

## Home for Good's Submission to *The Case for Change*

### Introduction

Home for Good is a national fostering and adoption charity with an ambitious vision to find a home for every child who needs one. We are pleased to make this submission to the Review of Children's Social Care in England in response to *The Case for Change*, published in June 2021. We welcome this report and its impressive coverage of wide-ranging elements of the care system whilst simultaneously summarising complex processes and challenges in a pithy and accessible way. We believe this report provides a strong starting point for the development of effective and sustainable child-centred solutions to the identified challenges within the system, and we remain willing to support the Review in the development of these. In addition, we welcome the broad range of stakeholders that the Review team have consulted with thus far. A willingness to listen deeply and be open to challenge must remain an approach of the Review moving forward.

This submission has been prepared in consultation with our care-experienced advisory group; a group of care-experienced adults who were either adopted or in foster care during their childhood. We commend their experiences and expertise to the Review for their consideration and reflection.

### CHAPTER 1

#### **What should the vision and purpose of the Children's Social Care System be?**

Home for Good is committed to realising its vision for a system where every child thrives within a home that is a haven, and where every child and young person has a family or tribe to belong to for life.

To do this, the system should prioritise relationships, supporting families to stay together where possible. However, when a child is unable to remain living with their birth parent(s), every decision made with and for the child should have in mind the aim of developing and nurturing trusted, healthy, and loving relationships with the important adults in their life. A flexible approach is required to do this well.

The children's social care system should be a place where every professional, family, teacher, social worker, and carer wraps around a child or young person to enable them to experience the safety, stability, and love that they need. It should enable children and young people to reach their potential, securing positive outcomes that reflect a parity with those who have not had experience of the care system. This must be the aim of the targeted and intentional support and care that should be wrapped around them.

We posed the question of what the vision and purpose of the Children's Social Care system should be to our care-experienced advisory group, who told us:

*"Enable families to do better for children and where this is not possible, to remove the children from further harm as it would be immoral not to do so." – Care-experienced Adult*



*“The two words that came to mind: ensuring safety, and following the assurance of safety, is stability. Whatever measures need to be put in place to guarantee safety, then we build as much stability as possible around that.” – Adult Adoptee*

*“Ensure that every child or young person has all that they need while growing up, including people to love them, a place to call home and support for every step of their journey.” – Care-experienced Adult*

*“Safety and support – support for everything, whether its school and homework, or whether there’s something bigger going on.” – Adult Adoptee*

*“From the cradle to the grave – wrap-around care that isn’t isolated. From the moment someone is concerned, there’s a wrap-around care around that family and individual that stays with them throughout. Not a quick fix, but longevity.” – Adult Adoptee*

*“If you take away the word ‘children’ from social care – you get adults. I need lifetime support and assistance.” – Care-experienced Adult*

*“It should be the same care that a child is given whether they are in my county or another – it shouldn’t matter where you are, who you are, at what stage of life you’re at, it should be consistent.” – Adult Adoptee*

## Feedback on Chapter 1

We welcome the thorough analysis of the patterns occurring within the system, including the changing costs and expenditure over time, as well as the evolving drivers behind the steady rise in children entering the care system. In particular, we welcome the recognition of teenagers as a growing proportion of children in care and how this cohort and their specific needs must be given urgent attention. We identify that the system has failed to adjust and evolve to meet the needs of these young people, leaving many struggling and behind.

In addition, we were pleased to see the acknowledgement within *The Case for Change* of the role that poverty and deprivation plays in the lives of families who are struggling on the edge of the care system. The report could and should go further to recognise that cuts in services and provisions, which have historically sought to address these factors, have undoubtedly played a role in the rise of families needing, and often not getting, support. Furthermore, we also welcome the recognition of the complex role that ethnicity plays in children’s experience of the system, with children from particular backgrounds being under- and over-represented within the system. We would encourage the Review to apply the lens of ethnicity to the entirety of its analyses, asking the question of whether there is racial disparity at play within each part of the system. The impact of ethnicity on children’s experiences is incredibly complex and we encourage the Review to take a sophisticated and thorough approach to the investigation of racial disparities to enable progress in understanding these issues better and making effective recommendations as a result.



## CHAPTER 2

In Chapter 2 we describe the important and underutilised role of the community in supporting families. What do you think **is the role of the Children's Social Care system** in strengthening communities rather than just providing services?

*"We don't utilise the full potential of communities, even though they are the first line of defence"*

We absolutely concur with *The Case for Change* that communities are an untapped resource, as they are structures and environments that endure even as children and families' needs evolve and change. Communities can offer an essential place of belonging for children and families and when individuals and families feel secure within a particular community, they can be more open to sharing some of the challenges they are experiencing and asking for support as a result. Some communities are able to provide support in a far less confrontational or stigmatised way than statutory services, often drawing on the power of relationships to build trust and provide help.

Well-equipped and empowered communities are also well-placed to meet some of the holistic needs of individuals and families that statutory services are unable to provide in a sustained way. This includes emotional and practical support, which should not be undervalued.

Home for Good works with churches and faith networks across the UK. Our work on the ground with these communities has demonstrated the untapped potential within faith communities, as an example of one such community group. With churches and other religious centres based in every local area of England, many churches are motivated to engage with and support the needs of their local communities, which includes vulnerable children and families. We identify that they are well-placed to offer support at many points within the children's social care system and we welcome the inspiring work being done by some incredible faith-based organisations and local groups.

