

# What do we want from the Children's Care Review?

CoramBAAF 40th Anniversary Reception, 14 December 2020

## Zoom Chat Summary

### Purpose

This short report collates the comments contributors at the event made via the chat function of the Zoom call. As the remarks and questions were posted when a specific speaker was presenting, we have listed them under the name of each contributor.

1. **Contributor:** John Simmonds, Director, Policy, Research and Development, Coram BAAF

- It is my hope that the Care Review will recognise the fundamental importance of the relational nature of children's services – John Simmonds

2. **Contributors:** Shabnam Karimzada – CoramVoice Care Experienced Consultant & Linda Briheim-Crookall, CoramVoice's Head of Policy and Practice

- Foster Carers put themselves through a challenging application and training programme and deserve more professional recognition than they receive currently. I think the majority of Foster Carers would like their own professional independent body- would this be something that will be considered?
- Thanks to Shab Karim for focussing on the positive contribution foster carers can make to the wellbeing of young people. It's such an important issue.
- We need to hear the voices of care leavers.
- Digital poverty has been a huge barrier for many care leavers through the pandemic.
- So important we listen and act on the voices of young people and involve the right people.

3. **Contributor:** Jenny Coles Director of Hertfordshire Children's Services and President of the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)

- Thank you Jenny for raising the issue of UASCs totally with you on this important group of young people.
- Thank you Jenny for speaking up about BAME children and those with additional needs.
- As well as the need to improve placements for priority children with an adoption plan, it's essential that we improve support after placement, planning on the basis of an assessment of need.
- An excellent summary of the key priorities for the review. Can I raise a voice for Kinship carers too, as they often feel overlooked by reviews of the care system.
- Adoption Connections a program of work that NFJO have been exploring 2020 the role of digital in modernising post adoption contact, for those wanting more information email: [bbarnett-jones@nuffieldfoundation.org](mailto:bbarnett-jones@nuffieldfoundation.org)
- There is growing evidence that well-supported kinship care is a positive option for children, preventing them needing to be in the care system. I'm interested in your thoughts about where kinship care fits in the care review?
- Couldn't agree with you more Jenny that the most important voice is that of children and young people who have care experience. We need to learn from them and what they think works. The last nine months has been a very challenging time for them and continues to be. It is important, that as a country, we invest in their futures, not just money, although that is important, but time and care.

4. **Contributor:** Vicky Ford, MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

The comments/questions here are grouped under topic headings.

## **School Exclusions**

- Wondering about comparisons of Children Looked After fixed term exclusions from school with the general population.
- Adopted children meanwhile are 20 times more likely than average to be permanently excluded from school - Virtual Schools and the PPP offer great opportunities to improve on this.

## **BME - equality**

- Within care review so important to look and explore diversity. Who is involved, who are the policy and decision makers, Hearing wide ranging views. Understanding the lived experiences. We need to stop talking about BME communities as hard to reach.
- The See-Hear-Respond program lead by Barnardo's has been outstanding in reaching and supporting vulnerable BAME families via organisations with grassroots understanding of BAME communities. An innovative model for other areas of work.
- The Review must also ensure that black and minority ethnic staff in a wide range of settings, as well as carers/adopters get heard, and are part of the review team/board?

## **Adoption Support and Funding**

- One of the issues we hear is that adopters need ongoing support when adopting.
- The Adoption Support Fund announcement is keenly anticipated and it would be a wonderful Xmas present to have stability for adoptive families.
- Very encouraging to hear there will be news about the ASF. The broader remit during Covid has enabled a step change in support provision for special guardians and there is strong evidence of impact. Hope this will influence decisions about future funding.
- Prevention should be given the same amount of funds and focus as caring for children out of home.
- Revisiting the 5 underpinning principles of the Welfare State are as significant now as they were in the 1940's - and will continue to be so as we recover from

the pandemic - for all families. Health, education, employment, housing, financial support.

- We still need to support young people. They are still feeling isolated, especially, as schools have to shut classes in response to local COVID. We need to ensure we can continue virtual support for young people who need it. The ASF COVID fund was a lifeline for some young people. If we can find ways to continue support where it is working, this is key.
- Mental health issues from the Covid19 Pandemic may not be a big tsunami but there is definitely an increase.
- Often CAMHS are not fit for purpose regarding support for adopted children as they come from a behaviour point of view.
- Post adoption support is a crucial point and increasingly will mean the difference between adoptions succeeding or not.
- Post special guardianship Order support is also vital. Better understanding and support prior to SGO's being granted also. This is happening following the study of this area of permanence.
- I am a teacher and been a foster carer for 2 years... and I have to constantly push for support in school. I know what pupils should be entitled to ). There should be more emphasis on the school / foster carer relationship to ensure pupils are getting the best.
- It should be available on an equitable basis. not for those who have the ability to shout loudest.
- Social care needs more investment, until children's services are fully funded and access to services becomes easier children and young people will continue to say the same things as they have for the last 15 years. Despite all the great work we all do to support them.
- My school has a 270k deficit and still doesn't have enough money to meet the needs of our SEN Children which often our adopted children are in. The only way to scratch the surface of help for them is by overspending, we are a grant maintained school and our authority are happy with the overspend but many academies will not commit to this overspend.

