



Impact report 2011

The impact of **Action for Children** services on
the life chances of children and young people

as long as it takes



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1. Introduction

1.1 This report concerns the difference Action for Children services make to the lives and life chances of the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people across the UK. Our services are able to demonstrate that they make children and young people safe and healthy and enable them to experience good relationships and achieve their full potential.

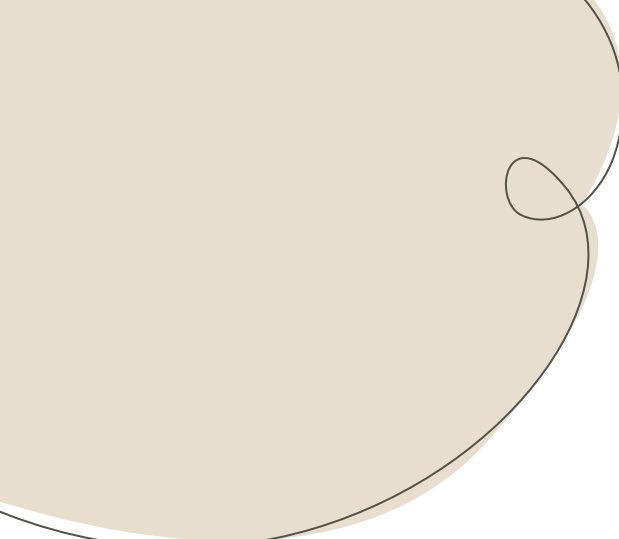
1.2 We are working in fast-changing times. There is less money available to run services and therefore even greater need to make the money that does exist work for the benefit of children and young people. New services models continue to emerge and new funding mechanisms are under active consideration across the sector. As a large voluntary sector provider of services, we are faced with both significant challenges and opportunities for the future in terms of the nature of our provision.



- 1.3** In addition, the UK Government has moved away from the previous reliance on a comprehensive suite of process measures to judge performance and handed back to local agencies the responsibility of determining the difference to be made and its measurement. Action for Children frequently leads and assists local partnerships and local authorities in this exercise in view of the work undertaken to date in emphasising the importance of child and young person outcomes in all our services.
- 1.4** Much of the evidence in this report comes from evaluations and research findings from reviews carried out in the 18 months before March 2011. Our services report on the outcomes of the children and young people they work with, enabling us to capture the impact of these experiences.
- 1.5** Our recording systems allow us to report on wider achievements with service users in aggregate form. A broad range of evidence has been used in this review. These include research, evaluation, service user feedback and analysis of statistical returns in relation to services. We bring together qualitative and quantitative information to build a holistic body of evidence from which to inform our practice and service development. Internally we evaluate our work regularly and systematically and co-operate fully with external evaluations of our services on an ongoing basis.
- 1.6** At Action for Children we are committed to ensuring we can demonstrate our services are effective in helping bring about necessary change in families. We are committed to gathering impact evidence and we invest in a programme of external research. A select group of practitioners are also being trained in the use of social return on investment (SROI) analysis.
- 1.7** This impact report provides a range of evidence to demonstrate how Action for Children achieves positive outcomes for the children and young people we support. The report will detail the difference we make to the lives and life chances of our service users in our four key areas of focus: safety, health, relationships and achievement. Key to the change we help bring about is our early intervention approach, which is critical to keeping down human and financial costs.
- 1.8** We use an outcomes-based approach to planning and delivering our services and deploy a range of tools to help us to collect information that enables us to evidence our work. We developed a bespoke Action for Children outcomes framework in 2005 and have revised it in 2011 for use from 2011–12 in order to further emphasise new policy and service priorities and refine the measurement of outcomes not outputs. All our services are being encouraged to deploy a results-based accountability methodology and each produces a report card, highlighting clear and concise information about the difference we make and how we do it. These report cards provide local evidence of our value while we are also able to aggregate key achievements across services.
- 1.9** This report sets out how Action for Children improves children’s lives, helping children to increase their skills and confidence, maintain or improve their physical and emotional health, reduce the level of risk or harm they face and ensure they are supported to live with stability and support.
- 1.10** Identifying the impact of our services ensures we provide optimal assistance and demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of services at a time when there are severe pressures on public spending. The report also includes therefore a summary of known impact in respect of Action for Children services in delivering cost-effectiveness.
- 1.11** The report demonstrates clearly that there is ample evidence of Action for Children services improving the lives of children and young people and that Action for Children is succeeding in meeting the needs of many of the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the community. We know this is an ongoing journey for us and for our service users and we are determined to continue to move ahead with further improvements and avoid any danger of complacency.

2. Executive summary

- 2.1** Action for Children has worked closely with over 52,000 children and young people by providing services where children and young people have identified needs requiring targeted support in 2010–11. We work with some of the most disadvantaged children, young people and families. We continue to place the highest level of importance on ensuring our services to children and young people make a positive difference and that that difference can be demonstrated at both local and national aggregate levels. It has developed a specialist outcomes framework which has recently been revised for implementation of a further refined approach towards outcomes rather than outputs in future years. Our electronic database has been improved to allow for reporting at local, regional and national levels against key outcome indicators selected by practitioners for relevance against each child or young person's case.
- 2.2** This report therefore brings together the knowledge from evaluations and research and other sources of information about the effectiveness of Action for Children services in terms of making a positive impact upon children and young people. The impact is therefore reported in largely qualitative fashion but there is a wealth of independent academic scrutiny which adds to the credibility of these reports.
- 2.3** The evidence has in this report been clustered under key headings relating to the work of Action for Children services. These relate to the impact of our early intervention services, especially our children's centres in England and Flying Start centres in Wales. We know we will need to continue to give priority to ensuring that services make a difference. The external environment is changing. Public expenditure reductions could reduce the availability of public services for children in need while the advent of new service funding mechanisms such as payment by results schemes will require more and more ability to demonstrate impact. We will also need to ensure that we understand the impact and value of services which are developing local community strength in view of the added impetus given to this kind of activity by the Government's attention to localism.
- 2.4** Additionally, there is a developing groundswell of policy thinking about the value of evidence-based programmes where tested in randomised clinical control conditions and such programmes were recommended as a way forward for early intervention services by the Allen Review of January 2011. We believe a full appreciation of effectiveness of services will need to embrace more than the results of these programmes as our experience in working with those in greatest need is that children, young people and families require flexibility and attention to highly specific needs if we are to make the greatest lasting difference. Nevertheless, we will be looking to expand our involvement in all service models to improve the life chances of vulnerable children, young people and families.



2.5 The Munro Review of child protection services in England and the Welsh Assembly Government's *Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action* will also both emphasise a greater need to focus on outcomes rather than outputs over the coming year and beyond. Similar focus on outcomes is also at a high level in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

2.6 We are also already preparing to improve our impact reporting further. We have launched a refined and slimmer outcomes framework from 1 April 2011. We are in the early stages of developing a reporting system which will allow us at aggregate level to link the outcomes achieved for children with the inputs, or forms of help, provided.

2.7 We are proud of our achievements but we also have high expectations of the services which we run for children and young people and we will continue to improve our overall effectiveness each year in order to achieve our mission.

2.8 The evidence in this report has been clustered under key headings relating to the work of Action for Children services. These relate to the impact of our early intervention services and our intensive family support services. The evidence of the cost-effectiveness of our services is featured and this is of particular importance at a time of significant reductions in public spending on services to children, young people and families. The report then goes on to show the impact of all our services for the most vulnerable and neglected children, young people and families in relation to keeping them safe and healthy and improving the relationships and achievements of the children and young people we work with.

2.9 This executive summary addresses the key headline messages in relation to each of these sections of the report.

Early intervention and help

2.10 Evidence shows that the following are key features and achievements of our early intervention and help services:

- ▶ The partnership style of work with other organisations delivering services from our centres is mirrored by the partnership style of work with families and these are highly correlated with positive impact as reported by service users and local professionals.
- ▶ Children's centres run by Action for Children play a significant role in protecting children and promoting the health of children, often through joint work with primary health care professionals in centres.
- ▶ The extensive use of outreach work from our centres means that improved outcomes are achieved with some of the neediest children and families who might find it difficult ordinarily to attend a centre.
- ▶ Our children's centres are lynchpins of local communities and offer the opportunity for local parents to become involved in the centre and develop more informal support networks among themselves.
- ▶ Parents and independent researchers report on high levels of improved confidence and ability to cope with difficulties among parents attending our centres.
- ▶ There are significant levels of involvement of fathers in the work of centres and this is linked to improved outcomes for children and families.

- ▶ Children’s learning is improved through the range of structured stimulation and social contacts available for them in our centres.

2.11 Our outcomes reports show that for all cases closed from October to December 2010, outcomes improved in over 70 per cent of cases.

2.12 Inspections that took place in Action for Children Sure Start children’s centres between April 2010 and December 2010 found 75 per cent of children’s centres to be rated as good or outstanding for outcomes relating to the educational, personal and social development of service users. Eighty-seven per cent of children’s centres were rated as good or outstanding in the outcomes related to the safeguarding of children.

2.13 Results from our surveys of parents using our children’s centres indicate that the longer-term outcomes of accessing children’s centres are promising:

- ▶ 90% of parents receiving outreach services said they are now more confident that they can be a good parent/carer to their child because of the support they have received
- ▶ 91% of our partners believe that we are very good or good at working together with other partners to deliver positive outcomes for children and families
- ▶ Our survey results show that 92% of parents feel supported by the centre’s services as a parent of a child with special needs, and 95% feel they are more confident in meeting their child’s needs as a result of their experience at the centre
- ▶ 88% of father/male carer respondents feel they can be a better role model to their child because of the services they used at the children’s centre
- ▶ 81% of father/male carer respondents feel their relationship with their child has improved after using services at the children’s centre
- ▶ 83% of parents surveyed who use our children’s centres feel their child is now happier and healthier as a result of outreach

2.14 We have also undertaken work with a number of our early intervention services in 2010–11 to demonstrate linkage between tools used in helping children, young people and families and outcomes achieved. We have produced a supporting families and young people outcomes toolkit containing tools which are correlated with the most successful outcomes achieved for children and young people through this work. For example, use of the outcomes star tool was correlated with an 82 per cent increase in emotional wellbeing of children and young people. Use of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) with families was correlated with a 97 per cent rate of improvement in children’s emotional wellbeing and a 90 per cent improvement in ensuring that protective measures were in place.

2.15 There is a strong case therefore to show that our early help services can prevent later or more immediate difficulties for parents when learning to manage their children and to support the view that early intervention has a high human, social and economic benefit for society.

Intensive family support

2.16 Action for Children pioneered intensive family support services to overcome issues around anti-social behaviour and uses this approach successfully for this reason and to prevent children and young people from entering care or crime.

2.17 The evidence shows that intensive family support services:

- ▶ make significant reductions in levels of child protection concern among some of the most socially excluded families
- ▶ raise self-esteem of parents and young people and improve relationships in families and communities
- ▶ reduce risk of homelessness for families and young people
- ▶ reduce risk of entry to care for teenagers where there are relationship difficulties with parents or carers
- ▶ improve the physical living conditions in households in contact with intensive family support services
- ▶ improve educational attainment of young people concerned

2.18 In addition, research and evaluation into Action for Children services show that positive change in families with multiple problems such as crime, substance misuse, neighbour disputes, intra-familial relationships etc was most highly correlated with the development over time of a trusting relationship with an Action for Children practitioner. The reliance on relationship as a vehicle for change in families is well established in the general social policy research literature and was highlighted in particular with regard to Action for Children's intensive family support services by the research undertaken by the Synergy group and published in 2009.¹

2.19 Examples of achievements in improving outcomes in Action for Children intensive family support services in 2010–11 were:

- ▶ Wirral Family Intervention Project – ‘82% school attendance remained constant or improved’
- ▶ Wakefield Family Intervention Project – ‘76% of children and young people improved their educational attainment’
- ▶ Leicester Family Intervention Project – ‘90% of parents reported improved parenting skills’

2.20 Positive outcomes for vulnerable young people at risk of offending are also highlighted by Action for Children services working in that field.