For example, Safe Families is a charity that works primarily, but not exclusively, with and through local churches to offer hope, belonging, and support to children, families, and care leavers. Their network of more than 5,000 volunteers works to decrease the flow of children entering the care system by providing relationship and connection for their community's most vulnerable individuals and families. With Safe Families' support, 90% of children on average are prevented from escalating and 50% de-escalate.

So too, our work as Home for Good seeks to inspire individuals and families from churches across the UK to consider opening their hearts and homes to children through fostering, adoption, and supported lodgings. We equip local churches to wrap around these families and the children in their care by supporting them in various creative ways. Through our model, children not only find a safe and loving home, but they can also be welcomed into a community with a wider range of skills to meet their needs. In addition, we identify that communities have an essential part to play in the lives of care leavers, as too many care leavers find themselves without a family or tribe to belong to as they journey into adulthood. While many want to live in independent settings, our ambition for young people should not be that they become lone rangers but rather that they are able to build healthy, strong relationships with people who will journey with them through the ups and downs of life – not because they are paid to, or because it's their 'job', but because they are genuinely committed to seeing that young person thrive and reach their full potential.

With high numbers of children in care and many more families in need of support, strengthening communities is a vital and sustainable way of meeting the needs of children and their families right across the children's social care system. Strengthening, equipping, and releasing



communities should be a priority for children's social care as it provides the context within which additional services provided by statutory services can be drawn in as necessary.

In Chapter 2 we describe the need for a clear definition and understanding of what we mean by family help. We will consult with families and others in the next stage of the review about what this should be. To start the conversation we have provided an initial definition of family help on page 36. What do you think about our proposed definition of family help? What would you include or exclude in your definition?

We commend the Review for producing a comprehensive definition of family help. We welcome the inclusion of adopters and kinship carers within this definition, recognising that these families are likely to face challenges in caring for children who have experienced significant trauma.

We support the recognition of communities as valuable resources and the importance of taking a local approach, which recognises the local context, environment, and history of a family. Faith communities are one such community group who are well-placed within every locale to provide support to vulnerable families.

In addition, as with so many parts of the system, we identify that stigma and shame is often a barrier to families asking for help and so we welcome the attempt within the definition to normalise family help and the prevalence of families needing help. This is vital in ensuring that family help provision actually reaches those who need it most and in giving families the confidence to ask for help without fear or shame.

We are also pleased to see that families who are parenting teenagers and children with disabilities are included within this definition, in acknowledgement of the particular challenges faced by these families. We recognise that children with additional needs make up a significant proportion of those in the care system, with children in care being three times more likely than all children to have a Special Educational Need.



## CHAPTER 3

How do we fill the accountability gap in order to take effective action to keep teenagers safe?

As *The Case for Change* outlines, there are a number of growing challenges and risks facing teenagers in England. These issues are complex to tackle and yet we see that when we fail to do so, there are dire and unacceptable consequences for young people.

To protect teenagers from harms outside of the home, we must first ensure that teenagers have a safe home to live in. Where a young person is poorly supported, placed far away from trusted relationships, and living in accommodation without the support or skills to navigate life, they are significantly more vulnerable to exploitation, as research by the Children's Commissioner has repeatedly highlighted<sup>1</sup>.

There is currently a shortage of homes ready and available for teenagers, particularly within fostering. As a result, some young people are being placed in residential care or independent settings even when such placements are not in their best interests. We must consider how we can inject greater capacity into the system and in order to do so, Home for Good believes that supported lodgings is ideally placed, as part of a spectrum of provision, to address the issue of sufficiency for older teenagers. Home for Good has been conducting two years' worth of research on supported lodgings provision across England and will be publishing a report summarising our findings and recommendations in October. We would be pleased for Josh MacAlister and the Review team to attend our report launch event and would be delighted to work alongside the Review team to share our vision for this valuable form of provision.

Where teenagers are in care and living with foster carers, in residential care or in semi-independent settings, the adults in these contexts are key and ideally placed to develop a trusting relationship with the young person, resulting in a natural proximity that allows for the early identification of and response to any signs of exploitation. Therefore, while it is right that there are targeted programmes and services developed to protect teenagers from harms outside the home, we must also ensure that adults who are supporting young people, including foster carers, adoptive parents, kinship carers, residential care staff, supported lodgings hosts, and social workers, are trained to a high standard so that they can identify and respond to any suspected or occurring instances of harm.

In addition, while *The Case for Change* rightly highlights harms happening outside the home, many families caring for teenagers experience challenges within the home that should not be overlooked. A failure to address challenges within the home will only exacerbate the vulnerability of young people outside of the home, if home does not remain a stable, safe, and loving environment for these young people. Foster carers, adoptive families, and kinship carers alike report dealing with violence and aggression during the teenage years, as well as other challenges such as poor mental health and substance misuse. It is vital that all families experiencing these challenges are able to access support to enable the home environment to remain a place where teenagers can be supported and loved through the challenges they face.

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<sup>1</sup> Stability Index (2019) Children's Commissioner for England. Available [online](#); Characteristics of Children Entering Care for the first time as teenagers (2021) Children's Commissioner for England. Available [online](#).



What can we do to support and grow kinship care?

We welcome the recognition of the incredible role that kinship carers play in children's lives, recognising that many step in to care for children with little warning, little support, and little-to-no training.

