parents respond to their babies' signals and develop strong, loving attachment and with a variety of difficulties including postnatal depression, sleeping or feeding problems, and anxieties about parenthood or a difficult birth experience.

Parenting improved on average two levels on the 10-point Parent Infant Relationship Global Assessment Scale, and parents with the lowest initial functioning improved the most.¹³⁴ The proportion of infants who were 'well adapted' or 'adapted' rose from three per cent to 29 per cent over the course of the intervention.¹³⁵ Parental depression rates dropped to less than a quarter, from about two-thirds.¹³⁶

¹³³ Conception to the first 18 months of life

¹³⁴ Spencer J, Tucker J, Cox L, and Sell A, Evaluation Report for OXPIP's clinical work, Oxford: OXPIP, 2012, cited in The Sutton Trust, *Baby Bonds: Parenting, attachment and a secure base for children*, Sutton Trust, 2014, p25–26

¹³⁵ Impetus-PEF, OXPIP's Performance Data: Overview and Insights, 2013, cited in The Sutton Trust, *Baby Bonds: Parenting, attachment and a secure base for children*, Sutton Trust, 2014, p25–26

¹³⁶ The Sutton Trust, *Baby Bonds: Parenting, attachment and a secure base for children*, Sutton Trust, 2014, p26

'A core part of our work in Children's Centres is with parents whose difficult experiences of being parented themselves (neglect, physical/sexual abuse, mental health problems, parental drug/alcohol misuse) have led to negative expectations of their relationships with their babies.'

'Working therapeutically with mothers who have had their children removed into care is essential, before they get pregnant again. They sometimes want to make up for the loss of that child by having another baby. There needs to be acknowledgement of and funding for work to pick up parents who have just had children removed.'

Jake Smith, OxPIP

Only 11 per cent of mothers say the majority of their antenatal appointments took place in a Children's Centre.

Only 16 per cent say their antenatal education classes took place in a Children's Centre.¹³⁷

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

Co-location of perinatal services was recommended by Rt. Hon. Frank Field's Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances,¹³⁸ and it is happening in some of the longest established Children's Centres. However the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Sure Start concluded that 'this vital collaboration remains a challenge at a local level.'¹³⁹ Co-location under one roof is less crucial than a 'holistic approach' involving multi-agency cooperation and coordinated practice which provides perinatal care for all families 'in an entirely seamless way and badged as a single service.'¹⁴⁰ As well as saving money this will also make information sharing far easier.

For the many centres already collaborating with health services this would take existing good practice to the next level.

- 81 per cent of Children's Centres have health visitor clinics;
- 79 per cent have baby weighing; and
- 64 per cent have ante-natal midwifery clinics within the centres.¹⁴¹

Fewer have antenatal classes and postnatal midwifery support, however: 47 per cent and 43 per cent respectively.¹⁴² Moreover, there is some worrying evidence that NHS-provided antenatal education is less and less available in any location: in 2011 44 per cent of low-income expectant mothers were not offered access to antenatal classes and three-quarters did not attend.

¹³⁷ CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1151 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

¹³⁸ Field F, *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*, London: Cabinet Office, 2010

¹³⁹ APPG Sure Start, *Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres*, London: 4Children, July 2013

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p14

¹⁴¹ 4Children, *Children's Centres Census 2013*, London: 4Children, 2013, p21

¹⁴² *Ibid*

77 per cent of mothers would support antenatal health appointments, antenatal education classes, and birth registration all being in their local Children's Centre.¹⁴³

CSJ/Bounty polling, June 2014

We recommend that local health and public health commissioners ensure all ante- and post-natal services are co-located within or co-ordinated from Family Hubs.

Good practice: Manchester

Manchester City Council has piloted an Early Years New Delivery Model (EYDM) to expand the reach of Sure Start Children's Centres by bringing together midwives, health visitors and outreach workers to identify parents and babies in need as early as possible. The model will have been rolled out fully across the whole of Manchester by April 2015.¹⁴⁴

Its purpose is to make better use of limited resources by picking up and addressing needs earlier: 'Initial financial modelling suggests that an additional £38 million invested each year would generate £45 million benefits across the public sector by year five, and more than £200 million benefits over 25 years.'¹⁴⁵

Now part of Manchester Children's Centres core purpose, the EYDM picks up all parents even before their child is born. It is an integrated assessment tool for all children from pre-birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage that combines universal services with a targeted approach for families in need.

Across Manchester, a lot of antenatal education classes as well as antenatal clinical appointments are held in Children's Centres, which means the health visitors get to know the families. Seven out of the 39 Children's Centres also offer birth registration, which enables outreach workers to get to know parents and let them know about other services.

Every new mother is visited, and assessed, at eight stages by the same, known, health visitor from 12 weeks prior to birth until their child's fifth birthday. Regular Joint Common Assessment Framework meetings between midwives, health visitors and outreach workers enable them to identify where more parents need more support. This is followed up with evidence-based interventions (e.g. parenting support, speech and language therapy) using a whole-family approach and 'assertive outreach' (ensuring people who are typically hard to reach, including those with severe mental health needs, substance misuse and a history of homelessness and offending stay in touch with services).¹⁴⁶

143 CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1154 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

144 Manchester City Council, *Report for Resolution, Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee*, Manchester: Manchester City Council, 4 February 2014

145 Greater Manchester evidence to the Communities and Local Government Committee, April 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmcomloc/163/163we08.htm> (28/05/14)]

146 Manchester City Council, *Report for Resolution, Young People and Children Scrutiny Committee*, Manchester: Manchester City Council, 4 February 2014

'An holistic assessment of need has enabled the early indicators of complex dependency to be identified and appropriate interventions delivered to prevent needs escalating. This is especially helpful for disadvantaged families who otherwise may not have received or sought support in the early stages.'

Janet White, Sure Start District Head of Centre, Manchester

Provision for families with children over five years

The 'hub and spoke' model means the important emphasis on early years support (to help parents give their children the best start) can remain core to the Family Hub's purpose, but parents of older children and teenagers will also be able to obtain the help they need through satellite facilities and services connected to, if not delivered from, the Hub. (Presently, three-fifths of Children's Centres do not offer regular services for children over five.)¹⁴⁷

'In order to tackle educational disadvantage, and to get all children "school ready", we have to break down the organisational and professional silos that exist between schools and early years provision. A "hub" model, where schools and other organisations work in partnership, is a major step forward.'

Dame Dana Ross-Wawrzynski, CEO of Bright Futures



¹⁴⁷ 4Children, *Children's Centres Census 2013*, London: 4Children, 2013, p26

Link local activities provided by volunteers through Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), faith and parent groups

The 'spokes' of the Family Hubs, the services in the community to which families would be connected by the Hub team, could be run in part by volunteers who were also benefiting from them, thereby returning to a key founding characteristic of Sure Start. Sir Norman Glass, one of its original architects writes:

*'[Sure Start] was structured to allow local people, particularly parents, to participate fully in determining the content and management of the programmes, in the light of their perceptions of what their areas needed... this programme would be 'owned' by local parents, local communities and those who worked in the programme.'*¹⁴⁸

Family Hubs will maximise both statutory services and local community assets (such as church-run parents/carers and toddlers groups and library-based story and rhyme times run by parents or library staff¹⁴⁹) and develop the networks which will help to provide all-important outreach into the community. Vital specialist family support interventions, typically provided by public services, can be greatly enhanced by community-based organisations. Chapter Five describes effective voluntary and statutory sector partnerships in local Troubled Families projects. Local VCS, faith or parent-led activities would register with the Hub to become a 'spoke' and undergo a simple 'approval process' which ensures there is appropriate safeguarding and health and safety policies are in place. This would substantially increase the 'offer' for families without further public spend.

Two-thirds say they either would or might be interested in helping out in a Children's Centre in return for services like employment support and parenting help.¹⁵⁰

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

Summary of recommendations

- **Children's Centres to become Sure Start Family Hubs: local 'nerve centres' coordinating all family-related support, including universal services and specialist help, to help meet both parents' most pressing needs;**
- **In response to the very high levels of family breakdown in this country Sure Start Family Hubs will include couples' relationship support/education as part of their core offer to families;**

¹⁴⁸ The Guardian, *Surely some mistake?* 5 January 2005 [accessed via: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2005/jan/05/guardiansocietysupplement.childrenewservices> (25/6/14)]

¹⁴⁹ For example, Wriggly Readers in Leicestershire [accessed via: http://www.leics.gov.uk/libraries_wriggly_readers (30/6/14)]

¹⁵⁰ CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

- Family Hubs will extend their core purpose to incorporate the vital work of Family Relationship Centres, so all separating parents have access to support; and
- Local health and public health commissioners to ensure all ante- and post-natal services are co-located within or co-ordinated from Family Hubs.

chapter three

Fathers and Family Hubs

Introduction

Fathers matter enormously to their children's lives. Yet the quality and stability of their relationship with children's mothers greatly influences how much and how well they are able to be involved as those children grow up. Many relationships are fragile at the time of conception when there may have been no intention or expectation of a future together. Almost a fifth of all children are not living with both their parents in the first year of their lives,¹⁵¹ and by the age of five this proportion has risen to almost half in low income households.¹⁵²

'Loads of young dads we know have failed – they were expected to by services. The message is that dads are not important.'

'Young dads face negative perceptions – of being feckless, irresponsible. We're seen as just sperm donors; it's assumed we're going to fail.'

'I was stopped by the Police on the school run and asked if my child was mine. They said there had been some kidnappings recently so needed to check. But the mum would never have been asked this.'

'Where dads are absent, there is often a reason behind this – often their relationships with their own dad.'

Young Fathers Group in Children's Centre giving evidence to the CSJ

151 HM Government, *Social Justice Outcomes Framework*, HM Government, 2012, p7

152 DWP, *Social Justice: Transforming Lives – One year on*, London: The Stationery Office, 2013

Our research revealed a million children who have no significant contact with their fathers.¹⁵³ Reducing our high rates of father absence is an urgent priority and every effort needs to be made to get fathers involved and keep them involved. *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters* drew attention to the way many statutory services fail to show adequate regard for fathers, how this can start before their children are even born and set completely the wrong tone from the outset.

It is vital that fathers who are most in need of support – but least likely to come through the doors of a Children’s Centre or admit to outreach workers that they are struggling to come to terms with their responsibilities – are not ignored. Family Hubs have the potential to make a huge difference to outcomes for disadvantaged fathers, particularly those who are young, by providing or connecting them to support. Although surveys suggest it is more common for those working supportively with fathers to be based in Children’s Centres rather than elsewhere,¹⁵⁴ we have heard that the current reality in many Children’s Centres is that there may be little incentive or requirement for doing such work. In evidence to the CSJ, Scott Colfer, founder of Dads TV described a view he had heard commonly expressed by Centre managers:

‘Nothing bad will happen if we don’t work with young fathers, and nothing good will happen if we do.’

In this chapter we describe how to ensure Family Hubs can build on progress made by Children’s Centres and make a decisive difference to families by working effectively and creatively to draw fathers into supportive networks and connect them to help.

Only 25 per cent of mothers say they think Children’s Centres engage fathers ‘well’ or ‘very well’.

Of those mothers who expressed an opinion, 82 per cent said that Children’s Centres’ opening hours were a barrier to fathers making use of facilities.¹⁵⁵

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

153 Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: why stability matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

154 Scourfield J, *Working with fathers – what’s going on out there?* Survey report, Cardiff: Cardiff University, 2012, Table 1

155 CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1007 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

Improving father involvement in perinatal services

A few days after our son was born we had to go back to the maternity ward because he was dangerously ill. Aside from that huge anxiety our biggest challenge was how I was treated by staff. Obviously I hadn't recently given birth but as a new, very tired and very worried dad some level of respect and regard would have made a world of difference. Instead they made it clear they thought I was irrelevant and were humiliating, for example when they 'caught' me eating my wife's leftover hospital food – she wasn't the patient but as the mum she got fed! When I quietly suggested this behaviour was unacceptable they began to treat me as potentially dangerous and sideline me from decisions about my son's care. I was fuming but able to shrug it off. But I have run international companies – if I was much younger, unsure of myself and uncertain about being a dad in the first place, that experience would have been about the worst start imaginable.

Professional father speaking about his experience in an NHS hospital, in evidence to the CSJ

The Royal College of Midwives emphasise to maternity care professionals that 'the birth of a baby is the birth of a family',¹⁵⁶ and the importance of not just attending to the needs of the mother and baby but also including the father:

'Engaging with fathers regardless of age and social circumstances increases the likelihood of positive changes to lifestyle and subsequently the health and wellbeing of mother, baby and the father himself'.¹⁵⁷

Yet too often in current maternity care settings fathers end up feeling excluded, fearful due to the risks and uncertainty of labour and frustrated at their apparent helplessness.¹⁵⁸ Research highlights the tensions that flow from them seeing themselves as 'parent and partner' and being treated as 'not-patient and not-visitor'.¹⁵⁹ Fathers who give valuable support to the mother while going through a significant change in their own lives, often face a lack of consideration from maternity staff. The tension this causes makes it much harder to be the solid rock they want to be and means going through this transition is harder than necessary, often markedly so.

Exposing community-based midwives, many of whom will also continue to work in hospitals, to a culture of father-inclusive practice in Family Hubs is a way of spreading awareness that this is important but not necessarily costly, in terms of time and effort.

Father-involvement has to be a priority as soon as an expectant mother books in for antenatal care, and not just in the delivery ward. Communicating directly with fathers-to-be is one way of achieving this, as can be seen in the example below. Men are more likely to attend antenatal classes when they are directly approached, when programmes are scheduled at convenient times outside working hours, and when the focus, at least initially, is on practical issues.¹⁶⁰ In

156 Day-Stirk F, *The birth of a baby is the birth of a family*, London: RCM, 2002

157 Royal College of Midwives, *Reaching Out: Involving Fathers in Maternity Care*, London: Royal College of Midwives, 2011, p4

158 Steen M, Downe S, Bamford N and Edozien L, 'Not-patient and not-visitor: A metasynthesis of fathers' encounters with pregnancy, birth and maternity care', *Midwifery*, 28, 2012, pp422–431

159 Ibid

160 Matthey S, Reay R and Fletcher R, 'Service Strategies for Engaging Fathers in the Perinatal Period – What Have we Learned so Far?' *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 11 (2), 2009, pp29–41

addition, specific antenatal groups focused on men's needs reduce distress, increase their ability to cope and result in improved relationships with partners.¹⁶¹ Finally, fathers who are unwilling to engage with statutory services may be less resistant to voluntary sector initiatives.¹⁶²

Good practice example: Maternity Assist

Maternity Assist is a digital communication tool channelling advice and information to expectant parents. It was developed by Professor Mary Steen and Duncan Fisher OBE in consultation with midwife managers and Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust. The mother, father and/or other key future carers such as grandparents all receive the same information, addressed to them individually, so they all read and discuss the material and make collective decisions.¹⁶³

Health- and wellbeing-related information can be channelled via email, social media, and mobile phones to expectant mothers and fathers, in line with the local maternity service's key health priorities despite the significant constraints on midwives' time. The content is decided by midwives, and may include videos on positions for labour; how to breastfeed successfully; birth options, as well as reminders of antenatal appointments and other aids.¹⁶⁴

Midwives based in the Family Hub could use it to connect parents to other relevant help e.g. a youth service for young parents and local support networks for mothers and fathers. Other information e.g. about benefits, housing, and finances could be communicated by other Family Hub staff through the same means.

Good practice example: Expectant Fathers Programme¹⁶⁵

The Expectant Fathers Programme has been developed by the charity Working With Men for first-time fathers who ask for guidance and support, and young fathers and fathers at risk. It is evidence-based, with particular attention given to accessing those least likely to enrol on programmes and considered 'hard to reach'. Evaluations have found that fathers feel more confident about their ability to look after their child and more aware of what was expected of them after completing the course.¹⁶⁶



The programme is built around practical sessions (baby-bathing, nappy-changing) as well as reflective sessions considering role choices and what type of dad they want to be. The programme makes fathers aware of the relevance of attachment or bonding with their baby. Working With Men also plan, provide and effectively publicise activities fathers can do with their child.

161 Redshaw M and Henderson J, 'Father's engagement in pregnancy and childbirth: evidence from a national survey', *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 13:70, 2013

162 Page J, Whitting G and Mclean C, *A Review of How Fathers Can be Better Recognised and Supported Through DCSF Policy*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008, p53

163 Maternity Assist, How it works [accessed via: <http://mary.coolgel.co.uk/index.php/how-it-works> (31/01/14)]

164 An evaluation programme running alongside the tool is led by Dr Carol Kingdon and Professor Mary Steen (co-founder of Maternity Assist).

165 Working With Men, Expectant Fathers Programme [accessed via: http://www.workingwithmen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=72&Itemid=68 (3/6/14)]

166 Action for Children, 'Growing Our Strengths' Project: *Improving Outcomes for Children, Young People & Families*, Action for Children et al, 2012

It is important that demonstrating engagement with fathers does not simply become a box-ticking exercise and that services are free to establish their own measures showing how delivery methods have encouraged greater take-up by fathers and meet the different experiences and needs of fathers and mothers. Ultimately widespread cultural change has to be the goal but we recommend that father-aware inspections frameworks should be used as a key driver to reform in the short- to medium-term.

96 per cent of mothers say that it is either very or quite important that midwives and health visitors include fathers as well as mothers.¹⁶⁷

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

Father involvement to be part of Family Hubs' reformed core purpose: to ensure this is fulfilled inspections of early years and maternity services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in all Family Hubs should examine how they are demonstrating engagement of fathers.

Payment and inspection to drive father involvement

Family Hubs should be paid for according to father involvement. Including active involvement of fathers within Payment by Results (PbR) for Family Hubs would help drive cultural change for those local authorities pursuing PbR models. PbR was trialled in Sure Start Children's Centres by the DfE from 2011–2013. Instead of rolling out the scheme nationally, ministers are allowing local authorities to decide whether or not to pursue PbR in children's centres through their own local schemes.

Ofsted currently require Children's Centres to gather information on father involvement factors in their inspection assessments, where fathers are defined locally as a 'target group'.¹⁶⁸ How 'target groups' are identified varies according to the individual Children's Centre's and local authority's identification of its community and their needs¹⁶⁹ and 90 per cent of Children's Centre leaders in disadvantaged areas consider fathers a target group.¹⁷⁰

Therefore, the foundations for measuring father involvement and incorporating this into Payment by Results outcomes are already laid. Outcomes will also have to be tangible and meaningful: numbers of fathers *registered* is insufficient. Fathers completing a parenting programme, attending a dad's group a minimum number of times over a set period or becoming more work-ready as a result of working with Job Centre Plus staff based in or connected to the Family Hub could, for example, trigger payments.