Cost-effectiveness

2.21 Action for Children has taken a lead role in the sector in working with its partners at the new economics foundation (nef) to demonstrate the cost savings achievable through investment in early intervention and intensive help for families by using the SROI methodology. These savings were as much as a £9.20 return on every £1 spent on an intensive family support programme. Subsequent analysis undertaken with New Philanthropy Capital identified that one family support service could save as much as £37,000 per year on the cost of other services.

2.22 As a result of this work, we can demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of services running from children's centres, family centres providing a range of services to children and families with additional needs and intensive family interventions. The development of our own skills internally in undertaking SROI analyses will mean that in 2011–12 we will add further to our understanding of the cost savings available through targeted services provided from children's centres and through work with teenagers presenting challenging behaviour in care placements.

2.23 All our services need to demonstrate their cost-effectiveness now more than ever in view of the limited resources available to fund services for the most vulnerable. We can therefore use our skills to assist others in changing the shape and face of the provision of children's services so they are increasingly designed and measured in relation to outcomes and cost savings in future to be able to help the most children and young people.

Keeping children and young people safe

2.24 Keeping and making children safe where they are at risk of abuse and neglect is of paramount importance to Action for Children. We have robust measures and systems in place to ensure that we achieve this. We know our services are:

- ▶ overcoming the neglect of children and young people through use of evidence-based measures based on relationships and practical assistance among other forms of help
- ▶ dealing effectively with a large number of concerns about safeguarding of children through partnership working with other organisations on a local level. This includes expressing dissent and disagreement whenever we believe that children and young people are not being afforded the level of protection which they deserve and finding solutions to such disagreements with professionals in other services
- ▶ achieving good reports in terms of keeping children safe when assessed by external inspectors
- ▶ promoting the ability of children and young people in care as a result of experience of sexual abuse to keep themselves safe both physically and emotionally through well-evaluated therapeutic interventions

Keeping children and young people healthy

2.25 Our services achieve significant improvements in the health of children and young people and these improvements relate to mental and emotional health on the one hand and physical health on the other.

2.26 In 2010–11 an improvement in the child or young person's emotional wellbeing was measured in 78 per cent of cases measuring this issue. Improvements in a child or young person's physical health were recorded in 80 per cent of the cases measuring this indicator.

2.27 A recent survey of parents across our children's centres found that 71 per cent of parents using health services at our children's centres said that they use health services more often than before they came to the children's centre. Ninety-three per cent of parents who responded feel more confident that they are doing what is best for their children's health and wellbeing as a result of using health or healthy lifestyle services at our centres.

2.28 The clearest forms of evidence of the effectiveness of our services in this respect are as follows:

- ▶ Our 'Growing Strong' research in 2007–08 indicated a number of our services were implementing forms of help well established in research to be associated with improved emotional wellbeing for children, young people and parents. These most commonly featured provision of practical opportunities to achieve something on a number of occasions and in a number of ways so that individual service users received congratulations and learned that they were able to achieve.
- ▶ Improvements to rates of drug and alcohol misuse by young people as a result of support and relationships and partnership work with specialist substance misuse services in cases where young people are very seriously at risk as a result of substance misuse and often at risk from related vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Improving children and young people's relationships

- 2.29** Most of our services are focused on providing help to children and young people and their parents or carers via relationships developed by our practitioners with them.
- 2.30** Our success is reflected in our low disruption rates for children in care or adoption placements. A disrupted placement is one ending in an unplanned way. At only six per cent for adoptive placements and 14 per cent for foster placements, we have an exceptionally good record in providing stability to some of society's most troubled children and young people.
- 2.31** In addition to the work of our intensive family support services and early intervention children's centres and Flying Start centres, evidence is strong with regard to our positive use of relationship to create change as below:
- ▶ Family relationships improve as a result of our provision of evidence-based parenting programmes such as the Incredible Years programme.
 - ▶ Our supported foster placements, including our use of multi-dimensional treatment foster care, achieve high levels of placement stability even for young people with histories of multiple placement breakdown prior to using an Action for Children fostering service.
 - ▶ Our 'Holding the Space' programme for the care of young people with histories of abuse in residential provision achieves improvements in the ability of young people to make and keep positive relationships with others.
 - ▶ Our short breaks provision for disabled children improves the ability of those children to form relationships in and outside their families.
 - ▶ Our Youthbuild supported apprenticeship schemes in Scotland play a major role in enabling highly vulnerable young people to form lasting positive relationships.

Improving children and young people's achievements in life

- 2.32** Improving the achievements of children and young people is central to many of Action for Children's services. We have evidence to show that our services:
- ▶ improve the rate of young people leaving care and otherwise vulnerable who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
 - ▶ improve the employment of highly vulnerable young people via our Youthbuild scheme in Scotland
 - ▶ reduce the rate of offending and re-offending for young people involved in and on the edge of crime
 - ▶ help young people to live in sustainable and suitable accommodation
 - ▶ help to improve young people's understanding of their physical environment and improve the sustainability of local communities
 - ▶ improve the practical skills of young people and disabled children and young people through a range of activities in our services
 - ▶ enable disabled young people to broaden their experience on achievement
- 2.33** An example of success in 2010–11 was that there was a 96 per cent improvement in school or educational outcomes for children and young people living in Action for Children foster placements arranged by our Fostering North East service, upon referral of children and young people to the service by local authorities.

In summary

- 2.34** Overall, Action for Children's services make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people and their families and equip them to develop resilience to overcome difficulties in the present and in the future. Our services' commitment to achieving and demonstrating positive difference are critical to Action for Children and enable us to continue to seek to influence the future provision of children's services. Our aims are to transform the provision of services to focus on effective early intervention and to fund these services through savings which they can achieve as demonstrated by our work on cost-effectiveness.

3. Early intervention and help



3.1 Early intervention and help for children and young people is not a single answer but a collection of answers to meet needs effectively, requiring a flexible and adaptive approach to service provision and outcomes. Early intervention and help requires us to value the importance of emotional wellbeing and the role of the relationship over time with a vulnerable service user.

Children's centres

3.2 Our services are effectively helping early in children's lives through our work in children's centres, which are commended for their parenting programmes and outreach support, and offer a range of activities, for example keeping families healthy and providing knowledge about managing debt and developing self-esteem. Our outcomes reports show that for all cases closed from October to December 2010, outcomes improved in over 70 per cent of cases.

3.3 Action for Children has commissioned King's College London to investigate the impact our Sure Start children's centres have on outcomes for the most vulnerable and neglected children. Interim key themes identified (November 2010) are very promising:

- ▶ The Action for Children agency partnership style, working with other local agencies, maximises service responsiveness for families, and can help protect local family support capacity, by engaging with small/medium-size agencies.
- ▶ Action for Children's ability to assemble a skill mix (including but not necessarily dependent on formal secondment) can ensure cohesive and responsive service design and delivery.
- ▶ Initial findings indicate Action for Children is able to demonstrate how family support provision contributes to helping achieve health outcomes for children and families.
- ▶ Centre-based work with adults who are parents means that individuals can be supported in developing their capacity as parents – as well as adults – including facilitating their engagement with and entry in to the labour market.
- ▶ Helping develop the confidence of adults to undertake good-quality parenting is a key building block in the building of community capacity.
- ▶ Children's centres have evolved a sophisticated range of mechanisms to maximise 'reach' in even the most challenging circumstances.
- ▶ Children's centres' contribution to enhancing the economic capital of the family but also the release of social and psychological 'capital', eg through access to employment and training opportunities.
- ▶ Action for Children's integrated approach to safeguarding children – demonstrated through a robust commitment to undertaking, along with colleagues, responsibility for safeguarding children.

3.4 The interim report concludes: ‘It is possible to identify an overlap/fit between services that meet the needs of children and their families and services whose identity and mode of delivery can potentially be seen to reflect “value for money”.’ Outcomes data will be collected in the second phase of the research, but data already collated shows that out of 202 closed cases:

- ▶ 156 children reported improved outcomes
- ▶ 85 maintained at initial level
- ▶ only five showed a deterioration

The areas of greatest improvement related to:

- ▶ parents’ capacity to support their child’s health
- ▶ parents’ ability to cope with difficulties
- ▶ improvement to the child’s learning environment

3.5 This interim report also stressed the significance of partnership approaches in reaching the most vulnerable families, and undertaking a co-ordinating and capacity-building role in local communities to enable parents to build support mechanisms between themselves.

3.6 Our children’s centres in England have achieved higher inspection grades than the national average for provision of day care services as reported in the Ofsted overview of early years day care inspections in 2008 and as when compared to randomly selected other providers in an internal evaluation of Action for Children centres.

3.7 Children’s centres which took part in the Ofsted trial early years inspections in 2009–10 achieved good and outstanding ratings. They were commended in particular for the effectiveness of parenting programmes and outreach to the most socially excluded and vulnerable families. Inspections that took place in Action for Children Sure Start children’s centres between April 2010 and December 2010 found 75 per cent of children’s centres to be rated as good or outstanding for outcomes relating to the educational, personal and social development of service users.

3.8 Sixty-nine per cent of children’s centres were rated as good or outstanding in effectively meeting the needs of service users and improving their outcomes.²

3.9 Recently, we carried out surveys across our children’s centres with parents and partner agencies to find out what they thought.³ Results from our surveys indicate the longer-term outcomes of accessing children’s centres are promising:

- ▶ 90% of parents receiving outreach services said they are now more confident that they can be a good parent/carer to their child because of the support they have received⁴
- ▶ 91% of our partners believe that we are very good or good at working together with other partners to deliver positive outcomes for children and families⁵
- ▶ Our survey results show that 92% of parents feel supported by the centre’s services as a parent of a child with special needs, and 95% feel they are more confident in meeting their child’s needs as a result of their experience at the centre

3.10 Action for Children's work with fathers in particular is also noteworthy:⁶

- ▶ 96% of father/male carer respondents said they feel supported to help their child get the best start in life because of services they have used at the centre
- ▶ 90% of father/male carer respondents felt more confident that they could be a good father because of their experience at the centre
- ▶ 88% of father/male carer respondents feel they can be a better role model to their child because of the services they used at the children's centre
- ▶ 81% of father/male carer respondents feel their relationship with their child has improved after using services at the children's centre

3.11 An external research evaluation was completed in 2009 into the effectiveness of the eight children's centres operated by Action for Children in Norfolk by RMRA and the Centre for Research on the Child and Family, University of East Anglia. This research highlighted a number of achievements:

- ▶ All children's centres had partnering arrangements with health services in the community and through links, resource sharing or working together across the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.
- ▶ Children's centres worked in various ways with social services with all centres having well established links to children's services and child protection teams to support the more complex cases and families at risk of social exclusion.
- ▶ Health service links were very important and sharing resources indicated close and effective working with a range of health professionals and children's centre managers.
- ▶ Play workers and nursery workers provided accessible support for families so they could deal with issues causing stress and potential risk to children and families.
- ▶ There was good professional expertise and integration of health, social and education services supporting families in need.
- ▶ The research further highlighted that each centre remains well positioned to deliver an effective preventative programme to enable children to avoid the damage caused by poor parenting or poverty and deprivation.