It is evident that where kinship carers are well-supported, recognised, and championed, that these arrangements can provide greater stability for children by enabling them to receive care from adults who they often have a pre-existing relationship with, whether family friends or wider birth family members. We recognise that children living in kinship care arrangements have often had some of the same experiences as looked after children who are living in foster care or residential settings, which means that those caring for them are contending with some of the same challenges. In addition, areas such as 'contact' are often particularly complex for kinship carers due to their pre-existing relationship with the child's birth parent(s). Yet, were it not for kinship carers stepping in, many more children would experience the instability of entering care and living with foster carers or in residential placements.

Research shows that more than three-quarters of all children living in kinship care are living in a deprived household,<sup>2</sup> with many receiving little or no support from their local authority. Some kinship carers are deemed ineligible to access some forms of support, including those caring for children who have not entered the care system. These families are unable to access therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund. Such realities are short-sighted and create a perverse incentive for children to be placed into care so that the family caring for them are able to access support. In addition to this, many kinship carers are unaware of support that they are eligible to access; this is further compounded by the variation between local authorities in the support available to kinship carers. Moreover, while some local authorities have a designated kinship care team that kinship carers can approach, this is not the case within all local authorities, which can result in kinship carers bouncing between professionals, with no one taking responsibility for the wellbeing and stability of these families.

In recognition of the overlapping experiences and therefore overlapping challenges that kinship carers contend with, we hold that it is vital that kinship carers are entitled to a parity of support with adoptive and foster families, regardless of whether a child officially enters the care system or not. This should include financial support as well as training, advice, therapeutic support, and access to peer support networks. We commend the work of the Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care to the Review and would encourage them to consider the recommendations of the Taskforce's 2020 report 'First Thought not Afterthought'<sup>3</sup> in considering how kinship carers might be better supported.

Just as *The Case for Change* highlighted that interaction with vulnerable families is often to 'investigate' and 'intervene', rather than 'support' and 'help', many kinship carers also report facing a hostile reception from local authority teams when reaching out for support. This acts as a barrier to families feeling able or wanting to ask for support when they are facing challenges. We must recognise the dimension of ethnicity within this too. Minority ethnic children make up 32% of children living in kinship care<sup>4</sup> and we know too from research conducted within adoption that minority ethnic individuals express higher levels of concern around how they will be treated

<sup>2</sup> Wijedasa, D (2015) The prevalence and characteristics of children growing up with relatives in the UK; Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies; University of Bristol; Available [online](#)

<sup>3</sup> First Thought Not Afterthought (2020) The Parliamentary Taskforce on Kinship Care, Available [online](#).

<sup>4</sup> Wijedasa, D (2015) The prevalence and characteristics of children growing up with relatives in the UK; Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies; University of Bristol; Available [online](#)



by social workers<sup>5</sup>. This creates a double disincentive for some families to reach out when they need to. It is therefore imperative that support is not just 'available' for kinship carers to seek out themselves, but that we recognise the specific barriers within some communities to engaging with statutory services. We therefore must work with these communities to build higher levels of trust and proactively offer support to families. This is another area in which the benefit of strengthening and engaging with communities is demonstrated.

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<sup>5</sup> ComRes (2019) British attitudes and barriers towards adoption; Available [online](#).



## CHAPTER 4

If we were creating care today that was good enough for all our children, what would it look like?

Home for Good is committed to realising its vision for a system where every child thrives within a home that is a haven, and where every child and young person has a family or tribe to belong to for life. Please see our response to Question (1), Chapter 1 for further information.

How can care help to build loving lifelong relationships as the norm?

We welcome the emphasis placed on the importance of lifelong relationships in *The Case for Change*. For many years, one of the purported aims of the care system has been to achieve 'permanence' for children in care and yet in reality, many care-experienced individuals describe facing a 'care-cliff' when they formally leave the care system between the ages of 16 and 25. With this 'care-cliff' often comes the end of relationship with important adults and caregivers in their lives. In such instances, the system is creating instability rather than permanence, by failing to enable children to nurture relationships that can endure for a lifetime, rather than just a childhood.

When we look at the experiences of children without care-experience, we see many of them continuing to enjoy and rely on the support of adults and family members throughout their lives. These relationships provide a stable base from which adults, both young and old, can explore, make mistakes and be supported to navigate the challenges and joys of life. Such needs do not end with the arrival of adulthood and just as any good parent longs to see their child happy, healthy, and flourishing with strong and supportive relationships not only in childhood but for the rest of their lives, so too our ambition for children in the care system must be the same.

Many of the outcomes by which we measure the 'success' or 'failure' of the system in supporting children and young people are experienced in adulthood, such as employment, access to higher education, engagement with criminality, and their overall contribution to society. These outcomes are not only influenced by children's experience during their childhood, but crucially, by how well supported they are able in transitioning into adulthood. We are too preoccupied with children's experience while in care, at the expense of planning for the future and ensuring they are set up to thrive over a lifetime. If they are not equipped with supportive relationships and a place of belonging that endures beyond the point of them formally 'leaving the care system', then how can they be expected to thrive?

If we are to help care leavers go on to thrive and reach their full potential, we need to draw upon community groups. As this submission has previously outlined, faith communities are brilliantly positioned to be there for children, young people, and families no matter whether they are on the edges of care, currently in care, or leaving care.