¹⁶⁷ CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1007 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

¹⁶⁸ Ofsted, *The framework for children's centre inspection*, Manchester: Ofsted, March 2013, p11, 25

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p25

¹⁷⁰ Tanner E, Agur M, Hussey D, Hall J, Sammons P, Sylva K, Smith T, Evangelou M, and Flint A, *Evaluation of Children's Centres in England, Strand 1: First Survey of Children's Centre Leaders in the Most Deprived Areas*, Oxford: NatCen and University of Oxford, 2012, p8

We recommend that local authorities pursuing Payment by Results for Children's Centres incentivise engagement of fathers, using tangible measures of outcomes.

Opening these Family Hubs for longer hours (for example from 8am to 8pm, and at weekends) would make it easier for fathers – especially those who are young and disadvantaged – to make it a port of call. It would also free up time and space for the Hub to provide support for relationships as part of the 'extended' core offer we describe in the Chapter Two.

Creativity is key. Rather than focusing exclusively on bringing dads into additional activities at the Hub, outreach to fathers will aim to connect them with help, support and opportunities to contribute to their communities in places best for them.

Inspiring practice: 100 Dads Walk

In Lambeth, for example, Young DadsTV worked with a church and library to organise the 100 Dads Walk from the local park to the Children's Centre. This was simply about getting dads together; not finding the dads with problems, and connecting them to what was going on in the community. As a result over a quarter of the dads said they wanted to become involved with Lambeth Dads group; there was a high level of interest in parenting and family learning courses and almost a fifth were keen to do some voluntary work.

Dads who took part said the event 'made me feel my role's important'; 'made me aware of support for fathers'; 'created another opportunity for me and my daughter to connect with more people in the community.'



Birth registration

Birth registration within Family Hubs maximises a key opportunity at an important life stage to publicise what goes on in the Hub and emphasise the importance of dads to families.

The Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances¹⁷¹ recommended registering births in children's centres to ensure all parents in a local community come through its doors and the DfE has promised to investigate the benefits of the mandatory system proposed in amendments to the Children and Families Bill 2013.¹⁷² They have also confirmed to the Sure Start All Party Parliamentary Group that no legal or regulatory changes are necessary to enable birth registrations in Sure Start centres, although the practice is not widespread.¹⁷³

The Children's Centre Census found that only six per cent of Children's Centres ran birth registration services in 2012–13.¹⁷⁴ Freedom of Information requests by the CSJ similarly revealed that in only seven per cent of local authority areas is birth registration possible at a Children's Centre. 66 per cent of local authorities responded that birth registration was not an option. 26 per cent of local authorities, however, responded that this was something they were looking into and working towards.¹⁷⁵

Registering births in Family Hubs would further break down barriers to sharing data across health and children's services, enabling them to plan ahead.¹⁷⁶ Data shows that centres offering birth registration generally are better at reaching vulnerable parents and involving them on an ongoing basis, than those which do not.¹⁷⁷ 100 per cent of young parents who registered at Benchill Centre in Manchester have returned.¹⁷⁸

Universal birth registration in Family Hubs would alert all new parents to the support services available, and may also help to reduce any stigma still associated with coming through the doors.¹⁷⁹

Good practice example: Benchill Sure Start, Wythenshawe

Benchill Sure Start Children's Centre is run by Barnardo's. In 2001 the programme manager identified a need for local birth registration: Wythenshawe is some distance from Manchester city centre, and it was not easy for parents to get in to the main register office, with public transport costly, and parking difficult. A registrar now visits for one full birth registration day per week, with additional days as needed.

'The only initial cost was the registrar's travel expenses and a laptop – less than the cost of missed appointments.'

Debbie Koroma, Centre Manager

171 Field F, *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults*, London: Cabinet Office, 2010

172 House of Commons, *House of Commons Notices of Amendments given on Tuesday 26 March 2013* [accessed via: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2012-2013/0131/amend/pcb1312603a.pdf> (24/6/14)]; Children and Young People Now, *Birth registration could be 'game changer' for children's centres, says MP*, 22 May 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1077284/birth-registration-game-changer-childrens-centres-mp> (24/6/14)]

173 APPG Sure Start, *Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres*, London: 4Children, July 2013, p13

174 4Children, *Children's Centres Census 2013: A national overview of developments in Children's Centres*, 4Children, October 2013, p24

175 Freedom of Information request by the CSJ, October 2013

176 Goff J et al., *Evaluation of Children's Centres in England, Strand 3: Delivery of Family Services by Children's Centres*, Oxford: Department for Education and University of Oxford, July 2013

177 APPG Sure Start, *Best Practice for a Sure Start: The Way Forward for Children's Centres*, London: 4Children, July 2013, Annex A – Evidence presented by Department for Education to APPG inquiry, p26

178 *Ibid*, p27

179 *Ibid*



The centre offer the family a photograph to mark the occasion, making the registration a ritual with significance, rather than just an administrative necessity.

All members of staff are given substantial training in involving families considered 'hard-to-reach' (especially dads).

'Birth registration brings families – especially dads – in. But it's the staff training, leadership and shared ethos across the whole team which is most important. It's the way it's done as well... We make a point of asking the dad for his details first so they feel recognised as a carer of the child. One dad said to us "this is the first time that I've ever been made to feel important as a dad".'

Gill Trimble, Programme Administrator

We recommend that all birth registration should take place within Family Hubs rather than civic registry offices.

Summary of recommendations

- Father engagement to be part of Family Hubs' reformed core purpose: inspections of early years and maternity services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in all Family Hubs to examine how they are ensuring fathers as well as mothers are being reached and supported.
- Local authorities using a Payment by Results model for Family Hubs to include father involvement in desired outcomes.
- All birth registration to take place within Family Hubs rather than civic registry offices.

chapter four

Supporting couple relationships

Introduction

About 300,000 families separate each year and over four million children do not live with both their parents.¹⁸⁰ Strong relationships between parents matter enormously to couples and their children and set the tone for much of family life. This is why it is essential that when relationships are under strain, couples who need it are offered help to overcome their difficulties and stay together.

Crucially, there is growing evidence of the impact and cost-effectiveness of relationship preparation and support – before and during relationships – not least from the recent evaluation of the support funded by the Department for Education which revealed that over the long-term, ‘interventions might provide substantially greater savings to society through the avoidance of costs associated with relationship breakdown than they cost to deliver’.¹⁸¹

Greater demand for couple support services in the UK suggests couples may be increasingly keen to ‘mend it rather than end it’, therefore it is vital they get the help they need to try to make their relationships work.¹⁸² This is still considered to be a difficult subject. There is an enduring belief that relationships are private and talking about them is a sign of failure and disloyalty to one’s partner which can make it harder for people to ask for help or access what is available.¹⁸³ However our polling suggests attitudes might be changing:

180 DWP, *Social Justice: transforming lives – One year on*, London: The Stationery Office, 7 May 2013

181 Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships (TCCR), National Foundation for Educational Research, Thomas Coram Research Unit and Qa Research, *Relationship Support Interventions Evaluation: Research Report*, London: Department for Education, 2014

182 Chang Y-S and Barrett H, *Couple relationships: A review of the nature and effectiveness of support services*, London: Family and Parenting Institute, 2009

183 Walker J, Barrett H, Wilson G and Chang Y-S, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010

Only 9 per cent said relationship support is only for couples in difficulty.

72 per cent said relationship support can help everyone improve their relationship.

62 per cent said it is better to talk about relationships earlier and learn how to communicate to prevent problems.¹⁸⁴

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

So this chapter makes recommendations to improve both local availability (at a time when public and family finances are very tight) and the cultural acceptability of couple support: normalising relationship education and support by raising awareness that although most if not all relationships run into difficulties, there are solutions for overcoming them.¹⁸⁵ It is simply not the case that when relationships hit difficulties there are only two options – either tolerating a low status quo or splitting up.

Relationship breakdown is not inevitable

A small but growing body of research has examined the success and cost-effectiveness of providing relationship education and support to prevent relationship breakdown. In the Introduction we drew attention to important gains following the implementation of the US Healthy Marriage Initiative which has seen more children living with two parents, fewer non-marital births, and fewer children living in poverty.

Numerous analyses of premarital, marital and other couple relationship programmes indicate that overall relationship satisfaction, communication and conflict resolution skills can be improved through their uptake.¹⁸⁶ There is also evidence that preventive programmes (including information and awareness sessions and skills-based courses) are generally well-received and can be helpful in the short-term.¹⁸⁷ Rolling out and evaluating the promising programmes that currently exist will give more valuable knowledge of what works and for whom:

*'We know enough to act and we should take action to know more.'*¹⁸⁸

184 CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

185 Walker J et al, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010

186 Chang Y-S and Barrett H, *Couple relationships: A review of the nature and effectiveness of support services*, London: Family and Parenting Institute, 2009

187 Relationship Foundation, *Building Strong Foundations*, Cambridge: Relationship Foundation, 2009

188 Stanley S, 'Making the Case for Premarital Training', *Family Relations*, 50, 2001, pp272–280



Relationship preparation

Currently, access to relationship preparation is extremely patchy. About a quarter of all individuals marrying each year receive some form of marriage preparation.¹⁸⁹ Most attend short courses being provided by churches, typically about two hours' duration.¹⁹⁰ Only 11,000 individuals per year, a mere two per cent of all those who marry, receive in-depth relationship preparation.¹⁹¹

Nevertheless, those who attend a variety of courses report that they can encourage them to think about issues they might otherwise not have considered (including partners' expectations of each other and how they might cope with problems that emerge) and drive home the message that 'all relationships have to be worked at and that most are stressful at some stage.'¹⁹²

A sample of over 3,000 adults in the US revealed that couples who had participated in premarital relationship education programmes had a 29 per cent reduction in likelihood of divorce over the first five years of marriage.¹⁹³ Participants showed reduced levels of conflict and higher commitment to their relationships regardless of their background. Several other studies have demonstrated the potential of premarital programmes to improve couples' conflict management, communication and relationship skills.¹⁹⁴ The recent evaluation of relationship support interventions for the Department for Education found that receiving Marriage Care's marriage preparation was associated with positive changes in relationship quality or wellbeing. 80 per cent felt that their understanding of how a healthy relationship is

¹⁸⁹ Relationship Foundation, *Building Strong Foundations*, Cambridge: Relationship Foundation, 2009, p44

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p44

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p10

¹⁹² Walker J et al, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010

¹⁹³ Stanley S, Amato P, Johnson C, and Markman H, 'Premarital education, marital quality and marital stability: findings from a large, random, household survey', *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2006, 20 (1), pp117–126

¹⁹⁴ Stanley S, 'Making a case for premarital education', *Family Relations*, 44 (4), 2001, pp392–401; Halford W, Markman H, Kline G, and Stanley S, 'Best practice in couple relationship education', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 29 (3), 2003, pp385–406

built and sustained had increased and participants said they were significantly more likely to seek support if things go wrong between them in the future.¹⁹⁵

However, take up of these programmes could be considerably higher: Despite high satisfaction rates *after* participating, only 21 per cent of couples attending marriage preparation in the study above had chosen to be there.¹⁹⁶ Although people getting married in churches are encouraged to attend marriage preparation by clergy there is no requirement currently for registrars to do likewise or even to let people know what is on offer:

Supporting marriage by supporting marriage preparation

As we stated earlier, marriage remains important to people across the socioeconomic spectrum but those in lower-income communities face both cultural and financial barriers to accessing it. We welcome the Labour Party's recognition of this in their proposal to waive marriage fees (at a cost of about £13 million) but believe if this incentive was limited to couples who took part in an effective Marriage Preparation course it would go further to prevent family breakdown.¹⁹⁷

We recommend waiving the registry office fee (£70 per couple) for couples intending to marry who take part in an accredited Marriage Preparation course.

Although couples might then have to pay for Marriage Preparation, (the average fee in 2009 was £50)¹⁹⁸ waiving the fee is likely to cover the costs in most cases.

Registrars would be required to give couples information about accredited providers in their local area who would in turn issue a signed certificate of completion to enable the waiver or discount to be applied to registry office fees. Relate have estimated that the cost of this scheme across England and Wales would be in the region of £3.5 million per annum (based on an estimate of 5 per cent of couples accessing accredited marriage preparation).¹⁹⁹ These costs assume fees are waived in their entirety and disregard resultant savings.²⁰⁰ A recent evaluation of Marriage Care's FOCCUS marriage preparation course indicated that for every £1 spent delivering marriage preparation, benefits of £11.50 were realised from the reduced costs of family breakdown.²⁰¹

195 Spielhofer T et al, *Relationship Support Interventions Evaluation, Research Report RR315*, London: Department for Education, 2014, p50, p52

196 *Ibid.*, p38, p41

197 *Mirror*, *Labour may scrap the £70 cost of a wedding notice to boost marriage*, 2 November 2014 [accessed via: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/labour-scrap-70-cost-wedding-2671131#ixzz36Ohrsbb6> (4/7/14)]. In 2012 there were 262,240 marriages (184,320, or 70 per cent, of which were civil ceremonies) (ONS, *Marriages in England and Wales, 2012 (Provisional)*, 11 June 2014, Table 1: Marriage summary statistics). Thus, on the latest data Labour's proposal would cost £12,902,400.

198 Relationship Foundation, *Building Strong Foundations*, Cambridge: Relationship Foundation, 2009, p95

199 Private correspondence with Relate about their submission to the DWP's Family Stability Review.

200 There is no separate registry fee to get married in the Church of England (which accounts for 74 per cent of religious weddings in England) or in other religious settings where registrars are not required. However, as the Church of England, for example, sets a charge nationally of £451, couples who have undergone accredited relationship education could receive the same level of subsidy as those going through registry offices. (*Church of England, Church wedding fees in 2013/14*)

201 Spielhofer T et al, *Relationship Support Interventions Evaluation, Research Report RR315*, London: Department for Education, 2014, p133. The evaluation estimated the cost-benefit ratio by measuring rates of relationship breakdown, and using the Relationships Foundation's estimated cost of relationship breakdown (only including tax, welfare and Housing Benefits that result directly from relationship breakdown, and adjusted for inflation and family trends) as a basis. They then worked out this cost per separated couple, and measured the cost of the interventions per couple and the savings in terms of reduced relationship breakdown rate. This gave a rough cost-benefit ratio.

Such an initiative has the potential to help normalise relationship education and make it easier for couples to access support if they hit difficulties at a later stage. It would also send a clear signal that the Government does not consider relationship breakdown to be inevitable, is willing to back measures to prevent it where possible and understands there are huge cost savings to be made.

Transition to parenthood

Becoming parents involves an enormous change for all couples, is the most frequently cited cause of stress on a relationship,²⁰² and tends to lead to a reduction in relationship satisfaction.²⁰³ Postnatal depression also has a significant impact on couple relationships and the negative effects can last several years²⁰⁴ with many relationships breaking down irretrievably, especially if support is absent, during this incredibly difficult time.²⁰⁵

This is a key transition point when relationship education and support could be (and sometimes is) offered by midwives or health visitors directly to expectant parents. Professionals could also signpost them to other organisations working within or connected to a Family Hub.

Our polling showed that, of those expressing an opinion, over two-thirds agree that Children's Centres should play a role in preventing family breakdown.

82 per cent of mothers say that antenatal education classes should include support for couple relationships, for example discussing the impact of being new parents on relationships, tools and skills for strengthening relationships.²⁰⁶

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

Although the NHS states that ante-natal programmes focusing on couple relationships, co-parenting and father involvement are associated with good family outcomes,²⁰⁷ ante-natal classes tend to be primarily practical and do not tend to include information about the changes that might occur in the parent's relationships as a result of having the baby.²⁰⁸

202 Walker J, Barrett H, Wilson G and Chang Y-S, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p27

203 OnePlusOne, *The Edith Dominian Memorial Lecture Proceedings: Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing*, London: OnePlusOne, 2006, p88

204 Walker J, Barrett H, Wilson G and Chang Y-S, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p32; 4Children, *Suffering in Silence: 70,000 reasons why help with postnatal depression needs to be better*, London: 4Children, 2011

205 Ibid

206 CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two)

207 NHS, *Preparation for Birth and Beyond: A resource pack for leaders of community groups and activities*, 2011, p16

208 Walker J, Barrett H, Wilson G and Chang Y-S, *Relationships Matter: Understanding the Needs of Adults (Particularly Parents) Regarding Relationship Support*, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, p73

'Family Links' antenatal programme includes talking explicitly about parents' relationships as couples, because the biggest risk of relationship breakdown is following the birth of a new baby. We include empathy for partners as well as for the baby – e.g. acknowledging a working partner's stress as well as the stresses a mother at home experiences. We need to think about the feelings of both; we need to think about the father.'

Sarah Darton, Parent Programme Director, Family Links

Moreover, as we describe in the previous chapter on Family Hubs, fathers can often feel excluded by maternity professionals making it less likely that their help will be sought or welcomed. Family hubs will offer programmes which actively encourage both parents to take part. One example of an evaluated programme which could be rolled out more extensively is provided below.

Good practice example: Family Foundations

'Family Foundations' is a seven-session pre- and post-natal programme for both parents expecting their first baby together. It aims to help them create a 'parenting team' around the baby. Its focus on the couple is based on research linking the quality of the couple relationship to parents' wellbeing and the effectiveness of co-parenting for children's behaviour.

Developed in the US and adapted for the UK, the Family Foundations programme includes the importance of parental conflict, managing stress and handling challenges, helping parents to understand babies' emotions, supporting the other parent and teamwork/developing a good division of labour.

The programme has been evaluated in the USA, and benefits for parents include better couple quality, lower maternal depression and reduced negative communication – all protective factors against relationship breakdown.²⁰⁹

In the UK, the Fatherhood Institute and the charity 4Children trained around 100 practitioners from Children's Centres and health services within 12 local authorities to deliver the programme locally in a two-year trial.

Delivering couple support as part of parenting education

'All parenting interventions should think about parents' relationships too'.

Susanna Abse, CEO of Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships (TCCR) in evidence to the CSJ

Support for parents in their couple relationships does not become less important as children grow older. Programmes helping couples in their 'partnering' as well as their parenting should be part of the core offer of Family Hubs because research indicates that it is the quality of the co-parenting relationship, rather than the individual parenting skill of each parent, which has the most profound effect on the functioning of the family as a whole, and thereby upon the life chances of the children involved.²¹⁰

209 Feinberg M, Family Foundations: A Strong Start – a summary, 2010; and Department for Education, Family Foundations, Commissioning Toolkit

210 TCCR, Helping families in trouble through the Parents as Partners programme [accessed via: <http://tccr.ac.uk/policy/policy-briefings/575-helping-families-in-trouble-through-the-parents-as-partners-programme> (04/07/14)]

Leading researchers in this area from the United States, Professors Cowan and Cowan, demonstrated that first-time expecting couples who received couple *and* parenting education had a reduced decline in marital satisfaction.²¹¹ Follow-up studies found these couples had comparatively higher marital satisfaction and higher parent wellbeing, and their children had higher levels of adjustment to nursery than others. An evaluation is currently being undertaken of the rollout of a programme based on the Cowan's work in several London boroughs as detailed in the box below.²¹²

Good practice example: Parents as Partners

Family Action and TCCR have teamed up to provide a 16-session parenting course which directly addresses couples' relationships called 'Parents as Partners'. This is a fully-evaluated and evidence-based group work programme for couples, based on the work of leading clinical psychologists and experts in couple relationship and parenting Professors Carolyn and Philip Cowan who are training those delivering the programme. It is designed:

- For 'hard-to-reach' families – especially chaotic and vulnerable families, including where there are child protection concerns;
- To help separated/divorced co-parents as well as those who live together; and
- To support positive involvement of fathers in children's lives.