- 3.12** The Nationwide Children’s Research Centre carried out action research in relation to our children’s centres in Workington, Millom and Barrow in Cumbria. Researchers have reported on the first two years of the three-year research programme due to conclude in 2012.
- 3.13** The researchers found that we provide a mix of universal services, including family learning and parenting programmes, as well as more intensive, personalised, targeted family support. We achieve a high level of reach (targeting) with just under half of the 83 cases included in year two of the research known to children’s services, with 33 per cent at level two/three or above. Increases in engaging with services and better parenting skills had the highest improvement rates, with the year one report concluding that the centres were contributing positively towards child outcomes, in particular children’s emotional wellbeing. The year two report reports 51 cases (72%) were assessed by staff as either improved or much improved; 17 were assessed as staying the same; and three were assessed as worse.⁷
- 3.14** Early help services can clearly be seen to make sense in heading off problems early in children’s lives. Our other services provide effective early intervention in terms of meeting needs at the early stage of a problem or in meeting needs early when identified no matter how severe they might be. Early help at any stage of life or at any stage of a problem is effective in meeting the needs of children and young people as soon as possible and therefore makes human and financial sense.
- 3.15** In Northern Ireland the early intervention programme was established to support children between the ages of eight and 13 years and their families, vulnerable to offending and anti-social behaviour. The research found that the principles of Action for Children’s family support model proved effective for delivering positive outcomes in a cost-effective way.
- 3.16** Five projects were established to cover each of the trust areas, of which Action for Children covered the Northern Trust area. In the first two years, there were 409 admissions across the programme, with an increase of 20 per cent between year one and year two. The monitoring data on discharged cases suggest there was considerable improvement shown for all those who completed the programmes across each of the five projects. Progression was demonstrated across five factor domains (that is individual, parenting, family influences, community influence, and education factors) between admission and discharge.

3.17 The independent evaluation showed an almost complete reversal from the level of difficulties experienced on admission to the level of difficulties on discharge, indicating the positive outcomes for the children and their families as a result of the intervention. Scoring was agreed between the staff, the referrers, the children themselves and their parents with a validation exercise to confirm comments reflected the outcome indicator scores accurately. The average cost of a service included in the programme indicated a substantial saving when compared to later interventions, such as care or custody interventions which can be 30 (or more) times the service cost.⁸

3.18 We have also undertaken work with a number of our early intervention services in 2010–11 to demonstrate linkage between tools used in helping children, young people and families and outcomes achieved. We have produced a supporting families and young people outcomes toolkit containing tools which are correlated with the most successful outcomes achieved for children and young people through this work.

3.19 The services involved in this work were:

- ▶ Clooney Family Centre, Northern Ireland
- ▶ Chance for Change, Northern Ireland
- ▶ Tullibody Families, Alloa
- ▶ Vale Family Intervention, Vale of Glamorgan
- ▶ Wrexham Longfields and Wrexham Solutions
- ▶ Liverpool Family Support
- ▶ Wheatley Children’s Centre, Doncaster

3.20 These services were able to demonstrate significant outcomes improvements. Use of the outcomes star tool was correlated with an 82 per cent increase in emotional wellbeing of children and young people and 80 per cent of understanding risk and ensuring that protective factors are in place. Use of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) with families was correlated with a 97 per cent rate of improvement in children’s emotional wellbeing and a 90 per cent improvement in understanding risk factors and ensuring that protective measures were in place.

4. Intensive family support



- 4.1** Action for Children developed and ran the first UK family intervention programme aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour in Dundee. This was developed in response to the council facing pressures to take action on people who caused problems to neighbours. Following a successful attempt at rehabilitation with one family, they decided to establish a specialist intensive project. The Action for Children Dundee Families Project was formally established in 1995.
- 4.2** An evaluation of the project found the multi-disciplinary nature of the project teams to be a key strength. Referral agencies included housing, social services, youth offending, health, police, education and schools, with a high degree of existing agency involvement with referral families, most had three or more different agencies involved (8% had more than six agencies involved). Co-ordinating this involvement for the best interests of the families is a key function of projects of this nature.⁹
- 4.3** The model of intensive family support service has since spread across the country and has come to demonstrate effectiveness in dealing with anti-social behaviour, youth crime and to reduce entry to care for teenagers. This has been achieved in Action for Children through a proliferation of family intervention services and through delivery of intensive help through family and children's centres.
- 4.4** A recent internal safeguarding evaluation of family intervention projects found that Action for Children family intervention projects are well placed to identify and respond to some of the most vulnerable children and young people that are in need of safeguarding. For example, Action for Children's 2009/10 business plan outlined how Liverpool Family Intervention Project 'hosts safeguarding meetings with children's services, MARAC, domestic violence pilot scheme, housing and drug and alcohol team.'
- 4.5** The results from research in 2010 'continue to show overwhelmingly positive outcomes for families.'¹⁰ Based on the 1013 families that formally completed an anti-social behaviour family intervention project intervention by mid-October 2009, the proportion of families (between support plan and formal exit) in which there were concerns about child protection declined from 24 per cent to 14 per cent (42% reduction). The figure at 31 March 2009 was a 43 per cent reduction.
- 4.6** Some services also measure improvement in living conditions (including any reduction in the risk of homelessness and where young people or their families are more able to sustain a tenancy). Eighty-three per cent of the children and young people assessed under this measure saw an improvement for this outcome.¹¹ For example, Dorset Nightstop supports potentially homeless young people. In quarters two to three, 82 per cent moved onto more sustainable accommodation directly following their Nightstop placement.
- 4.7** In 2010–11 an improvement in the living conditions of the child or young people was recorded in 56 per cent of the cases where this indicator was relevant to the case.
- 4.8** Our evaluated intensive family support services have been shown to raise the self-esteem of vulnerable parents and help overcome neglect by tackling issues in the early stages of a problem. There is positive evidence of change through the provision of intensive support via family intervention programmes to turn around anti-social behaviour by young people and families often where there is a risk of eviction and homelessness.
- 4.9** Action for Children's evidence base shows that intensive family support is a proven intervention that can:
- ▶ keep children out of care
 - ▶ prevent anti-social behaviour
 - ▶ provide a cost-effective solution to service provision, reducing need now and into the future

4.10 In 2010–11 an improvement was achieved in the identification of the strengths and limitations of the parent/carer’s capacity in 62 per cent of families in receipt of intensive family services. In 70 per cent of cases, an improvement in maximising the family income had been noted. Sixty per cent of parents and carers experienced an improvement in their capacity to cope with difficulties. Across Action for Children’s projects, 55 per cent of cases closed in 2010–11 showed an improvement in the young person’s or family’s ability to sustain a housing tenancy.

4.11 We have a wide variety of data from our projects that illustrates the wider value of our intensive family intervention services – the examples below are taken from Action for Children’s local business plans:

- ▶ Wirral Family Intervention Project – ‘82% school attendance remained constant or improved’
- ▶ Wakefield Family Intervention Project – ‘76% of children and young people improved their educational attainment’
- ▶ Leicester Family Intervention Project – ‘90% of parents reported improved parenting skills’

4.12 Recent research into all family intervention projects inclusive of those run by Action for Children demonstrates reduced anti-social behaviour and improved retention of tenancies in respect of families receiving a service. The rate of families in which there were concerns about child protection declined from 23 per cent to 13 per cent (43% reduction). In addition, figures demonstrated reduced anti-social behaviour and improved retention of tenancies in respect of families receiving a service.¹²

4.13 Furthermore, a three-year research study into the longer-term outcomes of families who had worked with intensive family support projects showed that:

- ▶ the intensive support provided to families who were at risk of eviction because of anti-social behaviour had the potential to reduce the need of children entering the care system
- ▶ of the 28 families who had significant needs and who were referred to the service and their progress evaluated, the researchers judged that for 20 families the project was a success
- ▶ the other eight families were considered to have continuing difficulties. The researchers highlighted the fact that the families who were referred to these services often had deep-rooted problems, suffered from multiple deprivations and were likely to continue to be vulnerable¹³

4.14 Data from family intervention official statistics,¹⁴ published on 15 September 2010, shows reductions at the end of the intervention compared to at the start (for the first 1,788 families to exit an intervention) included:

- ▶ marriage, relationship or family breakdown by 48%
- ▶ domestic violence between any members of the family by 54%
- ▶ child protection issues by 37%
- ▶ anti-social behaviour by 57%
- ▶ drug misuse by 39%
- ▶ alcohol problems by 48%
- ▶ truancy, exclusion or bad behaviour at school by 54%

- 4.15** Sheffield Hallam’s initial evaluation report of intensive family support projects,¹⁵ commissioned by Communities and Local Government in 2006, included the Dundee project in a two-year evaluation of six pioneering intensive family support projects. The research details how these projects were undertaking interventions with some of the most disadvantaged families in the country. The study findings indicate that, for the vast majority of families, the projects had helped them achieve remarkable changes:
- ▶ 85% of complaints about anti-social behaviour had either ceased or reduced to a level where the tenancy was no longer deemed to be at risk at the point where the family exited the project
 - ▶ in 80% of cases families’ tenancies had been successfully stabilised
 - ▶ over the evaluation period significant improvements in children’s health, wellbeing and educational attainment were recorded
- 4.16** The Scottish Government published an evaluation of intensive family intervention projects in Scotland. This research was undertaken mainly to evaluate the ‘Breaking the Cycle’ pilot projects funded by the Scottish Government. The evaluation focused on the three pilot projects – Action for Children Scotland’s Perth Families project, and pilot projects in Falkirk and in South Lanarkshire – as well as on Action for Children Scotland’s Dundee and Aberdeen Families projects. The evaluation endorsed the Dundee Families Project upon which the pilot projects were modelled, with the evaluation report stating among its key conclusions: ‘It would appear that there is a good prospect of positive outcomes from schemes set up on this model.’¹⁶
- 4.17** The development of family intervention projects highlights Action for Children’s expertise in innovation and responsiveness to emerging needs. Our independence is critical to delivery allowing us to gain the trust of families and co-ordinate multi-disciplinary working. Shared guiding principles include treating the family with respect, listening, being non-judgemental and accessible while ensuring the approach is challenging, consistent, and honest. Empowering families through building confidence and skills appears to be a significant factor in promoting positive change.
- 4.18** In 2008 an evaluation of Wakefield Families First highlighted early success in terms of working with families where anti-social behaviour was an issue.¹⁷
- ▶ The service users to whom the researchers spoke explained that at the time of the referral to the Action for Children family intervention project, they wanted help and were eager to accept support from any source.
 - ▶ After being involved with the project for at least four months, all service users interviewed gave many examples about how the family intervention project had provided them with help in resolving problems and meeting any needs they had. Service users particularly appreciated the emotional support that project workers gave them, help with developing parenting skills, work with children, and help managing debts. All felt that the family intervention project had helped them improve their quality of life and all reported feeling thankful that they had been referred.
 - ▶ All the managers and staff interviewed from referral agencies and other organisations said that there had been many positive outcomes for several families that the Wakefield Family Intervention Project had supported, including reduced incidents of anti-social behaviour.¹⁸

4.19 In addition, a recent study looking at the Northamptonshire Family Intervention Project¹⁹ commissioned by Action for Children found that the project achieves its aim: ‘As a result of intense whole family intervention, the child can live a safer, happier and more stable life at home and avoid being taken into care. This analysis found plenty of evidence of these outcomes.’

4.20 Other services also provide effective intensive help to children, young people and families. The Synergy group of researchers carried out a comprehensive review of outcomes achieved by four Action for Children services through audit of files and capture of the views of service users, partners and Action for Children staff.²⁰

4.21 The projects were drawn from two in England (Exeter and Bayswater), one in South Wales (Pontllytyn) and one in the north of Scotland (Moray). The services in Wales and Scotland were later to go on to take part in the longitudinal neglect research.