Alongside strengthening communities to provide a continuity of relationships for children and young people, we need to be radical in thinking of alternatives within the area of provision. Where there is existing provision that 'ends' at 18, 21 or 25, we need to think about how we can reconfigure this provision to enable and support relationships to endure, whether a child remains living there or not. In addition, we must identify types of provision that evidence demonstrates to enable enduring relationships for young people. Supported Lodgings is one such example where local authorities report that many young people continue to enjoy and be supported by their supported lodgings host for many years after moving on from the placement. This will be further





explored in Home for Good's forthcoming report on supported lodgings. Fundamentally, we must consider how we can create or prioritise provision that holds relationships as central and enables those relationships to be sustained, even beyond a child moving out of a home.

While initiatives such as Staying Put or Staying Close are a good first step, we need a mindset shift in our approach to children in care, where we understand our parental commitment as a nation towards these children as lifelong. We also need to ensure that practical steps and opportunities are in place for relationships to continue and that adults involved in the system are not disincentivised from prioritising lifelong relationships.

Home for Good is currently working on this area, considering how we might embed this further into the culture and practice of the system, and will make its recommendations to the Review in due course.

What changes do we need to make to ensure we have the right homes in the right places with the right support? What role should residential and secure homes have in the future?

As highlighted in *The Case for Change*, there is receptivity within the general public to engage with children in care through fostering or adoption, yet we are losing and letting go of people who are motivated to be involved.

We must interrogate whether unnecessary and solvable barriers might be at play that are preventing people with the right skills and who live in the areas of highest need from fostering or adopting. Ethnicity is also an important dimension here, with the lack of a spare room being a particular challenge in big cities such as London and Birmingham, due to high living costs, and yet these locations are where the largest ethnic minority populations live. There needs to be a creative approach to tackling these barriers in local areas.

We also need to consider how we capitalise on the receptivity and interest of the general public and how we hold onto people, harnessing their skills by signposting them to roles that are appropriate to their resources and skill set. We must consider both at a national as well as local level how we can provide other channels and opportunities for individuals and families to serve vulnerable children when fostering or adoption is not appropriate for them. This could include becoming a mentor, an Independent Visitor or Personal Advisor, or volunteering with a number of charities who support families. Home for Good strongly believes that there is a role for everyone to play, but the system needs to be fit for purpose in welcoming people's passion and interest by signposting them to the most appropriate opportunities. This should not only occur at the 'front door' of the system but should be integrated into and accessible at every level. We must enable the system to be sophisticated enough to retain and engage with these individuals and families as valuable assets in supporting vulnerable children and their families, regardless of whether they go on to foster or adopt at a later point.

Although not the case with every local authority, there can sometimes be a lack of coordination in approaches across different teams that work in different provision areas, such as adoption or fostering teams. The practicalities and requirements for becoming a foster carer or adoptive parent are distinct and yet there is often an overlapping motivation among those who step forward. It might be that fostering is not well-suited to an individual or families' setup, but that adoption or becoming an Independent Visitor could be a more suitable option. The system must do better at enabling greater collaboration across teams within children's social care departments,



for the sake of retaining those who are motivated to care for a child or young person. Too often these teams are competing against one another, rather than working together.

Home for Good plays a critical role in holding and journeying with individuals and families as they consider whether they could welcome a child through fostering or adoption. Through our resources, events and courses, prospective families can explore both routes at the same time, enabling them to identify which route is better suited to their skills, family setup and lifestyle. Our vision of a home for every child who needs one is fundamentally child-centred and as such, our work among churches and faith communities places an emphasis on families considering whether they could provide the home that a child needs, rather than seeking a child to 'complete' their family.

Having had the space to explore both adoption and fostering, this enables individuals and families to be more informed and confident when referred on to an agency or local authority. From this point onwards, our regional and national teams are able to stand alongside families as they continue their journey, checking in with them regularly, encouraging them and supporting them where changes or decisions need to be made. Our model allows us to offer independent, non-judgemental support to families through a process that can be full of challenges.

Where becoming an adoptive parent or foster carer is not suitable, the voluntary sector provides many other opportunities for people to play their part in supporting children in care, including mentorship. In order to empower everyone to play their part, the system would benefit from greater joined-up working between statutory services and charities / the voluntary sector at the local and national levels.

We identify that working to change the narrative and perceptions of the care system is a crucial first step in attracting people to step forward who otherwise might be put off by their assumptions about care and children in the care system. We need to raise the level of aspiration for children and young people, educate people on the needs, and ensure we are calling not just individuals and families to step forward but also communities to wrap around them.

### *The Role of Residential Care*

It is Home for Good's view that there will be a small group of children for whom a residential care setting may enable them to flourish to a greater degree than they would in another setting. However, we also identify and contend that there is currently an overuse of residential care settings for young people due to challenges around sufficiency and the widespread shortage and availability of other suitable placements, many of which are family-based, including foster families.

Furthermore, whilst they may be called 'children's homes', the evidence demonstrates that the majority of those living in such placements are teenagers and young people, with 56% ( $n=2,970$ ) aged 10 to 15 years old and 41% ( $n=2,180$ ) aged 16 or over in 2015. Overall, this means that the average age of a young person living in a children's home is 14.6 years old.

Many of these young people have experienced significant instability in their lives, which can be perpetuated through these placements, as 37% of children and young people living in children's homes were placed outside their local authority and further than 20 miles from home. While for some this may be due to necessary safeguarding measures and for their protection, it also means that many young people are residing in accommodation that is far away from familiar territory and often, their wider support network.