The programme focuses not only on parent-child interactions and parenting skills, but on all the relationships within the family.

Earlier versions that were run in the US demonstrated measurable positive effects including: improvements in couple relationship quality, reductions in parental depression and stress, better involvement of fathers and increased family income, all of which are protective factors against parents splitting up.

Parents as Partners is the only new, evidence-based parenting programme being funded by the Department for Education as part of the £30 million committed to relationship support programmes until 2015. The programme is being offered to a number of local authorities (Westminster, Camden, Islington, Wandsworth, Southwark and Greenwich) within its first year of running, and in 2014/5 it is to be extended to local authority sites beyond London.²¹³

Counselling and therapy when relationships are in difficulty

Access to relationship counselling is also vital for couples who are at risk of separating but who want to overcome difficulties and improve the quality of their relationship.

211 Cowan, C and Cowan, P, 'Interventions as tests of family systems theories: Marital and family relationships in children's development and psychology', *Development and Psychology*, 14, 2000, pp731–759

212 Family Action, *Parents as Partners Programme: A Couple Approach* [accessed via: <http://www.family-action.org.uk/section.aspx?id=23636> (26/6/14)]

213 Spielhofer T, Corlyon J, Durbin B, Smith, M, Stock, L and Gieve, M, *Relationship Support: Interventions Evaluation*. London: Department for Education, 2014

The recent evaluation for the Department for Education found couple counselling resulted in positive changes in individuals' relationship quality, wellbeing and communication.²¹⁴ The Department for Education evaluation also noted the cost-benefits of relationship counselling, with Relate and Marriage Care realising an indicative saving of £11.40 and £8.60 respectively for every £1 spent delivering this support.²¹⁵ Couple therapy can also be cost-effective:²¹⁶ TCCR's couple therapy services have been estimated to deliver benefits to the public purse state of almost £2 million over five to ten years, representing a saving of £4.58 for every £1 invested.²¹⁷ Since only £134,000 of the total invested amount came from the Government (with the remainder coming from fees) the public purse received a return of £14.18 for every £1 invested.

Couples therapy or counselling clearly can benefit those who take it up, but the effectiveness of counselling in enabling couples to stay together largely depends on it being sought before the relationship is in crisis and heading towards breakdown.²¹⁸ People usually go for relationship counselling as a last resort,²¹⁹ by which time problems can have become entrenched. Couples need to be encouraged to ask for help early.



This highlights again the importance of health and other professionals having greater awareness of couple counselling and its importance, and being able to pick up problems earlier and refer couples on to support. The next section reveals how rare it is now for GPs

214 Spielhofer T, Corlyon J, Durbin B, Smith, M, Stock, L and Gieve, M, *Relationship Support Interventions Evaluation*. London: Department for Education, 2014

215 Ibid, p15

216 Although the terms counselling and therapy are frequently used interchangeably, counselling often opens up communication between couples and helps them better understand underlying issues, whereas therapy goes deeper by aiming to help couples understand conscious and unconscious factors lying behind current difficulties, to bring about change.

217 New Economics Foundation (NEF) consulting, *Socio-economic impact of couple therapy*: Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, London: NEF, 2012

218 Chang Y-S and Barrett H, *Couple relationships: A review of the nature and effectiveness of support services*. London: Family and Parenting Institute, 2009

219 Walker J, McCarthy P, Stark C, and Laing K, *Picking up the pieces: a marriage and divorce two years after information provision*. London: Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2004

to refer people to NHS services for relationship difficulties even when they are at the root of mental health difficulties.

Family Hubs, as envisaged in the previous chapter, will be well-placed to connect couples from some of our most disadvantaged communities to this essential help, many of whom would not otherwise be aware of or have access to it, thereby helping to stabilise couples and families where family breakdown is most prevalent.

Expertise is already available and capacity would grow in response to demand from local authorities. Public health commissioners should be particularly interested in providing relationship support given the disease burden associated with poor relationship functioning.²²⁰ The Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships has trained thousands of professionals (more than 4,000 in the past year) including health visitors, social services staff, Children's Centre managers and CAMHS staff (parents' relationships with each other can significantly impact their children's mental health).²²¹

64 per cent of mothers would be interested in accessing support to strengthen relationships for expectant and new parents if it was available at their local Children's Centre.²²²

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

We recommend that family hubs – 'nerve centres' for all family related services – provide couples' relationship support/education as part of their core 'universal' offer to families.

Couple counselling and therapy in combating depression

A significant proportion of people with depression could benefit from couple counselling/therapy. Studies have found up to 30 per cent of major depressive episodes could be prevented if relationship dissatisfaction could be eliminated, and up to 66 per cent of the variation in major depression is due to relationship distress.²²³

NHS-funded couple counselling is currently available as an IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) treatment,²²⁴ but recent research has revealed that only 0.62 per cent of all sessions – one in every 161 – delivered in IAPT services (at the 'high intensity' level)

220 TCCR, *What do couple relationships have to do with public health?* [accessed via: <http://www.tccr.ac.uk/policy/policy-briefings/268-couple-relationships-and-public-health-tccr-policy-briefing> (26/6/14)]

221 Susanna Abse, CEO, TCCR, in evidence to the CSJ

222 CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two), June 2014

223 Whissman M and Bruce M, 'Marital dissatisfaction and incidence of major depressive episode in a community sample', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 108, 1999, pp674–678; Whissman M, 'The association between depression and marital dissatisfaction', in Beach S (ed.), *Marital and family processes in depression: A scientific foundation for clinical practice*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001

224 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Commissioning Effective Talking Therapies*, London: CSJ, 2012

were appointments for couple therapy for depression.²²⁵ TCCR's 'mystery shopper' research involved people expressing concerns to IAPT services about a family member which should have led to couple therapy being recommended as the most appropriate treatment. Yet 80 per cent of IAPT advisors made no mention of couple therapy and showed very low levels of awareness of the full range of NICE-recommended treatments.²²⁶

A recent report for the Centre for Social Justice exposed the poor availability of therapies other than Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) under IAPT, even though NICE urges delivery of the most appropriate treatment.²²⁷ Even under current commissioning arrangements (and we have urged reform of these)²²⁸ it is essential that couple support is made available, where appropriate, for patients presenting with depression who are referred into IAPT.

We recommend that the NHS and Public Health England fund an awareness campaign through Family Hubs and GP surgeries so GPs (and those who self-refer into IAPT) know couple support is available on the NHS and more couples receive support through IAPT funding (where relationship distress is contributing to partners' poor mental health).

Financial support for couples

We welcome the first steps taken by this Government towards recognising the importance of stability and commitment in the tax system by introducing a transferable tax allowance for married couples. This measure enables single-earner families (typically where one partner is out of the labour market because they are caring for children or an elderly parent or volunteering in the community) to reduce their tax burden. The paid worker's tax free allowance is boosted by some of their partner's unused tax allowance.

Not only does this reflect their interdependence but it also helps to off-set (albeit in a very limited way at present) the massive imbalance in support received by single-earner as opposed to dual-earner couple families. Proposed childcare subsidies for dual-earner families of £2000 per child dwarf the value of transferable tax allowances at the current level, sharply limiting parents' choice to provide childcare (and other care, for example for elderly relatives) themselves.²²⁹

We urge the Government to commit to working towards a fully transferrable tax allowance for all married couples and, as a first step, doubling the amount that couples with children under three can transfer to £2000, saving them an additional £200 per year and costing £480m.²³⁰

225 TCCR, *A drop in the ocean: couple therapy for depression in IAPT*, London: TCCR, 2013

226 Ibid

227 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Commissioning Effective Talking Therapies*, London: CSJ, 2012. NICE, *Depression: The treatment and management of depression in adults, Partial update to the NICE clinical guidance 23*, London: NHS, 2009

228 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Commissioning Effective Talking Therapies*, London: CSJ, 2012

229 DWP, *Helping people to find and stay in work* [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-people-to-find-and-stay-in-work/supporting-pages/introducing-a-tax-free-childcare-scheme> (3/7/14)]

230 Centre for Social Justice, *Supporting Families, Strengthening Marriage: A plan for a meaningful transferable tax allowance for married couples*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

Ensuring low-income married couples benefit from the transferrable tax allowance

Given the overriding priority of supporting and stabilising families in low-income communities, it is even more important to ensure that married couples eligible for Universal Credit (UC) receive the full benefit of transferrable tax allowances and it is not clawed back through a reduction in Universal Credit.²³¹

When Universal Credit is introduced, much of the benefit of the transferrable tax allowance for married couples will be lost to claimants through the current taper rate (set at 65 per cent) which withdraws financial support as people earn more. Analysis by the Resolution Foundation reveals that only three-fifths of married couples who qualify for the transferable personal allowance will see the full net gain of the additional £3.85 a week, and almost two-thirds of couples with children who get the allowance will not benefit from it at all due to the consequent reduction in Universal Credit.²³²

Disregarding gains from the transferable personal tax allowance for married couples on Universal Credit would cost £100m.²³³

We recommend that the gains from the transferable personal tax allowance for married couples are disregarded for those on Universal Credit.

Addressing couple penalties

The original *Breakthrough Britain* report and subsequent Dynamic Benefits report (which provided the blueprint for Universal Credit) both emphasised the need to address the couple penalties in the tax credit system which made it disadvantageous for low-income parents to live as a couple while claiming benefits (couple claims for working tax credit do not recognise the costs of a second adult).²³⁴ Academic research has highlighted the incentives for couples to split up when lone parents receive disproportionately large amounts in tax credits.²³⁵ Many organisations working in poor communities told us that, at best, non-resident fathers could feel they were actually helping their children financially by being absent from the home and, at worst, that the state was a better provider, thereby absolving them of responsibility.²³⁶

231 Hirsch D, *Who will benefit from the tax break for married couples?*, Resolution Foundation, October 2013

232 Ibid

233 The Institute of Fiscal Studies calculated (upon request by the CSJ in June 2014) that under current plans the transferable allowance will reduce UC entitlements by a little over £100m – offsetting about 15 per cent of the reduction in income tax revenue – based on the expected tax and benefit system in April 2016, assuming that UC was fully implemented and expressed in 2014 prices. This assumes no behavioural response and ignores non-take-up.

234 Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, section 4; *Centre for Social Justice, Dynamic Benefits: Towards Welfare That Works*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2009, section 4.2

235 For example, Francesconi M et al, 'The Effects of In-Work Benefit Reform in Britain on Couples: Theory and Evidence', *The Economic Journal*, 119, 2009, F66–100

236 See Centre for Social Justice, *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013, pp80–81

Universal Credit goes some way to addressing couple penalties although the need to offer transitional protection means that the relatively generous provision for lone parents can only gradually be rebalanced:

*'When looking at the pattern of changes, couples with children see the biggest increase in cash terms... Lone parents see a smaller cash increase... Transitional protection will ensure that there will be no cash losses for any households that are actively moved to Universal Credit from legacy benefits or tax credits, where their circumstances remain the same.'*²³⁷

We recommend that the Government invests in the earnings disregard for couples with children through annual uprating such that the lone parent disregard remains static whereas the couple disregard is uprated at twice the level of inflation, thereby keeping public spending under control at the same time as avoiding nominal decreases in lone parent support.²³⁸

Similarly, we recommend that the couple family benefit cap is uprated at twice the level of inflation whereas the lone parent family benefit cap stays static, until such time as there is greater parity in support for these two types of family, in line with OECD equivalence scales.

Summary of recommendations

- Registry office fees (£70 per couple) should be waived for couples intending to marry who take part in an accredited Marriage Preparation course.
- As we recommended in 2007, every couple to have a personal budget for relationship and parenting education with all individuals, couples and families entitled to draw down money to access pre-marriage, antenatal relationship support and parenting (of 0–5s, 5–11s and teens) services.
- Sure Start Family Hubs – ‘nerve centres’ for all family related services – should include couples’ relationship support/education as part of their core ‘universal’ offer to families.
- The NHS and Public Health England to fund an awareness campaign through Family Hubs and GP surgeries so GPs (and those who self-refer into IAPT) know couple support is available on the NHS and more couples receive support through IAPT funding (where relationship distress is contributing to partners’ poor mental health).
- The gains from the transferable personal tax allowance for married couples to be disregarded for those on Universal Credit.
- The Government to commit to working towards a fully transferrable tax allowance for all married couples and, as a first step, doubling the amount that couples with children under 3 can transfer to £2000, saving them an additional £200 per year and costing £480m.

237 DWP, *Universal Credit, 2012*, pp12–13 [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220177/universal-credit-wr2011-ia.pdf (26/6/14)]

238 Of family units with children predicted to receive benefits under UC, roughly equal numbers are headed by lone parents and couples (DWP, *Universal Credit Impact Assessment*, DWP, 2012, p14)

- Reducing the couple penalty must be an urgent priority. The Government to invest in the Universal Credit earnings disregard for couples through annual uprating such that the lone parent disregard remains static whereas the couple disregard is uprated at twice the level of inflation, thereby keeping public spending under control at the same time as avoiding nominal decreases in lone parent support.
- The couple family benefit cap to be uprated at twice the level of inflation whereas the lone parent family benefit cap to stay static, until such time as there is greater parity in support for these two types of family, in line with OECD equivalence scales.

chapter five

Father involvement from birth and after separation

Introduction

Our interim report *Fractured Families* highlighted the difficulties many fathers face in staying involved in their children's lives when their relationship with their children's mother has broken down – either by the time of the child's birth or subsequently. This chapter focuses on important issues within law (birth registration) and financial support around parenting (welfare and statutory child maintenance) which need reform if we are to ensure as many children as possible are able to have a meaningful relationship with both parents.

Joint registration of births

At present, the law on birth registration signals that fathers are less important to children than mothers and that less is expected of them. The mother is named automatically, but an unmarried father has to be present at the registration or submit a form declaring paternity to be named. Crucially the mother's approval is also required.²³⁹

Being named on the birth certificate confers parental responsibility and gives the parent(s) the right to be involved in decisions such as where the child lives, their education, religion or medical treatment.²⁴⁰ Although the 2009 Welfare Reform Act required the father's name on his child's birth certificate, the Coalition Government has not pressed ahead with its implementation amid understandable but unfounded concerns²⁴¹ that this would prevent

239 'The mother can choose to register the birth on her own if she isn't married to the child's father. The father's details won't be included on the birth certificate.' HM Government, *Register a birth* [See <https://www.gov.uk/register-birth/who-can-register-a-birth> (04/07/14)]

240 Parental Responsibility is defined in the Children Act (1989), Section 3 as 'all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authorities which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property'.

241 For instance, see: Women's Aid, *Response to Joint birth registration: promoting parents' responsibility*, Bristol: Women's Aid, 2007

mothers from protecting their child/ren (and themselves) from violent fathers. Comprehensive exemptions are stated on the face of the Act as can be seen below:

Welfare Reform Act 2009

The 2008 White Paper *Joint Birth Registration: Recording Responsibility* sets out changes to the law in England and Wales to make joint birth registration a legal requirement for all unmarried parents 'unless this is decided by the registrar to be impossible, impracticable or unreasonable'.²⁴² The Act states that joint birth registration would not be required where:

- a) 'that by virtue of section 41 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 the child has no father;
- b) that the father has died,
- c) that the mother does not know the father's identity,
- d) that the mother does not know the father's whereabouts,
- e) that the father lacks capacity (within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005) in relation to decisions under this Part,
- f) that the mother has reason to fear for her safety or that of the child if the father is contacted in relation to the registration of the birth, and
- g) any other conditions prescribed by regulations made by the Minister.²⁴³

Subject to these exemptions, both unmarried parents would both be required to be named on the birth certificate. Where the mother wanted the father recorded, but this was against the father's wishes, the mother would be permitted to identify the father independently, and then he would be required to be named on and sign the certificate (subject to a paternity test if necessary). Similarly, a father who wished to be named but who was obstructed by the mother would be able to declare his paternity and have his name recorded against her wishes (subject again to a paternity test and the exemptions above).

The Government should implement the 2009 Welfare Reform Act Schedule 6 on joint birth registration because of:

■ The benefits of signalling expectations – to fathers and services

Joint registration has important symbolic value: fathers matter to children and the law ought to reflect this. Fathers' failure to be registered on the birth certificate is a predictor both of decreasing involvement and low- or non-payment of child maintenance.²⁴⁴ Australia adopted a similar measure and achieved a reduction in the levels of sole registration by 20 per cent between 1994 and 2004.²⁴⁵

242 Department for Work and Pensions, *Joint birth registration: recording responsibility*, Cm 7293, 2008

243 Welfare Reform Act 2009 Schedule 6, 2B 4a–g

244 Kiernan K and Smith K, 'Unmarried parenthood: new insights from the Millennium Cohort Study', *Population Trends*, 114, 2003 pp26–33

245 Department for Work and Pensions, *Joint birth registration: promoting parental responsibility*, London: Department for Work and Pensions, 2007, p4

It may also encourage practitioners to think about fathers: requiring maternity staff and registrars to discuss the subject of the father's birth registration with both parents, as included in the 2008 White Paper, would help draw fathers into antenatal services on a formal basis. Maternity and teenage pregnancy services would need to have a conversation with the mother about the duty to register the father.

■ Children's right to know their parentage

Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires countries to ensure 'as far as possible' that a child's parentage is recorded. The desire to know where we come from is a strong one – often particularly strong when our experience is the contrary. Even where a father is not present he often continues to exist in the mind of the child, and future adult.

Risks and safeguards

The DWP's impact assessment noted that sole registrants tend to be disadvantaged and vulnerable mothers²⁴⁶ and, as well as the 2009 safeguards itemised in the box above, the Act allowed Registrars to permit sole registration and professionals (such as a social worker or medical practitioner) to advocate for this in the mother's or child's best interests (not least where pregnancy ensued from rape). Furthermore, domestic violence did not figure prominently in the Government's research as a driver of sole registration: failure to record the father was largely due to a lack of information, and a significant proportion of sole registrations were accidental rather than a result of conscious decisions.