4.22 This research highlighted a number of positive outcomes for children achieved through intensive family support provision. It demonstrated that intensive family support services achieve optimal impact when the following conditions are applied:

- ▶ continuity of support when the ‘intensive support’ period has ended
- ▶ the significance of the professional relationship as a vehicle for change with service users experiencing exclusion and disadvantage
- ▶ non-stigma – intensive service worked when provided from a universal service base

Making things ‘not worse’ might be an outcome which is not always well captured for some children.

4.23 The research by the Synergy group stressed in addition that the use of a professional relationship with vulnerable people was critical in leading to change in parenting and that the provision of intensive visiting for a period of time had a significant impact in reducing the level of concern about children’s wellbeing. The authors noted that working with families at the early stage of problems had significant impact in terms of avoiding problems becoming entrenched and irreversible.

4.24 The researchers noted in particular that there was a positive impact in terms of reducing early signs of neglect of children. It was in these cases where the use of professional relationship was noted by the researchers to have a significant impact as vulnerable parents and carers were able to use the comfort and security of such a relationship in order to develop self-esteem and provide improved parenting.

4.25 The researchers noted in these four services that there was not a concern among service users in terms of feeling stigmatised by contact with the services even though the services offered a range of assistance geared towards those in need of targeted assistance with safe parenting. This is likely to link to the role of Action for Children as a voluntary sector provider of services.

4.26 This research also provided a sound commendation for the Action for Children services concerned in so far as they avoided things from getting worse even though children’s wellbeing might not be susceptible to the tracking of improvement. This point is an important one to consider when working with families where neglect is an issue as traditional means of measuring effectiveness seek to measure change and improvement whereas for some children, the avoidance of deterioration was the best outcome achievable when parenting was good enough and in view of the trauma often associated with separation from birth parents.

- 4.27** Many of our services aimed at preventing youth offending provide intensive help to improve outcomes. The Ayrshire Crossover service recently won the Young Scot Heritage Award for a community project where young people worked with the local community to regenerate an area in East Ayrshire. Together they landscaped a garden, which they chose to name The Miners' Memorial Walk. Young people from the project also contributed to the production of a DVD on the issue of what unites and divides communities for the five nations' youth justice conference, as well as a DVD to help train children's hearings panel members in Scotland. Action for Children Scotland teamed up with 7:84 theatre company to create 'For A' That' – a unique contribution to the internationally acclaimed Burns Festival.
- 4.28** The Ayrshire Crossover service works with young people who have offended, addressing issues in their lives, improving confidence and maximising social inclusion. The service has been in operation since 2001 and was originally designed and established for young people who had been made the subject of a Supervision Requirement (Children (Scotland) Act 1995 S.70) whose offending had also resulted in prosecutions under sheriff summary, sheriff solemn, or high court proceedings and for whom there was a likelihood of the use of secure accommodation, a custodial remand or a sentence of custody. However, the project has adjusted to a changing external youth justice strategic agenda and priorities, corresponding legislative changes and strategic objectives at a local level to deliver and evidence outcomes consistent with the context of the 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) framework.
- 4.29** Through a modular approach, the Ayrshire Crossover project provides an intensive offence-focused cognitive/behavioural programme targeted at 14- to 18-year-old offenders who display a pattern of serious and/or persistent criminal behaviour and the project attempts to address this pattern before the young person becomes irrevocably involved in the adult justice system.
- 4.30** Other recent research has also identified positive outcomes²¹ for children and young people in terms of their involvement with the youth justice system:
- ▶ pre-court juvenile specific orders (ie verbal reprimand and final warning): these fell from 9% to 2% of families at the end of working with a family intervention project
 - ▶ warnings (eg early intervention warning, police, conditional and prostitute caution): these reduced from 10% to 6% of families who had warnings at the end of the intervention
- 4.31** The evidence in the evaluation of youth services in 2009–10 showed that:
- ▶ of the 11 young people engaged with the Dundee alternative to custody programme who were assessed as having a substance misuse issue, 36% were referred to a substance misuse agency and the remaining 64% received an in-house substance misuse programme
 - ▶ 65% of young people engaged with the Renfrewshire Moving On project were offered support with substance use
 - ▶ 151 young people receiving services from the Tayside treatment programme engaged in a substitute prescription programme

5. Cost-effectiveness



- 5.1** In the current financial climate it is particularly important that we offer the best value for money possible. This allows us to maintain our focus on the most disadvantaged children and young people and achieve our objectives in priority areas such as early intervention.
- 5.2** A recent study of a sample of families found that a single family intervention could save up to £49,000;²² another that for every £1m invested in family intervention could save £2.5m.²³ This is because high-quality interventions work – the changes they bring are sustained and often improve nine to 14 months after the initial intensive support.²⁴
- 5.3** An independent evaluation of Action for Children’s supported employment programmes found the following: ‘By diverting young people away from crime, alcohol and drugs the programme has the potential to lead to fiscal savings for the public purse.’²⁵ Using research evidence from NPC,²⁶ the researchers explain: ‘Each young offender costs society £300,000 over a lifetime. Prolific young offenders cost services and society £80,000 per year. Preventing one in 10 young offenders from ending up in custody could save society over £100m a year. The crimes committed by young adults are at a cost of up to £19bn every year. The annual cost in England and Wales was estimated to be £60bn in 2000.’
- 5.4** Action for Children commissioned NPC to review the financial evidence in relation to the planned closure of family intervention project services in light of public spending cuts. The review commented: ‘One family support service run by Action for Children that works with over 40 vulnerable families, reduces the number of children going into care by more than half, saving the local authority more than £37,000 per year for every child. If life-changing services such as these are cut across the UK, it will cost the UK economy £1.3bn per year.’²⁷
- 5.5** High costs are sometimes evident due to the specialist nature of some services. For example, the evaluation of short breaks and intensive support services characterised the level of qualified and trained staff, individualised planning and integrated service delivery, management support and transport costs as explanatory factors.²⁸ The report states: ‘The costs have to be seen in the context of the provision of other specialist forms of service delivery. For example the estimated cost of children in looked after secure accommodation is on average £471 per day and similarly the costs of maintaining young people with learning disabilities who have severely challenging behaviour is on average £475 per day. The cost of inpatient acute mental health hospital care is around £600 per day.’
- 5.6** Through our partnership with the new economics foundation (nef), Action for Children has been able to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of its family support, intensive family support and short breaks services. Furthermore, a group of Action for Children staff have been trained to carry out SROI analyses themselves.
- 5.7** The partnership with nef led to the Backing the Future report which suggested crisis intervention service models are most successful with families whose problems are acute rather than chronic. This work has shown the value of prevention and early intervention in both financial savings but also in improving long-term outcomes.²⁹

5.8 As a part of the Backing the Future research an SROI analysis was undertaken on Action for Children East Dunbartonshire Family Support (EDFS). This service provides short-term, focused and flexible support for children, young people and families in crisis. The project aims to:

- ▶ reduce the number of children being looked after and accommodated by East Dunbartonshire, both by helping accommodated children return safely to their home environment, and by helping families avoid crises that lead to children being removed from the family home
- ▶ support parents to better meet their children's needs
- ▶ help children and young people address issues that may be affecting their lives and wellbeing
- ▶ contribute to assessments of children's needs and parents' capacity to meet these

5.9 The SROI analysis found that for every £1 invested annually in this project, which is designed to catch problems early and prevent problems from reoccurring, society benefits by £9.20.

5.10 Furthermore, it found that approximately 93 per cent of the benefits to the state come through a reduction in foster care costs.

5.11 The research highlighted how some parents expressed concerns that without the work of the EDFS project there was serious risk that their children would end up being taken into care or that their children would have ended up out of work or involved in drugs or crime.

5.12 Stakeholders (including, parents/carers, referrers, Action for Children staff and other commissioners) identified a number of features as fundamental to the success of the EDFS project. These were:

- ▶ the flexible approach of the team members and the amount of time they were able to spend with children and families
- ▶ the impartiality of the team members, the time committed to listening and trying to understand and the use of time with children and parents individually and together
- ▶ the commitment to providing a space where children are able to enjoy themselves and build their confidence and self-esteem
- ▶ the tailoring of the service to individual families' needs
- ▶ the joint approach of addressing both the parenting skills of the parents/carers if necessary, and any problems the children might have

It was important to stakeholders that EDFS staff were not social workers; although EDFS work closely with the social work department, its lack of statutory power meant many stakeholders were able to trust it more easily.

Intensive family support services

5.13 Other cost analysis of family intervention projects has shown that the projects offered excellent value for money given their potential to reduce considerably short- and long-term costs of many agencies, including those providing services relating to housing, criminal justice, policing, education and health. They also offer many intangible benefits to families – such as keeping families together and improving their quality of life and their prospects – and to society, by making neighbourhoods and communities safer and more pleasant places.³⁰

- 5.14** Action for Children has invested in training a small number of its managers in undertaking cost-effectiveness analyses using the SROI methodology. Our analysts are currently looking at the cost-effectiveness of a Northumberland children's centre and the MIST service in South Wales (which supports children and young people in care). These analyses are due to report in the spring of 2011.
- 5.15** An analysis looking at the economic and social return of an Action for Children's family intervention project was also undertaken. This analysis estimates that for every £1 invested in Northamptonshire Family Intervention Project activities, the likely social value created is about £4, but in the range of £3 to £6 based on the information currently available.³¹ This analysis also suggested that had the service been running for longer than 12 months, it is possible that more confident assertions about savings could have been reached on the basis of the longer-term data.

Social and economic value of short break services

- 5.16** Action for Children and the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign have, in partnership, commissioned nef consulting to undertake research into the social and economic value of short break services.
- 5.17** This research explores the social and economic value created by effective local delivery of short breaks – the largest component of the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme.
- 5.18** Primarily, the research recognises that short breaks can provide families with a mechanism by which to cope with the pressures of caring for a disabled child. It also acknowledges that a significant number of families have in the past been unaware of or not able to access these services. By exploring the social and economic value created by short breaks, the research concludes that significant savings could be made to the state if short breaks were provided to all the families with disabled children who need them. It also calculated that failure to support these families in the long term would result in substantial additional costs to the state.
- 5.19** Through independent analysis of data nef consulting calculated that savings to the state when short breaks are effectively delivered of to all those eligible to receive them would reach a total figure of £173,988,440. These savings were based on the following data:
- ▶ decreased cost of long-term residential care from reductions in the number of disabled children placed outside of the family home: £135,008,061
 - ▶ decreased cost to health service from reduction in parents', families' and carers' stress: £17,610,108
 - ▶ decreased cost to schools of educating siblings with behavioural and emotional difficulties: £21,370,271
- 5.20** These calculations have been based upon the indirect impact on the family environment in terms of less stress for parents, more time for other siblings and a reduction in family breakdown. It should be noted that the lack of a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services, the social isolation of disabled children and their families, along with stress and potential family breakdown, can be calculated using additional indicators. Therefore the figures given in this research should be interpreted as a minimum figure.

6. Keeping children and young people safe



6.1 For the past three years an annual safeguarding review has been conducted in Action for Children. The safeguarding review process also comprises regular audits of case files undertaken by group managers of Children's Services and reported for central analysis and activity to implement aspects of the annual improvement plan. In addition, there are quarterly reports to the executive management team and safeguarding board of progress made against the improvement plan and themes emerging in ongoing case file audits throughout the year.

6.2 The safeguarding review process continues to identify that Action for Children services perform well in keeping children and young people safe. There is evidence of effective inter-agency working and high levels of identification and referral and resolution of safeguarding children issues. There has been significant improvement in reporting on outcomes and tracking outcomes for individual service users further to the impact strategy being implemented across the organisation. Between April 2010 and September 2011, 10,954 cases measured whether the risks to the child or young person are known and protective factors are in place. In the services in which there were safeguarding or child protection concerns, 80 per cent of children/young people were reported to have been assisted to live in situations where there were added protective factors in place as a result of help offered by our services working in partnership with others.