Furthermore, Narey's 2016 review of residential care highlighted that more than half of placements in children's homes last less than three months and that a children's home was the first-choice placement for only one quarter of children living in these homes.<sup>6</sup> Only 18% of placements last longer than a year. Devastatingly, almost a third of those in children's homes have had 6 or more previous placements. This evidence demonstrates the reality that many children and young people living in children's homes have experienced the most chronic instability.

However, it is important to note that children living in children's homes may be there for a number of reasons. For some, their behavioural or emotional needs may be so acute that only a children's home is able to provide the ongoing, intensive support they need. Others may require a short-term therapeutic stay to enable them to settle and be re-integrated back into a family setting.

One member of our care-experienced advisory group told us about a girl who had been placed in foster care and who would self-sabotage her placement with each foster family when she felt that they were getting too close and were beginning to take on the role of a parent in her life. After three successive foster placement breakdowns, she was placed in residential care where she was far more settled. Examples such as this demonstrate that there are some children for whom residential care can be the right place, for a period of time, where they can receive intensive therapeutic support. For children and young people who have strong attachments with their birth family, entering the care system and living in a new family environment can be a challenging transition. Where young people can live in a family-based setting, we contend that this will be the best place for most, but that some will need additional support in making this transition. As such, we recognise the role that residential settings could play in being a stepping stone for young people on this journey into a family-based placement. In Northern Ireland, there has been a shift towards using residential care settings in this way for younger children who are showing signs of struggling to settle in foster families. Residential care is used to both intervene at an early stage where consistent placement breakdown is looking likely and as a tool to provide more intensive support, with the aim of reintegrating a child or young person back into a family environment after a short period. This is not, however, how residential care is being utilised for most children in England.

Instead, it is more common for children's homes to be used as a last resort after other successive placements (often including foster families) have broken down. In addition, a young person may express a preference for living in a children's home because they want to be in a more independent setting. Sadly, there is an additional cohort of young people who are placed, either short- or long-term, in a children's home because of a lack of other available placements.

In considering how we might utilise residential care differently, a member of our care-experienced advisory group shared their insight into the role that residential care should have, using the two images of a nest and a springboard:

*"A nest: I think it's right that some children are placed for a while to access the right support. But for a while – how long, what does that look like? What's the nurture package? Is it a radical picture of a mum and a dad figure in the middle of this who love all the kids, rather than sessional workers? Something a bit radically different than what we're currently offering.*

*A springboard: What are we pushing them to? Do we connect them to family? What's the longer-term plan? Rather than 'this is all we've got' and I think that's probably been*

<sup>6</sup> Narey, M (2016) Residential Care in England; Available online [HERE](#)



*the black and white picture. I think we've got to be creative, imaginative and really think about that."*

We commend these perspectives to the Review and would be happy to convene further discussions about the role of residential care alongside family care, if helpful.

### *The Backdrop of Sufficiency*

It is significant that 8% of all looked after children in England are living in a children's home. It is Home for Good's view that there will be some children for whom a residential care setting may be the right place for them to be for a limited period of time. However, we argue that sufficiency challenges are a key driver behind the overuse of residential care placements for children and young people; that is, a shortage of other suitable placements able to meet a child's needs. Significantly, this shortage is often of family-based provision.

At present, there are a lack of foster carers with the right skills and in the right places ready and available to welcome children. As a result, children's homes are sometimes used on an emergency basis when suitable foster homes cannot be found, even when a foster placement has been deemed best for a child. For some of these children, what begins as an emergency or temporary placement can become a long-term placement. This is particularly the case for older children entering the care system, as there is a severe shortage of experienced foster carers who are able to care for teenagers.

- Local authority demand for residential placements has exceeded independent care home capacity. Only 41% of local authorities reported access to enough places for 16- and 17-year-olds, with less than a third saying the same for 14- and 15-year-olds.<sup>7</sup>

To provide a care system that is truly able to meet the needs of each child within it, we need a continuum of care. While there is a place for children's homes to exist as part of this continuum, we are concerned that sufficiency challenges are resulting in the overuse of children's homes for some children who, with the right support, would flourish in a family environment. In addition to this, the current overuse and outsourcing of children's homes is incurring significant costs for local authorities. Given the annual overspend on children's social care that has been well-documented over the past decade or so<sup>8</sup>, both the current scale of use and commissioning practices around children's homes are financially unsustainable for the system. The aspect of cost will be explored and outlined more fully later on in this submission.

We believe that there is now a ripe opportunity to explore whether, with the right support in place, a proportion of children currently residing in children's homes could be transitioned into family-based placements. Home for Good is committed to playing our part in making this possible by inspiring individuals and families from faith communities to step forward, in order to increase capacity in the system so that more children can live in a family-based environment, when this has been deemed the best option for them.

The desire to see children living in families, where this is appropriate for their needs, stems from two reasons. Firstly, for the past several decades, international research has demonstrated the poorer outcomes for children growing up in institutional or residential settings, in comparison to

<sup>7</sup> Institute for Government. 2019. *Children's social care*. Available: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2019/children-social-care>.

<sup>8</sup> LGA (2021) 'Eight in ten councils forced to overspend on children's social care budgets amid soaring demand; Available [online](#).



family-based settings<sup>9</sup>. Most recently, domestic research has highlighted the poorer health outcomes experienced by children who spend time in residential settings. This includes research<sup>10</sup> published in 2020 by UCL which demonstrates that adults who lived in residential care during childhood had a 40% chance of reporting poor health ten years later, rising to an 85% chance over the following two decades. Those living with a relative or growing up in their birth parent's care reported significantly lower rates of poor health over this period. Significantly more research is needed at a domestic scale to strengthen our understanding of the impact and outcomes for children living in children's homes in comparison to other placement types.

