

The Smart money

Making tomorrow better
for children and families



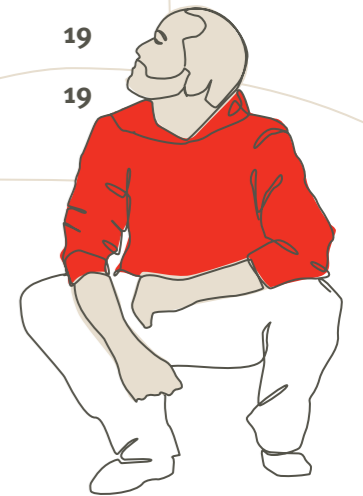
**Children
England**
Charities working for
children and families



as long as it takes

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Congratulations

Warmest congratulations. You've been elected to Parliament at one of the most important times in recent history.

There is agreement across all parties that we must do more to help the UK's most vulnerable children and families.

Yet at the same time we are in the middle of a global recession. Public spending is in everyone's sights. We need to make sure that when we invest our money, we do it wisely, to release potential and create a strong, stable and fair society.

Today there are around one million children who are at risk of intergenerational deprivation and neglect.¹ That means that from their first breath, these children risk repeating the same experiences as their parents: educational failure, mental and physical ill health, social isolation, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, financial hardship and early death. These are the children and families we work with. They live in your constituency.

Recession or not, we are not about to walk out on the most vulnerable children and families. Nor, we hope, are you.

There is a solution. We can work better and smarter. To do this, we need to change the way our work and the work of others is funded. In other words, we need to focus on intervening earlier.

This is something that our organisations have been doing for years. It's not a quick-fix solution and will require commitment over a generation, starting with this new term. But if we are successful, it will save money and it will save and transform lives.

In this document we outline how we can work together to promote early intervention and challenge the injustices and hardships that some children and their families face.

As an MP, you understand the power of the public voice. As charities, we listen to the voices of the powerless. Together, we can create an environment where early intervention becomes the norm, and we can end the scourge of intergenerational deprivation and neglect.

There's a lot to do.

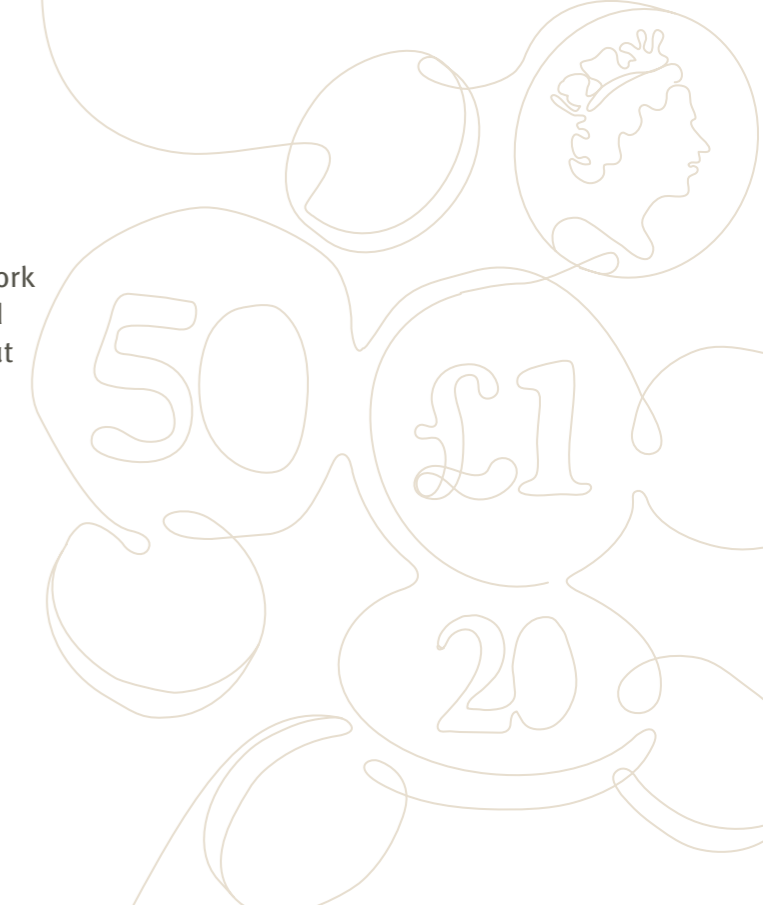
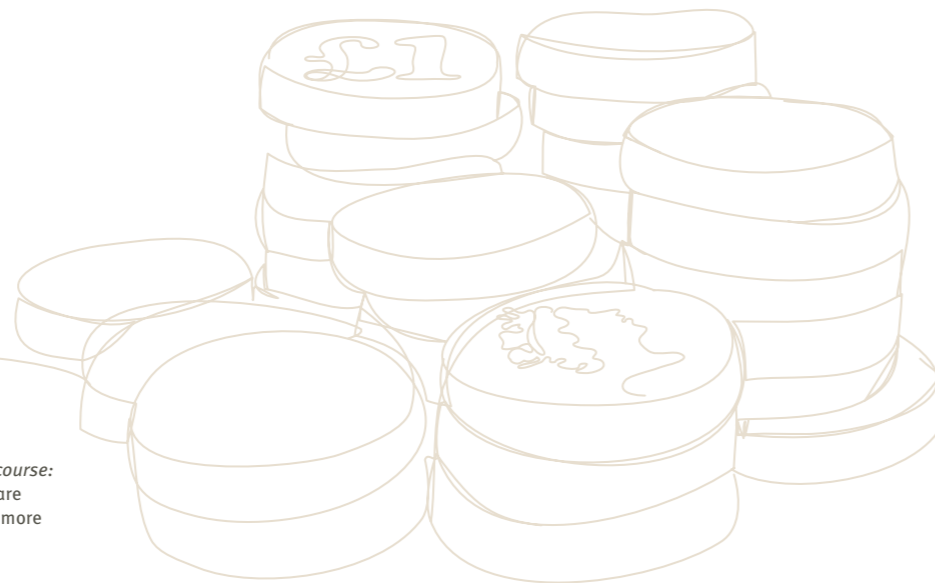
Let's start now.