- We know that with Brexit there is concern that low income families will be the ones to suffer even more as living expenses might very well increase which inevitably link with children already in vulnerable situations.
- The work on building the liaison with schools and social care is so important. Being a school governor and having been a DSL schools definitely need support. Covid has shown us this.
- The issue of access to services is also relevant to the way services are commissioned and the design of contracts. For fostering and res care we have over 50 varying specifications that apply across England, so it's no wonder there's variety. Reviewing national contracts to get some commonality would be a worthwhile task.

### **Kinship Care**

- The Scottish care review is focusing on supporting children within their families and recognising the significant role of kinship carers.
- Mockingbird has provided stability for many children and has really supported kinship carers and adopters as well.
- 200,000 children in the UK are in kinship care - recognising and supporting them must be a priority alongside fostering and adoption.
- We cannot settle on Mockingbird, it isn't a one suits all fix for the multitude of different situations for children and families. It has its flaws, we cannot settle solely on this method that is ring fenced by certain providers, we have to continue to evolve our practice.
- Children in care and care leavers' voices must be central to any review of the care system, as must the voices of their carers, whether that is SGO, Kinship, foster carers or adopters.
- Foster carers need to recognise as the professionals that they are. Currently many carers feel they have no say in the wellbeing of the young people they care for.
- There are many others who really want to be involved in the care review..., virtual schools have been mentioned but also the health sector want to be involved... LAC nurses, CAMHS, paediatricians all develop significant relationships with children and young people.

## General

- I believe we need a whole system review but we need to understand that is the political context this therefore is a major review impacting on the local, regional and national field.
- My family fostered in the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s - experiencing significant change during that time. One thing has not changed - children have one go at a childhood and as adults making decisions about their futures, we are duty bound to ensure that all children have the best chance to secure family life.
- IROs must become more independent to champion children.
- Health and disability definitely need to be up there. We have lost some focus in those areas. Again areas where some real innovative and thinking outside the box work going on behind the scenes.

## Questions about the Care Review

- Do we know the membership of the Care Review?
  - Do we know the remit of the Care Review?
  - Do we know what outcomes the Review is seeking to achieve?
  - How do we know whether the Care Review is politically 'neutral'?
  - Is the privatisation of services in the 'mix' of options being considered by the Care Review?
  - Is the Care Review going to lead to more / changes in legislation in respect of children?
  - What is the starting point for the Care Review: Pre - Covid or Covid influenced developments?
  - What influence will the recently published article by the Centre for Public Impact (CPI) part of the Boston Consulting Group - have on shaping the remit, enquiry and outcomes of the Care Review?
- Well supported kinship care can be a positive alternative to local authority care for children who cannot live with their parents. Kinship care including special guardianships should be part of the care review. Is it known whether this will be the case?

- So this is more than a review of the care system but the whole of the children's social care system I think we do need clarity on this.
- The review should include Social workers, Foster Carers and young people in care and care experienced. People actually doing the job on the ground and those who have experienced the system. Will you confirm that this will be the case?
- Not only are adopted children needing timely support and therapy but there are still so many teens that have fallen through the net and are now involved with Youth Offending teams, Police, and in prison. We need an increased focus on walking with and supporting those families. How can we do that? Open to talking through this, in my volunteering role with aww Are Family and as a Home for Good Champion.
- How can we ensure this Care Review is different from the Narey/Owers Review and the Fostering Inquiry carried out by the Select Committee? Both these reviews made significant recommendations for improvement in the care system but none of these recommendations have yet been implemented by the Government. A focus on adoption is far too narrow and risks ignoring all the major issues around the vast majority of children and young people in care and leaving care.
- Will the English approach be influenced and informed by our colleagues north of the border?
- Can the Minister make a commitment that the Review will address issues of unwarranted variation across the care system which impact particularly on children and young people placed out of area?
- How do we stop going full circle and make this care review really count. Make the difference. Really champion all excellent work and outcomes out there now and build on what's working. We need to look across the spectrum of children services.
- Special guardianship is playing a key role as an exit out of the care system following care proceedings and providing children with loving safe homes. What are the ambitions of the Review with regard to special guardianship, including increasing access to the ASF?

- Local authority budgets have been cut year on year. Is the Review going to address how services to children and young people can be improved in the face of extensive cuts? Children's social care needs more money, not less and finances must be part of the review.

### **General Questions**

- The Children's Commissioner in a recent webinar 'How to make the Care System better' (24/11/20) advocated a move to a National Care Service. Effectively removing Leaving Care services out of Local Authority / Children's trust responsibility - because of the highly fractured and inconsistencies afforded by having 151 different Local Authorities / Trusts interpretation and provision of support services. Have we reached the point for all of Statutory Children Care to be removed from Local Authority / trust responsibility for the same reasons?
- There are frequent concerns at the changes of social worker for a child being detrimental to the development of a relationship that is widely regarded as being beneficial for a child and others - such as the Courts. Have we reached a tipping point where all social work staff should be permanent and no locum staff should be employed - For example, the Police do not have locum Police Officers?