Over three quarters of mothers say that they think it should be the law that both parents are named on a child's birth certificate, except in exceptional circumstances such as where the father is unknown, the pregnancy resulted from rape, or where the father being registered would put mother and child at risk from violence.²⁴⁷

CSJ/Bounty – the Parenting Club polling, June 2014

The Government must implement the 2009 Welfare Reform Act Schedule 6 on joint birth registration to help correct the current imbalance of parents' rights and responsibilities so unmarried fathers are required to be on birth certificates (with appropriate exemptions).

²⁴⁶ Graham J, Creegan C, Barnard M, Mowlam A and McKay S, *Sole and joint registration: exploring the circumstances, choices and motivations of unmarried parents*, DWP Research Report No. 463, London: Department for Work and Pensions, 2007

²⁴⁷ CSJ/Bounty – the Parent Club polling, June 2014, sample of 1009 mothers (either expectant or with children under two)

Father involvement post-separation

The Coalition Government's proposals on co-operative parenting after separation affirmed that 'parents who are able and willing to play a positive role in their child's care should have the opportunity to do so'²⁴⁸ and the Children and Families Act 2014 inserted a presumption that the 'a court... is as respects each parent... to presume, unless the contrary is shown, that the involvement of that parent in the life of the child concerned will further the child's welfare' into the Children Act 1989.²⁴⁹

However, the structure of financial support after separation is at odds with this recognition that children do best if they continue to have a relationship with both parents, because it hampers the ability of many low-income non-resident parents paying child maintenance according to the rules, to maintain contact with their child/ren.

Welfare, other state support (including Housing Benefit) and the statutory child maintenance system all see separated parents either as a 'parent with care' (usually the mother) or a 'non-resident parent' (usually the father). The latter is generally treated as a single person rather than as a parent with financial responsibilities for their children.

Child tax credits and child benefit all go to the parent with care, regardless of how many nights a child stays with the non-resident parent and, as regards Housing Benefit, a non-resident parent could have their child/ren stay with them three nights a week whilst remaining subject to the removal of the spare room subsidy.²⁵⁰ Local authorities may exercise discretion, but the system allows only one parent an entitlement to a bedroom for that child. Also, if they are under 35 and in privately rented housing they will now only be entitled to Housing Benefit at a rate equivalent to a single room in a shared house.²⁵¹ (Previously this shared accommodation rate applied to single people under 25.)

Lack of recognition of parental responsibilities in the benefits system is exacerbated by the way statutory child maintenance liabilities are calculated solely on the non-resident parent's income. Although we wholly support the principle that both parents should contribute financially to the care of children we are concerned that our child maintenance system is hampering paying parents' ability to spend time with them and the current balance is not quite right. Income thresholds at which paying parents begin to pay a higher level of maintenance have not been uprated since the turn of the century so they have to pay far more than was originally intended, relative to their income, leaving them with little to support themselves or their children.

Moreover, making non-resident parents pay as much child maintenance as possible can create significant work disincentives, undermining a key objective of welfare reform and making it

248 Department for Education and Ministry of Justice, *Co-operative Parenting Following Family Separation: Proposed Legislation on the Involvement of Both Parents in a Child's Life*, London: Department for Education and Ministry of Justice, 13 June 2012, p1

249 Children and Families Act 2014, Part Two Section 11 [accessed via: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/section/11/enacted> (26/03/14)]

250 Claimants lose 14 per cent of Housing Benefit if they are deemed to have a spare bedroom and do not move to a smaller property, and 25 per cent if they have two spare bedrooms.

251 *Housing Benefit* [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/housing-benefit/eligibility> [04/07/14]]

harder for them to be good role models to their children. This section explains where the problems lie and why, instead of piecemeal tinkering with parts of the system we need a complete review of post-separation family support.

Child maintenance

To reiterate, our long-troubled and much-reformed statutory child maintenance system is inadvertently hampering the ability of many low-income fathers (paying child maintenance according to the rules) to maintain contact with their children.²⁵² When children are able to spend time with these dads, they are often doing so in a context of severe financial hardship.

Our research has exposed concerns about the way the statutory child maintenance scheme calculates liabilities for non-resident parents on low income. Such parents make up the majority of those who pay child maintenance through the statutory scheme.²⁵³ Moreover those not using the statutory scheme but making their own arrangements typically decide how to set levels of payment by using the same calculator.²⁵⁴ Although liabilities are not imposed the calculator can create a sense of entitlement for what may be an unrealistic level of financial support from the paying parent.

Present arrangements might be defended on the basis that the overriding priority should be to put as much money as possible into the hands of the primary carer, for the benefit of the child/ren. Where one parent is providing all of the care for the child/ren, this is clearly appropriate (although the non-resident paying parent must be left with enough to cover their own basic needs). However, while we agree that children's welfare should always be of paramount concern, it is clear that:

- As current thresholds for reduced and flat rate maintenance payments remain set at 1998 levels, the presumed intent behind the original Scheme – to ensure fathers contributed at a level commensurate with their income and liabilities – has been lost;
- Nothing should undermine the message that fathers are important to children;
- The realities of shared care that characterise post-separation family life in the second decade of the 21st century challenge the current assumption that there should be one parent who receives the full range of child-related state subsidies as well as child maintenance.

252 Although online message boards such as The One Show, *Did the CSA need to change?*, 22 October, 2008, [accessed via: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/legacy/theoneshow/consumer/2008/10/22/did_the_csa_need_to_change.html (04/07/14)] and many other sources of anecdotal data make this point we are not as yet aware of quantitative research revealing how much father absence is driven by child maintenance liabilities

253 75.1 per cent of the live caseload of 1,394,000 has an assessment of £30 or less (DWP, *CSA Quarterly Summary of Statistics, March 2014*, London: DWP, 2014, p21).

254 Child maintenance options, *Child maintenance calculator* [accessed via: <http://www.cmoptions.org/en/calculator/> (04/07/14)]

A brief history of state involvement in collecting child maintenance payments in the UK

The central principle of existing child maintenance legislation is 'the duty to maintain' which, in the words of the Child Support Act 1991, means that 'an absent parent shall be taken to have met his responsibility to maintain any qualifying child of his by making periodical payments of maintenance with respect to the child of such amount, and at such intervals, as may be determined in accordance with the provisions of this Act.'²⁵⁵

Prior to the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008, for most parents this meant a compulsory engagement with the Child Support Agency (CSA) that calculated and collected maintenance payments irrespective of whether or not parents were willing and able to make their own private arrangements. As Sir David Henshaw acknowledged in 2006, the existing child support system was 'designed primarily to reclaim money for the taxpayer when parents with care [were] on benefits'.²⁵⁶

The last Labour Government's acceptance and implementation of Henshaw's key recommendation that 'the state should only get involved when parents cannot come to agreement themselves, or when one party tries to evade their responsibilities',²⁵⁷ radically altered the environment in which parents made arrangements about post-separation financial provision for their children. Since 2008, all parents have been free to make their own private arrangements for child maintenance with the state offering a statutory scheme for those parents unable or unwilling to make a private agreement.

This move away from state interference has been built upon by the Coalition Government which introduced a 'gateway conversation' with the DWP's Child Maintenance Options service, (intended to encourage parents to consider whether they are in a position to set up a family-based maintenance arrangement without applying to the statutory child maintenance scheme) and charging mechanisms (to incentivise the private transfer of maintenance payments between parents).²⁵⁸

If children are to experience close, stable and meaningful relationships with both parents after separation, both parents need to be able to meet their own and their children's basic needs. Our findings strongly suggest that current maintenance liabilities calculated under both the 2003 and the 2012 regulations simply cannot be met by some low-income paying parents. Crucially there is no self-support reserve, unlike in other countries.²⁵⁹ The following are representative of the many stories we have heard, not just from paying parents/fathers but also from those close to them:

"I'd just like to highlight the father's side – my son's marriage broke up through no fault of his own. He has two small children. He was up-front from the start about wanting to support them but the CSA took so much off him and he got so much into debt that he ended up trying to take his own life and was under a counsellor and crisis team for nine months. When I contacted the CSA and said they were not leaving him enough to live on the only comment I got was "Tough, he'll just have to find the money, won't he"."

255 s.1 Child Support Act 1991

256 Henshaw D, *Recovering Child Support: routes to responsibility*, London: The Stationery Office, 2006, p 16

257 *Ibid*, p5

258 The Child Support Fees Regulations, 2014

259 For example, Australia has a self-support allowance of one third of male total average earnings.

'I agree absent parents should pay for the upbringing of their children. I love my twin boys with all I am. I see them every other weekend and in the week. What upsets me is that I take home £196 a week. By the time I take out my rent, gas electric, council tax, water rates, food then my CSA I am left with £5 a week to live on. I have had to take my car off the road can't run it and walk to work every day 5 miles a day. It's actually getting to the point where I can't see my boys. I can't feed myself let alone them.'

BBC message board²⁶⁰

Outdated thresholds in the current calculation schemes

The three child maintenance schemes

Currently, three statutory child maintenance schemes are used to work out maintenance payments run by either the Child Support Agency (CSA) or the Child Maintenance Service (CMS).²⁶¹ The scheme which applies to each parent will depend when they began to pay child maintenance. The three schemes are:

1. the 1993 Scheme, run by the CSA;
2. the 2003 Scheme, run by the CSA; and
3. the 2012 Scheme, run by CMS.

The 2012 Scheme is open to all new applicants and will gradually replace the 1993 and 2003 Schemes (the aim is to transfer all cases to this scheme by 2017).²⁶²

Our remarks are focused on the 2003 and 2012 Schemes which both have the same underlying structure whereby the 'paying parent' (also known as the 'non-resident parent') pays a percentage of their income to the 'receiving parent' (or parent with care) with the percentage varying for the number of 'qualifying' children. The 2003 Scheme uses net income as the basis for calculating liability. The 2012 Scheme uses gross income but with different percentages so that, overall, the two Schemes produce similar results.²⁶³

The 2003 and 2012 Schemes recognise that a straight percentage would be inappropriate for those on a low income, so these parents are asked to pay a smaller amount. This is achieved through two thresholds. Below the first the non-resident parent pays only a nominal sum (the 'flat rate' of £5), between the first and the second they pay the 'reduced rate' and above the second they pay the full amount (the 'basic rate').

²⁶⁰ See: The One Show, *Did the CSA need to change?*, 22 October, 2008 [accessed via: http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/legacy/theoneshow/consumer/2008/10/22/did_the_csa_need_to_change.html (04/07/14)]

²⁶¹ Citizens Advice Bureau, *Child maintenance – what happens if you're already on the 1993 or 2003 Child Support schemes?* [accessed via: http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/wales/relationships_w/relationships_children_and_young_people_e/relationships_child_maintenance/relationships_child_maintenance_2012_scheme/relationships_child_maintenance_eligibility_and_rules/child_maintenance_what_happens_if_youre_already_on_the_1993_or_2003_child_support_schemes.htm (04/07/14)]

²⁶² Ibid

²⁶³ Although tax credits are not included in the income of the paying parent in the 2012 scheme this does not significantly change the situation because it uses the same threshold values as the 2003 Scheme.

A 1998 Green Paper²⁶⁴ gave the values of £100 and £200 a week net income to the two thresholds finally applied in the 2003 Scheme. This was three years later than was originally planned. It is worth looking at what those values meant when they were set to apply (in the year 2000) to gain an appreciation of their likely intention. Given the figures below, it would appear that the intention of the 2003 Scheme was that a non-resident parent working 30 hours on National Minimum Wage (NMW) should pay the nominal ('flat') rate of £5 a week, £260 a year because in the year 2000:

- The lower threshold of £100 corresponded to the net earned income from approximately 30 hours work per week at National Minimum Wage (NMW)²⁶⁵ suggesting that paying parents were only expected to pay more than the nominal rate when they were working a significant number of hours and therefore at least able to support themselves.
- The upper threshold of £200 corresponded to the net earned income from 35 hours work per week at twice NMW, suggesting that paying parents only began to pay the full amount when they were working full-time and earning significantly above NMW.

However, the Scheme made no provision for the upgrading of these threshold values with the passage of time – an upgrading that was essential if their original intention as we have judged it, of ensuring fathers were able to support themselves as well as fulfil their liabilities, was to be maintained. These 1998 values, detailed above, were still in place in the 2003 Scheme and continue into the 2012 Scheme, though these are now applied to gross income. (Again, in the 2012 Scheme there is no provision for any upgrading.)

If the initial intentions of the 2003 scheme were to be preserved the corresponding threshold values for the 2014–15 tax year should be £187 and £360 respectively (30 hours at NMW of £6.51/hour and 35 hours at twice NMW). So until a paying parent was earning £187 they would have paid only £5 (or an inflation-adjusted nominal sum).

This fixing of the thresholds means that the intentions of the 2003 Scheme, carried forward to the 2012 scheme, are no longer fulfilled. Currently:

- The lower threshold of £100 net corresponds to the net earned income from approximately 16 hours work at NMW
- The upper threshold of £200 net corresponds to the net earned income from approximately 34 hours work at NMW (or just over 30 hours when tax credits are included)

Non-resident parents whose income is such that they should be paying only the nominal sum are instead required to pay the 'basic rate' which is a much greater amount. This can leave them with few resources to meet their own essential living costs, and to care for the children when they are with them. Our worked example below applies the 2003 Scheme and shows a liability for a paying parent of £1,887 in 2014 in contrast to £260 in 2003 for

²⁶⁴ Department of Social Security, *Children First: a new approach to child support*, Cm 3992, London: The Stationery Office, 1998

²⁶⁵ The NMW had been introduced in the previous year at £3.60 an hour (see: The National Minimum Wage Regulations 1999)

someone earning at the same level. This is caused by the fixing of the threshold values at their 1998 values.

Child Maintenance thresholds and low-income paying parents: worked example

In looking at the effects of assessments made under these regulations, we took, as an example, a couple with two children who were both earning £10,000 a year, equivalent to 30.5 hours per week at NMW, and both providing hands-on care for their children.²⁶⁶ With the addition of Child Benefit and tax credits, their weekly household income is £508. However, if the couple separates, the individual household income of each parent is widely different.

This example assumes a common post-separation care pattern with the mother providing the main day-to-day care for the children and the father providing care for them from Saturday morning to Sunday evening, and a few hours on a Wednesday after school.

In these circumstances, with both parents still earning £10,000, with the addition of Child Benefit, tax credits and statutory child maintenance, the mother's household income reduces to £436 per week (around 86 per cent of the joint household income). However, the father's household income, after paying 20 per cent statutory child maintenance reduced by one seventh (the reduction in liability provided for an overnight stay under the regulations) falls to £176. This is less than 83 per cent of the income of a single adult yet the father is providing care for his children on three days of the week.

In this case, the mother's weekly net household income after separation is only £72 less than when the family were together but there is one less adult to provide for and the children will be looked after outside the house by the father some of the time. In terms of equivalised income, she is actually better off, financially, than before the family separated. However, the substantial decrease in the father's weekly net household income means his ability to care for his children may be severely affected.

Table 1: The financial situation of a couple both earning £10,000 a year with two children, before and after separation, 2014–15 tax year

	Couple, both working	Primary carer	Second parent
Annual income	£20,000	£10,000	£10,000
Income tax and NI	-£486	-£243	-£243
Tax credits	£5,220	£9,385	£1,275
Child benefit	£1,775	£1,775	
Net income	£26,509	£20,917	£11,032
Child maintenance		£1,877	-£1,877
Final net income	£26,509	£22,794	£9,155
Weekly net income	£508	£437	£176

²⁶⁶ Income tax and NI calculated using <http://policyinpractice.co.uk/outcome-based-software/universal-credit-calculator/> (11/7/14), child benefit calculated using government child benefit calculator; tax credits calculated using government tax credits entitlement tables and child maintenance calculated under 2003 scheme using Child Support Agency, Child Maintenance Calculator [accessed via: <https://www2.dwp.gov.uk/csa/v2/en/calculate-maintenance.asp> (11/6/14)]

We found similar effects when looking at different examples. An additional concern, given the commitment of the Government's welfare reforms to making work pay, arises in the fact that paying parents can find themselves little better-off financially if they move into work, once child maintenance payments are taken into account, than when they were unemployed because of the fixed thresholds. Anecdotally we found that low-paid work and child maintenance liabilities were considered mutually incompatible:

'He couldn't possibly pay. After housing costs and travel to work it left him with just £1 a day to live on. That had to cover everything – gas, water, electricity as well as food and clothes. How was he supposed to live? And how could he look after the children?

He tried working extra hours but it made no difference. In the end I paid – he was in a dreadful state and couldn't take any more. And I was so worried about him. Each time he left the house I was scared in case I never saw him again. I thought he might just walk out into the sea and keep going.

He hates asking so I have a jar in the cupboard that I keep topped up. Then he takes what he needs. But this is not good for either of us. He's nearly forty and shouldn't have to be reliant on me in this way. I know being in work is good for him. But it just means bigger payments for me. We don't gain anything financially.'

Mother of non-resident parent in evidence to the CSJ

It is instructive and concerning that the latest figures available indicate that in 44 per cent of assessed child maintenance cases, the paying parent is unemployed.²⁶⁷ So in close to half of assessed cases fathers are not setting the kind of example to their children many would like and the parent with care, typically the mother, is getting minimal financial help from them.

To illustrate this we looked at the gain over unemployment for a paying parent working various hours at minimum wage. Account must be taken of the loss of Housing Benefits and council tax support as the paying parent moves into work or increases the hours worked; and, of course, being in work will bring its own expenses such as travel costs. We took the example of a paying parent in one bedroom social housing in the East Midlands paying the median rent of £71.20 and Band A Council Tax of £14.60.²⁶⁸ For work expenses we included only travel costs, represented by the £19 cost of a weekly flexi ticket within the Central Leicestershire area. As in our first example we consider a parent with two children having the children for one night a week.

We start with the 2003 Scheme under the present tax credit and welfare system since the majority²⁶⁹ of parents paying through the statutory schemes are in this group and this will continue to be the case at least until 2017 for many people.²⁷⁰ We see from Table 2 that after working 16 hours a paying parent is more than £15 worse off than when unemployed. For

267 Child Support Agency, *Quarterly Summary of Statistics for Great Britain*, September 2013, p12 (the last QSS to include the unemployment numbers) [accessed via: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/259738/csa_qtr_summ_stats_sep13.pdf (04/07/14)]

268 JRF, *A Minimum Income Standard For The UK In 2014*, JRF, 2014

269 979,900 of the live CSA caseload of 1,394,000 are on the 2003 Scheme (Page 16 of the March 2014 Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics)

270 The aim is for all claimants to be on Universal Credit by the end of 2017.

34 hours work a single adult, after paying work-related travel costs, is £43.55 better off but a paying parent gains less than £7 (£6.22).