Dame Clare Tickell
Chief Executive, Action for Children

Helen Dent, CBE
Chief Executive, Family Action

Maggie Jones
Chief Executive, Children England

¹Estimate based on Oroyemi, P, Damioli, G, Barnes, M and Crosier, T (2009) *Understanding the risks of social exclusion across the life course: families with children*, Nat Cen/Cabinet Office; 4%–7% of children are caught up in 'long-term multiple disadvantage', these families are more likely than others to have four or more children.



A new generation for a new generation



This year, the year you start your new term in Parliament, 700,000 children will be born.² Each one will be full of potential. Some will have a better start than others but every one of them will be born with the hope that they will live happy and fulfilling lives.

But right from the start, some will struggle. Around 50,000 children born this year will already have begun the journey their parents took to the margins of society.³ By the time you seek re-election, another 200,000 children will have joined them.

They will live in families who struggle with a range of problems, including mental ill health, learning difficulties, drugs or alcohol. Many of their parents will have been brought up in similar homes themselves.

In the worst cases, these children will experience violence and neglect.

Each one of these children is entitled to hope for better. We know, through the work that our organisations do, that we can create a cycle of aspiration in which children and their families regain control of their lives, believe in their abilities, and achieve at school and their jobs. A cycle in which children's potential is recognised and realised and in which they can pass on their experiences to their children.

This Parliament sees an ambitious generation of MPs committed to improving the lives of their constituents. There's a belief in working together and a fresh optimism. There's an appetite for change.

We want these aspirations to be extended to the worst-off children and their families so that a new generation of MPs can say that they helped build a new generation of hope for our worst-off children and families.

And we want to say that we did it with you.

²Office for National Statistics www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=369; in 2008 there were 708,711 live births and this figure has been rising since 2001.

³Extrapolations from Oroyemi et al op cit. Also Scott (2002), quoted in *Policy review of children and young people: A discussion paper*, HM Treasury, DFES, Jan 2007, estimates that 15% of children aged 0–5 show early signs of anti-social behaviour, which would put the figure up to 105,000.

A better way of working

To start with, we need to think long term. Good policies need time to work. Services need time to establish themselves. Too often we've been undone by change, quick fixes and one-off initiatives. We need stability, for as long as it takes.

There's a better way of working, and it starts with these principles:

1. **Cross-party agreement** to promote early intervention. Solving the complex problems facing the most deprived children and families requires a level of long-term commitment that can only be achieved by cross-party consensus and a willingness to take an agenda forward over a generation. These problems cannot be solved over just one parliamentary term.

2. **A commitment to long-term policies.** Between 1988 and 2009, there were over 400 major announcements relating to children and families; that's almost one a fortnight. They include many positive initiatives, but many were not sustained. They included:

- a. 98 separate Acts of Parliament across the UK
- b. 82 different strategies
- c. 77 initiatives
- d. 50 funding streams

On average, each initiative lasted a little over two years.⁴

3. **A commitment to long-term funding** of projects. Very often contracts last three years or less. That's just enough time to set up, start to make an impact and implement an exit strategy. Just enough time to raise hopes for local people and dash them.

4. **A partnership with MPs** in which we share our expertise and work with you to promote early intervention and increase our local impact for those at risk of inter-generational deprivation.



⁴As long as it takes: a new politics for children, Action for Children (2009)

How we can help you



There's a new enthusiasm in the air for local solutions and working together. It comes from a belief that people on the ground know what's needed in their community.

We welcome this. We work locally. We run local projects that help local people. Our expertise is based on listening to people who have long ceased to have their voices heard and working with them to help them change their own lives.