6.3 Evidence indicates the following:

- ▶ Action for Children services frequently and regularly report concerns about children's safety to local authorities and other professional agencies.
- ▶ Action for Children services are frequently involved with children where there is a concern about that child's safety.
- ▶ Action for Children services play an important role in ensuring that statutory agencies take action to keep children safe. In 4% of cases audited, Action for Children expressed a disagreement with a local authority or local statutory social work service about how well children were safeguarded. These disagreements always involved Action for Children expressing a higher degree of concern about children's safety and almost always led to an improved set of arrangements to secure a child's protection.
- ▶ In more than two-thirds of cases Action for Children services were involved with other agencies in planning for outcomes for the most vulnerable and neglected children and in reviewing achievements to ensure that children were safeguarded and well served by services.
- ▶ Early indications from a longitudinal research study concerning the impact of provision on neglected children and young people show promising indications that changes to improve the safeguarding of these children are changes that are sustained over time.

Early years

- 6.4** Inspections demonstrate the significant added value provided by the Action for Children regulated early years services in respect of all aspects of care and management, including significantly higher performance ratings for keeping young children safe in Action for Children settings.
- 6.5** The inspection of a children's centre provides an independent external evaluation of its effectiveness and what it should do to improve, based upon a range of evidence including that from partner organisations, parents and prospective parents who use the centre and its services and first-hand observation (Ofsted guidance 2010).
- 6.6** Two Action for Children children's centres took part in 2009–10 in the Ofsted pilot inspections using the draft new regulatory framework. These were the Burnley Wood centre in Burnley and the Nomony centre in Plymouth. The outcomes of these thorough and comprehensive inspections were very positive for Action for Children services. These recent new-style inspections found that safeguarding of children was 'outstanding'; the centres worked proactively and effectively with other key agencies to promote the welfare of users. There were very robust recruitment and vetting procedures in place.

- 6.7** Several further inspections took place using this new framework in Action for Children Sure Start children's centres between April 2010 and December 2010.³² Our services were particularly strong in safeguarding. Inspectors described our staff as being confident in their understanding of child protection policies and procedures and adept at identifying vital signs and referring quickly and appropriately when necessary. Our services demonstrated a good record of improving the safety of children subject to child protection plans. Eighty-seven per cent of children's centres were rated as good or outstanding in the outcomes related to the safeguarding of children.

Reducing early signs of neglect

- 6.8** Early indications from services participating in the longitudinal neglect research programme are promising in suggesting that Action for Children services make a significant difference to the children and young people concerned.
- 6.9** We are working with the University of Salford to identify the impact of approaches towards resolving the neglect of children in eight projects across the UK. This is an innovative longitudinal study, which aims to measure impact over a period of four years by tracking outcomes for children while still receiving a service, at the end of service and via partner agencies further to the end of service. The final research report from the University of Salford will be produced in 2012 but the projects themselves have tracked impact with regard to those children who are affected by neglect.

- 6.10** The first independent interim progress report from the University of Salford on outcomes being achieved was produced in July 2010.³³ These early results show encouraging signs in meeting the requirements of three Action for Children outcome indicators, namely that a child's emotional wellbeing is improved, that the risks to a child are known and that the child feels safe in their living environment.
- 6.11** Key messages from this significant research at its interim stage:
- ▶ Of the sample of children whose cases had been fully considered, it was evident that in 85% of cases, researchers found a discernible lowering of concern about neglect.
 - ▶ In a proportion of these cases, this lowering of concern related to the early interventions applied by Action for Children services to prevent neglect from deteriorating to the point where children would have to live with alternative carers.
 - ▶ In these cases, the most common interventions correlated with success were the provision of an enduring relationship with a vulnerable parent and the provision of multi-faceted approaches combining practical assistance on the one hand with assisting vulnerable parents to confront painful issues affecting parenting on the other. In some of the cases, these approaches were also found in parenting programmes provided.
 - ▶ In other cases, where the concern of neglect reduced, it did so because Action for Children services assisted statutory agencies to reach earlier conclusions about the need for children to enter alternative care arrangements whether with agreement of parents or through securing court orders. This was clearest when Action for Children took a concluded assessment to a multi-agency forum to enable that forum to make a clear decision about the wellbeing of the child or young person.
- 6.12** Earlier research by the Synergy group in relation to Action for Children intensive family support services stressed in addition that the use of a professional relationship with vulnerable people was critical in leading to change in parenting and that the provision of intensive visiting for a period of time had a significant impact in reducing the level of concern about children's wellbeing. The authors noted that working with families at the early stage of problems had significant impact in terms of avoiding problems becoming entrenched and irreversible.³⁴
- 6.13** These researchers noted in particular that there was a positive impact in terms of reducing early signs of neglect of children. It was in these cases where the use of professional relationship was noted by the researchers to have a significant impact as vulnerable parents and carers were able to use the comfort and security of such a relationship in order to develop self-esteem and provide improved parenting.
- 6.14** The researchers noted in these four services that there was not a concern among service users in terms of feeling stigmatised by contact with the services even though the services offered a range of assistance geared towards those in need of targeted assistance with safe parenting. This was clearly linked to the role of Action for Children as a voluntary sector provider of services.

6.15 This research also provided a sound commendation for the Action for Children services concerned in so far as they avoided things from getting worse even though children's wellbeing might not be susceptible to the tracking of improvement. This point is an important one to consider when working with families where neglect is an issue as traditional means of measuring effectiveness seek to measure change and improvement whereas for some children, the avoidance of deterioration was the best outcome achievable when parenting was good enough and in view of the trauma often associated with separation from birth parents.

6.16 The Action for Children knowledge review of the nature of neglect and established effective interventions in overcoming neglect (2008) also showed that the combination of relationship and attention to personal trauma allied to assistance in dealing with practical issues was among the most highly effective approaches. This is important as it reflects the fact that neglect of children occurs when personal deprivation such as abuse, being unloved etc, combines with environmental deprivation such as poverty, poor housing and limited educational attainment and aspiration.

Child sexual abuse

6.17 Action for Children provides therapeutic services to children and young people who have been sexually abused. This group of services has been clustered together for the purposes of research and development as a 'Safe and Secure' theme. These services have been subject to ongoing research from the University of Christ Church in Canterbury whose final report was produced in 2010.

6.18 Both quantitative and qualitative data was analysed in respect of children and young people receiving services across eight different projects. The results were positive in affirming the benefits for children and young people from receiving structured and long-term skilled interventions and these benefits related to evidence of improvements in self-esteem and mood and control over life choices.

6.19 The report summarised the findings as follows: ‘...there were significantly lower numbers of children/young people who displayed violent or aggressive behaviour, experienced sleep problems or had nightmares. The evaluation did not demonstrate significant impact on the number of children/young people who attended appropriate education. Most children at both time points did not appear to experience problems with this. Mental health symptoms, social relationships, emotions and feelings were assessed using the SDQ [strengths and difficulties questionnaire]. We found significant decreases in the total difficulties experienced by the children/young people and a significantly reduced negative impact of these difficulties on daily routines. The SDQ data also indicated fewer emotional problems following intervention. In contrast to the initial assessment, at follow-up, the majority of children/young people (between 61% and 86%) scored within the normal bands of the SDQ.’

6.20 It continued: ‘Overall, children reported more positive feelings after attending therapy than before. However, a number of negative feelings still persisted. The children believed that others saw them as much happier and more “normal” than they felt inside. A number of daily life events were improved after receiving therapy. All three children claimed that their worry had reduced. Two children reported that their concentration had improved and one child felt that their sleep and eating habits had improved. However, all three children reported that feeling like ‘the odd one out’ had not changed after therapy and none thought that their self image had improved; indeed one child reported that they felt worse about their appearance after attending therapy. Two children believed that their behaviour towards siblings, carers and those at school had improved, but one child felt that their behaviour towards siblings and carers had worsened. One child reported that although other people saw their behaviour as good, they themselves felt that their behaviour was bad. The fact that children can recognise this discrepancy between internal feelings and the way that others see them may indeed be a positive impact of therapy. Finally, the most resoundingly positive outcome children reported after attending therapy is that all felt optimistic about their future. None of the children commented on any negative aspects of coming to the project. Those who did comment reported that coming to the project was good.’

7. Keeping children and young people healthy



- 7.1** In 2010–11 an improvement in the child or young person’s emotional wellbeing was measured in 78 per cent of cases measuring this issue. Improvements in a child or young person’s physical health were recorded in 80 per cent of the cases measuring this indicator.³⁵
- 7.2** While 100 per cent of cases noted an improvement or consistency in identification of the health and development needs of children and young people, in 99 per cent of relevant cases improvement or consistency was noted in terms of the child or young person recognising their own health and development needs. The child or young person’s communication skills improved or remained constant in 100 per cent of cases measuring this indicator and the use of harmful substances was reduced in 93 per cent of cases.
- 7.3** There was also improvement or maintenance in 98 per cent of cases that examined whether the parent/carer’s capacity to support their child’s health and development was enhanced.
- 7.4** In a recent children’s centre parents’ survey 84 per cent of parents with a child who has special needs felt their child is now more confident and gets on better with people around them,³⁶ and 85 per cent felt their child is happier since using information, advice and services at our centres.³⁷

Emotional wellbeing

- 7.5** Action for Children services improve the emotional wellbeing of children and young people through a range of different ways of helping and these reflect the best evidence available in the research literature. These activities span all age ranges of children and young people and concentrate broadly on improving confidence and self-esteem through empathy and achievement for undertaking tasks well however large or small.
- 7.6** Sixty-eight services measured improvements in emotional wellbeing, including increased emotional awareness and appropriate expression of feeling. Seventy-eight per cent of children/young people were reported to have shown improvement.
- 7.7** The ‘Growing Strong’ campaign involved Action for Children undertaking a series of studies to highlight how its services promoted the emotional wellbeing of children and young people. These highlighted how well Action for Children services provided services that were significant in literature reviews of research studies in respect of improving emotional wellbeing.
- 7.8** The Action for Children services which were part of the study were able to demonstrate good use of relationship with the most vulnerable and neglected children and parents to effect change and the development of self-esteem through a range of activities including those which provided reward and acknowledgement for achievement for children, young people and parents who received little such acknowledgement for the most part of their lives. The close work of Action for Children services such as early years centres and work with schools highlighted the importance of making the educational experience one which provided satisfaction in order that children could grow in an emotionally healthy fashion.

The impact of participation

- 7.9** The drama-based ARTiculation project started 11 years ago as a youth arts weekend and has grown into an annual weekend event that also includes the buddy programme and satellite youth arts events. Around 500 young people have participated in these events and have benefited from this initiative.
- 7.10** Young people's insight into their interpersonal and social skills was evaluated at the beginning and end of the ARTiculation weekend. Their self assessment at the beginning and their self assessment at the end showed that young people felt their skills had increased or further developed.
- 7.11** An evaluation of the achievements of the ARTiculation initiative over the course of its lifetime was undertaken and showed that it acted as:
- ▶ a catalyst for young people to get involved with other activities
 - ▶ an opportunity to reflect on their current and future circumstances
 - ▶ an opportunity to broaden young people's horizons by providing them with an alternative
 - ▶ safe and supportive environment
 - ▶ a positive experience that young people can draw upon in less positive times
 - ▶ a fun, enjoyable and practical way of increasing young people's interpersonal and artistic skills

- 7.12** The underpinning theme that runs through this research is the positive impact that attending an ARTiculation weekend and becoming a buddy has on young people's confidence and self-esteem. The analysis of the findings demonstrate that ARTiculation can act as a springboard that enables young people to take advantage of further opportunities due to their increased self-esteem and confidence. Where young people experience low self-esteem and confidence outside of the ARTiculation weekend, they can draw on – or be supported to draw on – real experiences of when this situation was reversed to boost them and enable them to deal with situations more positively.