Secondly, while children's homes may provide strong, positive relationships with staff while a child is living there, we are concerned about the continuity of these relationships beyond the age of 18, or when a child leaves the home. While pilot projects such as 'Staying Close' have been developed in some parts of England and are designed to support young people to remain living nearby with the aim of continuing these relationships, we are concerned that these schemes are not providing the long-term place of belonging that young people need.

One member of our care-experienced advisory group told us about a relative of hers who runs several residential homes and her insights were compelling: *"With the best will in the world, he physically could not continue to support those children over 18 because there are too many of them. That's where it really does fall because you're put out – no matter how much the person really doesn't want to do that, there's no option but to put that child out at 18 and they can't continue to do much else for them. You'd love to be able to keep in touch with all the children and keep supporting them, but it's physically not possible to do."*

No person, no matter how old they are, ages out of the need for a tribe or family to belong to. We must do more to enable the formation and continuation of positive, committed relationships with adults for the young people living in and leaving children's homes. It is imperative that we do this if we want to set them up well and provide a stable base for them to go on to achieve all they are capable of in adult life.

### *Costs of Residential Care settings*

Residential care in England is becoming increasingly privatised, with most homes run by private companies and voluntary sector bodies rather than local authorities.

- On 31 August 2020, 78% of all children's homes were run by private companies, 16% were run by LAs, and 6% were run by voluntary organisations. This continues the trend of private companies operating larger proportions of the sector year on year.<sup>11</sup>
- There were 1,948 private children's homes at 31 August 2020, a 7% increase (127 homes) since 31 March. Only 8 LA homes were opened during the same time, while another 5 closed. This led to a 1% increase (3 homes).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> van IJzendoorn, Marinus H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, Marian J., Duschinsky, Robbie, et al. 2020. 'Institutionalisation and Deinstitutionalisation of Children 1: A Systematic and Integrative Review of Evidence Regarding Effects on Development.' *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7 (8). Available [online](#). pp. 703-720.

<sup>10</sup> Murray, E.T., Lacey, R., Maughan, B & Sacker, A (2020) *Association of childhood out-of-home status with all-cause mortality up to 42 years later: Office of National Statistics Longitudinal Study*; BMC Public Health; 20: 735

<sup>11</sup> Ofsted. 2020. *Main findings: local authority and children's homes in England inspections and outcomes autumn 2020*. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-and-childrens-homes-in-england-inspections-and-outcomes-autumn-2020...>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



- Local authorities have reduced the number of homes they run from 423 in March 2018 to 408 in March 2020.<sup>13</sup>

Over recent months, [reports have emerged](#) that reveal the astronomical profits that the independent sector is making, causing many to question its viability and quality. However, the number of new residential homes of all types continues to rise in England at what some consider to be an alarming rate, thus raising questions about the future sustainability of residential care for looked after children.

Analysis of the costs of residential care within the children's social care sector is particularly important given the well-documented financial overspend faced by many local authorities:

- In 2017/18, local authorities spent £7.9 billion on children's social care, 13% of their locally controlled budgets. 47% of this budget was spent on services for looked after children.<sup>14</sup>
- Councils in England collectively *overspent* by nearly £3 billion on children's social services from 2010/11 to 2016/17.<sup>15</sup>

Children's homes make up a significant proportion of this overspend, with figures showing that in 2018/19, spending on independent sector children's homes services by councils was over £1 billion.<sup>16</sup>

Given that the children living in residential care make up 8% of all looked after children, it means that around 27% of spending on looked after children is being given to private providers of children's homes. The key question then becomes whether such spend is delivering the outcomes that we want to see for these young people, given the high fiscal investment. There is a lack of research into the medium- and long-term outcomes for children living in children's homes, but we know that the outcomes generally for looked after children remain consistently poor:

- Nearly half of all young men (21 years and under) in custody have experience of the care system.<sup>17</sup>
- One third of care leavers become homeless within the first two years of leaving care and 20% of homeless individuals are care experienced.<sup>18</sup>
- Looked after pupils are disproportionately represented in school exclusions<sup>19</sup> and are four times more likely to suffer with poor health in later life.<sup>20</sup>
- 39% of care leavers aged 19-21 years in 2020 were not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 13% of all 19- to 21-year-olds.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ofsted. 2020. *Main findings: children's social care in England 2020*. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-data-in-england-2020/main-findings-childrens-social-care-in-england-2020>.

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Government. 2019. *Children's social care*. Available: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2019/children-social-care>.

<sup>15</sup> Morse, Amyas (Comptroller and Auditor General of the National Audit Office). 2018. *Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018*. Available: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Rome, Andrew. 2020. *Profit making and Risk in Independent Children's Social Care Placement Providers*. LGA and Revolution Consulting Limited. Available: <https://www.revolution-consulting.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Profit-Making-and-Risk-in-Independent-Childrens-Social-Care-Placement-Providers-Published-end-January-2021.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> National Audit Office (2015) Care leavers' transition to adulthood

<sup>18</sup> Young & Homeless 2018 (2018) The Homeless Link Research Team; Link [here](#)

<sup>19</sup> Timpson, E (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusions

<sup>20</sup> Murray, E.T *et al* (2020) Non-parental care in childhood and health up to 30 years later: ONS Longitudinal Study 1971–2011; European Journal of Public Health

<sup>21</sup> Department for Education. 2020. *Children looked after in England including adoptions*.