But conflicts of interest can arise and differences have to be resolved. Using our experience and the evidence we've collected over the years, we can help you by advising you about what works, what the consequences of actions may be and by helping you deliver solutions.

And we work just about everywhere in the UK:

- ▶ together, we represent over 1,000 projects
- ▶ we work with hundreds of thousands of children across the UK
- ▶ we cover every corner of the UK and have projects in almost every constituency
- ▶ we have hundreds of years of experience of supporting children and families

We'd love you to visit one of our projects in your constituency to show you what we do.

Just fill in the card attached to the back cover of this booklet and we'll arrange it.

Working in partnership – what we do

Around one million children are at risk of intergenerational deprivation. They live in families in your constituency and they use services that we run.

Although these families live in poverty, their problems cannot be solved by money alone. They need intensive support to overcome their hardships. These may include:

- ▶ mental and physical ill-health
- ▶ learning difficulties
- ▶ dangerous drinking
- ▶ unemployment
- ▶ drugs
- ▶ domestic violence
- ▶ chaotic relationships
- ▶ crime – both as victims and perpetrators

Children may experience:

- ▶ poor parenting
- ▶ poor social and emotional skills
- ▶ low attainment
- ▶ poor communication
- ▶ low birthweight
- ▶ poor health

Many children can cope with adversity. Some children overcome hardship through strength of character. These children are most likely to have loving, capable families and strong relationships with siblings, friends and communities. Their parents will probably have had a good childhood.

But faced with multiple problems, it's not surprising that others sometimes can't cope.

Nor is it surprising that parents who are unable to look after themselves are more likely to neglect their children.

With the right help and support, these children and families can regain control of their lives.

That's where we come in.



How we work with the one million most deprived

We win trust

We work with children, young people and their families who are often suspicious of the authorities. They don't trust professionals. Some families refuse to visit services. Others are overwhelmed by their complex lives and simply don't turn up – this is quite common where people have depression, for example.

One study showed that one in four young people don't approach specialist help because of lack of trust or because they don't have the information they need.⁵

It's important that our services are open to all. Once people come through our doors, we can build trust. Once we have trust, then we can signpost people to services that they may not have considered or might have been too embarrassed to ask about.

And if they can't or won't come to us, we go to them and work alongside them, in their home.

We give people confidence

We work closely with children and families themselves, helping them take decisions so they can regain their independence. Trust and confidence are key.

So our organisations offer general services (known as universal services) and specialist services (known as targeted services). A children's centre is an example of a general service, but within it there may be, for example, a specialist therapeutic course available.

As people's needs change, they are likely to move between the two until they feel they no longer need help.

We work in partnership with children, young people and their families. Our expert staff work to help them identify the support they need.

We are child centred but we understand that the family is the most important thing to children.

And our work is based on evidence and practice. **We know what works.**

What is early intervention?

It's not just about early years work, although it's true that the earlier you can intervene, the better the chance of success.

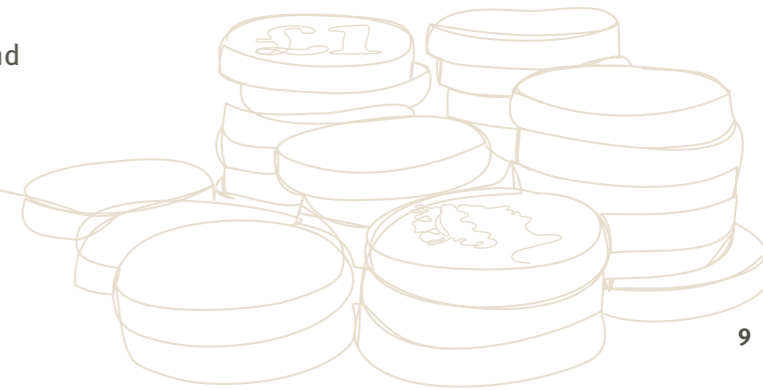
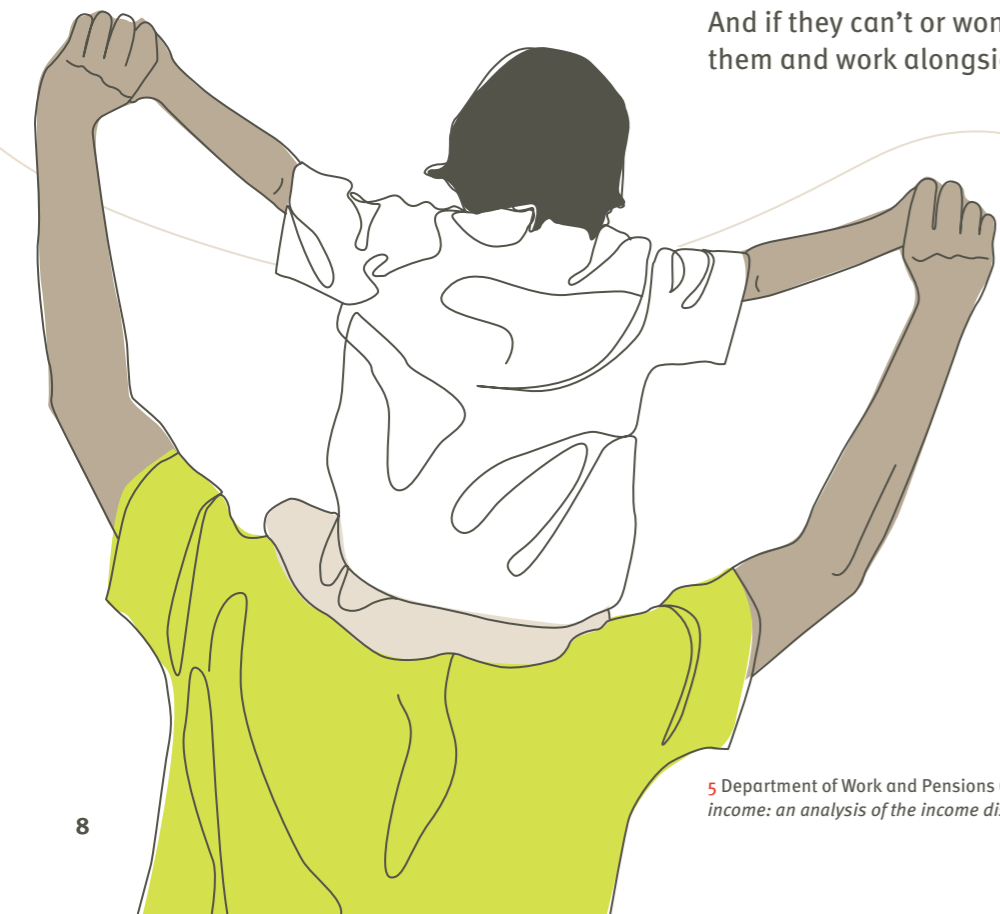
Children face problems at different stages of their lives for all sorts of reasons: bereavement, a change in family relationship, a parent becoming unemployed or a physical or mental health problem in the family.