Physical health

- 7.13** Thirty-two services reported on improvement in physical wellbeing and found improvement in 80 per cent of cases. Of the cases most recently closed, 75 per cent of cases achieved a reduction or cessation in young people's substance misuse.
- 7.14** In cases where improvement in independence skills was relevant, including increased ability to manage health needs for disabled children and young people, 71 per cent of children/ young people were reported to have shown improvement.
- 7.15** We also have a wide variety of data from our projects that illustrates the wider value of our family intervention projects. For example Action for Children's 2009/10 business plan highlighted that at Bolton Family Intervention Project, '80 per cent of parents reported enhanced capacity to support their children's health and development' and at Wakefield Family Intervention Project '78 per cent of children and young people attended essential health appointments.'

- 7.16** A recent survey of parents across our children's centres found that 71 per cent of parents using health services at our children's centres said that they use health services more often than before they came to the children's centre. Ninety-three per cent of parents who responded feel more confident that they are doing what is best for their children's health and wellbeing as a result of using health or healthy lifestyle services at our centres.³⁸
- 7.17** The Action for Children partnership with the Ramblers organisation showed considerable improvements in healthy lifestyles, confidence and self-esteem among families who participated. The Furness Families Walk4Life programme in Cumbria was delivered by Ramblers in partnership with Action for Children.
- 7.18** An independent evaluation found families were walking more, were better informed about the benefits of walking and that there was greater attendance at the Action for Children children's centres which participated. This evaluation also found that the most significant benefit for parents and children was an improvement in their emotional wellbeing achieved through the achievement of undertaking walks and contact with new friends found through the programme.
- 7.19** Findings from all the inspections that took place of Action for Children Sure Start children's centres between April 2010 and December 2010 confirmed the levels of parents' satisfaction: 69 per cent of children's centres were rated as good or outstanding in outcomes related to health improvement and promoting healthy lifestyles.
- 7.20** Outcomes from outreach work are promising. Eighty-three per cent of parents surveyed who use our children's centres feel their child is now happier and healthier as a result of outreach.³⁹

8. Relationships



- 8.1** Action for Children helps children and young people to maintain supportive relationships with significant others. In 2010–11 the quality of family life was enhanced or remained constant in 98 per cent of the assessed cases, and an improvement or maintenance was demonstrated in 99 per cent of the cases measuring the child or young person’s supportive friendships.
- 8.2** Many services measured the impact they had on helping children and young people to develop supportive relationships with significant others. This can include helping children or young people to improve communication with their parent(s) or carer(s), as well as services’ impact on supporting children or young people to improve their ability to make friends. Eighty per cent of children/young people were reported to have shown improvement. Seventy-nine per cent of the children and young people supported between July and October 2010 had improved social and communication skills.
- 8.3** Many of our services run evidence-based parenting programmes, such as ‘Incredible Years’, ‘Triple P’, ‘Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities’ and the Solihull programme. The delivery of an evidence-based parenting programme (Incredible Years) which targeted vulnerable families with children aged eight to 13 at risk of anti-social behaviour in Poole was found to be working and highlighted as promising practice by the C4EO.⁴⁰

Children in care

- 8.4** In our fostering and adoption projects, in 90 per cent of cases an improvement or consistency was measured in the child or young person’s ability to maintain a supportive relationship with significant others, and 88 per cent achieved this level with regards to living safely in the family network or placement.
- 8.5** Our success is reflected in our low disruption rates. A disrupted placement is one ending in an unplanned way. At only six per cent for adoptive placements and 14 per cent for foster placements, we have an exceptionally good record in providing stability to some of society’s most troubled children and young people. Many children and young people who live with our foster carers do so as a result of having experienced multiple placement breakdowns before local authorities commission our supported placement services.
- 8.6** The specialist black adoption service has an impressive track record in both recruiting black adopters and supporting lasting placements of children with those adopters. The service is known to have placed 19 black and minority ethnic children with adopters recruited and supported through the Action for Children service in 2009–10 and there has been only one disruption of a placement in that time. This latter figure in particular is an outstanding achievement by this service.
- 8.7** Action for Children commissioned the University of Central Lancashire to conduct an evaluation of Action for Children’s practice in ethnically matching black, Asian and mixed-parentage children for adoption. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of Action for Children Adoption Black Families in developing, supporting and encouraging adoptive parents (and families) from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds to provide permanent homes for children and young people waiting for adoption. The report concluded: ‘With an all-BME staff group and central focus on ethnically matched placements, Action for Children Adoption Black Families had developed specialist expertise and insight into the myriad of ethnicities, cultures and religions of both adoptive parents and children.’⁴¹
- 8.8** Through monitoring and evaluating the difference made by implementing a training programme, ‘Holding the Space’, we have been able to demonstrate the great potential for improving the quality of lives of children and young people who have experienced abuse. With this evidence, we were able to roll-out the programme to further projects in Scotland,

where a follow-up evaluation helped us better understand the personal and professional challenges that needed to be overcome to move the implementation forward. This evaluation has enabled us, and the organisation as a whole, to understand that the most important tool we have to help children and young people is the relationship we have with them.

Supporting disabled children's relationships

- 8.9** A recent research evaluation undertaken by the University of Ulster has demonstrated further impact of Action for Children services on the lives of disabled children, young people and their families.⁴² Included in the research project were three Action for Children services – in Cardiff, Glasgow and Edinburgh – that provide specialist short breaks and intensive support services to families and young people with developmental disabilities and whose behaviour is severely challenging.
- 8.10** Over a six-month period, children were reported to have shown improvements in their communication and personal care. Likewise, around half the children improved in terms of their stereotyped behaviour and aggression to other people. Children who had received short breaks tended to have improved behaviour, especially if they received a greater number of nights per annum. This was linked with improved ratings on parental wellbeing. For small proportions of children the risk of moving out of the family home had increased rather than decreased.
- 8.11** Using file data on goals set and individual programme plans, the key workers for each child or young person were asked to rate the children's outcomes on a simple three-point scale: improved, stayed the same or worsened in the areas noted above. Overall more than 40 per cent of the children were deemed to have improved in one or more areas and the improvements were greatest in communication and personal care.

- 8.12** Compared to children who had intensive support only, higher proportions of children who attended short breaks were rated as showing improvements in their self feeding and personal care.
- 8.13** Similar ratings were made for challenging behaviour that the children were recorded as displaying. More children were rated as improved in the hurt they may cause others and in stereotyped, repetitive routines. Fewer had changed in terms of screaming, self-injury and depressive mood. Few children's behaviour had worsened although this was more marked with sexualised behaviour than with other behaviour linked with the age of the young people.
- 8.14** Higher proportions of children who received both short breaks and intensive support showed improvements in self injury and a greater reduction in stereotyped, repetitive behaviour. Otherwise the improvements in other behaviour were unrelated to the type of service.

Supported apprenticeships

- 8.15** A recent evaluation has demonstrated the impact of our supported employment programmes.⁴³ Young people commonly cited improved relationships with their families as a result of Youthbuild. The e-Aspire data shows this to be the case for 32 per cent of the young people who had a follow-up assessment. The report explains: 'Often these improved relationships come about because their parents had been unhappy with them because they were not engaging in employment, education or training, and because of their involvement in anti-social or offending activities. In these cases, when the young people began engaging with Youthbuild, their parents changed their attitudes towards them. Instead of being disappointed in their child and expressing that, they are proud and pleased with the effort they are making, and so the communication between child and parent is becoming more positive.'

8.16 One young person who participated in the Clackmannanshire programme said: 'I feel like my mum respects me more. For the first time in my life she said she's proud of me.' Another young person from West Dunbartonshire said: 'My mum hated me dosing, I spoke to her two weeks ago for the first time in three months. This shows her I'm doing something with my life.'

8.17 The report continues: 'Some young people on Youthbuild have seemingly irreparable relationships with family members, however by taking control of their lives through involvement in Youthbuild they feel better about themselves and are more able to deal with these challenging circumstances.' One young person said: 'I was in a home when I was younger, and before this course, life wasn't worth living. I was always stressed because of my family. This gets me out of bed every day. Just coming here is the most helpful thing.'

8.18 The report explains: 'Young people not only spoke of improved relationships. They reported that they are also leaving behind negative relationships. For young people who are part of a group of friends who are involved in offending behaviour or substance abuse, it is crucial that they move away from individuals and situations that encourage them to become involved in these activities. The young people who discussed this said their reasons are that they know that they cannot have a positive future if they continue with relationships that encourage and support negative behaviour.'

Prevention through relationship building

8.19 Sometimes early intervention is necessary early on in the development of a problem. For example, an independent evaluation of our Pinnacle service evaluated the effectiveness of early intervention parenting programmes and individual casework in diverting young black and minority ethnic boys from anti-social behaviour and crime in the South London boroughs of Lambeth and Lewisham.

8.20 This service ran for three years until March 2009 when the Government funding available came to a planned end. The evaluation was carried out by the University of Salford who reported in 2009. The report demonstrated the powerful impact of combined parenting programmes and individual casework for parents and groupwork for affected young people and offered a solution for diverting children and young people from crime in and anti-social behaviour in areas where these issues were prevalent among young people.

8.21 Impact was recorded as follows:

- ▶ Parents and carers reported that they now listened more and had more patience in the family. This feedback was echoed in children's comments on their own and their parents' behavioural changes.
- ▶ Improvement in parent/carer and child relationship.
- ▶ A greater sense of control over life and more confidence for parents/carers.
- ▶ Improved friendships and the development of informal support networks for parents/carers.
- ▶ Improvements in the originating problem: in the medium term, parents, carers and young people consistently claimed significant improvement in the originating problems that led to the first referral. These included problems with anger and aggression, problems with school, problems with self-esteem and mental health and problems with the police.

8.22 There is particular value in this evaluation in that it demonstrated the impact of this Action for Children service, not only in the here and now but across years, as the researchers were able to have contact with both existing and past service users and those who had used the service for over 12 months.

9. Improving children and young people's achievements in life



9.1 Action for Children youth services have demonstrated their impact on improving young people's access to education, employment and training, as well as suitable accommodation. Successful work has been measured demonstrating improvements in supporting young people to engage in positive activities and reducing involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour. Specific examples include work to help young people who have been in custody, are homeless or have been in the care of a local authority service, the Youthbuild programme, which secures supported apprenticeships for highly vulnerable young people, as well as the specialist intensive fostering programmes.

Education, training and employment

9.2 Overall last year, 53 per cent of children and young people working with our services improved their attendance at school, further education, training or in employment and 74 per cent of children and young people showed improvement in attendance. These are impressive figures in view of the fact that the children and young people concerned have established patterns of under-achievement and non-attendance. In over half of the cases where the indicator was measured, an improvement in the child or young person avoiding exclusion was identified and similarly, a 54 per cent reduction was measured in those cases measuring the young person's offending.

9.3 Engagement in education, employment or training (16+) was included in 12 of our service report cards with 61 per cent of children/young people reported to have shown improvement. Overall, 54 per cent of young people were helped to improve their status of remaining in education, employment or training after 16. A good example is the 87 per cent of 19-year-old care leavers supported by Rotherham Bridges leaving care service engaged in education, employment or training in the first quarter. With reference to all cases closed between October 2010 and January 2011, outcomes for young people given youth employment support improved in 67 per cent of cases.