Between 2011/12 and 2017/18, the cost of local authority residential care placements rose steeply, increasing by 42% in real terms, from £2,999 to £4,705 per child per week. Not only are children's homes expensive, but they are becoming increasingly privatised, with little market regulation and national oversight surrounding the health of children's social care markets.

- The six largest independent children's social care placement providers (made up of both private companies and voluntary sector bodies) made £219 million in profits in 2020 (this includes both fostering and children's home providers).<sup>22</sup>
- The 20 largest providers made £265 million in profits, an average profit margin of 17.2%.<sup>23</sup>

As such, we welcome that following a letter from the Chair of the Children's Social Care Review in England, the Competition and Markets Authority announcing in March 2021 that they would investigate the children's social care market.<sup>24</sup>

*RECOMMENDATION: The Competition and Markets Authority should consider introducing a financial cap on the cost of places in children's homes to ensure that the demand for stable, loving homes for children is not being exploited for excess profit.*

### *Unregulated Accommodation*

While discussions about older children in care are often centred around regulation and the suitability of accommodation, we want to see the emphasis shift to a more ambitious vision to provide holistic care for this cohort to enable them to truly thrive throughout their lives.

In February 2021, the Government issued a response to its consultation in 2020, committing to ban unregulated settings for under-16s. While this is a welcome first step, it does not adequately solve the crisis in options for teenagers. Only around 100 children under the age of 16 are placed in independent and semi-independent settings at any one time,<sup>25</sup> and while the national standards are a first step, the only solution that the Department for Education has put forward to address the lack of available placement options is to increase the number of places in children's homes. This is not a sustainable or comprehensive solution.

Teenagers in care are six times more likely (compared to children under 13) to be living in residential or secure children's homes.<sup>26</sup> While residential care is right for some children, it is imperative that the Government also commits to investing in family-based options for teenagers. With the continuing rise of older children coming into care, more options are needed as demand is far outstripping supply, which has resulted in the increased use of unregulated accommodation in past years.

There is thus a pressing need for more foster carers for teenagers and Home for Good is working hard to recruit more individuals and families to play this role. In addition to this, we identify the significant opportunity that supported lodgings can play in meeting the needs of teenagers looking for a more independent setting, but still within a family environment. However, as things stand, supported lodgings is underused and poorly defined, with huge variations in practice as a

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Local Government Association. 2021. *Private equity involvement in care placements needs reviewing amid concerns concerning profit and debt levels*. Available: <https://www.local.gov.uk/private-equity-involvement-care-placements-needs-reviewing-amid-concerning-profit-and-debt-levels>.

<sup>25</sup> Department for Education. 2020. *Looked after children in independent or semi-independent placements*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/looked-after-children-in-independent-or-semi-independent-placements>).

<sup>26</sup> Children's Commissioner. 2019. *Stability Index 2019: Overview report*. <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/cco-stability-index-2019.pdf>.



result, thus greater investment and guidance is needed in order to make this a viable option and address the sufficiency challenges within the system. Home for Good's forthcoming report, which will be published in October 2021, will outline a set of reforms for this provision that would enable it to reach its potential and meet the needs of more young people across England.

**RECOMMENDATION:** *The Government should prioritise increasing capacity within family-based settings for young people, including foster care or supported lodgings, as part of their response to poor quality unregulated provision, rather than focusing solely on increasing capacity in children's homes.*

Feedback on Chapter 4:

### *Stigma*

Our care-experienced advisory group had a rich discussion about the element of stigma attached to the care system:

*"The stigma is founded on truth because we know that the outcomes aren't as favourable for those who are or have been in care. Until the outcomes are better, there will be negative connotations and connections with being in care because it means you're less likely to fulfil your God-given potential. How you cut into that cycle and change that narrative is a different question but if there wasn't a stigma, that would kind of be a problem because we'd be sugar-coating the fact that, at the moment, being in care means that you're disadvantaged, or likely to be disadvantaged."*

Other members of the group shared that they had encountered many instances of stigma during their time at university and how many of the perceptions about children in care had been gleaned from popular culture, including TV shows. One of the members of the group expressed her concerns about the impact of these negative perceptions, saying:

*"It's a bit worrying now because those people who have those opinions from Tracey Beaker, they're now going to go into Family Law and be representing these children and that's slightly terrifying."*

Our group discussed how the school curriculum, which places an emphasis on tolerance, rarely speaks about children living in the care system and therefore that it becomes taboo to be a child with this experience. Members of the group expressed that in the school environment, teachers and other school staff had spoken to them in ways that caused them to feel embarrassed about being care experienced.