Early intervention can mean intervening:

- ▶ early in a child's life
- ▶ early in the development of a potential problem
- ▶ early once a problem has been identified

In other words, early intervention means meeting people's needs as soon as they emerge.

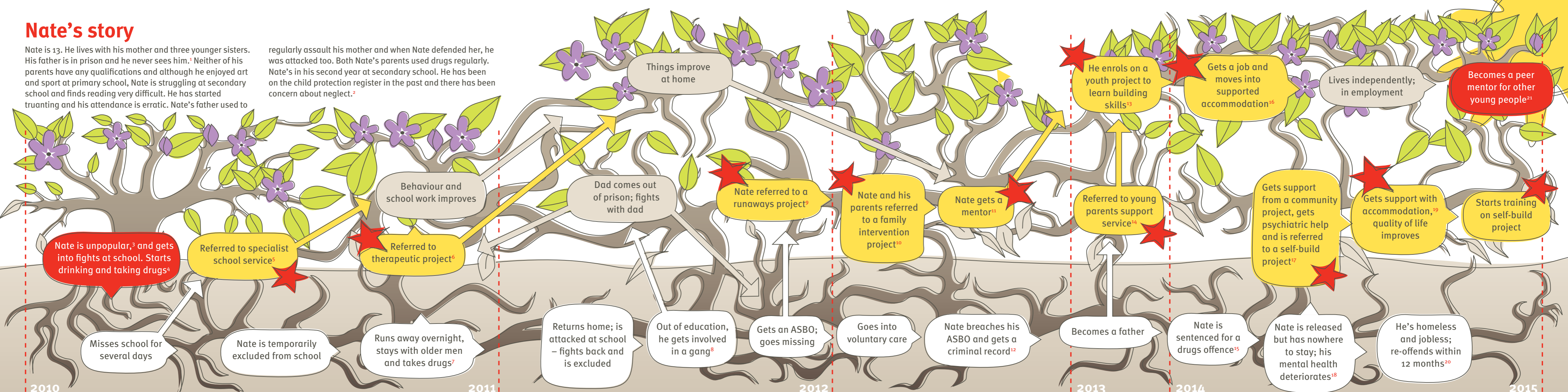
⁵ Department of Work and Pensions (2009) *Households below the average income: an analysis of the income distribution 1994/5–2007/8*, London



Nate's story

Nate is 13. He lives with his mother and three younger sisters. His father is in prison and he never sees him.¹ Neither of his parents have any qualifications and although he enjoyed art and sport at primary school, Nate is struggling at secondary school and finds reading very difficult. He has started truanting and his attendance is erratic. Nate's father used to

regularly assault his mother and when Nate defended her, he was attacked too. Both Nate's parents used drugs regularly. Nate's in his second year at secondary school. He has been on the child protection register in the past and there has been concern about neglect.²



¹ In 2005 there were 162,000 children with a parent in prison, *Poverty and disadvantage among prisoners' families*, Smith, R., Grimshaw, R., Romeo, R. and Knapp, M, JRF 2007.