9.4 With regard to young people leaving care or otherwise vulnerable and working with our services, the most recent figure in respect of NEET for all young people, shows that 46 per cent of young people were engaged in education, employment or training. These figures are not comparable with national NEET figures compiled by the Government in respect of all young people as Action for Children services are only dealing with providing assistance to the most vulnerable facing issues such as loss of family, end of fostering or residential home placement, self-harm and substance misuse. There is no national comparable figure in respect of this cohort of young people.

9.5 In 2010–11 services achieved improvement or maintenance in 97 per cent of cases in which the child or young person's educational achievement was being measured. This is significant in view of the fact that many children and young people working with our services had prior poor and worsening educational attainment levels. This achievement even extended to many of the vulnerable children in care in Action for Children foster placements. For example, in 2010–11, those local authorities referring to our Fostering North East service reported improved school or further education outcomes for 96 per cent of children/young people in placements.

9.6 An independent evaluation by Ekosgen explored the impact of the Youthbuild programme on educational achievement, specifically how our supported employment programmes help young people to gain skills and qualifications.⁴⁴ Young people identify these immediate outcomes as the most useful as they participate to increase their employability, but there are also additional benefits from sessions on 'job-related skills and qualifications, the health and development needs of the young people, risks to their safety, income maximisation, making informed choices, and practical life skills' as the evaluation report makes clear.

9.7 Furthermore our performance data shows that 58 per cent of young people whose progress was measured have improved in terms of educational achievement. The evaluation states: ‘[The young people] were proud of their achievements and knew that these would be valued by employers which in turn made them feel more confident about their employability.’

Young people not in employment, education or training

9.8 A number of Action for Children youth services make active contributions to assisting young people to be engaged with education, training or employment. Services for care leavers all pay attention to this issue and their impact is shown in the table below.

Care leavers in education, employment or training 2010–11

Action for Children service users	Number of service users included in returns	Percentage in education, employment or training	Percentage NEET
Quarter 1	871	63%	37%
Quarter 2	508	63%	37%
Quarter 3	607	71%	29%

9.9 The wider youth services evaluation in 2009–10 highlighted in addition the following examples of achievement:

- ▶ 71% of all 16, 17 and 18 year olds engaged with the Corner House project were in education, training or employment
- ▶ 100% of young people engaged with Calderdale Pathway Team had access to the Connexions adviser and have agreed to a plan of action to access education, employment and/or training
- ▶ 85% of children and young people engaged with the Exeter Family Intervention Project were linked into some form of education and employment

9.10 Action for Children Youthbuild is a pre-vocational programme of support for young people aged 16 to 24, helping them get into the construction industry in Scotland. The programme offers support and training targeted at socially excluded young people who may face challenges in entering and competing in the labour market.

9.11 Youthbuild exemplifies how Action for Children is working to boost self-esteem and develop the skills of young people to help them make the most of their lives.

9.12 The Action for Children Youthbuild initiative offers a model of how to work with young people from a range of socially excluded backgrounds, including young people with experience of the youth justice system and those with special educational needs. Successes on the Action for Children Youthbuild programme include:

- ▶ an average 80% success rate for getting vulnerable and socially excluded young people into employment
- ▶ considerable savings on working with this cohort, in view of the estimated annual cost of £47k for a male in a youth offender institution⁴⁵

9.13 The original Youthbuild services independently evaluated were those in Inverclyde and Glasgow in 2008. This evaluation indicated that the services had a 65–70 per cent success rate in enabling young people to achieve employment.

9.14 A further independent evaluation has been carried out by the University of Salford in relation to the Youthbuild service in Salford and was reported in 2010. It has identified that 30 per cent of the young people were helped into employment and notes the significance of this figure when taking into account the damaged histories of the young people concerned. The report also noted:

- ▶ the service supports young people from the most challenging backgrounds (in terms of offending, health and attitudes)
- ▶ Salford Youthbuild has been a catalyst for positive change in the lives of young people

- ▶ Salford Youthbuild has helped prepare young people for the transition into work by developing key life skills while supporting young people with their challenging backgrounds
- ▶ Salford Youthbuild can help in supporting young people to gain entry into employment or further education and training
- ▶ young people working with Salford Youthbuild have reduced their offending behaviour and removed themselves from negative peer groups
- ▶ Salford Youthbuild can help in improving young people's health and wellbeing

Youth justice

9.15 The above evaluation also identified the following examples in relation to reducing youth offending or risk of offending or further offending:

- ▶ Of 28 high-risk young people placed on the Dundee alternative to custody programme, only four (15%) re-offended during their contact with the programme.
- ▶ Prior to engagement with the Tayside Treatment Service, 21 young people were tracked by Tayside Police and had been arrested on 65 occasions in the six months prior to accessing treatment (average 3.1 arrests per person). In the 12 months since the same young people successfully engaged with the service and completed their treatment, only six (29%) of those young people were arrested.
- ▶ To tackle the underlying causes of crime and anti-social behaviour, Exeter Family Intervention Project completes 90% of family assessments in the first four months, 100% of families are supported with one-to-one work and have a multi-agency support plan in place.
- ▶ Young people referred to Ayrshire Crossover showed a reduction in bullying, discriminatory and/or anti-social behaviour as evidenced by reports from key partners in education, ASBO, criminal and youth justice agencies.

9.16 Action for Children is also a registered provider of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for care of challenging young people mainly referred through youth justice systems. An independent evaluation of the Action for Children Wessex Community Project's remand fostering scheme found that it had consistently impressive outcomes:

- ▶ 75% of young people did not re-offend while in placement
- ▶ all the young people were engaged in school, training or employment by the time they left the placement

9.17 The Youth Justice Board commissioned the University of York to evaluate the intensive fostering pilot services across the country and the evaluation report was published in July 2010.⁴⁶ The evaluation highlights the positive outcomes for young people who have experienced the programme. The report recommended the continuation of the intensive fostering programme. Key findings included:

- ▶ initial outcomes for young people one year after sentence or release from custody included:
 - ▶ the young people who had experienced intensive fostering were more likely to be engaged in education or training (70% rather than 30% in the comparison group)
 - ▶ over half of the intensive fostering group returned to their family home
 - ▶ none of the intensive fostering group were in custody or homeless
- ▶ of the 23 young people:
 - ▶ nine were either not reconvicted at all or reconvicted for few, relatively minor offences
 - ▶ eight young people's offending had not improved up to one year after leaving their placements
 - ▶ five were non-graduates as they breached their sentence
- ▶ reconviction rates were significantly lower for the 23 young people from the intensive fostering group against the comparison group

Access to suitable accommodation

9.18 In 59 per cent of cases where access to suitable housing was an issue in the financial year, there was an improvement in the young people's accommodation situation.

9.19 The evidence in the youth evaluation in 2009–10 showed that:

- ▶ 90% of young people remained in stable accommodation during their involvement with Bolton Young People's Accommodation Service
- ▶ of 15 young people on the Dundee Alternative to Custody programme, five identified accommodation as an issue and five (100%) were offered support to stabilise existing or to find new accommodation
- ▶ 100% of young people accessing Gen R 8 were provided with support to stabilise their accommodation
- ▶ 67.5% of young people engaged with the PATH project had suitable accommodation
- ▶ 82% of young people engaged with Calderdale Pathway have suitable accommodation as defined by commissioners
- ▶ 100% of young people engaged with Helensburgh and Lomond were equipped with the life skills required to sustain a future tenancy

Getting young people more involved

9.20 Action for Children services also assist young people to participate in activities that benefit others – over half showed an improvement in this area in 2010–11. Services also helped young people to take part safely in a leisure activity of their choice in 68 per cent of relevant cases where this was an identified goal for a young person dealing with exclusion and limited previous educational or life attainment.

9.21 Examples in the youth services evaluation in 2009–10 showed that:

- ▶ 95% of young people at the canal project are engaged in artwork, music and games
- ▶ 50% of young people engaged with Gen R 8 had discussion with their worker around leisure activities
- ▶ 45% of service users at the Exeter Family Intervention Project participated in project activities such as fundraising, 'fun days' or media events

9.22 Action for Children youth services have contributed to work undertaken on behalf of the Government's former Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) in providing good practice examples of improving outcomes for young people while engaging young people in work which will sustain the environment for the future. These approaches in Action for Children were included in good practice guidance issued by the SDC in April 2010. The work of the SDC has now been absorbed by other government departments further to the outcome of the May 2010 general election.

9.23 The best example of Action for Children service impact was derived from the Moving On service in Renfrewshire. This project involved young people with a history of offending in improving their own community environment such as landscaping grounds of a residential community home for the elderly. The young people were noted to have improved self-esteem and were enabled to future employment through demonstration of successful engagement in a purposeful and constructive activity.

9.24 Young people were required to budget, undertake price comparisons, develop trade skills and undertake health and safety training before commencing with the challenge. The young people built a portfolio of evidence as they went along and this has been used to demonstrate experience and competency which can be shown to prospective employers and thus help young people to gain employment at the end of their involvement with Moving On. A national toolkit and guidance about how best to achieve improved outcomes for young people through sustainable development approaches has also been developed by Action for Children and is available for organisations via www.actionforchildren.org.uk

9.25 In 2010–11 improvement was measured to show that 73 per cent of children and young people for whom the issue was relevant were more able to express their ambitions for the future.

Developing skills

9.26 In 2010–11, there was an improvement in 59 per cent of cases measuring the child or young person's practical life skills. Twelve service report cards measured improved practical life skills, including improvement of financial management skills/reduction of debt. In these cases 90 per cent of children/young people were reported to have shown improvement.

9.27 Through six pilot projects in 2010, we worked with project staff and young people to help young people gain better and safer access to IT, helping them achieve better outcomes. Dell provided funding to continue the partnership throughout 2011, adding five new projects to the initiative. Young people were able to have improved access to IT in a safe and supportive environment, learning to be independent and self-directed. The evaluation found young people's skills and confidence increased, as well as their employability and access to training and education.⁴⁷

9.28 Action for Children has provided services with the assistance of funding and staff time from Barclays. These services have involved the provision of money and debt advice workshops for young people preparing for independence after care and for vulnerable families attending supporting families services. As a result of the positive evaluation report undertaken in 2009, the initiative with Barclays has moved to a next stage with an intention to provide this service in all Action for Children children's centres.