The gain for 40 hours work, when tax credits run out, is £54.13 for a single adult (an average of £1.35 an hour) and £15 for the paying parent (37p an hour). The calculations have taken no account of other work expenses. This situation has arisen because of the anachronistically low values of the two thresholds and is not appreciably resolved by the 2012 scheme.²⁷¹

Table 2: Paying parent with two children having one overnight stay on Minimum Wage pre Universal Credit 2003 Scheme, 2014/15 tax year

Hours worked (weekly)	0	16	34	40
Gross Earnings		£100.96	£214.54	£252.40
Net Earnings		£100.96	£202.61	£228.35
Working Tax Credits				
Child Tax Credits			£15.16	
Child Benefit				
Rent	-£71.20	-£71.20	-£71.20	-£71.20
Housing Benefit	£71.20	£55.89	-£71.20	-£71.20
Council Tax	-£14.50	-£14.50	-£14.50	-£14.50
Council Tax Support	£11.60	£6.89		
Job Seekers Allowance	£72.42			
Total Net Income	£155.22	£163.74	£217.77	£228.35
Disposable Income	£69.52	£78.04	£132.07	£142.65
Child Maintenance	£0.00*	-£5.00	-£37.33	-£39.15
Work-related travel costs	£0.00	-£19.00	-£19.00	-£19.00
Disposable income after child maintenance and travel costs	£69.52	£54.04	£75.74	£84.50
Gain over out of work situation for paying parent		-£15.48	£6.22	£14.98
Gain per hour for paying parent		-£0.97	£0.18	£0.37
Gain over out of work situation for single adult		-£10.48	£43.55	£54.13
Gain per hour for single adult		-£0.66	£1.28	£1.35

Notes: On the 2003 Scheme 16 and 34 hours at minimum wage correspond closely to the £100 and £200 net weekly income thresholds. Tax credits run out at 40 hours.

*£0 child maintenance is paid if there is an overnight stay and the paying parent is liable for the nominal rate

Crucially, neither does the introduction of Universal Credit resolve this situation even though it represents a major improvement in the general view of work incentives. Table 3 shows that Universal Credit provides better support for a low earning single adult than the present tax credit and welfare system (especially at the 16 hour figure). However, the paying parent has only fractionally more money after working 34 hours than after working 16.

271 Under the 2012 scheme the paying parent is more than £17 worse off than when out of work after 16 hours although they gain about £15 after 34 hours (an average of 43p an hour) and £19 after 40 hours (48p an hour) calculated using HM Government, Child Maintenance Calculator [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/calculate-your-child-maintenance> (11/7/14)]. Tax credits, Housing Benefit and council tax support in Tables 2 and 3 are from <http://www.entitledto.co.uk/> and rent/council tax costs from Joseph Rowntree Foundation, A Minimum Income Standard for the UK in 2014, London: JRF, 2014, p31; Child maintenance in Tables 2 and 3 is calculated using the 2003 Scheme accessed via: Child Support Agency, Child Maintenance Calculator [accessed via: <https://www2.dwp.gov.uk/csa/v2/en/calculate-maintenance.asp> (11/6/14)]

Table 3: Paying parent with two children and one overnight stay on Minimum Wage under Universal Credit, 2003 Scheme, 2014/15 tax year

Hours on NMW (weekly)	0	16	34	45
Gross Earnings		£100.96	£214.54	£283.95
Net Earnings		£100.96	£202.60	£249.80
Universal Credit:				
Base Element	£72.42	£23.40		
Housing Element	£71.20	£71.20	£28.53	
Child Element				
Rent	-£71.20	-£71.20	-£71.20	-£71.20
Council Tax	-£14.50	-£14.50	-£14.50	-£14.50
Council Tax Support	£14.50	£4.11		
Total Net Income	£158.12	£199.67	£231.13	£249.80
Total Disposable Income	£72.42	£113.97	£145.43	£164.10
Child Maintenance	£0.00	-£5.00	-£34.73	-£42.82
Travel Costs		-£19.00	-£19.00	-£19.00
Disposable income after child maintenance and travel costs	£72.42	£89.97	£91.70	£102.28
Gain over out of work situation for paying parent		£17.55	£19.28	£29.86
Gain per hour for paying parent		£1.10	£0.57	£0.66
Gain over out of work situation for single adult		£22.55	£54.01	£72.68
Gain per hour for single adult		£1.41	£1.59	£1.62

Note: On the 2003 Scheme 16 and 34 hours at minimum wage correspond closely to the £100 and £200 net weekly income thresholds. Universal Credit runs out at 45 hours.

The reason for this is seen from the simple structure of Universal Credit and the 2003 Scheme calculation rules. For every extra £1 of net income between the £100 and £200 thresholds:

- Universal Credit is withdrawn at a rate of 65p in the pound; and
- Child maintenance increases at a rate of 25p, 35p or 45p in the pound.

So a parent with two children with no overnight stay will gain nothing from the extra 18 hours worked after Universal Credit is withdrawn and child maintenance is paid and although the parent in our example has a 1/7th reduction in maintenance (for one overnight stay) this is off-set by the loss of council tax support. Moreover, after 45 hours work this parent has gained only £30 (66p an hour) compared with the single adult's gain of £72.68.²⁷²

Unless the thresholds are adjusted and/or other changes made to the statutory maintenance calculation schemes paying parents will continue to find that supporting themselves is precarious, let alone supporting children on overnight and other stays.

²⁷² Universal Credit figures and net income figures are from <http://policyinpractice.co.uk/outcome-based-software/universal-credit-calculator/> (11/6/14)

None of these figures include the 20 per cent collection fees that will come in under the Child Support Fees Regulations 2014 if parents use the CMS, which could further increase the paying parent's liabilities. It could be argued that as the aim of this policy is to help effect a cultural shift away from parents using the state system and towards making family-based arrangements, state-determined thresholds and percentages will become less important. However the Government's Child Maintenance Calculator tool also applies these metrics. This tool is promoted on internet search engines, the Child Maintenance Options website and printed material, and all parents calling the Child Maintenance Options call service are automatically directed to it.

We recognise that this tool is intended to provide parents with an estimate of how much child maintenance would be payable under a Child Maintenance Service arrangement, with the aim of providing a starting point for them as they seek to arrive at a family-based arrangement. However, this then acts as a Government-endorsed minimum amount for the 'paying' parent. It must have integrity and produce amounts that are affordable.

As there is very little public awareness that the thresholds are anachronistic and therefore flawed, receiving parents are unlikely to be sympathetic to requests from paying parents to adjust downwards what the calculator says they are entitled to. Family-based arrangements based on the Child Maintenance Calculator are therefore likely to be inherently unworkable for low-income payers who want to be able to spend time with their children.

Although we wholly support the contributory principle of child maintenance, the fundamental flaws in the system which we have identified run the risk of exacerbating fathers' absence or children's experience of financial hardship while in their care.

The Government must urgently raise the current thresholds at which fathers are expected to pay the reduced and basic rates of child maintenance.

This must be the first stage of a radical review by the Government of child maintenance and financial support for families after separation to better enable both parents to play a meaningful role in their children's lives. Both parents need to be assessed for their ability to contribute to the cost of bringing up children and the distribution of maintenance and state support must be based on the caring responsibilities of each parent.

The need for fundamental reform

In summary, despite several revisions to the Child Support Act 1991, the UK child maintenance system remains unchanged in that it still identifies one parent as the 'paying parent' (formerly 'absent/non-resident parent') who is required to pay a percentage of their income to the other; 'receiving parent' (formerly 'parent with care'). This Percentage Income model, which places a financial liability upon one parent and not the other, is consistent with a prevailing 'Lone Parent' model applied to separating families which provides all of the financial support

to one parent to the exclusion of the other. It also undermines the work incentives at the heart of current welfare reform measures.

Where one parent has a sole caring responsibility for a child, an appropriate Percentage Income model may be argued to be fair and effective. However, in a world where most children increasingly spend at least some of their time with both of their parents and this is considered best for them,²⁷³ we believe this model risks children experiencing financial hardship when they are with the 'paying parent' who can find themselves unable to provide even basic immediate needs such as food, clothing, money for school outings etc. For some, their ongoing inability to fulfil their parenting responsibilities increases the risk that their child/ren will lose their relationship with that parent.

Whilst the Percentage Income model may be easy to understand, easy to apply and, therefore, less prone to error in its application, we do not consider that this outweighs the need for a statutory scheme that reflects the caring responsibilities of each parent and the capacity of each parent to contribute to the financial wellbeing of their children. We believe that a scheme based upon such principles would also establish an important principle that both parents are valued for both their financial and caring contribution, post-separation.

A new statutory scheme could, for example, be based on an Income Shares model, versions of which are used in Australia, the majority of US states and Norway.²⁷⁴ This would:

- Assess the cost of bringing up children, at various ages and the capacity of both parents to make a financial contribution to that cost;
- Base each parent's contribution to the total maintenance requirement on each parent's income and include a 'self-support reserve'²⁷⁵ as it is critical that assessment levels recognise parents cannot provide support for their children unless they can first support themselves; and
- Distribute the maintenance liability in accordance with the caring responsibilities of each parent.

We recommend that the Government urgently commissions a review of international evidence that considers how the full range of state and other financial support after separation in other countries better enables both parents to play a meaningful role in their children's lives. Without pre-empting the findings of this review it seems clear that both parents should be assessed for their ability to contribute to the cost of bringing up children and the distribution of maintenance and state support should be based on the caring responsibilities of each parent.

273 See for example: HM Government, *Parental Separation: Children's Needs and Parents' Responsibilities, Next Steps*, London: The Stationery Office, 2005

274 Parkinson P, *The Future of Child Support*, Sydney Law School Research Paper No. 08/49, 2007 [accessed via: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1128023 (06/06/14)]

275 Ibid

Summary of recommendations

- The Government to implement the 2009 Welfare Reform Act Schedule 6 on joint birth registration to help correct the current legal imbalance away from (unmarried) fathers who should be able to put themselves forwards as fathers on birth certificates, without requiring mothers' approval (with appropriate exemptions).
- The Government must urgently raise the current thresholds at which fathers are expected to pay the reduced and basic rates of child maintenance to enable paying parents to support themselves as well as their children.
- This must be the first stage of a radical review by the Government of child maintenance and financial support for families after separation. Both parents need to be assessed for their ability to contribute to the cost of bringing up children and the distribution of maintenance and state support must be based on the caring responsibilities of each parent.

PART THREE

Supporting families
in difficulty

chapter six

The Troubled Families agenda

Introduction

The Troubled Families agenda, launched at the end of 2011 with cross-party support, is fundamental to a much wider effort aimed at tackling intergenerational disadvantage and breaking cycles of family dysfunction. Focused on families who have multiple, severe and entrenched difficulties, its ambition is not only to turn these families around but also to reform the way local services work with families to achieve change: 'system change' not just within the family but also within statutory services.

Fulfilling these ambitions takes time and we recommend that the Troubled Families programme remains a spending commitment for the full term of the next Parliament and beyond. We therefore welcome the announcement in June 2013 that funding will be extended by an extra £200m to help a further 400,000 families. It is not yet clear on which families this money will be focused and we consider that working preventively, with those who are 'just coping' but only one or two additional challenges away from becoming severely 'troubled', needs to be prioritised. The Riots Panel estimated that there are around half a million 'forgotten families' experiencing 'multiple disadvantages' which require intensive intervention, but which are not being targeted by the Troubled Families Programme.²⁷⁶ The work of our Alliance members across the country bears this out.

'Some parents have lost control of their children and struggle with any form of discipline or setting boundaries, some don't seem to think there's anything wrong with letting children – even young children – stay out very late. Over the past five years or so we've seen the youngest age of young people on the street late at night fall from about 13 to about nine. And we work with some eight- year-olds. Some are carrying knives and smoking skunk.'

276 Singh D et al, *After the Riots: The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel*, Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012, p38

That wasn't happening a few years ago. Many of these parents received poor parenting themselves when they were children so the cycle continues unless the right intervention is given.'

Richard Franklin, Youth Services Manager at CSJ Alliance organisation Prospec in evidence to CSJ

This extended commitment makes it even more important that lessons are learned from the last three years.²⁷⁷

We recommend that Troubled Families spending is guaranteed until at least the end of the next Parliament.

Working preventively with 'just coping' families has to be prioritised if we are to prevent a new cohort of troubled families taking the places of those whose lives have been 'turned around'.

Working across the family means thinking about couple relationships

Our research suggests that one of the five key family intervention factors,²⁷⁸ 'considering the family as a whole', could be greatly strengthened by also taking parents' couple relationships into account. The way parents relate to each other sets the tone for other interaction within families and to a large extent determines the level of stability. Family stability is an important work strand in the Social Justice Strategy because family breakdown is now widely acknowledged to be a driver of poverty.²⁷⁹

Research indicates that it is the quality of the co-parenting relationship, rather than the individual parenting skill of each parent, which has the most profound effect on the functioning of the family as a whole, and thereby upon the children's life chances.²⁸⁰

Thinking about the couple, whether they are still raising children together or not (and 88 per cent of families in the Westminster Troubled Families programme for example, are lone parents²⁸¹) is also vital to ensuring fathers are as integrated as possible into Troubled Families work (although there may be some cases where this is inappropriate). Even if they are 'off the scene' they frequently continue to exist in the mind of the child and exert a strong influence, direct or otherwise.²⁸²

277 At the time of publishing this report the first evaluation from the Ecorys UK consortium is close to being released, and we await its findings with interest. See Department for Communities and Local Government, *Study to assess impact of troubled families work*, 14 March 2013; HC Deb 3 December 2013 c632w [accessed via: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131203/text/131203w0002.htm#131203w0002.htm_snews25 (03/12/13)]

278 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Working with Troubled Families: A guide to the evidence and good practice*, London: DCLG, 2012, p6

279 See HM Government, *Social Justice: transforming lives*, HM Government, 2012

280 Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P.A., & Barry, J. Couples' groups for parents of pre-schoolers: Ten-year outcomes of a randomised trial. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(2), 240–250, 2011

281 Westminster City Council, *Cabinet Committee Update report on progress in implementing a Troubled Families Programme in Westminster*, December 2013

282 See Centre for Social Justice, *Beyond Violence*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012, p136

The Parents as Partners programme described earlier in this report (see p73) is an example of the kind of intervention that recognises the importance of the couple relationship to children's outcomes and helps parents to make significant and lasting improvements across a range of measures.



Save the Family (described later in this chapter) work with the whole family and help couples to strengthen their relationship as well as to improve their parenting skills.

Given the high level of family instability in troubled families, we recommend that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) ensure all local authority programmes provide support for couple relationships and draw in fathers who can often be helped to become a resource to the family.

Ensuring families with the greatest needs are identified and do not 'fall between' the criteria

The recent National Audit Office report on Troubled Families confirmed our concern that local authorities have experienced difficulty in locating families, and warned that DCLG cannot yet be sure that it has identified all of the families in most need of assistance.²⁸³

Attachment and outcomes criteria

The National Audit Office research also found that 21 per cent of local authorities considered that DCLG choice of criteria potentially excluded some families with multiple challenges in their area from being included on the programme.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ National Audit Office, *Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges*, London: The Stationery Office, 2013, p6

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p24

To count as a 'Troubled Family', a family must meet either all three of the centrally-set criteria (involvement in youth crime or antisocial behaviour; children regularly truanting, and an adult on out-of-work benefits) or two of the three plus a fourth, locally defined, criterion/set of criteria.

Attachment fees are paid for families with the locally determined criterion/set of criteria *and* two other centrally-set criteria, but families cannot be attached when they have several of the problems included in the local set of criteria but only one or none of those which have been centrally set.

Given that families with young children, for example, may only be eligible for the out-of-work benefits centrally-set criterion (as their children are not old enough to meet the other two) this immediately rules them out from being attached to the programme. Yet their difficulties might be multiple and complex and their children likely to have many adverse experiences and be at risk of facing extremely poor outcomes.

Similarly, results-based payments are only triggered by success in the centrally-set criteria. We understand the difficulties in standardising outcome measures across a very wide range of locally determined criteria but it is concerning that there is no 'Troubled Families' funding to acknowledge, for example, success in tackling a father or mother's addiction, which could easily be a family's most pressing problem, or in helping a family become debt-free. Without a result-based payment it could be impossible for a local commissioner to ensure such a service was adequately funded and had sufficient capacity available to troubled families coordinators.

Many of the locally determined criteria are also public health priorities. Over 50 per cent of local authorities use domestic violence or abuse, substance misuse and mental health for their local criteria.²⁸⁵ Our Freedom of Information requests found among councils who have used these problems in their local criteria, substance misuse featured in an average of 20 per cent of families, domestic violence in 23 per cent, and mental health in 24 per cent. There would be more synergy with local public health priorities if the health incentives that work in tandem with the public health outcomes framework were also applied within the Troubled Families Financial Framework.

In January 2012 the Government announced a new health premium incentive scheme whereby local authorities will be paid a premium for progress made against public health indicators.²⁸⁶ The interim report of the Health Premium Incentive Advisory Group recommends that local authorities are given flexibility to select a small number of local indicators against which premium payments for progress achieved can be assessed.²⁸⁷ These might differ from the 66 Public Health Outcomes Framework indicators.

285 National Audit Office, *Programmes to help families facing multiple challenges*, London: The Stationery Office, 2013, p24

286 Department of Health, *Helping people live healthier lives: the future for public health*, 23 January 2012 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/helping-people-live-healthier-lives-the-future-for-public-health> (30/05/14)]

287 Health Premium Incentive Advisory Group, *Recommendations to the Advisory Committee on Resources Allocation (ACRA)*, Interim report 1, 15 October 2013

This combination of a small number of national and local public health indicators could be a fruitful way forward for the next phase of the Troubled Families financial framework, enabling the Government to incentivise local authorities to achieve progress against key national criteria whilst balancing this with responsiveness to local needs and enabling local authorities to direct funds to work with the most vulnerable.

We recommend that the centrally-set attachment criteria allowing local authorities to include families on the programme are extended to include key public health priorities such as domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health.

We also recommend that results-based payments are made available for success in tackling drivers of family breakdown such as debt and substance misuse.

Preserving effective residential programmes

Based on sound evidence DCLG suggest that local authorities adopt a community-based family intervention project model.²⁸⁸ However this will not always be intensive enough to enable families with the most entrenched difficulties to turn their lives around, particularly when they have been made homeless. This may require specialist, *residential* family support where, in effect, the whole family is fostered, which can often prevent children from being taken into care.

'They are off the radar, but are more real and costly in human and financial terms ... but there's not a single budget saying these people exist ... a tsunami of people unable to find short-term respite care or residential support is coming.'

Edna Speed, President of Save the Family, in evidence to the CSJ

Yet residential programmes like the one offered by Save the Family, (see case study below) with proven effectiveness in turning families around, are being prevented from receiving funding (while continuing to receive referrals) because their local authority is allowing its community-based Troubled Families programme to displace their work.

We recommend that where there is a clear local need for residential support ('family fostering') and an effective provider able to deliver it, this higher level of support should be included as part of the Troubled Families menu of options.