² In 2006–07, 44% of child protection cases (14,800 children) were due to neglect – DCSF (2007) *Referrals, assessments and children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan or are on child protection registers, England – year ending*

³ Just over 40% of children aged 11, 13 and 15 find their peers kind and helpful, the worst in the developed countries – *An overview of child wellbeing in rich countries*, UNICEF (2007).

⁴ Over 40% of children aged 11–15 who smoked regularly, almost a quarter of those who drank regularly and almost half of those who took cannabis at least once a month had an emotional or mental

disorder – Maught, Barbara, Brock, Anita and Ladva, Gita, 'The health of children and young people', Chapter 12 *Mental health*, Office for National Statistics, 2004.

⁵ Family Action's Specialist Schools Service works with children, families and schools to tackle causes of children's behaviour and mental health problems where they are at risk of exclusion.

⁶ Action for Children's MIST project carries out intensive work with highly vulnerable young people aged 11–25; the project has reduced the number of young people in the Youth Justice System and improved family relationships, *Action for Children Briefing* Nov 2008.

⁷ 100,000 children under 16 run away overnight every year – The Children's Society (1999) *Still Running*.

⁸ 29% of young people in a self-selecting online research study said they had been affected by gun and knife crime; 36% said they were worried about gangs in their area; 41% know somebody who has been personally affected – *Step inside our shoes*, Action for Children (2009).

⁹ Action for Children's Liverpool Young Runaways Project gives support to young people missing from home or care. In 2009–10 it reduced running away in 61% of cases.

¹⁰ Family intervention projects (FIPs) provide intensive support to families and cost around £8,000 per family. Independent evaluations of FIPs run by Action for Children and others show that they are successful in 70% of cases, and they reduce levels of physical abuse by 43% (*Anti-social behaviour intensive family support projects, an evaluation of six projects*, Sheffield Hallam University and Salford University, DCLG (2006)).

¹¹ Action for Children's Gael Og project offers peer mentoring to help young people reduce substance misuse and make positive choices about their lives.

¹² In 2005, 57% of young people breached their ASBO according to the National Audit Office reported by BBC http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6214662.stm

¹³ Action for Children's Youthbuild programmes have a 70–80% rate for helping vulnerable young people move

into employment, and 75% of the young people who start the project complete it (*Growing up – supporting young people to a successful adulthood*, Action for Children, 2009).

¹⁴ Family Action's Young Parent Support Service offers parenting support and prepares young parents for training and work before having other children. In Hackney, this service has contributed to a 20% reduction in teenage pregnancy since 1998.

¹⁵ 50% of inmates in young offender institutes (YOIs) have spent time in care (*Counting the Cost: Reducing child imprisonment*, Nacro, 2003); 84% have been excluded from school (*Some facts about young people who offend – 2005*, Nacro, 2005); half the population of YOIs have a reading age of less than 11 (*Audit and Review of Education in the Youth Justice System*, YJB, 2001).

¹⁶ Action for Children's Sperrin and Lakeland Floating Support Service works with care leavers and young people aged 16–17 at risk of homelessness to help them develop the skills needed to maintain their tenancy and assist with accommodation. It includes a 24-hour on-call service.

¹⁷ Action for Children's Wessex Community Projects service supports families through the youth justice system. It provides remand fostering and supported accommodation for children awaiting custody. It also provides intensive fostering to challenge anti-social behaviour and provides education support to improve academic skills.

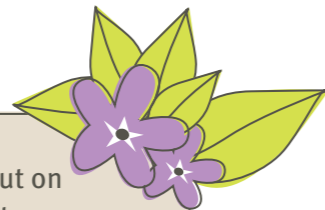
¹⁸ Around 10% of young people have mental health problems. For young people in conflict with the law, the figure is at least three times higher and could be as high as 81% (*Mental health needs of young offenders*, Mental Health Foundation, 2002).

¹⁹ Action for Children's Gabriel Court service helps young parents and parents-to-be with tenancies.

²⁰ 80% of young offenders re-offend within 12 months (*Penal Affairs Panel – Issues Paper No.10*, April 2009 www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/PAP_Young_Offenders.pdf)

²¹ Action for Children's 24/7 project runs a peer mentoring scheme to prevent youth homelessness.

Lorraine's story



Our worst-off families are caught in a cycle of deprivation and neglect. Parents who have suffered in childhood themselves have no parenting model to draw on. When they have lived in households where no one has worked for generations, finding a job can be a massive undertaking. The stresses of living in deprivation are apparent in high-levels of long-term physical and mental health problems.

Lorraine is not yet 20. She walked out on school at 14. Five years on, she has two children, aged three and two. She has no qualifications and is depressed. She has an on-off relationship with the children's father, but he doesn't live with her. The next five years will shape her children's lives in the same way the last five shaped her.