9.29 The evaluation report stressed the following:

- ▶ 88% of participants in workshops stated that they had benefited from the advice provided
- ▶ participants benefited from the opportunity to function and socialise in a positive and friendly environment and this resulted in increased confidence and social skills
- ▶ many participants were able to reduce debt, better manage their finances, use financial services and plan for the future
- ▶ some progressed on to volunteering and further educational opportunities which strengthened their ability to secure employment
- ▶ there were benefits both in terms of knowledge about managing debt and in terms of self-esteem and confidence for parents and young people who attended the Financial Futures workshops in partnership with Barclays

Building disabled children's skills

- 9.30** The evidence of the impact of Action for Children services for disabled children shows an excellent record of success evaluated by external research in helping young people to undertake successful transition to adulthood.
- 9.31** There are significant research reports about specific services for disabled children provided by Action for Children. The first is that relating to the Kingfishers project in Gloucestershire, which exists to provide supported housing to young people with learning difficulties entering transition to adulthood. This research was carried out and published in 2008 by researchers at the Norah Fry Research Centre at the University of Bristol.
- 9.32** The research found that disabled young people were helped towards independence very effectively and identified the key factors in relation to how the service ensured positive outcomes. Kingfishers adopted an holistic approach to progression, taking an interest in the tenants' employment, future accommodation and social lives as well as developing practical skills.
- 9.33** Another research study was carried out in 2008 by SDS Project Management Consultancy Ltd as an evaluation of person centred planning as a means towards aiding transition to independence for young people with learning difficulties at the Monksfield Short Breaks Service in Northumberland. Person centred planning (PCP) is a method of engaging a person who has support needs in sharing their views and aspirations for the future and making sure those views are central to plans developed for them. PCPs are usually undertaken with people who may previously have had decisions made for them. It provides an opportunity for the person to make choices and to be heard.
- 9.34** This research identified that Action for Children staff used PCP with service users to achieve effective positive outcomes for them and this is a significant finding in view of the importance in current government policy of personalisation whereby disabled people are able to identify and select their own support services sometimes with a personal budget provided.
- 9.35** The interim report from the Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University looking at the impact of Action for Children short break services on outcomes for children has demonstrated that in this context Action for Children is having the greatest impact on those children with the highest level of need.⁴⁸
- 9.36** An independent analysis of Action for Children services for disabled children presents a positive picture of the impact of Action for Children's short breaks on disabled children and their families. Of the outcomes for which progress was recorded, 74 per cent were recorded as having either improved or been achieved over the six-month review period chosen by the external researcher.⁴⁹
- 9.37** The researcher explains that given the high levels of need identified for the children in the sample, improvements in outcomes, however small, are positive. This is particularly pertinent for children for whom undertaking elementary tasks, such as holding a knife and fork, or remaining seated at the dining table at meal times present significant difficulties.
- 9.38** The outcome indicator – 'views are sought, heard and contribute to decision making' – had the highest percentage of recorded improvement with 32.9 per cent. This is particularly pertinent as many of the children attending Action for Children short breaks are non-verbal and use specialist techniques for communication, such as picture exchange communication system (PECS) or Makaton.
- 9.39** The researchers identified that the fact Action for Children services integrate these children into a community so that they are able to continue to attend the short breaks together with other children who have a gastrostomy feeding tube, or disrupted sleep patterns, or who are non-verbal is an outcome in itself which deserves recognition.

- 9.40** Perceptions on the services by the families, other service providers and commissioners and staff were also positive. Families reported improvements in their child's:
- ▶ confidence (63%)
 - ▶ emotional wellbeing (50%)
 - ▶ behaviour (30%)
 - ▶ personal care (48%)
 - ▶ practical skills (37%)
- 9.41** Families and service partners were positive about the quality of the service provided with regards to the staff's knowledge of their child's specific condition and associated needs, the quality of the equipment at the homes, taking the child's views into consideration and communication between different agencies working with individual children.
- 9.42** Overall, families were very positive about how the three homes shared information with other professionals. Around two-thirds of families reported that the targets set for their children were linked to work being undertaken at their child's school or with other agencies working with their child.
- 9.43** Nearly three-quarters of the staff members that submitted surveys agreed that partnerships with other agencies help to achieve the best outcomes for children.
- 9.44** Furthermore, Action for Children's short breaks service at Warren Park in South London was also evaluated positively by King's College London for its pioneering work in improving life outcomes for disabled children through improved access to IT at the centre. The evaluation report noted improvements in self-esteem and in relationships with parents as a result of working with young people and their families using IT where young people had communication impairments.
- 9.45** An evaluation of the impact of Action for Children short break services on outcomes for children revealed the following impact on children and young people:
- ▶ The data gathered for this study suggest that the children in the sample are making positive improvements in various areas of their life to varying degrees, and that the work carried out by Action for Children staff is helping them to do this.
 - ▶ Children's personal and practical skills had improved and respondents reported improvements in children's abilities to socialise, with improved access to leisure activities as a result of the short break.
 - ▶ A linked achievement is that these disabled children can be involved in a very wide range of activities, some of them in the wider community. The children are given the opportunity to enjoy themselves and play.
- 9.46** These opportunities are assisted through our corporate partnerships – for example a generous donation from Balfour Beatty enabled Action for Children to build accessible outdoor play equipment in 14 disability projects, giving disabled children the same opportunity as their peers to grow and develop through play. Further donations have been received towards trips for young carers, enabling them to engage safely in a leisure activity of their choice.
- 9.47** Similarly for young people with severely challenging behaviour participating in community activities is a major achievement, which Action for Children achieves, as the University of Ulster found in their recent evaluation. Services that contribute to children's improved behaviour can have a significant secondary impact on family outcomes. A much higher number of parents were rated as having improved in terms of the wellbeing indicators when the behaviour of the child had improved, with around one quarter of families who took part in this study rated as having improved in terms of physical health, family functioning and coping, but equally some situations had worsened, notably in terms of a risk of family breakdown.

Action for Children schools

9.48 Action for Children operates a small number of special schools providing special educational provision and, in some cases, residential care home facilities. These are Headlands School in South Wales, the Cotswold School in Wiltshire, Spires School in Oxfordshire and Penhurst School, also in Oxfordshire. The Cotswold and Spires schools are currently being merged to form a new Parklands Campus provision on the existing site of Spires School from September 2011. This is a school which will seek to transform outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged young people through provision of small group care and education to enable students to gain maximum benefit from lower staff to student ratios.

9.49 Penhurst School caters for young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties and the others provide education and care for young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. In September 2010, Penhurst School was awarded specialist school status in communication and interaction which attracted an amount of additional funding from the DfE. This has provided the school with the opportunity to replace and expand much of its IT hardware and software which is dedicated to developing the communication and independence skills of the pupils and students. The development of the IT access has resulted in significant progress in communication and interaction for all young people with the additional benefits of increased self-esteem, personal confidence and satisfaction. Specialist school status has also enabled greater involvement with the local and wider communities to contribute to education and training in disability awareness to local schools and community groups.

9.50 Educational attainment results at these schools cannot be judged in line with mainstream schools as the Action for Children schools cater only for those whose special needs are such that they are unable to thrive in mainstream education. Nevertheless Headlands School achieved 10 young people attaining grade C or higher at GCSE in the summer of 2010 with one young person obtaining three such qualifications; one grade B was awarded among these achievements. At the Cotswold School, one young person sat four exams, gaining a C grade in one of them.

9.51 Penhurst School follows a different educational route and seeks to assist young people to obtain accredited life and living awards suitable to the learning skills of the young people at the school. These awards contain different levels and different themes.

9.52 At Spires School, one young person gained a grade B, and another grade C at GCSE in 2010 with one achieving Bronze ASDAN awards. Forecast grades for 2011 are not currently available. These results combined with the very positive results from inspections of educational and/or care facilities indicate that Action for Children schools are making significant achievements with very vulnerable young people and opening up new achievement horizons for them where possible.

March 2011

Endnotes


- 1 Tunstall J, Blewett J and Meadows P (2009) An Evaluation of the Delivery of Targeted Family Support by Action for Children, London: Synergy Research and Consulting Ltd.
- 2 Action for Children children's centres (England) service report card (April 2010 – December 2010)
- 3 All our children's centres across England were invited to take part in three surveys, which took place in August and September 2010. Survey methodology for parents/carers was via paper-based surveys and for partner agencies was via an online survey. Total numbers of respondents for each survey were as follows: 1049 parents/carers who access services at our children's centres; 162 parents/carers who access outreach services; 98 respondents from partner agencies working with our children's centres. Unless otherwise stated in a footnote, percentages are based on the full sample size of the respective survey. Please be aware that base sizes will vary in results discussed throughout this report, and particular caution should be taken when interpreting findings from small base sizes as margin of error will be greater in these cases. Some questions were filtered – for instance to fathers or to those accessing a particular type of service – these base sizes are therefore smaller.
- 4 Base size excludes non-responses = 130
- 5 Base size = 80
- 6 Action for Children children's centres survey, September 2010
- 7 Manby M, (2010) Action research for children's centres in Workington, Millom and Barrow – a second year evaluation report
- 8 Dawson H, Dunn S and Morgan V, Independent Research Solutions (October 2010) 'An Evaluation of the Early Intervention Programme for the Prevention of Offending'
- 9 Dillane J, Hill M, Bannister J and Scott S (2001) An Evaluation of the Dundee Families Project, joint publication with Scottish Executive, Dundee City Council, NCH Action for Children
- 10 National Centre for Social Research (2010) Anti-social Behaviour Family Intervention Projects - Monitoring and Evaluation
- 11 Action for Children outcomes framework data
- 12 National Centre for Social Research (2009) Anti-social Behaviour Family Intervention Projects - Monitoring and Evaluation
- 13 Sheffield Hallam University (2008) The longer-term outcomes associated with families who had worked with intensive family support projects (a number of Action for Children services were part of this research study)
- 14 <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/d000956/osr09-2010.pdf>
- 15 Anti-social Behaviour Intensive Family Support Projects: an evaluation of six pioneering projects (2006)
- 16 Evaluation of intensive family support projects in Scotland (2009) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/272803/0081442.pdf>
- 17 Parr S, Nixon J and Duffy D (2008) The Wakefield Families First Project: An Evaluation, Centre for Regional and Economic Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 The economic and social return of Action for Children's family intervention project, Northamptonshire (2010)
- 20 Tunstall J, Blewett J and Meadows, M (2008) An evaluation of the delivery of targeted family support by Action for Children <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/36/5020.pdf>
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 DfE analysis based on information on families supported by 17 local authorities
- 23 Early impact and evidence of family pathfinders, York Consulting, October 2010
- 24 Monitoring and evaluation of family interventions (information on families supported to March 2010) <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications//eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RBX-09-16.pdf>
- 25 Ekosgen (November 2010) Evaluation of Supported Employment Programmes – year one report
- 26 va Poorvliet M, Joy I and Nevill C (New Philanthropy Capital) (February 2010) Trial and Error: Children and Young People in Trouble with the Law, a guide for Charities and Funders
- 27 New Philanthropy Capital used the SROI models developed by the new economics foundation (nef) to provide figures on Action for Children's East Dunbartonshire Family Support service on the success of the programme in preventing children from going into care. This figure takes into account the savings of £0.8bn the Government would make from not providing family support services to all children in the UK at risk of going into care. However, cutting these services would be a false economy, as many more children would be taken into care, at a cost of £2.1bn. This gives a net cost of £1.3bn (£2.1bn–£0.8bn).
- 28 McKonkey R (2011) Working Outside the Box: An Evaluation of Short Breaks and Intensive Support Services to Families and Disabled Young People whose Behaviour is Severely Challenging, summary report
- 29 nef (2009) Backing the Future: Why investing in children is good for us all
- 30 National Centre for Social Research (2009) Anti-social Behaviour Family Intervention Projects - Monitoring and Evaluation
- 31 The economic and social return of Action for Children's family intervention project, Northamptonshire (2010)
- 32 Eleven per cent of Action for Children children's centres inspected, number of children's centres inspected = 16, number of children worked with = 1431, from Jan–Dec 2010)
- 33 <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/content/180/Research>
- 34 Tunstall J, Blewett J and Meadows, M (2008) An evaluation of the delivery of targeted family support by Action for Children <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/36/5020.pdf>
- 35 Action for Children outcomes framework data
- 36 Base size = 32
- 37 Base size = 33
- 38 Base size excludes non-responses = 179
- 39 Base size excludes non-responses = 119
- 40 The delivery of an evidence-based parenting programme commissioned to the voluntary sector which targeted vulnerable families with children aged 8–13 at risk of anti-social behaviour (awaiting publication – <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/default.aspx>)
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- 42 McKonkey R (2011) Working Outside the Box: An Evaluation of Short Breaks and Intensive Support Services to Families and Disabled Young People whose Behaviour is Severely Challenging, summary report
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- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Social Exclusion Unit (2002)
- 46 <http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/1778/>
- 47 Davey S, Omega Alpha Ltd (2011) Action Inspire IT – overall evaluation report
- 48 An evaluation of the impact of Action for Children short break services on outcomes for children – interim report (October 2010) Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University
- 49 Ibid.





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