*"At parents evening I never wanted my parents to come because "what if someone can sense that I was adopted from seeing my parents?" And I'm a carbon copy of my mum – there's no way someone could tell, but I would still be like "someone is going to work it out". It didn't come from home, it came from the way school dealt with it and they made it something embarrassing and it didn't need to be at all."*

It was identified that we should be talking to children about the care system and the children who are in care, to avoid the perpetuation of unhelpful stereotypes, which only serve to make children with care-experience feel isolated and uncomfortable. As one member said:

*"If people aren't learning about it in school - that it's not that you're all going to become criminals and you should avoid that child - then no one is learning about it anywhere"*





*except movies and their parents' outdated views. I think it has to be taught in schools right from the start that children are in care and that is absolutely fine."*

Other members of the group talked about the need for society to apply "distinction, not disgrace" to children in care, saying "*I think there is room for distinction, not least because extra care and support is needed, but actually when that distinction leads to disgrace, that becomes the issue.*" Members shared how they had each reached a place in their own journey where they felt they could talk about their experiences and life journey without feeling a sense of shame:

*"I love talking about being adopted, I love talking about the fact that our family has grown through adoption. My heart flutters within me when our adopted daughter opens up to someone and talks about her adoption – she's owning the fact that our family has been brought about through the process of care and celebrating that rather than feeling that it's something to be hidden."*

The group identified that to combat the stigma surrounding the care system, more positive stories need to be shared by the media, as this would help to change the narrative around vulnerable children. They were keen to stress that this should not be restricted to the stories of those who have become hugely famous or successful but should also include the stories of individuals who are thriving and doing well in their sphere.

With regards to telling the stories of care-experienced individuals, one member said;

*"I wonder who is out there – what is going on, how do we pull out the best? How do we celebrate and put a spotlight on them? And do enough of it to raise the sea level and the expectation of transformation."*

The group identified that meeting others who are care-experienced enables them to feel a level of stability and that there is often an immediate sense of understanding between them, even if they have had significantly different journeys. Many of them have found that when they share their own journey with people, that stories have emerged out the woodwork of individuals who are care experienced, and yet had not felt able to tell many other people.

*"We feel like we connect across any parallel because we've both had the same or similar experiences. We raise the sea level and make it a fishing net where those who get it feel part of it. Wherever you are in feeling unique, feeling united with a sense of family and purpose."*

*"There is an undercurrent of understanding. And if more of us step up into that to celebrate that, honour that and welcome that, I think we could begin to change and raise a generation of young people and find those who are our similar cohort to celebrate those stories – from factory worker to footballer – that is a story of success and survival."*



## CHAPTER 5

How can we strengthen multi-agency join up both locally and nationally without losing accountability?

Within the children's social care system, different types of provision often exist in silos. At a local level, adoption and fostering teams operate very differently, particularly as adoption is now being operated via a regional model. This is also reflected at government level, with fostering and adoption teams within the Department for Education often operating relatively separately, demonstrated by the differing progression in policy development. This is also evident with other overlapping areas and departments, including criminal justice, health services, mental health support, housing, and communities – these siloed areas that exist at a government level trickle down into siloed working on the ground within children's social care.

Multi-agency working must be improved at the highest level for it to also be improved on the ground. If we are committed to holistically improving the outcomes of children in care, we must take a holistic approach to solutions and support, ensuring that there are shared aims and ambitions across agencies for meeting the needs of children. We recommend that the Government establishes a 'Children's cabinet', made up of Ministers from across Government Departments to coordinate efforts and ensure that departments are pulling together towards a shared goal.

**How can monitoring and inspection make the most difference to children's and families' experiences and engender greater freedom and responsibility in the workforce?**

Home for Good welcomes the attention that has been given to the prevalence of low-quality unregulated accommodation over the last couple of years. Developing regulation for these settings is imperative to ensuring that our most vulnerable children and young people are being provided with support of the highest quality. We believe that in order to sufficiently raise the quality of this provision, standards must go beyond minimum baselines centred around the bureaucratic elements of provision, to a high bar of standards that recognise the holistic needs of young people. Setting the bar high will enable young people to be provided with the support and relationships that enable them to thrive and reach their potential.

We have attached our submission to the Government's recent consultation on the National Standards for the Review's consideration.

**What will need to be different about this review's recommendations compared to previous reviews so that they create a tipping point for improvement?**

We believe that change is possible but that it will only come when all parts of society feel a responsibility towards our nation's most vulnerable children and young people and feel equipped and supported to know what role they can play in bringing about change. As *The Case for Change* outlines, top-down or bottom-up initiatives in and of themselves struggle to bring about the change that is needed. Both approaches must be catalysed together, around a shared vision and shared ambition in order to bring about true change. To create a tipping point for improvement and enable a system that truly works for children and young people, the review must not simply put forward technical changes, but must outline changes needed in attitudes and priorities that drive practice and behaviour within the system. This includes the emphasis already given by the Case for Change to the importance of relationships. We must change hearts



and minds, not just policies and processes. We must change perceptions and highlight prejudice, in order to empower children and young people to fulfil their potential and celebrate their stories, rather than feel a sense of shame about them.

*The Case for Change* rightly identifies that there is a 'risk averse' culture across many parts of children's social care. As a result, we identify that this leads to an unhealthy blame culture within many parts of the system. This can act as a deterrent to progress and change occurring and must be addressed if this Review is going to catalyse and empower all parts of the system to work towards a shared goal. As long as specific stakeholders – agencies, authorities, social workers, charities, and others – respond defensively to proposals or challenge, change and reform will be hard to achieve. Changing hearts and minds then must ensure that the unique contributions of different members and stakeholders in the system are validated, as appropriate, to empower each of these groups to take change forward.

It is vital too that while the recommendations should be bold, broad, and ambitious, they must be resolutely pragmatic and deliverable. Only in this way can this Review genuinely bring about tangible, measurable, and successful change for children.