It could go either way.

Lorraine's violent childhood haunts her. She worries about her parenting skills. She feels she is not bonding with her second child.

Because she's alone, her children don't have friends to play with. Their development is slow. Her first floor flat is damp. She gets burgled for the third time. Her eldest child throws violent tantrums.

The children look uncared for. Her youngest goes to hospital after scalding himself.

Both children have asthma. One night she rushes them to hospital by taxi. She borrows money.

She worries that her children will be taken away.

Sometimes she watches them when they're asleep and wonders whether she can carry on.

Her children go on the child protection register.

Lorraine is referred to a children's centre. She attends parenting classes. She makes friends and swaps experiences. At the centre, her children make friends. The centre puts her in touch with a counselling service and for the first time she starts talking about her own childhood.

She learns about creative play. Her children make great progress. Her relationship with her youngest improves.

She takes literacy and numeracy classes so she can help her children with homework when they get older. She qualifies and gets a job in a local shop.

The centre contacts a housing officer. She meets them about a new place. She feels calmer and her children are more relaxed. The asthma attacks are less frequent.

Both children are now settled at school. They see their father regularly and are thriving.

The high cost of failure

There is now overwhelming evidence that early intervention works.

So we know that we can get better results for the money we spend.

Take, for example, a young child who is persistently showing signs of anti-social behaviour, defiance and getting into fights. Children who behave in this way are sometimes said to have a conduct disorder.

Children with conduct disorders have usually experienced great hardship. Their parents may have physical or mental health problems. They are likely to have few or no qualifications. Unemployment and drug and alcohol misuse are likely to feature. It's not surprising that children in these circumstances are at great risk of neglect.

The chances of children becoming serial offenders, long-term unemployed or drug users are high.

Rather than invest money in children and their families when they need it, we end up spending more money on them when the damage has been done.

So when we've failed to invest in parenting classes, when we've failed to identify a mental health problem, when we've not put in place the therapeutic support a child needs, and we've not picked up on their drug habit,

then we spend £100,000 a year on putting them in a young offenders institute.⁶

Where, incidentally, there's an 80% chance of re-offending within one year.⁷

Cost ineffectiveness

Almost half the children who demonstrate anti-social behaviour in the early years will continue their behaviour into adulthood, ending up as serial offenders.⁸

An estimated 80% of all criminal activity can be traced to people who had conduct disorder as children.

A serial offender will cost society between £1.1 million and £1.9 million over a lifetime.

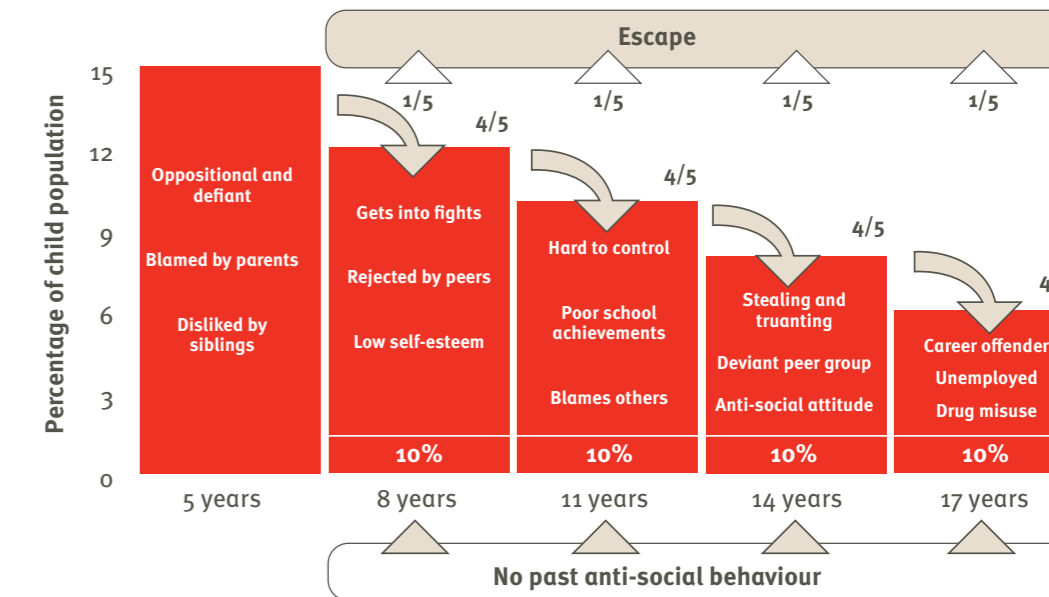
The cost of this criminal activity is estimated at £84 billion a year in the UK.⁹

Just 1% of the law and order budget would be sufficient to fund a comprehensive programme of pre-school support for 30% of all children born each year.¹⁰

⁶ *Young Offenders: A secure foundation proposal for the establishment of a Young Offenders Academy: a pilot project*, The Foyer Federation (2009); The Foyer Federation adds together the direct costs of running a YOI (around £60,000) with 'substantial costs associated with custody' referred to by the Youth Justice Board. ⁷ *Penal Affairs Panel – Issues paper No.10*, April 2009 www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/PAP_young_offenders.pdf ⁸ Maughan, B and Kim-Cohen, J (2005) 'Continuities between childhood and adult life', *British Journal of Psychiatry* 187: 301–303 ⁹ *The chance of a lifetime: preventing early conduct problems and reducing crime*, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health (2010) ¹⁰ *ibid*.