288 Department for Communities and Local Government, *Working with Troubled Families: A guide to the evidence and good practice*, London: DCLG, 2012

Troubled Families programmes displacing effective work with the most vulnerable

Save the Family, in Cheshire, has transformed the lives of thousands of vulnerable families over the last 30 years. By taking the whole family into its residential accommodation the charity's model of 'family fostering' keeps the family together; prevents children from being taken into care, helps families face their difficulties and prepares them for life back in the community.

However, intensive family support funding is now all channelled into its community-based (not residential) Troubled Families work. Social workers are still desperate to place families with the charity (otherwise their children will be taken into care) but no funding has come with the families.

The charity is now funded primarily through residents' Housing Benefit payments, but gets no funds for the intensive and specialist family support work needed to help families turn their lives around. Given the numbers involved the charity simply cannot meet this level of unfunded demand.

For example, in just one week in January the charity took in families containing eight children who would have otherwise remained in a neglectful situation or been taken into local authority care; but they also had to turn away 15 families with children (22 people in total) who were homeless, despite having room to accommodate them, because they were ineligible for any Housing Benefit and had no other form of public support.

These are exactly the sort of families the Troubled Families programme was set up to help and evidence shows that residential Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) can work very effectively.²⁸⁹ The original FIP offered three levels of support:

- Residential – where the most 'at risk' families received intensive 24/7 support, such as Save the Family provides;
- Dispersed tenancies – families were housed in unsecured tenancies in communities and visited/ supported every day. If they made progress, their tenancy would be made secure;
- Outreach – families with less severe needs were worked with in their own homes.

Residential and dispersed tenancy services had a considerably higher success rate than community 'outreach'.



289 Diallane J, Hill M, Bannister J and Scott S, *Evaluation of the Dundee Families Project: Final Report*, Glasgow: Centre for the Child & Society and Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, 2001, p vii

Sustaining and building on progress

'When we think about the future of troubled families, we need to think about what happens when a family exits the programme. What do they step down to?'

David Holmes, Chief Executive, Family Action²⁹⁰

A major question for the Troubled Families programme is what happens when interventions cease, either when a family leaves the programme or when central funding for it ceases. Many local authorities are concerned with building sustainability into their programmes and avoiding a cliff-edge of withdrawal of intensive support.

The role of the voluntary sector

Voluntary sector organisations are often uniquely placed to identify and work with the most complex families. Not only can their independence from statutory services give them an advantage in gaining families' trust, our research found they also play a valuable complementary role in befriending and mentoring families who are stepping down from or up to intensive statutory support. They can also help to 'plug' them into new social networks and communities and break free from previous destructive influences and habits. Ongoing involvement, much of which is unpaid, is often indispensable for long-term and sustainable change.

'The advantage of an organisation being community-based is that it has a potential benefit to increase community cohesion and wellbeing as almost a by-product of the support process, and it's not a top-down, service-led initiative.'

Shirley Berry, Bethany Christian Trust, CSJ Alliance member in evidence to CSJ

This is seen in the case of Yeovil4Family below. The volunteer mentors build relationships with the families which enable occasional 'top-up' support, even after interventions have ceased. They make sure the families have strategies and always have somewhere to go – they leave the door open so that families can always contact them if they need to meet with a mentor, even if just for a coffee and a chat.

This is an area where volunteer mentors have great potential. Volunteer mentors may have the time that professionals lack to have informal 'top-up' meetings to keep families on track, embedding what has been learned from the programme into the families everyday lives.

Local authorities need to make volunteer befrienders/peer support a core part of Troubled Families provision, alongside and following professional intervention to sustain family learning and change and avoid a cliff-edge of support withdrawal.

²⁹⁰ David Holmes, Family Action, in evidence to the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 29 January 2014 [accessed via: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/public-accounts/PAC%2029.01.14.pdf> (01/02/14)], p13

Good practice example: South Somerset Troubled Families/Yeovil4Family

In South Somerset, delivery of the programme has been commissioned out to a local voluntary sector organisation that has developed an innovative delivery model combining trained volunteer mentors with professional link workers. A professional link worker provides the point of contact with specialist services, and a trained volunteer mentor is assigned to the family to 'share the journey' with them: helping them to take small steps, repeating positive messages and gradually building their confidence and aspirations.

Mentors can identify things that can build self esteem incrementally, even when families may not be able to – e.g. re-discovering something they're good at. Families are encouraged to set their own goals – such as a meal together; writing one positive thing about other members of the family, reading aloud to their children or getting up before 9am. This helps to build their self-esteem and develop resilience.

It is this combination of the volunteer mentor with the professional link worker that makes the difference. The matching process is important – they identify the needs of the family and match to the skills/qualities of the mentor. Yeovil4Family usually change the mentor after six months, and constantly review the mentor-mentee relationships to avoid attachment/dependence, and build self-reliance. It is designed to be a relationship which will no longer be required.

The council adopted this model as their delivery model for Troubled Families and are rolling it out across the whole of South Somerset, having commissioned Yeovil4Family to deliver this for a further two years beyond the initial contract. They are also now looking at other areas beyond Troubled Families of getting statutory agencies working together with non-statutory volunteer support, seeing this as an opportunity to change their ways of working.

Achieving system change

'We need to think about how, if I put it bluntly, we can turn round the troubled services around troubled families ... At the moment we have uncoordinated, reactive services ... and we need to change the system. [If we don't] it will be a massive missed opportunity and we won't make the kind of saving that all of us want to make.'

Louise Casey²⁹¹

Some local authorities have been able to ensure their Troubled Families programme helps to drive a genuine 'system change' in terms of how agencies work together and how they work with complex families. Most notably, four areas took advantage of Public Service Transformation funding and expertise to pilot a Community Budgets model as a means of tackling some of their biggest social challenges. They drew public services, business and the voluntary sector together across a range of policy areas including Troubled Families.

However the CSJ has been told that the amount of money and support available on an ongoing basis to help local authorities effect the 'public service transformation' vital for realising the full potential of the Troubled Families agenda is far below what is needed if they are to see the same gains as four pilot areas received. Given the importance of achieving system change so

291 Reported in The Independent, 'We must improve services or troubled families will blight society' says Troubled Families 'tsar' Louise Casey, 24 June 2013

councils are able to face the social policy challenges within the tightly restricted budgets that will be the norm for the foreseeable future, it is essential that a sufficient level of financial and practical help is made available.

This is not simply about drawing down expertise from the centre: much is said about the need for local authorities to share good practice with each other. Central government can help to facilitate this, for example by resourcing 'back-fill' to enable someone to be seconded from one council to another:

We recommend that the Government commit to resourcing public service transformation at a level that will enable local authorities to effect system change.

Summary of recommendations

- The Troubled Families programme should be a long-term commitment, for the full term of the next Parliament – and beyond.
- Working preventively with 'just coping' families has to be prioritised if we are to prevent a new cohort of Troubled Families taking the places of those whose lives have been 'turned around'.
- Given the high level of family instability in Troubled Families, DCLG must ensure all local authority programmes provide support for couple relationships and draw in fathers who can often be helped to become a resource to the family.
- Where there is a clear local need for residential support ('family fostering') and an effective provider able to deliver it, this higher level of support should be included as part of the Troubled Families menu of options.
- The centrally-set attachment criteria allowing local authorities to include families on the programme to be extended to include key public health priorities such as domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health.
- Results-based payments to be made available for success in tackling drivers of family breakdown such as debt and substance misuse.
- Local authorities should make volunteer befrienders/peer support a core part of Troubled Families provision, alongside and following professional intervention to sustain family learning and change and avoid a cliff-edge of support withdrawal.
- The Government to commit to resourcing public service transformation at a level that will enable local authorities to effect system change.

chapter seven

Supporting families whose children are on the edge of care

Introduction

Much can be done to transform outcomes for children currently living in highly dysfunctional families by working intensively and effectively with both their parents. Our research has brought to light certain programmes and approaches with proven ability to change lives and bring children back from the brink of local authority care. Outlined below, these must be rolled out nationally as a matter of urgency.

Children 'on the edge of care' (and youth custody) typically come from disadvantaged families who are frequently caught up in a range of the five pathways to poverty: relationship difficulties and behavioural problems (including truancy, self harm, antisocial behaviour and criminal activity), alcohol and drug misuse, low educational attainment, economic dependency and severe debt.²⁹² Along with these come other long-term difficulties including domestic violence, depression or other mental health problems and living in poor housing.

These make it very hard for parents to provide safe, stable and nurturing relationships for their children. Working with families so they can address these problems and learn how to create a healthy environment for their children can prevent them from having to enter care. Yet keeping children's levels of need below care thresholds while family work is undertaken is a crucial priority – achieving it requires ensuring a range of public, private and voluntary sector services are working well together in proactively addressing these 'lower' levels of need in ways described below.

²⁹² Children's Rights Director for England, *Children on the edge of care*, Ofsted, 2011; Centre for Social Justice, *Couldn't Care Less*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2008, Chapter 1; Forrester D et al, 'What is the Impact of Public Care on Children's Welfare? A Review of Research Findings from England and Wales and their Policy Implications', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38, 3, 2009 pp1–18

Many of the families being helped in the Troubled Families programme will have children on the edge of care but there will be others in this position, in any given area, who have not been attached to the programme (perhaps because they do not meet the criteria as described in the previous chapter) but will need similar help. This is why the system change described in the last chapter is so important so that all family support is aligned with the key 'intervention factors' identified as effective in working with those with multiple and complex needs.²⁹³

Underpinning all these 'factors' is the need for interventions to help families help themselves. A similar kind of system change, with the same rationale, has also been called for in social work: Professor Munro's review found that the child protection system had become a 'defended system' emphasising procedure and giving insufficient attention to developing and supporting expertise in working effectively with children and families.²⁹⁴

'We've evolved a language where we talk about vulnerable children rather than vulnerable families – it's about rescuing vulnerable children from horrible parents, whereas the 1989 Children Act was very clear that social workers should work in partnership with parents to reduce the risk to children. We need to get back to that context. Services should privilege being in birth families, offering families skilled help – we need to recognise the importance of family.'

Steve Goodman OBE, *Reclaiming Social Work*, in evidence to the CSJ

There are many evidence-based interventions for children on the edge of care, some of which are currently being piloted and supported by the DfE.²⁹⁵ Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is one of the more recent ones to be trialled in the UK and we were particularly impressed when we visited projects by its explicit focus on relationships across the family.

This chapter however draws particular attention to Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, a more established programme offering parents struggling with addictions the best possible chance to turn their lives around – sometimes the only real chance they have ever had – which may obviate the need for their children to be taken into care.

We also highlight Safe Families for Children, a new community-based initiative where volunteers partner with statutory and other services to help families in crisis.

Finally, although we are clear that other support services have to help prevent families becoming involved with statutory child protection professionals, we recognise the critical nature of social work and make recommendations for training and reform within this profession that would drive the kind of system change recommended by the Munro Review.

293 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), *Working with Troubled Families: A guide to the evidence and good practice*, London: DCLG, 2012

294 Munro E, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child-centred system*, London: The Stationery Office, 2011

295 Evidence Based Interventions Programme, *Interventions for looked after children, children on the edge of care or custody and their families* [accessed via: <http://evidencebasedinterventions.org.uk/> (3/7/14)]

Children on the edge of care

Numbers of 'children in need' are increasing. In 2012/13 there were 395,100 children coming into this category – an increase of five per cent since 2009/10. The number (127,100) subject to Section 47 and initial child protection conferences also increased by 42 per cent over the same period, and the number (52,700) of children who became subject to a child protection plan increased by 19 per cent.²⁹⁶ If these families can be supported so that their children can remain with them there are significant savings to be made in terms of financial cost and human suffering.

Although being taken into care may be the only reasonable option, four out of 10 children in care believed that had there been more support, they would not have needed to be removed from their parents.²⁹⁷ Each looked after child in England costs £37,669 per year accounting for over a third of all Children's Services budgets nationally.²⁹⁸ Much money could be saved and heartache avoided or greatly reduced if families got timely help to turn their lives around.

Tackling parental drug and alcohol addiction

At the same time as seeking to stabilise families, our work constantly draws attention to the need to tackle other pathways to poverty.²⁹⁹ Parents who have addictions can neglect and abuse their children to the extent that their removal becomes the only viable option. (Parental substance misuse is a factor in almost two-thirds of families in care proceedings.)³⁰⁰ Many CSJ Alliance organisations and family court professionals point to the very damaging home environments these parents have sometimes grown up in. Lack of nurture and unmet emotional needs in parents are often contributing factors to their destructive behaviour.

Removing their children can be devastating for all concerned, leading to a loss of hope and motivation to change on the part of the parent(s) and, as we have explained previously, it can drive a desire for future pregnancies.³⁰¹ In the worst cases, judges have removed multiple babies from mothers due to addictions: over 7000 mothers and almost 23,000 children have been involved in repeat care cases over the last seven years.³⁰² Senior District Judge Nicholas Crichton removed one mother's fourteenth baby into care because of her addiction to crack cocaine and other drugs.³⁰³

*'It is a human tragedy. I have had mothers say to me, "If you take away my child I will have another and I will go on having children until you stop taking them away".'*³⁰⁴

296 Department for Education, *Characteristics of children in need in England: 2012 to 2013*, 31 October 2013, Table A2

297 Ofsted, *Children on the edge of care: a report of children's views by the Children's Rights Director for England*, Manchester: Ofsted, 2011, p7

298 House of Commons Library, *Children in Care in England: Statistics*, Standard Note SN/SG/4470, May 2012, Table 4 (Figure shown is for 2009/10); Department for Education, *Statistical Release: Local Authority And School Expenditure On Education, Children's Services And Social Care For 2011-12, Including School Revenue Balances*, London: Department for Education, 2013

299 Throughout all our work, the CSJ has identified worklessness/economic dependency, educational failure, severe personal debt, addiction, and family breakdown as key drivers of poverty.

300 Forrester D, and Harwin J, 'Parental substance misuse and child care social work: findings from the first stage of a study of 100 families', *Child and Family Social Work*, 11 (4), 2006, pp325-335

301 Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain: The Next Generation*, London: CSJ, 2008, p115

302 Broadhurst K, Harwin J, Shaw M and Alrouh B, 'Capturing the scale and pattern of recurrent care proceedings: initial observations from a feasibility study', *Family Law*, 2014

303 *The Guardian*, 'Drug addicts' children need protecting', 21 October 2010

304 *Sunday Times*, *Drug mother has all 14 children taken into care*, 10 June 2007

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court stood out to us as being particularly effective in helping parents pull their lives together before their children are taken away. Giving them a level of help and support they have not experienced before can also clarify whether or not they will be able to turn their lives around within a timeframe that is appropriate for their children's best interests.

Based on an American model of 'problem-solving courts', which has been successful in enabling more children in care to return home, the FDAC helps families where substance misuse means care proceedings are underway.³⁰⁵ Involvement (which is voluntary) takes families through a process specifically designed for tackling drug and alcohol problems. The family is supported by a multi-disciplinary team including specialists in substance misuse, mental health and family therapy.³⁰⁶ They are also assigned a key worker and trained volunteer parent mentor who will themselves have had similar experiences of overcoming substance misuse (two thirds of mentors are FDAC graduates).



The court monitors the family's progress regularly and, in between court review hearings, the parent will see their key worker and parent mentor regularly. The authority of the court underlies the whole process, and is used to hold participants to their promises. The result of failing to commit is identical to the usual court route: families can lose their children.

The family comes before the same judge throughout the process. Judges are trained in Motivational Interviewing and works directly with the parents to overcome their problems. Timescales are firmly fixed to key stages in the child's development: for example, since the sensitive time for attachment is between six and 18 months, any decisions on whether to return the child must be taken before the child reaches six months.³⁰⁷

Research suggests that traditional 'adversarial' court processes in care proceedings can fail to motivate parents to change or to induce agencies to work together, with the result that children spend long periods in foster care, and very few families are able to successfully overcome their problems.³⁰⁸

'The problem-solving approach in care proceedings is a very different culture from the usual adversarial approach, the FDAC changes the mindset of parents and professionals

305 Worcel S, Furrer C, Green B, Burrus S, and Finigan M, 'Effects of Family Treatment Drug Courts on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare Outcomes', *Child Abuse Review*, 17, 2008, pp427–443

306 Coram, *Family Drug and Alcohol Court: Information for Professionals*, Coram and The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust

307 Bambrough S, Shaw M, and Kershaw S, 'The Family Drug and Alcohol Court Service in London: A new way of doing care proceedings', *Journal of Social Work Practice, published on early view*, 3 June 2013, p3

308 Harwin J, Ryan M, Tunnard J, Pokhrel S, Alrouh B, Matias C, and Momenian-Schneider, *The Family Drug and Alcohol Evaluation Project Final Report*, London: Brunel University, 2011

and is about collaboration and honesty rather than a system that encourages the parent to deny their problem and become caught up in a contest.'

Sophie Kershaw, FDAC Service Manager, in evidence to the CSJ

The evaluation showed almost doubled rates of parent-child reunification (39 per cent, compared to 21 per cent) and faster permanent placement for children who were not reunited with their parents.³⁰⁹ Given the scarcity of foster parents and the specialist support required as a child progresses through the care system, this implies a considerable easing of the burden on services in the future.

Parents accessed substance misuse services more quickly, received a broader range of services, and were more successful at staying the course of treatment and stopping substance misuse. The results were particularly remarkable for fathers: 36 per cent ceased substance misuse, compared to zero per cent in the comparator group.³¹⁰

84 per cent of the public, when questioned in our YouGov poll whether drugs courts should be more widely available across the UK, thought that it was a good idea.³¹¹

The evaluation also demonstrated cost savings, due to children spending less time in foster care (an average saving of £4,000 per family) and reduced court costs.³¹² It is estimated that the FDAC saves the public purse a staggering £40,000 per year for each family where there is recovery.³¹³ Given the very tangible cost saving this is a prime candidate for social investment.