Continuity of anti-social behaviour from ages 15 to 17¹¹



So what's the alternative?

Well, here are a few examples:

- ▶ Parenting classes cost between £500–£900 for a group course, and £4,000 for an intensive course with the parents of one child.¹²
- ▶ Family intervention projects, which work with families with multiple and complex problems, cost about £8,000 per family. Independent evaluations show that they are successful in 70% of cases, and they reduce levels of physical abuse by 43%. And that's not taking into account the reduction in neglect and the suffering of young children in the hands of parents who can't cope.
- ▶ The Family Action Building Bridges services for families where one parent has long-term mental ill health costs £5,000 and significantly reduces the number of parents with clinical symptoms by almost half, as well as reducing the number of children on child protection plans.
- ▶ An independent evaluation of three projects run by Action for Children shows that, taking into account increased tax revenue through employment, decreased benefits, reduced health costs of children, reduced crime and anti-social behaviour and reduction of costs and care, the projects saved between £4 and £9 for every £1 invested in them.¹³

¹¹ Taken from *Policy review of children and young people: A discussion paper*, HM Treasury & Department for Education and Skills, January 2007. ¹² National Institute for Clinical Excellence (2006) ¹³ *Backing the future: why investing in children is good for us all*, New Economics Foundation (nef), Action for Children (2009).

The view from abroad

By European standards, we don't spend a great deal of money on children and families. Denmark spends over twice as much as a percentage of GDP. Finland and Sweden spend about 50% more.¹⁴

But we know that we've been badly hit by the global recession. Money's going to be hard to come by. So we need to make what we've got work smarter.

How does the UK measure up to this standard when it comes to investing in solutions to 'social problems'?

Well, pretty badly. In fact, we have the worst record in Europe.

Of course, international comparisons are very complex, but if you take 16 countries across Europe, you find that the comparative costs of social problems are higher in the UK than anywhere else.

In the UK, the financial costs of social problems are higher than in almost all western European countries. They are almost four times higher than in Finland, twice as high as Sweden and almost 50% higher than they are in Italy.

¹⁴ All figures taken from *Backing the future: why investing in children is good for us all*, New Economics Foundation (nef), Action for Children (2009).

The comparative costs of social problems in 16 countries across Europe (£ billions)

Index of countries	Cost in £ billions
Finland	44.55
France	108.11
Germany	110.41
Italy	118.87
United Kingdom	161.31

Costs of social problems have been calculated based on UK cost equivalent

So not only are we spending less, we are spending less wisely.

Research carried out for Action for Children by the New Economics Foundation (nef) shows that if we focus on early intervention, the economy could save a staggering £486 billion over 20 years.

Now we know that this can't be done all at once. But it shows what the benefits could be, both for people receiving services and the rest of us who pay for them.

By being smarter in the way we invest, we can release the potential of a new generation.

That's what early intervention is all about.



Kat's story

Kat and Martin live with their young daughter. Kat has mental health problems. Only last year she was hospitalised after hearing voices. She comes out of hospital and becomes anxious and housebound. She puts on a lot of weight.

The family has debts. Martin cares for them both, but their daughter Siobhan is struggling. Her behaviour is out of control.

Siobhan is at risk of neglect. The impact could be devastating on her development, her health and her future.

Family Action support workers come in. First they help Kat understand her condition and its impact on her family. They then help her

manage it. Then they work on establishing routines at home for bedtimes and mealtimes. With support, Kat learns how to play creatively with Siobhan. The workers also help Kat and Martin be more consistent in their parenting.

Kat communicates better with Siobhan now, who is ready to start primary school. Kat's more confident. She's studying childcare and is now a volunteer for a charity. Martin's taking driving lessons. Their finances are under control. The world is opening up to them.





‘Early interventions for disadvantaged children promote schooling, raise the quality of the workforce, enhance the productivity of schools and reduce crime, teenage pregnancy and welfare dependency... A large body of research in social science, psychology and neuroscience shows that skill begets skill; that learning begets learning. The earlier the seed is planted and watered, the faster and larger it grows.’

‘Investing in disadvantaged young children is an economically efficient policy’, James Heckman, Nobel Prize-winning economist, 10 January 2006

We all want children to flourish and to have the best possible start in life. The fact is that sometimes they don’t. We want you to stand beside us and represent children and families who will otherwise get forgotten.