The FDAC has been replicated from its pilot in the Inner London and City Family Proceedings Court to five London boroughs and will be further extended to Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, with a further shortlist of locations in the North of England.³¹⁴ In line with the Family Justice Review's recommendation of further limited rollout to build an evidence base, the Department for Education is currently providing development funding for the FDAC pioneers to work with local authorities to implement the FDAC in their local area until March 2015.³¹⁵

However without greater investment progress will be very slow: only four will have been established outside London by the end of the funding period (2013–2015). Yet this intervention is urgently needed across the country and it has been shown to save significant

309 Ibid, p4

310 Ibid, p4

311 CSJ/YouGov poll, in CSJ, *Every Family Matters: An in-depth review of family law in Britain*, London: CSJ, 2010, p17

312 Harwin J, Ryan M, Tunnard J, Pokhrel S, Alrouh B, Matias C, and Momenian-Schneider, *The Family Drug and Alcohol Evaluation Project Final Report*, London: Brunel University, 2011, p6

313 Ernst and Young with RyanTunnardBrown, *FDAC Development Project: Options for Sustainability and Rollout*, London: Department for Education, 2012, cited in Bambrough S, Shaw M, and Kershaw S, 'The Family Drug and Alcohol Court: A new way of doing care proceedings', *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 2013, p5

314 Community Care, *Family Drug and Alcohol Court to expand into Buckinghamshire and northern England*, 15 November 2013 [accessed via: http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2013/11/15/family-drug-and-alcohol-court-to-expand-into-buckinghamshire-and-northern-england/#.Us_Pavu_Rko (15/09/13)]; Coram, *More specialist courts to be set up for families facing substance misuse*, 4 July 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.coram.org.uk/news/more-specialist-courts-be-set-families-facing-substance-misuse> (08/01/14)]

315 HM Government, *Evidence-based interventions for vulnerable children*, 16 December 2013

public money and private heartache. The US evidence and the many pilots are all pointing in a very promising direction and Sir James Munby the President of the Family Division of the High Court has urged judges and others from local authorities and mental health to work together to establish an FDAC in every local family court.³¹⁶

We recommend that there is ongoing development funding available from 2015 to establish an FDAC in every family court. Social investment via social impact bonds considered as an option for financing by local authorities.

The FDAC is not only an excellent example of multi-disciplinary, specialist working to tackle one of the leading causes of children being taken into care; it is also an exemplar of the way of conducting child protection social work recommended by the Munro Review.

Safe Families for Children: a community-based response to families in crisis

Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a volunteer-based model offering peer support to families with young children who are struggling profoundly. They provide short-term respite care to help parents get back on their feet. Although social services are aware of families' inclusion in the programme, it is entirely voluntary; parents are not mandated to enter it, they retain parental responsibility and can take their children back whenever they choose. The focus is on enabling parents to provide safe families for their children.

A Host Family looks after a child for a short period of time giving parents space to overcome difficulties. A 'Family Friend' works alongside the parents, offering mentoring and support through crisis. A 'Resource Friend' organises necessary resources from a central resource bank of donated items such as bedding, carry cots, highchairs and other items necessary for looking after a young child. Finally, a 'Family Coach' works with the parents within 48 hours to make sure the Host Family and child are settled and the parents' relationship with the Family Friend is working. Volunteers receive comprehensive training, screening and accreditation.

The initiative began in Chicago over 10 years ago, and has since helped 11,000 families in the US stay together, and reduced the numbers of looked after children in Chicago by about 50 per cent over that period.³¹⁷ It is being piloted in North East England, originally in Middlesbrough and has now been extended to 11 local authority areas. SFFC's Policy and Procedures have been approved by the local Safeguarding Children Boards. An evaluation has also been commissioned.

By 31 March 2014, the end of its first year, SFFC in the UK had received 185 referrals (mainly from Social Services (39 per cent) but also from Sure Start Children's centres, schools and health professionals), and had helped 101 families (227 children), with a total of 206 nights hosted. It now has 631 volunteers, providing 122 homes in which to host children, involving 68 churches.³¹⁸

316 Munby J, *12th View from the President's Chamber: The process of reform: next steps*, 9 June 2014 [accessed via: http://www.jordanpublishing.co.uk/practice-areas/family/news_and_comment/12th-view-from-the-president-s-chamber-the-process-of-reform-next-steps#.U61ov5RdWzY (27/6/14)]

317 Evidence submitted by former Director for Children and Family Services, State of Illinois

318 Figures provided to the CSJ from SFFC, June 2014



The evaluation led by Durham University in partnership with Cambridge University found that the largest proportion of children went home to their parents at the end of the placement (76.5 per cent), and of the remainder for whom data was available, eight per cent went into the care of statutory child protection services.³¹⁹ Ongoing follow-up evaluation will be needed to determine whether or not the longer term benefits found in Chicago are replicated. A charitable foundation is paying the overheads of the pilot for three years, after which point, and if the evaluation proves the concept, the 12 local authorities will be expected to pick up the cost of overheads (in 2016–17).

Although the programme is currently church-based, nothing precludes its being located in other communities; all it requires is a substantial volunteer base. SFFC are in talks with the Muslim Council of Great Britain and Jewish leaders about drawing on the resource of these communities. The plan is to extend this nationally, and the charity expects to have 100,000 volunteers across the country within 10 years. A partner has also been identified in Scotland to take on the franchise there.

Once its effectiveness has been established, the Safe Families for Children (SFFC) programme must be endorsed by central government as a community-based resource for local authorities to prevent children in struggling families from having to go into care.

Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a promising programme needed in every local authority area. Subject to its evaluation, we recommend that local authority Children's Services partner with the charity by paying overheads as it rolls out gradually across the UK.

319 Crighton D, Farrington D and Towl G, *Safe Families for Children: A Review of International Research and Proposals for Evaluation*, February 2014, p7

'System change' in Social Work

Social workers are critical professionals for families on the edge of care. If they are to work in effective partnership with parents to reduce risk to children their practice will have to undergo a fundamental shift and this starts with training as emphasised by the Munro Review.

Social work education

Professor Munro recommended that employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) work together so social work students are prepared for the challenges of child protection work, notably *inter alia* that employers are able to apply for special 'teaching organisation' status, awarded by the College of Social Work.³²⁰

Our review also heard that social work education can often be quite removed from social work practice. Students attend university courses, and must complete practical placements as part of their course, but many of those delivering courses have not been practising social workers for some time.

'Lecturers on Social Work should also be practising – like in medicine. But most lecturers on social work courses have not practiced for years.'

Steve Goodman OBE, Reclaiming Social Work

Subsequent to the Munro Review there is new training scheme *Frontline*, which focuses on practical as well as academic training and is a potentially promising initiative.³²¹ However other solutions must be found for the majority of social work students still going through the traditional route (there are currently only 100 places on Frontline) the detachment of social work education from social work practice needs to be addressed.

We recommend that there should be Training local authorities, similar to University or Teaching Hospitals, where local authorities link up with a university and senior practising social workers are also involved in teaching. The Department for Education, in partnership with the independent College of Social Work could play a key role in developing this new approach.

Examples are already emerging of county councils working with universities in similar ways to this which will provide invaluable learning opportunities for other authorities. The University of East Anglia (UEA) runs a graduate training scheme in conjunction with Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils. Essex and Herefordshire County Councils and Croydon Borough Council have launched social work academies working with Higher Education Institutions to ensure continuous professional development, support for frontline social workers and post-qualification training at every level.³²²

320 Munro E, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A child-centred system*, London: The Stationery Office, 2011, p13

321 Frontline, *Frontline's Approach* [accessed via: <http://www.thefrontline.org.uk/about-frontline/frontlines-approach> (27/6/14)]

322 University of East Anglia, *Social Work Graduate Trainee Scheme* [accessed via: <http://www.uea.ac.uk/study/admissions-info/social-work-graduate-trainee-scheme> (3/7/14)]; Essex County Council, *Working Here* [accessed via: <http://www.essexsocialwork.co.uk/adults/working> (3/7/14)]; The Guardian, *Herefordshire offers pioneering support for social workers* [accessed via: <http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2013/oct/09/herefordshire-pioneering-support-social-workers> (11/06/14)]; Community Care, *Council launches children's social work academy*, 24 September 2010 [accessed via: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2010/09/24/council-launches-childrens-social-work-academy/#.U5lLXYolko> (11/06/14)]

Social work education and training need to be delivered by practising social workers. The Department for Education should work with the independent College of Social Work to enable at least one local authority in every region to become a 'Training Local Authority' operating like a university hospital.

'This more co-ordinated response to social work training is critical. There is a real need to connect more pro-actively the academic offer, the employer context and the first years of employment of newly qualified staff. It's essential that we support social workers with the best academic offer post qualifying, assist them to translate theory into day to day reality and systematically nurture their development in a way that benefits them and most importantly the children and young people they work with.'

'We are already dealing with the demand from a second cohort wanting to join the programme and are extending our thinking into the placement offer we make to those still at the pre-qualifying stage.'

Sheila Lock, (interim) Director of Children's Service at Norfolk County Council, in support of the CSJ's proposal for training local authorities (which has also been endorsed by Dave Hill, Executive Director for People Commissioning, Essex County Council.)

Fathers and social work education

There is considerable evidence that social work and other child welfare services focus on mothers and sideline fathers.³²³ Ofsted found that in serious case reviews the father tends to be overlooked and an audit of case files including children in need, child protection, and looked after children, found:^{324, 325}

- 20 per cent of children's files did not have the birth father named;
- 80 per cent of fathers were not living with the child;
- Fewer than half the fathers in touch with their child were invited to a core assessment meeting (but when invited, three-quarters attended).

Despite the fact that roughly equal numbers of men and women are perpetrators of neglect and abuse against young children, women who are perpetrators tend to be offered supportive interventions, whilst men in this position tend to be denied access to both services and their children.^{326, 327} This can fail to hold fathers responsible and deny them the opportunity to be involved in family matters.³²⁸ Lack of paternal interest and involvement with their child(ren) and difficulties locating fathers³²⁹ all play a part but social workers' attitudes and behaviours

323 Scourfield J, Maxwell N, Holland S, Tolman R, Sloan L, Featherstone B and Bullock A, *Improving the engagement of fathers in child protection*, National Institute for Social Care and Health Research, 2013

324 Ofsted, *The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews*, Manchester: Ofsted, April 2011, p9, para 19

325 Featherstone B, Fraser C, Lindley B and Ashley C, *Fathers Matter: Resources for Social Work Educators*, Family Rights Group, 2010, p16

326 Redford et al, *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*, London: NSPCC, 2011, p49

327 Swann G, *Breaking Down Barriers: Developing an Approach to Include Fathers in Children's Social Care*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, 2013

328 Coady N, Hoy S and Cameron G, 'Fathers' experiences with child welfare services', *Child and Family Social Work*, 18, 2013, pp275–284

329 Smith T, Duggan A and Bair-Merritt M, 'Systematic Review of Fathers' Involvement in Programmes for the Primary Prevention of Child Maltreatment', *Child Abuse Review*, 21, 2012, pp237–254

can be unhelpfully dominated by seeing men as a 'threat', 'problematic', 'absent', 'worthless' and, 'irrelevant'.³³⁰

'Men come off badly in social work, and are pathologized. One of the reasons for this is down to how social workers are perceived by the families: A social worker is the scariest person ever to knock on their door. Men tend to shout and swear and appear aggressive when confronted with a powerful social worker, whose presence carries the threat of the removal of their children. Then social workers think 'If he's like that with me, he's probably like that with the children' – which is nonsense: we'd all fight really hard for our children if we thought someone was knocking on our door to take them off us.'

Steve Goodman OBE, *Reclaiming Social Work*

It is important that social workers are given the training to feel safe to work with men, and that social work education prepares them to understand how fathers are likely to react to challenging situations. However, educators have noted the lack of learning materials around working with fathers and this is borne out by the lack of father engagement described above.³³¹

The College of Social Work has produced a series of curriculum guides for social work education to support curriculum development and educators. A curriculum guide on the importance of working with fathers, and how to include fathers in social work would be a valuable resource for educators, and would send a strong signal to course designers about the importance of working with fathers.



330 Scourfield J, Maxwell N, Holland S, Tolman R, Sloan L, Featherstone B, and Bullock A, *A Feasibility study for a randomised controlled trial of a training intervention to improve the engagement of fathers in the child protection system*, National Institute for Social Care and Research, Wales, 2011; Scourfield J 'Constructing Men in Child Protection Work', *Men and Masculinities*, 4 (1), 2001, pp70–89; Scourfield J, *Gender and Child Protection*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Featherstone B, Fraser C, Lindley B and Ashley C, *Fathers Matter: Resources for Social Work Educators*, University of Bedford: Family Rights Group, 2010; Strega S, Brown L, Dominelli L, Walmsley C and Callahan M, 'Working with me, working at me: Narratives of fathers in child welfare', *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 19(2), 2008, pp72–91

331 Featherstone B, Fraser C, Lindley B and Ashley C, *Fathers Matter: Resources for Social Work Educators*, Family Rights Group, 2010

The need to involve fathers wherever possible must also be included on the single summary document recommended in Martin Narey's recent report on the education of social workers. This highlighted how unhelpful it was in course design that universities had to draw upon at least five source documents when determining the academic content of the social work degree.³³² Narey concluded that

*'there needs to be a concise, single document drafted, drawing on the advice of the College of Social Work, academics and, particularly, employers, which offers ... a GMC-style summary of what a newly qualified children's social worker needs to understand. Such a document should cover not only factual issues but those which are best described as philosophical or attitudinal.'*³³³

The College of Social Work should publish a curriculum guide on the importance of working with fathers and how to include fathers in family work and this subject needs to be covered in the concise, single summary document outlining what a newly qualified children's social worker needs to understand, as recommended by the recent Narey review on social work education.

The Department of Education should fund a pilot in a local authority area where social workers ensure all practices, procedures and systems prioritise including fathers to provide a model of good practice.

The seven principles on which the Islington Breaking Down Barriers project was based (see below) provide an exemplar for local authorities and could be incorporated into the curriculum guide.

Good practice example: Islington Breaking Down Barriers project

Breaking Down Barriers was an 18-month project which ran in Islington until 2011, as a part of the doctoral research of Gavin Swann (operational manager for Islington Council's Children in Need service). The aim was to ensure all practices, procedures and systems within Islington Children's Services considered fathers, and to increase the numbers of men, including fathers and partners, recorded in social work assessments. All agencies and members of the Safeguarding Board in Islington signed up to the following seven objectives:

1. Create and adopt a fatherhood strategy for Children in Need (CIN) and related services with realistic goals and targets. This should include a policy for communicating with fathers and an explicit code of practice for dealing with fathers and male carers. This strategy should be communicated and discussed with all staff and visible for families.
2. Identify in what ways agencies as a whole as well as individual services and individual staff can draw fathers in and discuss these objectives in supervision and appraisal/performance management systems.

³³² Narey M, *Making the education of social workers consistently effective*, Department for Education, 2014, p5

³³³ *Ibid*, p43

3. Refine the existing referral and assessment process and the accompanying paperwork to ensure that fathers' data is collected explicitly, systematically and accurately.
4. Use data collection system(s) to regularly assess patterns of use in services, and identify areas where fathers are not being included to guide the focus of communication and services.
5. Ensure that training is available for staff at every level of each organisation in father-inclusive practice so it becomes embedded in all levels of work, and not reliant on the commitment of targeted services or committed individuals within teams.
6. Establish better pathways and referral processes between generic 'preventative' provision including Children's Centres and related services and 'crisis' intervention services such as CIN. This could enable vulnerable fathers to be identified and supported earlier.
7. Ensure gender specific and otherwise appropriate information is available to give fathers ante-natally and subsequently.³³⁴

Taking this whole-system approach led to a 140 per cent increase in the identification of fathers in Islington, as well as smaller increases in fathers' (and their families') involvement in assessments and care planning with the result, for example, that more children were placed with paternal extended families during the pilot than previously.

The Government should pilot a wider trial of this approach and evaluate its success in changing working cultures around engaging with fathers.

Reclaim social work

The Munro Review emphasised the need for whole-system change in social work so that the profession focused on helping families change rather than on assessing risk. Reclaim Social Work (RSW) is a model of social work practice pioneered in Hackney (and showcased in the Munro Review) which enables social workers to spend more time working *with* families: helping them to change how they parent and helping them to develop effective strategies for tackling the considerable challenges they face.³³⁵

In this model social workers' experience is greatly prized and career progression is not solely into line management. Whereas traditional social workers have a caseload of about 15 children, and managers oversee about seven to eight social workers, and are thus responsible for over 100 children at risk, in RSW children are allocated to a systemic Social Work Unit headed by a Consultant Social Worker, who is both a manager and practitioner. They lead a unit constituted of a social worker, a children's practitioner, a clinical specialist and a unit coordinator, who takes all non-social work tasks off social workers.

The unit holds weekly meetings to discuss the families and shares responsibility for decisions. It is distinctive that 'each family, child and young person is known to each member of the unit'.³³⁶

334 Swann G, *Breaking Down Barriers: Developing an Approach to Include Fathers in Children's Social Care*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, 2013

335 Munro E, *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – A child-centred system*, London: The Stationery Office, 2011, see Appendix D

336 Cross S and Munro E, *Reclaiming Social Work: London Borough of Hackney Children and Young People's Services*, London: Human Reliability Associates and London School of Economics, 2010, p2

Being multi-disciplinary, the unit brings multiple skills and perspectives, which enables broader assessments to be made and each team member to reflect critically on their own practice, not just what is going on inside the family. Social workers in this model need the skills to work constructively with the family to help them change as well as to assess risk.³³⁷ To ensure social workers had the requisite level of skill, every social worker had to go through a competency test, and those who were found inadequate to this demanding task were replaced.

Independent evaluations show positive differences between RSW and traditional teams. One evaluation concluded RSW 'supports reflective learning and skills development through its shared approach to case management'.³³⁸ Another found 'strong evidence that the systemic unit approach provided an excellent level of service for families'.³³⁹ RSW cut the costs of children's social care by five per cent, which was directly attributable in large part to the reduced numbers of looked after children (which fell by 30 per cent over 2005–2009), but also reduction of staff absences due to sickness by 55 per cent.³⁴⁰

Obviously other models may be successful in achieving system change and many localities have used RSW to develop their own schemes, however it is crucial that elements of any system change model are not used simply to 'tweak' existing ways of doing things.

To ensure families are actually helped, we recommend that local authorities' Children's Services (who have not already done so) adopt a model to achieve whole-system change in child protection social work as a matter of urgency – the Reclaim Social Work model is an exemplar of the kind of change required.

Summary of recommendations

- The Department for Education's funding for further roll-out of the FDAC must be ongoing after 2015 to enable much wider roll-out across the country: there needs to be a FDAC in every local family court.
- Safe Families for Children (SFFC) is a promising programme needed in every local authority area. Subject to its evaluation, local authority Children's Services must partner with the charity by paying overheads as it rolls out gradually across the UK.
- Social work education and training needs to be delivered by practising social workers. The Department for Education to work with the independent College of Social Work to enable at least one local authority in every region to become a 'Training Local Authority' operating like a university hospital.

337 Morning Lane Associates, *Reclaiming Social Work* [accessed via: http://www.morninglane.org/Morning_Lane_Associate_1/Reclaiming.html (01/11/14)]

338 Cross S and Munro E, *Reclaiming Social Work: London Borough of Hackney Children and Young People's Services*, London: Human Reliability Associates and London School of Economics, 2010, p33

339 Forrester D, Westlake D, McCann M, Thurnham A, Shefer G, Glynn G and Killian M, *Reclaiming Social Work? An Evaluation of Systemic Units as an Approach to Delivering Children's Services*, Summary report, Bedfordshire: University of Bedfordshire, 2013, p20

340 Cross S and Munro E, *Reclaiming Social Work: London Borough of Hackney Children and Young People's Services*, London: Human Reliability Associates and London School of Economics, 2010

- The College of Social Work to publish a curriculum guide on the importance of working with fathers, and how to include fathers in family work.
- The Department for Education to fund a pilot in a local authority area where social workers ensure all practices, procedures and systems prioritise including fathers to provide a model of good practice.
- Local authorities' Children's Services (who have not already done so) to adopt a model to achieve whole-system change in child protection social work as a matter of urgency – the Reclaim Social Work model is an exemplar of the kind of change required.

chapter eight

Kinship care: investing in extended families to prevent further breakdown

Introduction

'Kinship care is the next big area [for government policy attention] after adoption in terms of outcomes for children...We need to invest in kinship care arrangements to ensure permanence and avoid arrangements breaking down. Good quality training for social workers and longer-term support for kinship carers, based on the model for post-adoption support, are key.'

Steve Towers, Operational Social Work Manager, Sunderland City, in evidence to the CSJ

Kinship care should not be seen as a poor relation of other forms of care. The Government should be on the side of extended family members and draw on them as a resource wherever possible. By stepping in, grandparents and other relatives provide continuity by minimising a child's risk of multiple placements, enabling children to maintain family relationships and a secure identity, and avoiding the distress which can be caused by moving in with strangers.^{341, 342}

'Kinship placements are overwhelmingly more successful than foster placements.'

Carolyn Fair, Operations Manager, Children's Placements Services, Ealing, in evidence to the CSJ

341 Green R, 'The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy and Practice', *Future of Children*, 14, 1, 2004, pp131–147

342 Save the Children, *Kinship Care: Providing positive and safe care for children living away from home*, London: Save the Children, 2007

'Sibling care can be extraordinarily successful... My sister Linda did so much for me. Without her we would have been placed in care and our futures would have turned out very differently.'

Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP³⁴³

Despite the legal recognition of the value of kinship care and the enormous burden family and friend carers lift from the formal care system, the overwhelming majority of arrangements lag far behind fostering and adoption when it comes to the level of support available from local authorities. Carers face many difficulties but cite their dealings with Children's Services as being their greatest challenge (72 per cent of carers rated Children's Services' non-financial support as poor or very poor).³⁴⁴ 60 per cent of kinship carers feel wholeheartedly isolated and unsupported,³⁴⁵ their stress and depression levels are high.³⁴⁶

This chapter reveals the extent of kinship care arrangements, the benefits and challenges and makes recommendations to improve their stability.

Profiling kinship care

Kinship care within the family network (as opposed to residential care homes, adoption, or unrelated foster placements) when children are no longer able to live with their parents can take several forms. Children in formal kinship foster care (where the foster carer is a member of their family or a close family friend) are considered *looked after* by the local authority, but only five per cent of children in kinship care arrangements have formal kinship foster carers. The remaining 95 per cent are either:

- In arrangements underpinned by a legal agreement obtained through the courts:
 - Special Guardianship Orders, which assign parental responsibility; or
 - Child Arrangements Orders, which state with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact, and when; or
- Private, informal arrangements.³⁴⁷

Under the 1989 Children Act local authorities have a legal duty to *consider* placing looked-after children with family or friends wherever it is in a child's best interests.³⁴⁸ The 2008 Children and Young Persons Act stipulates that kinship foster care should be the preferred choice when children cannot live with parents³⁴⁹ and most recent guidance from the Department for Education states that local authorities should 'identify and prioritise suitable

343 London Evening Standard, *Help older children bring up siblings, says Johnson (who was raised by sister)*, 19 November 2013

344 Hunt J and Waterhouse S, *Understanding family and friends care: the relationship between need, support and legal status*, London: Family Rights Group, 2012, p63

345 *Ibid*, p66

346 Selwyn J et al, *The Poor Relations? Children and informal kinship carers speak out*, London: Buttle UK, 2013

347 Nandy S and Selwyn J, *Spotlight on kinship care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK*, University of Bristol, 2011, Table 11.2, p118

348 Children Act 1989. It will not always be beneficial as in some cases extended families will also be dysfunctional.

349 Gautier A and Wellard S, *Giving up the Day Job? Kinship Carers and Employment*, London: Grandparents Plus, June 2012; Children and Young Persons Act 2008, Part 2, Section 8: Provision of accommodation and maintenance for children who are looked after by a local authority

family and friends placements, if appropriate... before care proceedings are issued, as it may avoid the need for proceedings.³⁵⁰

Outcomes from kinship care

Prevalence of and reasons for kinship care

The best available evidence indicates that in 2001, 143,367 children and young people in England were living with kinship carers.³⁵¹ In England, 44 per cent of kinship carers are grandparents, and 38 per cent are siblings.³⁵² The likelihood of being in kinship care is greater for ethnic minority (especially Black and Asian) children.³⁵³

The reasons for children being in kinship care are similar to those in care. One major study found the majority of children were in kinship care for four main reasons (and typically more than one factor was present):³⁵⁴

- Parental substance misuse (60 per cent);
- Abuse or neglect (59 per cent);
- Parental mental illness (28 per cent);
- Domestic violence (27 per cent).

In addition, parental imprisonment can be a reason for kinship care,³⁵⁵ and parental death accounts for 30 per cent of all kinship care.³⁵⁶ These traumatic experiences mean most children (85 per cent) come into kinship care with existing emotional and behavioural difficulties.³⁵⁷

While kinship placements typically last longer than those with unrelated carers and children are subject to fewer moves and therefore experience greater stability, some research suggests breakdown rates should still be of concern to local authorities³⁵⁸. Significant numbers of children in kinship care arrangements will experience further instability, particularly if support is not forthcoming.

For example, one social worker drew our attention to the fact that little research has been done to date on the outcomes of Special Guardianship Orders (which assign parental responsibility to a carer but do not sever the child's legal connection to their birth parents) in terms of how frequently they break down in later years. In his view:

350 Department for Education, *Court orders and pre-proceedings for local authorities*, London: Department for Education, April 2014, p11

351 Nandy S and Selwyn J, *Spotlight on kinship care: Using Census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK*, April 2011, University of Bristol, p19. Analysis of this aspect of the 2011 census in due to begin shortly.

352 Ibid, p35

353 Ibid, p30

354 Hunt J and Waterhouse S, *Understanding family and friends care: the relationship between need, support and legal status*, London: Family Rights Group, 2012, p7

355 Department for Education, *Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*, London: Department for Education, 2010, p8

356 Selwyn J et al, *The Poor Relations? Children and informal kinship carers speak out*, London: Buttle UK, 2013, p10

357 Hunt J and Waterhouse S, *Understanding family and friends care: the relationship between need, support and legal status*, London: Family Rights Group, 2012, p79

358 Farmer E and Moyers S, *Kinship Care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placements*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008, cited by Prof Joan Hunt in evidence to the CSJ



'We need to build on a carer's skills as a child gets older and that means having access to resources so we can give support, say, with behaviour management. Because issues change: it can be hard when an older child begins exploring their identity and they want to contact their birth parents.'

Steve Towers, Operational Social Work Manager, Sunderland City, in evidence to the CSJ

Support for kinship carers must keep pace with recent adoption reforms

The logic of recent reforms on adoption (which recognise the need for parents to be able to access ongoing support) should, we believe, be extended to cover those looking after the children of family and friends. There are already welcome signs that the Government is beginning to recognise that kinship carers have similar support needs. For example, the Department for Education recently announced that employees who are foster carers and 'those who care for children of family or friends, such as a grandparent caring permanently for their grandchild – will be offered up to 20 days paid leave to attend training or meetings relating to their role as a carer.'³⁵⁹

Enabling kinship carers to continue working by allowing flexibility and ensuring wages are sustained despite supporting a family member can help to alleviate some of the very real financial hardship they and their children face:

- 79 per cent reported that becoming a kinship carer resulted in financial difficulties;³⁶⁰
- 85 per cent of children in kinship care are in families on state benefits³⁶¹ and 41 per cent of those who gave up work when the children moved in are dependent on state benefits as their main source of income;³⁶²

359 Department for Education, Press Release, *Government's first foster-friendly employer*, 24 April 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/governments-first-foster-friendly-employer> (24/6/14)]

360 Hunt J and Waterhouse S, *Understanding family and friends care: the relationship between need, support and legal status*, London: Family Rights Group, 2012, p60

361 *Ibid*, p9

362 Grandparents Plus, *Giving up the day job?: Kinship carers and employment*, London: Grandparents Plus, 2012, p3

- Only 31 per cent are able to provide all the basic items widely considered to be necessities (heating, cooked meals, winter clothes, etc).³⁶³

We recommend that all government departments and local authorities lead by example by developing employment policies enabling those who care permanently for the children of family or friends to receive a defined period of paid leave to attend training or meetings relating to their role as a carer.

A Kinship Care Passport

Inconsistent provision of support for kinship carers across different parts of the country mirrors, in many ways, the situation which gave rise to the recent adoption reforms. Acknowledgement that potential adopters were put off by very real fears that they would not receive the support they needed to make a success of this very difficult – and typically heroic – task led to the development of the adoption passport.

The Adoption Passport

The Adoption Passport recognises the ongoing needs of many children adopted from care and the likely benefit to families of post-adoption support.³⁶⁴

The passport guides parents through the range of support services made available by local authorities. Every adoptive parent is entitled both to advice about these services, and to an assessment of their needs at any time. Moreover, those who have adopted a child in England may also be entitled to help, such as Discretionary Housing Payments compensating them for not receiving the spare room subsidy while waiting for their child to arrive. This could be particularly useful to kinship carers who are on 'stand by' to take over care due to the instability of a child's birth family or are providing temporary accommodation in an emergency.

The stakes are very high both for adopters *and* kinship carers – if support is not forthcoming children may go through the trauma of another family breakdown. However, presently there appears to be very little pressure on local authorities to consider the potential for long-term permanence within kinship care arrangements. This will only be realised, in many cases, if these carers are supported in a similar way to adoptive parents. Lack of information, for example, is a significant barrier to boosting the success rate of kinship care.³⁶⁵

363 Buttle UK, Press Release, *New Study Reveals the True Cost of Kinship Care*, 15 April 2013 [accessed via <http://www.buttleuk.org/pages/press-releases.html> (25/05/13)]

364 Department for Education, *Further Action on Adoption: finding more loving homes*, 2014

365 Smethers S (Grandparents Plus), *The challenges for kinship carers and professionals*, presentation to Kinship Care: the First Choice for Children conference, 6 June 2013 [accessed via: <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The-challenges-for-kinship-carers-and-for-professionals.ppt> (02/01/14)]

We welcome the Department for Education's resource pack issued in June 2013 but recommend that it be seen as a first step towards the development of a Kinship Carers' Passport which mirrors the provisions of the Adoption Passport by requiring local authorities to inform carers about:

- Support available in the authority's area; and
- Authorities' duty to provide that support under statutory guidance.

Adopters have a right to request and receive an assessment of need, so we also recommend that this become part of the Kinship Carers Passport

In addition, from the outset information should be provided about the different legal statuses of kinship carers. Too many carers and social workers are unclear about the legal status of their arrangements and the support attached to that status.

In the same way that the Government provided an Adoption Reform Grant to drive improvements in post-adoption support and in awareness that support was available (both acknowledged as being linked to potential parents' willingness to adopt) there needs to be a one-off Kinship Care Reform Grant to enable local authorities to improve their practice around family and friends care.

We recommend that this be of the same magnitude as the Adoption Reform Grant, to reflect its importance to the Government (a total of £200m from April 2013-March 2014) although the number of children in kinship care in England is over 40 times the number of those placed for adoption, so the *per capita* amount will be much lower.³⁶⁶ It will be essential for councils to use the money to drive sustainable change, for example by working with Family Hubs who can help to coordinate support for kinship carers by connecting them to universal and other services.

Good practice example: Hampshire County Council

Children's Services in Hampshire have recognised the need to adequately support kinship carers, including informal carers:

'Without adequate support for informal kinship carers, including financial support, this can lead to children unnecessarily entering care ... it is cost-effective to put money into early support rather than to have more children becoming looked after.'

Sharon North, Commissioning Officer, Children and Families, in evidence to the CSJ

Hampshire now has a standard process for all informal kinship care arrangements. Where a family relative indicates a willingness to care for a child, but is requesting a level of support, an assessment is undertaken to assess their capacity to meet the child's needs and to identify the necessary support.

366 3,350 children were placed for adoption in the 2012–2013 financial year (although reforms are intended to increase that number) while about 143,000 children are currently estimated to be in kinship care. Broad B, *Kinship Care – A Research Paper for the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)*, 2013; Department for Education, *Adoption reform grant: determination letters for 2013 to 2014*, 2013 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-reform-grant-determination-letters-for-2013-to-2014> (25/6/14)]; Department for Education, *Press Release, New rules to overhaul adoption*, 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-rules-to-overhaul-adoption> (3/7/14)]; ONS, *Statistical First Release: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2013*, Department for Education, 2013

After six months any informal arrangement receiving support from Children's Services is reviewed to ascertain if the support needs have been met, whether permanency should be secured, and whether it is appropriate to remain an informal arrangement. The Family and Friends Care Policy clearly fulfils the statutory guidance's stipulation that access to services be based on needs.

'Like all authorities we are keen to reduce our numbers of children in care and recognise that for many children being in their wider family network is in their interests. It is well documented that informal family carers are more likely to be older and less affluent; therefore caring for a child will be an added financial pressure... In particular setting a standard weekly amount of financial support whilst an assessment is being undertaken has been a significant change.'

Sharon North, Commissioning Officer, Children and Families, in evidence to the CSJ

Ensuring kinship carers can make informed decisions

In addition Hampshire County Council Children's Services have produced a template letter for workers to give all kinship carers. This ensures clear expectations of carers and also clearly sets out their entitlements.³⁶⁷ The worker undertaking an assessment must write to the carer advising of the basis of the arrangement, clarifying any financial support to be provided. The new Informal Family and Friends Care Procedure states: 'It is of greatest importance that an informal family and friends carer is completely aware of, and understands, the basis on which they are providing alternative care to a child'.³⁶⁸

With the aim of preventing placement breakdown, we recommend that the Department for Education develop a Kinship Carers Passport, with up-front financial assistance to local authorities in the form of a Kinship Carers Reform Grant. This would include:

- A requirement on local authorities to provide full information about the different legal statuses to carers, and to explain the implications of support available for each option;
- An entitlement to request and receive an assessment of need.

The greater demand for support following the provision of such a passport would obviously require some up-front financial assistance to local authorities, analogous again to the Adoption Reform Grant.

Peer support

Many kinship carers simply want someone to talk to who understands what they are facing on a daily basis.³⁶⁹ They are often more open to receiving information and advice about what services are available to them from peers who have experienced similar circumstances. It must be appreciated that there is often a fear they will look as if they have failed if they have to ask statutory services for help – especially if they, as a family carer, have fought to obtain or retain care of children.

367 We also heard that Sunderland City Council have produced a Family and Friends Care information leaflet on family and friends care (including the types of care and legal arrangements, where to access the Council's policy, sources of independent advice and support, as well as contacts for council support services) but this does not yet appear to be standard local authority practice.

368 Hampshire County Council Children's Services, *Departmental Procedure No 07/113: Informal Family and Friends Care Procedure*, 2013

369 Family and Childcare Trust, *Grandparents Plus and Family Lives event: Relative Experience Relative Experience: lessons in peer support: Adopting a strengths-based approach for kinship carers*, 12 February 2014, Newcastle Assembly Room

Findings on the impact of befriending support for kinship carers include improved problem solving and wellbeing among carers, and high motivation and low drop-out rate from volunteers.³⁷⁰ Voluntary sector organisation Family Lives are currently providing a four-day training programme for kinship carer befrienders, aimed at building skills to give one-to-one support.

We recommend that local authorities partner with local voluntary sector agencies and former kinship carers to develop peer support networks and that these are based in or connected to Family Hubs.

Good practice example: Relative Experience

Relative Experience is a project in the North East of England providing peer-to-peer support for kinship carers through trained volunteers. It is aimed at reducing stress and isolation amongst kinship carers, providing assistance through particular challenges and signposting carers to relevant sources of support and advice. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund Silver Dreams Fund and run by Grandparents Plus in partnership with Family Lives and the Family and Childcare Trust.

An independent evaluation by Coram found that the use of peer volunteer befrienders was effective and kinship carers responded well to the support offered, valuing the emotional support and the opportunity to talk to someone who understood their circumstances. The project had a positive effect on carers' mental wellbeing and self-confidence about their ability to cope. The volunteers also found the experience highly rewarding and gained personal satisfaction from supporting others through what they have themselves experienced.³⁷¹

Benefits following the child

It is important to be aware that many children on the edge of care are temporarily placed with extended family in emergency situations which can continue indefinitely with no formal care proceedings. If, for example, a drug-using parent rather suddenly becomes unable to cope but all parties hope the child will be able to return home, grandparents often step in. The informality of the arrangement means they have no official financial support. We recommend that existing state support should follow the child, rather than staying with the parent, as soon as there is a change in residence initiated by, or brought to the attention of, social services.

Currently parents continue to receive Child Benefit for eight weeks³⁷² after a child has taken up residence elsewhere unless they give consent for the money to be redirected.³⁷³ Given the advances in technology and improvements in government payments systems since this time frame was set we see no reason why it should not be shortened. Similarly, any tax credits to

³⁷⁰ Ibid

³⁷¹ Marden R and Bellew R, *Relative Experience North East Pilot: Final Evaluation Report*, London: Coram, March 2014

³⁷² Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, Section 143(2)

³⁷³ Ibid, Schedule 10 para 1

which a parent is entitled should be automatically transferred to the carer when a child has moved out. Claiming child-related elements of Universal Credit when not providing for a child is illegal; as Universal Credit returns have to be completed within a month this could trigger a reallocation of Child Benefit.

We recommend that existing state support (child benefit and child-related tax credits) should follow the child, rather than staying with the parent, as soon as there is a change in residence initiated by, or brought to the attention of, social services.

Summary of recommendations

- All government departments and local authorities to lead by example and develop employment policies enabling those who care permanently for the children of family or friends to receive a defined period of paid leave to attend training or meetings relating to their role as a carer.
- With the aim of preventing placement breakdown, the Department for Education to develop a Kinship Carers Passport, with upfront financial assistance to local authorities in the form of a Kinship Carers Reform Grant. This would include:
 - a requirement on local authorities to provide full information about the different legal statuses to carers, and to explain the implications of support available for each option;
 - an entitlement to request and receive an assessment of need.
- Councils to partner with local voluntary sector agencies and former kinship carers to develop peer support networks based in or connected to Family Hubs.
- Existing state support (child benefit and child-related tax credits) to follow the child, rather than staying with the parent, as soon as there is a change in residence initiated by, or brought to the attention of, social services.

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