The evidence is now incontrovertible. If we invest in our children and young people, then we will reap the dividends. It’s an economic fact and it’s a moral imperative.

This is an exciting time. We’re not politicians, but we can see that politics has changed. People want politicians to work together. There’s a new belief in long-term planning. There’s a greater shared sense that those who are the worst off in our society are part of our society and deserve and need better support.

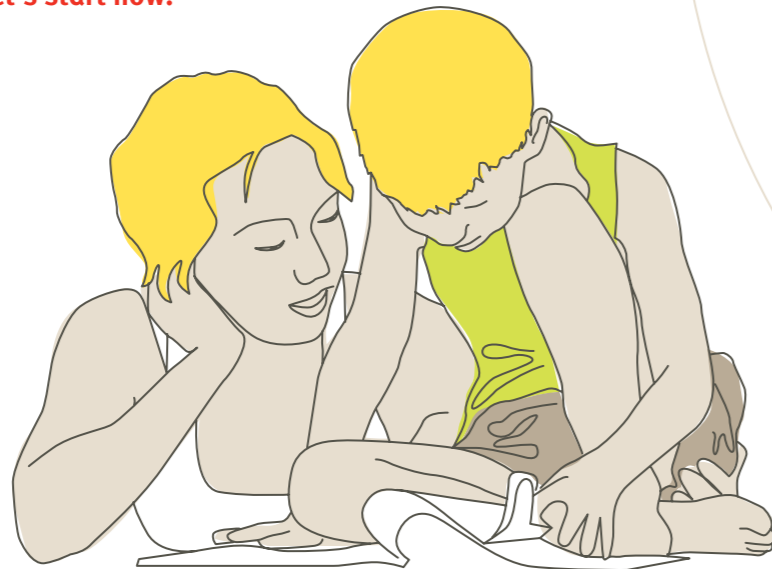
Our hope is that you will join us in our aim of eradicating intergenerational deprivation. We want to be able to say that in this year, 2010, a new generation of MPs came together so that no child should suffer deprivation simply because their parents did.

We fear that, in a recession, the voices that shout the loudest will get what they need. The marginalised will stay in the shadows and the hopes of another generation of children will be lost.

Let’s not allow another generation to fail – join us today.

We’ve got a lot of work to do.

So let’s start now.



Miriam’s story

With no family or friends in this country, Miriam, a mum of two, discovers that she and her baby are both HIV positive.

In shock, Miriam stops eating. She loses track of time. Her medication means she can’t concentrate. Both children are underfed. Her four-year-old son becomes withdrawn and anxious. He doesn’t go out to play. The tiny bedsit is messy and smells. Miriam keeps breaking down.

A worker from Positive Parenting and Children (PPC)* visits. She helps Miriam tidy up. The next day PPC looks after her children while Miriam attends a parent support group. She meets people living with HIV and AIDs. Her children make friends.

The support worker helps Miriam manage her medication and a healthy diet for the family. PPC volunteers take the children on trips, giving Miriam time to herself. Her worker helps get a new flat for the family and a school place for her son. The family’s health improves. They’re happy at home and settled in their new community.

*PPC is a small, community charity in South London, and is a member of Children England.

What you can do

There are five simple things we are asking you to do:

Today

1. Write to the Chancellor to ask how the Treasury intends to deliver efficiency to the economy by investing in early intervention services.

Tomorrow

2. In your first meeting with your local authority as an MP following the general election, raise the issue of early intervention services and ask what is being done in the constituency. Then let us know the results. Check with the local authority in six months and keep us updated on progress in your local area.

This month

3. Champion early intervention in Parliament, for example through an all-party parliamentary group.

Next month

4. Visit one of our local services. We will help to identify a project and make arrangements.

This year

5. Hold a special surgery for children, young people and their families at a children’s service in your constituency.

Please affix stamp here



Samantha Windett
Action for Children
85 Highbury Park
London N5 1UD

END OF PAGE



Please let us know what actions you intend to take:

- I will write to the Treasury today to ask them how they intend to deliver efficiency to the economy by investing in early intervention services
- I will raise the issue of early intervention services in my first meeting with the local authority
- I will join an all-party parliamentary group and promote early intervention for children and their families
- I will visit one of your local services this month
- I will hold a surgery at one of your projects in November

We will send you information to help and support your actions when you sign up.

Name: _____

Constituency: _____



Who we are

Action for Children is a leading UK children's charity, with around 420 projects helping over 156,000 children, young people and their families in local projects around the UK. Action for Children supports and speaks out for the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the UK.

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

020 7704 7000

Family Action is the UK's largest family charity. Family Action provides practical, emotional and financial support to disadvantaged and socially isolated families through over 100 services in communities across England, and grants to families and individuals in hardship across the UK.

www.family-action.org.uk

020 7254 6251

Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families voluntary sector. Children England represents charities of all sizes, including Action for Children and Family Action but particularly small, local charities, providing them with the information they need to thrive and support children well.

www.childrenengland.org.uk

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